# Weird Tales

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# Weird Tales

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A MAGAZINE of the BIZARRE and UNUSUAL

VOLUME X NUMBER 4

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## *Contents for October, 1927*




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# THE EYRIE

"AT LAST WEIRD TALES is coming out with a real serial!" writes W. L. Mason, Jr., of St. Louis. "Kline's *The Bride of Osiris* looks as if it is going to be a whopper."

"My compliments to Otis Adelbert Kline," writes Seabury Quinn. "*The Bride of Osiris* rings the bell, and no mistake. There is a little of everything which goes to make up a good mystery-thriller in this tale, and a mighty good underlying plot as well."

It is such letters as these that encourage us to continue printing serials, together with the tremendous popularity achieved by some of the recent ones: *Across Space, Drome, The Star-Shell, Explorers Into Infinity* and *The Dark Chrysalis*. Some of our readers do not like serials, and they let us know in no uncertain terms what they think of us for making them wait a month to get the second part of a story which they have begun under the impression that the story was complete in one issue. We must consider their likes and dislikes as well, and for that reason the magazine is made up almost entirely of stories and novelettes that are complete in a single issue. But those of you who like serials, who love the thrill of anticipation that comes of waiting for the author to solve a dramatic situation in the next number, you will find one corking good weird serial in each issue of WEIRD TALES, carefully selected to pack as many shivers and thrills as possible into the three or four installments of the story.

We recently had the inestimable privilege of accompanying E. Hoffmann Price on a shopping tour for Oriental rugs. This indefatigable Orientalist is a privileged customer in the rug emporiums, and as he tore down stack after stack of rare fabrics, explained the various knots to us, showed us how to tell an antique from a modern, rhapsodized on the design of a Bokhara, and went into detail over the ornate artistry of a rare old Persian rug, he got us so interested that we suggested that he write a weird tale dealing with his hobby. The suggestion struck fire, and *Saladin's Throne-Rug*, in this issue, is the result. Though the story takes place *in* Chicago, it is not *of* Chicago,

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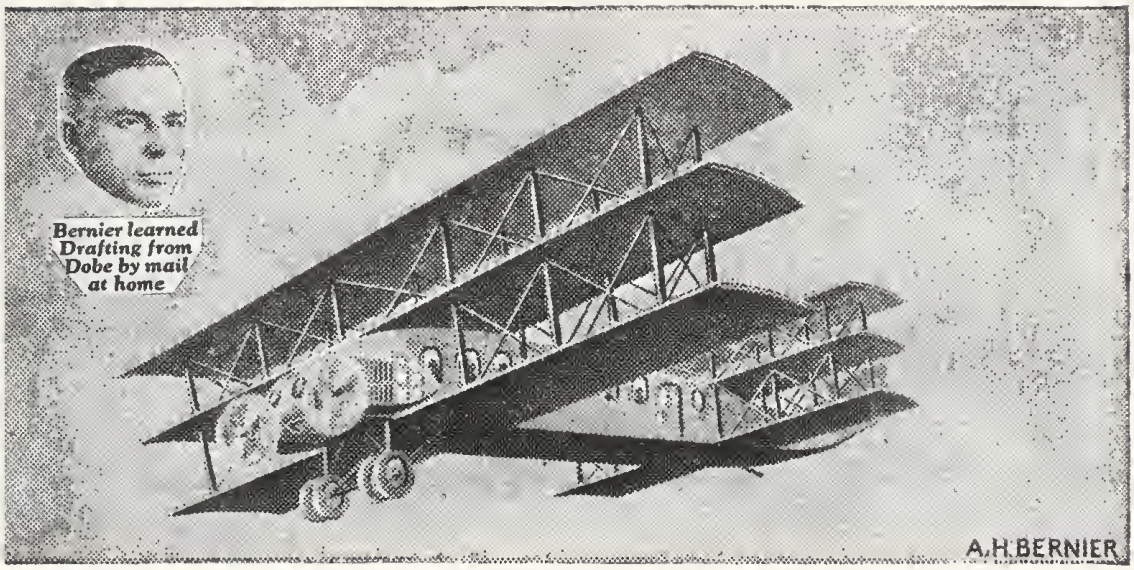


# Dobe Draftsman Designs Aeroplane!

Once more a Dobe Draftsman is in the limelight. A. H. Bernier, who learned by mail from Mr. Dobe, everything he knows about drafting, made the design of this huge passenger tandem triplane. It will be used for commercial trips between Kansas City, Chicago and St. Louis and will weigh 14,000 pounds when loaded with the 30 passengers it will carry and its 300 gallons of gasoline.

Bernier learned drafting at home. He took the easy, quick, practical training given by Mr. Dobe while holding down his regular job. **You can also learn drafting at home,** just as Mr. Bernier learned it. You can go right on working just like you are working now. Mr. Dobe will train you, the practical, sensible way. You will get identically the same kind of training that was given Mr. Bernier. Write for Mr. Dobe's catalog, "Successful Draftsmanship" today.

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Bernier makes $7,000.00 a year in his own business. In a letter to Mr. Dobe he says he cannot find words to express how grateful he feels to Mr. Dobe for having taken a boy who left school at 12, who was only a helper in a factory earning $12.00 a week, and made a successful draftsman out of him.

Just the week before Mr. Bernier told us about designing the aeroplane he was given a job for making plans and designs for a $160,000.00 hotel which netted him $8,000.00.

Bernier's case is out of the ordinary and somewhat unusual. But it does show what one young man, almost without education, was able to do by learning drafting in the easy, practical way. The first thing Bernier did was to answer one of my advertisements. That is the first thing you should do, now.


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for it is redolent of Oriental perfumes, and breathes the intoxicating fragrance of the East. There are two subjects on which this expert swordsman and former soldier of fortune can discourse by the hour with winged words that make time fly past so quickly that half a night is consumed before one realizes that it has begun, and these are the Orient and its rugs. You have admired his Oriental stories in the pages of this magazine, but this is the first rug story he has written.

"I wonder if someone won't write about a snake migration of some sort," suggests Mrs. W. Lange, of Astoria, Oregon, in a letter to The Eyrie. "There actually was one at Klamath Falls, Oregon, in 1909. I've heard it was terrifying, but as I was only three at the time I don't remember it."

"*The Dark Chrysalis* is my idea of a truly weird tale, mingling fact with fiction, being well written, and convincing," writes Rollin Coleman Smith, of Los Angeles. "Each chapter or part rises to a gripping climax of its own. Somebody mentioned in a letter to The Eyrie," he adds, "that he or she did not care for stories pertaining to the destruction of our sphere. On the contrary, narratives embracing such huge happenings are fully enjoyed by the majority of your readers."

"Just a few lines to tell you how much I have enjoyed the August issue of WEIRD TALES," writes William E. Venable, of Anniston, Alabama. "All the stories were riproaring good, but *The Bride of Osiris* outstands all the rest, with *The Man With a Thousand Legs* a close second. Please give us more stories of the type that Edmond Hamilton writes, as his stories are in a class by themselves. Mark me down as a reader who wants WEIRD TALES twice a month."

G. Muder, of Pittsburgh, writes to The Eyrie: "*Satan's Fiddle* in the August WEIRD TALES far excels any story that I have read for some time. It excels at every point—a very unusual story. If it were issued in pamphlet form it would create a sensation in musical circles. It would be a loss to musical literature if this story is not given the widest publicity."

There have been many letters of enthusiastic commendation of Mr. Malcolm-Smith's unusual story of the cosmic chord, and we regret we have not space to print them all.

"You publish such magnificent stories in WEIRD TALES that it is hard to make a choice," writes Eugene L. Middleton, of Los Angeles. "Jules de Grandin and his adventures are almost always inexpressibly good, particularly *The Curse of Everard Maundy* in the July issue. I have recently started to mark all the stories in WEIRD TALES, in the table of contents, as I read them, with short criticisms in shorthand in the margin, and a series of X's to show how good they were in my estimation. For instance, one X means the story was good enough to attract my attention; two X's that it was very good;

*(Continued on page 567)*

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# Suddenly I Broke Away

## *and Held Them Spellbound*

**As I review that tense dramatic moment when I electrified that meeting, it all seems strange and weird to me. How had I changed so miraculously in three months from a shy, diffident "yes" man to a dynamic, vigorous he-man? How had I ever dared give my opinion? Three months before nobody ever knew I held opinions!**

ALL my life I had been cursed with a shy, timid, self-conscious nature. With only a grammar school education I could never express ideas in a coherent, self-confident way. But one day my eye fell upon a newspaper article which told about a wonderful free book entitled "How to Work Wonders with Words"—a book that was causing widespread comment from coast to coast—a book that was being read not only by millionaires, but by thousands of others. It discussed men like me and explained how we could overcome our handicaps.

At first I was skeptical. I thought these defects were a part of my natural makeup—that I would never be able to overcome them. But some subtle instinct kept prodding me to send for that free book. I lost no time in sending for it, as I was positively amazed at being able to get cost free a book that made absolutely plain the secrets that most successful men have used to win popularity, distinction, money and success.

As the weeks wore on and I absorbed the principles of this remarkable method, I became conscious of new physical and mental energy, a new feeling of aggressiveness, and a resurrected personal power that I never dreamed I possessed. Then came that day in the general meeting when the president called on the assembled department heads and assistants for suggestions on the proposed new policy.

Three months previously, the forces of indecision, timidity, and inability to talk in public would have held me to my seat. But suddenly that new power took possession of me and drove me to my feet. That wonderful 15-minute daily training at home had taught me to forget myself and think only of my subject. Almost automatically the ideas which had heretofore lain dormant in a mental jumble, now issued with a vigor, clearness and enthusiasm that astounded me no less than my boss and associates. And I noticed with silent exultation the rapt, intent look on my audience as my story unfolded itself smoothly and eloquently.

Today the men whom I used to greet deferentially I now meet with an air of cool equality. I am asked to conferences, luncheons, banquets, etc., as a popular after-dinner speaker. And my talents are not confined to business matters, but have made me an interesting conversationalist at social affairs. I am meeting worth-while people, I own a good job, a good home, a good car. I am the happiest man that ever lived.

And I frankly and candidly admit that I owe all of these blessings to that wonderful little free book "How to Work Wonders with Words."

**What 15 Minutes a Day Will Show You**

How to talk before your club or lodge
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"Back to Nak-Jad!" cried Grarhorg.

AS AN occultist of some thirty years' standing, it has been my lot to listen to some strange stories and tales, for I have been called upon to hear confidences, some of which were horrifying in the extreme—things which almost appalled me, but never quite, for two reasons. One is that once I myself passed through an experience so frightful that nothing happening thereafter has ever availed to wholly upset my equanimity. And the other and more important reason is simply this:

The Great Law is *just!* Equal and opposite vibrations cancel each other. Sin as deeply as one may, still redemption is possible, nay, certain, after the equivalent proportion of suffering has been experienced. Thereafter, whoso has sinned may build Sin's opposite of Good until the last scars of Evil are erased from the sight of men and angels, and the soul once again shines stainless. . .

Repeatedly I have emphasized this to those poor, sick souls who have crept to me, sobbing out their griefs, fear-stricken, all hope vanished, yet desirous of relieving their sadly overburdened minds by "talking it over" with one who could at least sympathize because he could understand, and who, they knew, would not shrink from them, poor spiritual outlaws though they might be.

So, to me has been granted a privilege that has brought tears of humil-

ity to my eyes many times; the highest and holiest privilege to which the eternal-living spirit may hope to attain while still inhabiting the body of the flesh—that of sometimes reassuring and comforting a fallen soul that has been drawn into the abomination of desolation, clutched by the grisly hands of the powers of darkness. And because I have been, perchance, of some slight help along such lines to them, there are a few who speak of me as a "soul-doctor".

Yet never, I say this truthfully, have I betrayed a confidence reposed. True, I have given some stories to the world, as I may give others. But always with the consent of the principal character involved—never otherwise.

And now, by her actual, expressed wish, I release the terrible story told me in her own manner by her who was once upon earth named Lura Veyle.

I CAN recall, dimly, a time when I was innocent, spotless of soul, and with a mind unstained. But that was ages ago, if time be measured by experience rather than by the hands of a clock. Yet now, as earth-years are counted, I am but forty-one.

Oh, this hideous burden of memory! Can it ever be lightened? Horrific thoughts swarm up from the lowest depths of my consciousness wherein I have tried to bury them—stifling, choking me till speech becomes an overwhelming exertion.

Great sin have I wrought, power and triumphs unearthly have I known, arroganee has made of me first an evil-doer against all spiritual laws; and afterward an abject slave, exposed to the insults, jibes and derision of the leering legions of the Haters and Mockers infesting the outer voids!

Through hells unnamed till now I have passed, tortured and harried. From Flaming Furies I have fled in a blackness so dense it could be felt. Alone I have wandered over the rocky face of a burned-out world, devoid of any inhabitant save myself.

Deep has been my suffering—and I have merited it, every bit! Nor has all of it sufficed to blot out my sin. Atonement is very far from complete. Yet, with soul laden with shame, I have struggled so high already that I dare say "Thank God," without shuddering in terror lest even worse befall me for venturing to breathe that Ineffable Name.

Behold me as I am! A dwarfed, bent, crippled, warped hunchback. Hair hanging in wild elf-locks, gray and stringy, about my face. My face! It more nearly resembles that of an ape than of a woman. Bleareyed, wrinkled, with evil writ so plain on my features that children run screaming and dogs bristle, snarling, as I pass. Yet I was, at twenty, considered the most beautiful young woman in a city noted for its examples of feminine pulchritude.

That beauty which was mine was my curse, yet not that alone caused my undoing and downfall. That was due to my unholy pride and self-conceit. Mortal happiness and the joys of earth were insufficient to gratify my inordinate ambition. Wherefore, in a world beyond this world I accepted pomp and power and dominion, and reveled therein; to the height of my desire and beyond, to horrors inexpressible.

I had a sister. She loved me. And so did I—love myself! She was my diametric opposite. Blond whereas I was brunette. Slender and petite whereas I was tall and voluptuously modeled. She was gentle and humble, and I, to my shame, was stern, cold, proud and haughty. She was kindly where I was cruel—ah! fill in for yourself all that was good as contrasted to all that was evil, wicked; and whenever the finer quality was manifest, be very sure that

while it was descriptive of her, never by any chance would it apply to me.

All that was good and holy she was, and I, filled with the seeds of all that was bad—unsprouted, then, it is true; but soon, all too soon, to crack open and rear a writhing crop of clinging hell-weeds that eventually well-nigh strangled my immortal soul.

One loved her, and she adored him as only a pure and good girl can adore the man of her choice. And I adored him too, or thought I did, from the first moment I set my eyes on him. I had been prepared to ignore "her Edwin." She had enthused too much about him. "What a good man——" until I was nauseated at sound of his name. Once, in a tantrum, I snapped:

"The sooner you two fools are married, the better for all concerned! After the honeymoon, when full acquaintance is established, perhaps we'll get a vacation from 'Edwin' and his multifarious perfections. He's just plain man like all the rest; and if you want my candid opinion, he's very much a 'he-sissy'!"

Even yet I can see the hurt look she bestowed upon me. But all she said was: "Wait, sister, until you've seen him. You'll love him, too."

I did—but not in the way she, in her innocence, meant!

There came a time when, during an interview which I deliberately schemed to bring about, I sought to turn his allegiance from her shrine to myself. And in terse, scathing phrases, he let me see, plainly, what a really honorable man thought of me and my attempt!

Humiliation, followed by a cold, deadly rage, suffused my entire being. Without further words I walked away from him. Nobody, observing us as we met at breakfast next morning, would have suspected that aught untoward had ever passed between us. Only he and I knew, and I knew, too, that very soon only I would ever know. . .

I'd heard the servant maids talking. There was an old gipsy woman, too old to travel longer with the caravans. Her sons had purchased for her a tiny plot of ground and a small cottage near where Lost River enters Deadman's Swamp. The maids had whispered of love-philters, charms, spells. . . One said: "She will only see those who love when the moon shines . . . those who hate when the dark o' the moon prevails."

That old gipsy was a disappointment to me. She heard me out, patiently. But she shook her head. Nor could a proffered bribe of a thousand dollars move her to change her determination.

"You do not belong in my circle," she said. "Nor does any that touches mine touch yours. I may not, dare not help you. Yours is a strange fate. You must work out your own magic wickedness or leave it alone. Yet if you desist from your purposes you will die from the hate-poisons in your blood. You had best go home and pray, then lie down and die. Otherwise, great evil will you wreak, although never on earth shall you be punished therefor."

In disgust, I left her presence, wordlessly.

But all that night one sentence ran through my mind, excluding all else:

"You must work your own magic wickedness or leave it alone."

An ignorant, illiterate, uncivil old gipsy! There must be a higher, stronger magic. I wrote to dealers in antique books. They mailed me lists such as they compile for collectors. So, I gained insight into ancient arts; such lore as it were well for all the world had it never been known!

Two photographs I took to a sculptor of my acquaintance. In exchange for a smile and a few low-spoken words, meaning less than nothing to me, but which went to his

head like a powerful wine, the poor, infatuated fool made me two figurines from a white clay. And the likenesses, though small, were very perfect. I'd assured him they were intended as a wedding jest, and he believed me. What did he know of the Dark Lore? He considered himself overpaid when I allowed him to kiss my hand as I left his studio.

The terrible methods I employed in utilizing those figurines are best unrelated. None shall ever learn of that frightful sorcery from me, directly or indirectly. But—there was, within a month, a terrible auto accident. Edwin was unrecognizable. And she, my little sister, lived but ten days thereafter; a helpless, shuddering, apathetic wreck; vaguely moaning: "Edwee . . . Edwee . . ."

And I—exulted!

This is the curse of the Dark Lore—no sooner is one triumph achieved by its sinister aid than the drunken soul craves even greater conquests! And I was no exception.

Edwin? Was dead—through my spells, and lost to the world and me. But was he lost to *me?* True, his body I might never see more—but his spirit! Once again I turned to the forbidden books. And the Evil Powers beheld—and chuckled. On the night when I found that which I sought, there was mirth in many hells.

"THUS is the Mystic Lamp of the Adept prepared. . .

"But when ye shall come to light it, use ye not fire nor flame. Fairly in the center of a darkened chamber shall ye place it. Then must ye, circling about it, with woven paces and waving arms, whisper, at low breath the Spell to the Fire-Sprites; until at length, streaming from all fingertips shall a flickering flame be seen. So, hold ye one hand each side of the holy lamp in such wise that the streamers of lambent flame do unite at that spot where is the wick fashioned from the thrums of the *Lapis Asbestus.* And if all be well and duly prepared, ye shall behold a marvel indeed.

"Yet observe the color of the flame the Lamp gives out, for it will be the color of the soul of whoso made that Lamp. And should the flame be silvery, know that high spirits love and guard ye. Shall it burn blue like the vault of heaven, then stedfast shall ye stand against all evil, sin, or shame. If it be of golden hue, deep is the knowledge to which ye shall attain, and wisdom worthily used is good to have. But should it blaze searlet, know it emanates from a wrathful soul. Crimson shall betoken a nature filled with wicked desires. Purple shall tell of pride and of high command, although this may be well or ill; for there be colors holy as well as unholy, which may be known by their softness or by their glare . . ."

Vivid, glaring crimson, tinged with hectic purple rays, flooded that darkened chamber when I completed that experiment. And my lip curled in scorn of all consequence as I read in that illumination my secret nature revealed. To an humbler soul it might have served as a solemn warning. To mine it was but proof that I was great, and would be greater.

Thereafter, for eleven days I made another lamp each day, which totaled a dozen. And on the twelfth night, I lighted them all at once. And each gave off that same glorious yet sinister brilliance as did the first with which I had experimented. Grouped together they filled the room with intense vibrations, much as the overtones of some great organ would thrill the soul of a musician. I had dared much; but had succeeded thus far in all I had attempted. Always the drunken soul seeks further conquest . . .

So, I drew the circle and the triangles, and at each angle save one I

placed a lamp. The draperies of earth I removed from my person and tossed them aside indifferently. I was above all conventions, had cast off all inhibitions which hamper the mediocre. For I knew that power more than mortal was henceforth mine to wield as best pleased myself.

Then, with the remaining lamp, the twelfth one, held high in a hand which did not shake or quiver, I entered the magic circle—and only then did I close the gap in the mystic figure with that twelfth lamp. For several minutes I stood thus, reveling in the sense of my own importance and splendor, for I felt—royal! Then, with a wave of my hand I began the spell that should drag back the soul of lost Edwin from whatsoever dim realm it had reached. Once it had beheld *my* glory—knew *my* power . . .

*It came!*

That command was too potent to be disregarded. And I beheld a white specter that gazed at me with eyes mutely reproaching me for that which I had done to him and his . . . Disillusion!

*That?* The poor, feeble, impotent, contemptible ghost—it was not worth summoning! Its love? Absurd! With a wave of my hand and a curt order I banished it from my presence. But what, oh! what, was left?

In my mind, unbidden, unsought, there formed another incantation. I swear that never had I read *that* in any book. It was the clarion call of a soul athirst for love—the call of a soul high enough to be greatly daring—for that call would summon no lover from earth's weak children . . . I uttered it in clear, full tones. And I would that brain had shriveled and tongue withered ere I thought, and dared, that unholy evocation.

Yet what ensued was anything save terrifying! Came a blaze of regal, splendid, somber purple and dusky gold; and, lo! just outside the magic circle stood one whose lofty bearing and prideful look bespoke him no lowly, common spirit.

His great, luminous eyes met mine and in their depths I read full understanding and mutuality of purpose. On his lips a slow smile hovered, proclaiming louder than words the extent of his admiration of myself.

But back of him!

Rank on rank, stretching away in space as though no chamber walls existed, were ranged a throng, hardly less glorious than was he in appearance. Who or what he might be, I knew not—then. But one thing was very evident, would have been clear to a duller wit than mine—he was their Master, their Leader, their Overlord.

And mine!

None who has not faced such a being can comprehend the subtle urge which I knew then. Never thereafter for me could there be inclination toward mortal man, not though one such should lay at my feet all the treasures of Golconda.

That mighty being was kneeling just without the barrier of the protecting circle. His arms were outstretched, his fingers barely avoiding passing above the mystic lines traced upon the floor. And I—I laughed in his face. But not the derisive laughter of scorn—nay! it was the laugh with which a woman greets her well-beloved.

"Thou art a—demon?"

"Call me that, if thou wilt—thy 'demon-lover', and I'll be content!"

"But what, then?"

"A rebellious Angel—I!"

"Lucifer?"

"Not so—yet his co-equal!"

"Who, I said?"

"Hesperus!"

"And *I*?"

"Shalt share my throne and power!"

"On earth?"

"Here—and hereafter!"

Again I laughed. Triumphant. Thrilled at my evident power over such a being. But not thus easily was I to be won. I would make certain of his love.

"Nay, not tonight!"

He rose to his full height, folding his arms across his breast. His brilliant eyes flamed into mine—there was not a yard of distance between us, for I had unknowingly drawn close to the edge of the ring "Pass Not".

"Thou wilt summon thy Hesperus again, O Beloved?" The cadence of his tones thrilled me as never had I thrilled before.

"Assuredly."

"Soon?"

"Perhaps."

"A token from thee, my Queen, ere I depart?"

What had I to bestow? Then I remembered. On my finger I wore a ring set with a black opal. It had been my mother's and her mother's before her. But surely, it was mine now. It should have been sacred. But what was sacred to me—then? I stripped it from my finger, *kissed it,* and tossed it to him. And by that one piece of folly gave him a focus whereto he could always direct his thoughts, so, reach me, invariably, at his will! But I knew not that, at the time. Would that I had! The blaze of splendor—triumphant—from his eyes, well-nigh intoxicated me! I reeled backward to the center formed by the interlaced triangles. It was a genuine physical effort to keep from rushing forward again—to his embrace!

For a full hour I stood there, still guarded by the power of those protecting symbols I had traced upon the floor; accepting homage, as one by one his attendant host of lesser fallen angels and fiends and demons filed past me; each in his turn bending the knee and bowing his head in subjugation to their Lord's choice—their Queen to be! He, last of all his subject throng, saluted precisely as had the least of his followers. Then he, too, vanished, and I was alone.

THAT night I slept fitfully. Visions of pomp, and pride, and power filled my mind to drunkenness. Little could I recall of them when daylight filled my room, but while the dreams lasted, they were gorgeous. No one had entered my room, that I knew, for the door was locked on the inside. Yet on my dressing table I found a necklace the like of which never was known on earth before.

It was a long chain of some dusky yellow metal, neither copper nor gold. The links were strangely wrought and intricately twisted. Pendant from every link hung a transparent, ruby-colored stone; each one fashioned artfully to the semblance of a small human heart. And, most peculiar feature of all, while each heart-shaped stone was in reality smooth, yet at a casual glance each one seemed to be actually sweating drops of blood!

A jeweler to whom I showed them said it was due to some peculiarity of crystallization; but he could not for all his skill and his experience of years name the stones; and he was a sorely puzzled man. Nor was he at all pleased when I refused to tell him whence I had them. All I would vouchsafe was: "Oh, a gift from a ruling Prince—an admirer . . ."

I wore the gift of Hesperus, for such I knew the necklace to be, to a ball that night. I was never popular with the members of my own sex, but on that night it seemed to me that many who had at least formerly pretended to be nice to me acted as though they actually feared me. There was a truly great statesman there. I had never formally met him. But as I passed him during the

course of the evening, I saw such involuntary admiration betrayed in his eyes that I favored him with a dazzling smile.

I heard him query of the lady to whom at the moment he was talking:

"Who is that superbly beautiful creature?"

"Lura Veyle," she snapped, all out of patience with him. "Stuck-up thing . . ."

He contrived to get himself introduced to me. It was easily accomplished. There were mutual acquaintances. We did not dance. We sat—and *he* talked. He was a brilliant conversationist, and on that occasion he fairly outdid himself. Inwardly I smiled. It was so obvious. Later he wheedled me into accompanying him to a dimly lit balcony—"for a breath of fresh air," he said.

I'll admit I was flattered by his attentions. What woman wouldn't be? Hardly were we alone than—it was highly improper, especially from one such as he, with his social status—he attempted to slip his arm about my waist, murmuring: "I know—dear—it's presumption on such short acquaintance, but—Lura—I——"

It was as far as he ever got! Even in that half-light I saw his eyes protrude; while over his face came a look of unqualified terror. His knees gave from under him and he slumped down, whispering, "My—heart——"

Naturally, I shrieked! He lived

**"You would be thick!" she screamed. "Wallow there, and soon you shall be thick indeed."**

barely long enough to gasp, audibly, so that others as well as myself heard him: *"The—Devil——"*

Truly, I knew myself the beloved of Hesperus!

OF COURSE, the tragic episode broke up the ball. It was then just a few minutes past midnight, and naturally, all the guests went to their respective homes. I, however, had no intention of losing any sleep because of the regrettable circumstance. Wherefore, by 1:30 I was in my bed and sound asleep. But before 2:30 I was once more wide awake. Moved by an impulse I did not pause to analyze, I arose, donned a light kimono and slipped from my room to that empty chamber wherein I was accustomed to perform my strange and unhallowed practises.

Deliberately I caused the mystic lamps to ignite, and equally deliberately I refrained from drawing the protecting lines of the mighty ring "Pass Not", although I knew full well that unless I stood in the center of the potent dodecagon formed by the interlaced triangles, there would be no protection or safety for my spirit from the Haters who Haunt.

Yet I, in my arrogance, ignored that awful danger. It was well enough for lesser souls, I thought, contemptuously, to take all due precautions; but for me they were superfluous, puerile.

Was not I the beloved of the great Hesperus? Most assuredly, yes! Then what lesser powers dared molest *me*, when to do so would be to incur the full wrath of their puissant Overlord, whose terrific vengeance could nowise be escaped or averted?

Even more rashly, that I might omit no single detail which could aid in filling my cup of folly brimful and running over; after I had cast aside my earthly habiliments, with the exception of that wondrous necklace of ruby-colored, bleeding stone human hearts, I once more voiced that same incantation that had first brought my Dark Angel to my presence.

I had not uttered a third of the spell ere he arrived! And wondrous power that was his, for one moment he was a mighty spirit, devoid of material substance; and the next moment, his was a form as solid as my own, into whose arms I yielded myself! Our lips met—and in the next instant—I was in the halls of hell!

Nor have I ever seen that body which was Lura Veyle since!

But I presume that they—my relatives and friends—interred the inert form with appropriate ceremonials; and praised the departed soul; and mourned my loss, after the fashion of earth's dwellers.

I suppose I should have been either terror-stricken or else enraged, because of what had happened to me. But in truth I was neither angry nor frightened. I say it honestly—my sole reaction to that stupendous change was a certitude that I had reached home! For I actually felt thus. I had attained to my own proper place, my true environment!

To my added satisfaction I found that I was robed in splendor far surpassing the fairest dream of any earthly costumer. On my brow was a scintillant diadem of many-colored jewels. In my hand I was holding a scepter of gold, gem-studded, tipped with a great amethystine stone which was carven into a symbol strange to me; but which, I knew in some indefinable way, possessed in itself some very potent properties.

Obviously I was in a palace—the palace of Hesperus, Ruler of one of the realms of hell. Equally obviously, I was in a chamber which had been prepared against my coming, for it was virtually a duplicate of my own personal room back upon earth; excepting that the furnishings and fittings were of more splendid

material and finer workmanship. I was standing before a great mirror, and reflected therein I could see myself as I was in all my glory.

Kneeling just before me, but one at each side a trifle, so as not to interfere with my view, were two shapely, nude, coppery-colored female slaves whom I rightly took to be there in the capacity of hand-maidens to my own royal self.

Oh, my soul knew where I was, and all that had happened, yet I pinched myself in several places—then I grasped one of the maids by the hair and tugged! The abject creature emitted a whimpering yell. I released her.

"But—but," I said, uncertain if they could understand my speech, "I seem—solid—as ever. You seem—solid . . ."

One, not her whose hair I had pulled, replied:

"O Regal Lady! Let this slave explain. Only your earth-body have you departed from. When *you* are not in it, it can not feel. You are now here. That which *felt* while in the earth-body now feels *here* . . . Only one envelope have you abandoned; and the self has many envelopes yet remaining. Each resembles, but more—*thin*—the outer one. Only it is really the other way about—for each one, going *outward,* is like the inner one, but coarser as one becomes more thick, until the greatest thickness is found upon earth . . .

"But when the earth-thick body is hurt, scars remain. Here no matter how badly the form may be injured, the wounds shortly close again—unless one is condemned to—destruction—by our Master . . ."

The slave faltered in her speech, while a look of ghastly fear overspread her intelligent features. Very low she whispered: "Before—*destruction*—are many—horrors to be undergone—then—the self is—*thinner*—in a different, but not less awful—hell . . ." and again that look of ghastly fear hinted at the untellable . . .

There ensued for me all the splendor which lay within the power of Hesperus to bestow. Feastings, revelries unholy at which I presided co-equal with him; glories and triumphs unimaginable; ecstasies so thrilling that mind can not in soberer moments comprehend such; and I was taught control of powers and forces stupendous; received homage from beings splendid, beings grotesque, and beings—or fiends—of malignancy so hideous they nearly appalled even my over-bold soul to gaze upon. These, all these and more, were mine for a period covering several earth-years; for in full compliance with his given promise, Hesperus proclaimed me his Queen, and I shared his throne and his authority.

However, these matters I do not enter into detail about, for it is not of my triumphs and the gratifications of my inordinate ambitions, vanities, and arrogance that I would tell, but of what came after. But even before the crash occurred, I should have been warned, for there were times when I deemed, vaguely, that I detected a fleeting sneer on more than one countenance as some spirit, or fiend, bent the knee before me and bowed the head in token of subjugation.

But ultimately I could not conceal from myself that Hesperus was neglecting me; stating quietly that important affairs which concerned me as well as himself were demanding all his attention. And, perforce, with that meager explanation I must needs content myself. Finally, though, at a great banquet held in celebration of a victory over some band of Angelic Ones from a higher plane, my fate came upon me with a certainty leaving nothing to be hoped for.

As I entered the great hall by one portal, through another came Hes-

perus, and at his side glided with serpentine grace one who—I recognized the fact at a glance—had originated on some planet far different from that earth whence I had fallen!

The mocking smile on her curling lip was all too unmistakable. Rage suffused me. All the hell-nature that was mine rose up, rebellious; gone were all fears of consequences to myself, and naught remained but hate and—revenge!

Long ere this happening I had learned one of the uses of that amethystine-tipped scepter. What injury it could inflict—if any—on the actual spirit, I knew not; but to the various layers, or shells, or souls—call them as may be most suitable—I knew that it could do much. With wrath sufficiently intense suffusing the bearer, simply by pointing at the hated one with that symbol, annihilation of all which was visible ensued, abruptly.

And it was full at the towering figure of the Arch-Liar Hesperus himself that I directed its full potency, rather than at the beguiled fool swaying so gracefully triumphant, serpentlike, at his left side.

*And nothing happened!*

Only, a yelling, screaming, hooting, howling tumult of demoniacal laughter rocked that vast hall to its very foundations. The merriment of the utterly damned, rejoicing at the humiliation and the shame of her to whom, formerly, they had rendered abject homage!

Reverting to earthly methods, I drew back my arm and hurled that accursed scepter at the gravely smiling countenance of the Arch-Liar. Languidly he held up a hand, and the whirling scepter floated, light as a feather, into his grasp.

And a moment later, with no volition of my own, I found myself, denuded of all my regal robes and ornaments, crouched like any abject slave at his feet, helpless, unable even to move! While all about us crowded and jostled and swirled that fiendish throng, mocking, jeering, reviling me, gloating, appraising that beauty which was mine, so ruthlessly revealed.

SUDDENLY Hesperus singled out one from amongst that hideous mob. "Thou," he commanded.

The monster approached, bent the knee in fealty. I shuddered with horror at his aspect. A dreadful premonition overwhelmed me, and with it there came despair absolute, unleavened by any hope! I knew my fate.

I can not adequately describe that —oh! *what* shall I term it—or him! All that I can say is—it was a huge, hairy-appearing brute, altogether bestial; yet in a way a most amazing travesty on the human type. Its back was furry, but what seemed to be hair, I learned later, was in reality more closely allied to the quills on a porcupine, although longer, thicker, and more sharply pointed. Its front was scaly skin like an alligator's under-parts; and its awful, cruel face and head were of some horny substance closely resembling the upper shell of a turtle.

Add to all this two round, black, lack-luster eyes, staring lidless, with a dull red glow showing beneath their inky surfaces; and two upper eye-teeth so long that they hung always bared nearly to the chin of the Thing —and you will have then but a poor and feeble word-picture. Its sole weapon was a ponderous, spike-studded bronze mace, nearly as long as the monster was tall.

"Thy name?" Hesperus demanded.

"Grarhorg!"

"Thy rank?"

"Guardian of thy watch-tower of Nak-Jad, standing where thy north frontier o'erlooks the Gorge of the Gray Shine."

"A lonely, a drear, and a dangerous post," Hesperus said reflectively, while the rabble ceased its clamor in anticipation of that which was yet to come.

"All that," growled the beast-fiend, truculently. "Yet I hold it fast, under thee. Naught from the north has ever passed thy border unbidden since thou didst commission me the Guardian of Nak-Jad."

"The force under thee?"

"Composed of Vobwins, Sogmirs, and Miljips. A mixed array, a bare ten score; but sufficient, under *me*."

Hesperus nodded approbation of this modest speech.

"Thy recreations are——?"

"Holding thy line inviolate, as bidden."

"But thy followers?"

"Find it suffices them that I am not displeased. Nay, are they nobles of thy court, that they should know delight in soft dalliance?"

"Thou art bold, Grarhorg," Hesperus reproved sternly, but a moment later he fairly smiled with delight when Grarhorg, nowise abashed, retorted grimly:

"There is need of boldness in him who can hold Nak-Jad secure!"

"See, my Grarhorg"—Hesperus indicated miserable me crouched there between them as they faced each other—"here is some slight recompense for thy labors, a comfort in thy loneliness, and a toy for thy idle moments."

"Mine?" The monster seemed incredulous.

"Aye," nodded Hesperus, "a toy for thee."

A huge paw, with claws as long and as sharp as those of a bear, clamped down on my bare shoulder. I was tucked under the hideous fiend's arm as though I were an inanimate bundle. In a voice as harshly reverberating as the bellow of a great bull alligator, such as I have often heard by the river near our family home upon earth, the monster roared, exultant: "Grarhorg, for this, will hold Nak-Jad safe though thou wert—pardoned!"

Even Hesperus laughed outright at the absurdity of that possibility; but that usurper Starling, swaying serpent-fashion beside her new Lord, asked, furthering the jest: "But why, Grarhorg, after he were pardoned?"

"Because he would soon return," retorted the brute. "What, do I not know my Lord by this time?"

"Enough of this," exclaimed Hesperus when the laugh died down. "Let the feast commence." He would have led the way to the long tables but Grarhorg spoke once again.

"Thy leave to return to Nak-Jad—now?"

"Small honor dost thou do us and our feast," Hesperus replied. "Why such haste?"

"This—my 'toy'," explained Grarhorg succinctly. "There is meat to be had in Nak-Jad for the eating, as well as here. Let this *infant* depart with his plaything, O mighty Hesperus."

"Farewell, sweet babe," mocked Hesperus. "Thou hast my permission."

Grarhorg, with no further words, turned from the festivities and strode out of the great hall to a wide, high-walled courtyard where he opened his ugly gash of a mouth and emitted a raucous howl. Came the swishing of mighty pinions, a fetid odor, and, swooping down from the air above, a winged nightmare descended.

It had the head of a crocodile, the neck of a serpent, a lizard's body, the legs and talons of a vulture many times magnified, and the wings were those of a gigantic bat. It towered above the huge Grarhorg half again as high. Grarhorg caught me by the neck in one great paw and held me out to the nightmare.

"Carry this—thou," he rumbled. "Harm it not—or *I* harm thee!"

The sinuous neck arched, the ugly head shot downward, and the bony jaws seized me by the middle. I felt every sharp-pointed tooth sink deeply into my waist, piercing me through and through. Writhing and screaming in agony unbearable, but which yet I had to endure, I beheld Grarhorg clamber to the back of the nightmare and seat himself where serpent neck joined lizard body. Smiting his frightful steed a heavy thump with his bronze mace he yelled:

"Back to Nak-Jad!"

I was but a sickly, whimpering, moaning, semi-conscious · *limpness* when the Blood-Red Tower was reached. And that edifice I can not describe at all. I was barely aware that that nauseating breath was no longer scorching my middle at the same time that both extremities were almost freezing from the intense cold of the air through which we had flown at a speed incredible. Dimly I could perceive a building and that its color was scarlet-red; but thereafter I never saw again its outside.

Grarhorg, descending from his seat on the nightmare's back, received me in one capacious paw and strode through a narrow door . . .

It is not within the scope of the human mentality to comprehend an infinitesimal portion, even, of the soul-nauseating outrages and degrading debaucheries to which I was subjected . . . Grarhorg—eventually tired—then——

Ensued a period so dreadful I lost even the concept of time. There were . . . Vobwins; Sogmirs; Miljips . . . each worse than the preceding ones . . . argh! I—I——

An abominable Sogmir, who, at his best, was fouler, more cruel, viler even than Grarhorg was at his worst; wearied, too . . . as a new amusement, grasped me by the ankle, whirled me about his head, and, sufficient momentum established, he released his hundred-clawed clutch, sending me hurtling headlong, headlong, through a window in the lower story of the Red Tower of Nak-Jad, out into empty space! I fell as falls a shooting star, down and adown into the ghastly Gorge of the Gray Shine!

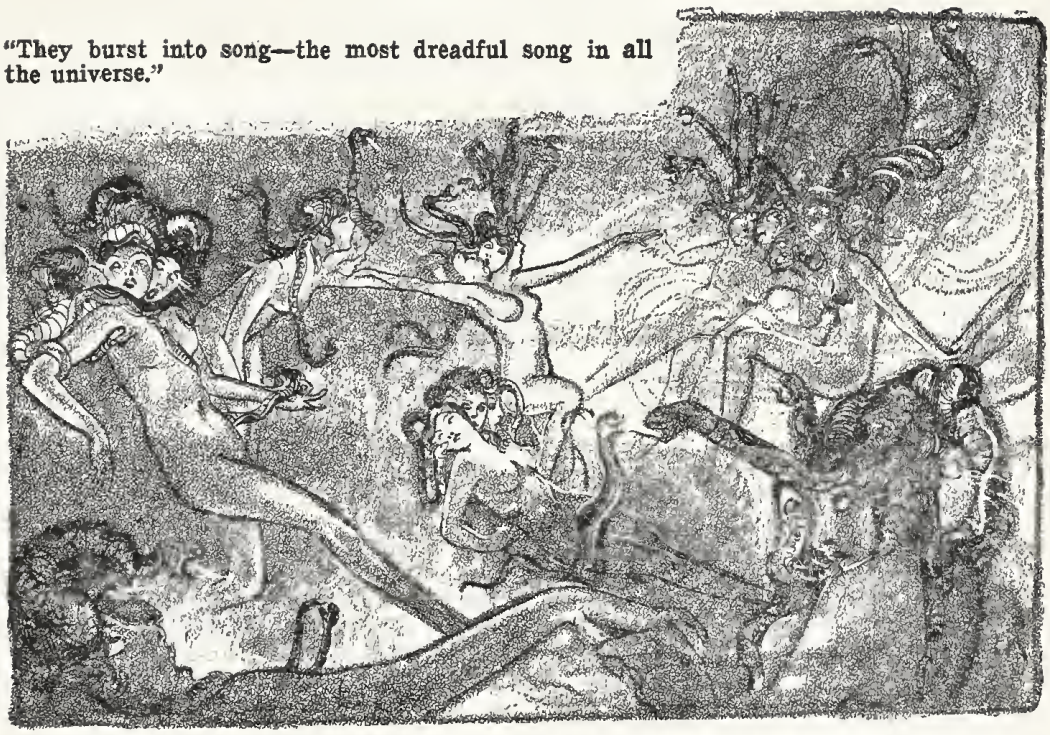
Actually I could hear the *squolch* as my form struck bottom! Saw the frightfully mangled form which had been so sickeningly tormented in Nak-Jad lying there, writhing, twitching, in feeble, expiring convulsions; until slowly the final quivering twitch indicated that the end had come. And realized that I myself had stood apart during all this, and had, in fact, but lost another of my shells; had now a new one in which to functionate; and was, in reality, but become more *thin*.

And oh, the relief of it, after Nak-Jad and——

SHRIEKING, sobbing, wailing and moaning in hopeless horror afresh, I whirled about and fled down the sloping bottom of the Gorge; for close behind me, with shrill whistlings and high-pitched pipings there raced a dozen or more luminous-shining skeletons, remarkably human in appearance; except that upon earth any one of them would have measured at least twenty feet in height, yet not one of them would have spanned, at the waist, to the bigness of a fourteen year old boy.

The bottom of the Gorge was for a long way as slippery-smooth as glare ice; and I skidded and slithered and slid as I ran, while behind me came that skeleton hell-brood, and they experienced not the slightest difficulty in maintaining their footing.

By what method can earth-time be measured in the many hells? Was it an hour—or a day—or an eon that I fled, and those ghastly things pursued? How may I tell? If horror is any criterion, it was an eternity of flight, spurred on by a nameless dread of consequences beyond even



"They burst into song—the most dreadful song in all the universe."

my concept, should I be overtaken. But oh! that Gorge seemed endless between those towering walls wherein that lone and sorely affrighted soul that was myself fled, wailing.

How or when or whence it came I had not noted, but I discovered that I was, for the first time since Hesperus cast me openly aside, once more arrayed in a robe. It was of some grayish, shining texture. It floated behind me like a filmy veil as I sped along on fear-driven feet. Then, suddenly, the robe was tight against my back as an icy wind blew shrieking down the Gorge.

That robe acted somewhat as a sail, which helped me, as it held part of that ponderous wind which swept me onward and forward. But that same wind helped my pursuers not at all, as their more *open* structures failed to catch or hold any assisting pressure from it. I began to have hopes . . .

And as usual, in those infernal regions, hope springs up but to add another and keener torment when the hope dies horridly . . . Abruptly I came to a halt. Incredulously I gazed, as well I might. For a very few more steps would have precipitated me, all asprawl, into a vast lake of dark blue slime or ooze! The Gorge of the Gray Shine had terminated. And that lake had no beach. Sheer cliffs rose on both sides of the mouth of the Gorge. And behind came on, avidly, that luminous skeleton crew. One, evidently fleeter than his fellows, was even then within reaching distance. His bony claw caught me by the throat. The piping whistling he kept uttering resolved itself into words:

"Thick—thick—like you! I shall draw strength and be *thick* . . ."

Desperation and nausea aroused wrath within me. Wrath such as I had thought was obliterated completely from my nature, slain beyond all possibility of re-arousal during the loathly depravities to which I had been subjected while in the power of

the demoniacal vilenesses who inhabited the Blood-Red Tower of Nak-Jad.

There, at first, I had tried to fight against my fate, in regal indignation, for I had not then lost my pride and arrogance, even though I no longer queened it by the side of Hesperus.

But such awful punishment had been dealt me by Grarhorg that it very effectually slew the last temerarious thought of resistance. So that thereafter I had dared do naught else than tamely submit to whatsoever of humiliating degradation he might choose next to inflict upon his—"toy." And after he had become wearied of me and had cast me to his legion—I had been in even worse plight, likewise endured inertly, indifferently at times, when the overtaxed spirit could no longer recognize varying degrees of agonized, excruciating suffering.

All this was flashing through my mind as that bony grisliness clutched me by my throat. But at that chill touch, the rapidly mounting wrath within me exploded. Exerting a strength I knew not before that moment that I possessed, I struck violently at that pallid white forearm. It broke! Broke like a brittle twig! The fleshless, thickless fingers fell at my feet. In my turn I grappled that elongated animate skeleton and lifted! It was feather-light. I hurled it from me out into the Lake of the Dark Blue Ooze!

"You would be *thick!*" I screamed. "Wallow there, then, and soon shall you become thick indeed!"

The skeleton fell on the surface of the slimy lake, but did not sink, for the stuff was too dense; although it was not exactly solid, either, being more like the gumbo mud of my natal region upon earth. After considerable struggling the animate abhorrence got to its feet, but it no more resembled a skeleton. I had plenty of time to watch; as the other members of the pursuing band had halted in a hesitant group.

I laughed, openly, mocking them. Actually, I had at last encountered some *things* that were afraid of *me!* Yet, I knew that, did I attempt to retrace my steps and go back up the Gorge, they would be upon me like so many ravening wolves; and against such odds I could not dare to contend. Also, doubtless, there would be many others like them, and probably things even worse to be encountered should I escape them, so long as I should stay in that Gorge.

I turned again to observe the thing I had flung into the lake. It was no longer pallid white. Rather, it more resembled a corpse decaying and blackening from putrescence. It was not a pretty sight, even to eyes such as were mine, inured to horrid sights. It had accumulated all the thickness it could carry, and too much; albeit not of the sort it had desired so avidly. As I watched, its knees buckled, overweighted, and it went down and stayed prone. Slowly, very slowly, it partially settled into the gummous ooze.

A wild idea possessed me. Upon earth the suicide disposes of one shell at least, speedily. Already I had lost two, and could have not so very many more remaining. Behind me were the animate skeletons who waited ... and before me the Lake of the Dark Blue Ooze. Well, I would intentionally cast myself upon the bosom of that sinister-appearing Lake, and if the ooze swallowed me, then I would have rid myself of all my woes at a single stroke. And if I should find that I had but lost another shell, with others still remaining, I'd no longer flee from any menacing Things; but would, rather, welcome them as unintentional deliverers.

I RUSHED out upon the surface of that ooze and found that it would bear my weight so long as I kept mov-

ing rapidly. I sank barely to my ankles in most places, although at times I would go down half-way to my knees. So I decided that I'd not lie down and quit, but keep going. Who knew? Perhaps even hell had its limits! Occasionally I stood on one foot and scraped the sticky stuff from the other and then reversed the operation. And so, went on, and on, and on.

Two red suns hung in the sky, close together, revolving about each other slowly. Apparently they never set, for the plane of their orbits seemed to be parallel to the surface of the lake. As I looked back, the cliffs where the Gorge of the Gray Shine debouched showed but as a dim, dun cloud. Ahead I could faintly see another shore showing as a purplish-black bank of cliffs. Was I at the bottom of a huge bowl with unscalable sides? Or would there be a way out—and if so, into what would it lead me of further horrors unguessed?

But I was thinking too far ahead, borrowing trouble when real trouble was awaiting me but a few yards ahead of where I then was. If the evidence of my sight was to be relied upon, I was approximately half-way across the lake. And just in front of me was a genuine pool, a lesser lake of clear, limpid fluid within a greater lake of viscous ooze.

The pool mirrored the red suns, and, vanity not yet wholly dead within me, I bent above its surface, desiring to see how I appeared after all my many vicissitudes. And a long, whiplike tentacle whirled upward from the depths, barely missing my face! Another instant, and that pool was aboil with squirming, writhing snaky feelers that came over the edge and secured fast anchorage on the surface of the ooze. Another instant still, and great purplish-pallid globular bodies hove themselves up from below and pulled themselves out upon the ooze which easily supported their weights. Great, round, black, lackluster eyes, horrifically reminiscent of the baleful eyes of Grarhorg, were glaring into my own wildly staring orbs!

I howled—*howled*—in maniac frenzy, and, catching up my robe, for I sorely needed free use of my members, I departed, full speed; howling at every jump! And those damnable things, octopods, or rather, polypods; for each had many more than eight legs; swarmed over that slimy surface much faster than I could run.

Short indeed was the distance I covered before I was overtaken. One clammy tentacle had me by the waist, hauled me back so violently that I went sprawling flat—and was at once the nucleus of a heaving, feasting mass that was drawing through many rubbery suction cups, wherewith each tentacle was provided, the substance composing that form or shell serving me as a body. I could feel ropy strips of substance pulling away from me to the accompaniment of such rending and racking tortures as I had never before then undergone. Nothing which Grarhorg and his myrmidons . . .

The globular, many-tentacled ghouls were slowly crawling back to their limpid pool, leaving me lying there. With a shock I realized how *thin* I had become. Then realized that I no longer *hurt*. Slowly I comprehended what had actually happened. The ghouls had depleted so much of my *thick* that I had become invisible and intangible to them; so that, to them, I was as one wholly devoured, leaving nothing more to be assimilated.

Then I noted another fact. In actuality I was no longer in contact with the surface of the ooze; but was floating at an appreciable height above that gummy slime. I was in a horizontal posture, but as soon as I attempted to assume the perpendicu-

lar I was successful. So, off I set once more, heading for the black cliffs ahead. My progress, for I was literally walking on, or through, the air, was so restful after my wild race from the ghouls, that it seemed no time at all ere I was looking up the towering walls and wondering how I was to surmount them.

I caught myself wishing that I could fly. Dimly, somewhere in my consciousness an earth-word was urging remembrance . . . what . . . again . . . "Levitation . . ." what was that? But even as I was thinking—as the meaning came—so I began to float upward, slowly at first, but as conscious will took charge, faster and faster—I was atop!

EVEN at the cliff-lip the light was so dull it was a dusky twilight; and but a short way inland, it was black as black could well be. Nor, try as I would, could I levitate myself above it. Yet I dared not go back the way I had come, and the narrow strip of twilight zone seemingly terminated but a few yards in either direction from where I stood. With no alternative I walked directly away from the cliff-lip and into that dense pall of blackness.

Hark! What was that rumbling, rolling reverberation? Thunder, of course . . . Again! Thunder? Perhaps . . . And once again. And that time I became positive that whatever it might be, thunder it certainly was not! Peal on peal that heavy rumbling shook that dense blackness—peal on peal of Gargantuan laughter!

At me? And if so, why? It simply couldn't be directed at, or caused by, my own small and thin self. There was not sufficient of importance about one poor, disconsolate, lost soul to occasion all that disturbance!

I decided I would head directly toward its source. But that was more easily decided upon than accomplished. It was ahead! It was back of me! Only it wasn't back of me at all! It was off to the right—no! it was close by, to the left—but, it was overhead and very, very near—no, again! it was straight beneath me, down, away down—except that it was everywhere at one and the same moment . . .

And I was more afraid of that awful laughter than I had been of the many-tentacled ghouls which had risen from the limpid pool in the Lake of the Dark Blue Ooze!

It shook one so! It aroused imaginings of beings monstrous; beings such as had never known light-rays; beings that had lived in Chaos and Old Night! And with that last thought, I knew to what realm I had arrived.

I was in that original Great Void which was, long before the shining worlds were created; beyond the Last Frontier; remote even from the scope of the Ultimate—*Mercy!*

I commenced speculating: "Mercy . . . Mercy . . . Ultimate Mercy . . . and what is it, this—"Mercy"? But try as I would, I could make nothing intelligible of that word "Mercy". Yet I had heard that word—but where, and when, and under what circumstances? . . . although I could not recall what it meant, nor how it was to be reached—won—nor of what use it would prove to be, once it was —was—"granted!"

No wonder that then I could not understand. Two abstractions these, which I had never rendered concrete in all my selfish, cruel existence upon earth—the universe's training school for souls.

Not that I thought out at that moment the last part of what I have just said. That is only a recent realization. All I was capable of actually comprehending at that period, was the lost and hopeless condition in which I found myself. One thing,

however, I could not well ignore—that fearsome laughter!

My progress was slow, dreadfully so. Just that! For every step was taken in dread of the unknown; which—considering my experiences during what seemed to my wearied soul to have lasted for eons past—must necessarily be "dreadful." Why! How could I even foresee what frightful calamity the next step might precipitate me into? For that matter, I could not see anything at all! That blackness was so dense I could feel it! Save for the fact that it was dry, it was virtually as dense a medium as water, calling forth as much exertion as would swimming in order to make appreciable headway through it. Yet in reality I was not swimming, but as I have said, I was walking.

There were times when I trod on what I knew to be bones—old, dry bones that broke, crackling, beneath my feet. There were times when I stepped on things that wriggled and squirmed, sluggishly, underfoot. There were occasions when I felt long, soft, furry somethings drifting aimless through the air; that brushed against my face and body, sickeningly. There were long spells when I seemed to be part of a multitude of invisible beings, not even so solid as was I; chill, feeble beings that did but weep and wail, low-voiced; while over, and under, and through, and all about, reverberated that shaken laughter.

And then again I would wander alone in stygian darkness; alone save for that terrible merriment that was not mirth, nor anguish, nor sorrow, nor any other emotion known to human concept; but which yet bespoke a horror greater than all other horrors—the Horror of Great Darkness itself, as mentioned, guardedly, in the Ancient Books.

It became unbearable, totally so! Nothing could be worse! Rather than endure my fears alone another moment, I would cheerfully have welcomed Grarhorg and his hellish crew in the Blood-Red Tower of Nak-Jad as dearly beloved playmates!

The last vestige of what—borrowing an earth-word—I must perforce term "spunk" quitted me. For, after all, the self can endure only so much and thereafter it capitulates, regardless. As did I!

I opened my mouth, and all the repressed terror which was stifling me found expression in a prolonged series of howls, yells, and shrieks! Not mere whisperings and low-voiced wailings, either; but a perfect pandemonium of discordant vocalization that for the time at least, to myself, forced the terrible shaken laughter into taking second place in volume.

MY SCREAMS were replied to by screams even louder and more horrific than were those I had emitted. A horde of bipedal beings, apparently formed of fire, for they glowed as if internally they were in a state of combustion, rushed at me swifter than the swooping of hawks dropping from above.

A horde of women, naked, the most beautifully modeled figures I ever beheld; but with their classically perfect faces writhed into the most damnable expressions of malignancy imaginable. Three-headed they were, every one of them; with twisting, squirming knots and coils of slim serpents atop their heads in lieu of hair. And long jets and flickers of flame issued from their straining mouths at every screech, while from their lurid eyes streamed rays of baleful, cold, green fire! Aghast, I fled! I was not immune from terror at such a visitation as I myself had invited!

Ah well! They soon caught me, for they were long of limb and fleet of foot and much *thicker* than was I, and of strength prodigious. I was

surrounded by them. They screamed —words, at me. They clasped me in their arms, hugging me fiercely to their burning breasts. They—*kissed me!* Kissed me, avidly, with lips that scorched, while they breathed searing sighs into my nostrils and between my lips. They tore me from one another's embrace, jealously, each shrieking, maniacally, that she loved me!

They pushed, clawed, and fought with one another to obtain momentary possession of me; and all the while the writhing serpents of their hair struck, and struck, and struck again at my face, and neck, and shoulders, and breast; infusing at every touch their venom into that shrinking, anguished, naked thing that was "I."

What abominable poisons entered into me, whether from serpent-stings or Furies' breaths, or from both together, I can not say; but—ere long I—*I was kissing them in return;* avid, panting, drunken, knowing that I was fast becoming as they were! Aware too, that I was commencing to *glow;* was full of flame delighting while it hurt excruciatingly—and, worst of all the many terrible things which had happened during all that period elapsing since I had received the first embrace of Hesperus, I was aware that I was fiendishly glad to be at one with them!

Likewise, I knew that I was rapidly becoming *thick*—almost if not entirely as thick as were they, for they were actually endowing me with their substance. And I could feel that, starting at each cheek-bone and reaching to about the back of my neck, another face was growing out of my head! Knew, surely, irrefutably, that my long, fine hair which upon earth had hung nearly to my knees, was turning—nay, had turned —into thin, venomous serpents that writhed, hissing soft wickednesses into my ears, which thrilled, joyously, at the enticing music of the sibilant sounds!

Sudden as leaves before the breath of a wind, the Flaming Women, or Furies, released me, scattering as blown leaves, into open order; and promptly, clasping hands, they formed a ring having me as its center; then, slowly at first but with ever-increasing swiftness, they swirled into a dance, amazingly graceful, yet, in its way, terrible, too; because of its utter, voluptuous abandonment.

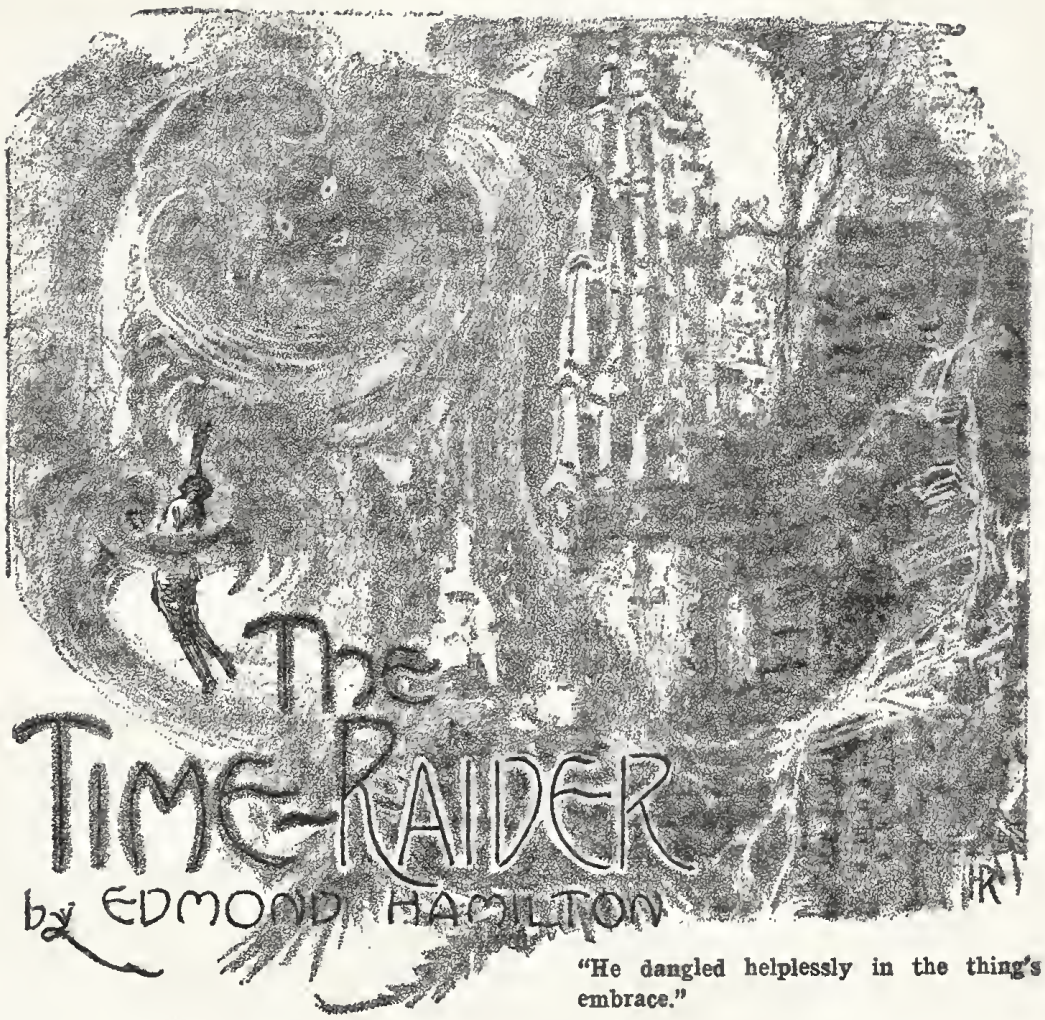
They burst into song—the most dreadful song in all the universe. A chant of initiation and welcome into their ranks. A song of instruction revealing to me depravities and loathly delights of abandonment such as I, who had been the victim of much that is foul, could not wholly understand the meaning of.

Even now, so deeply were those burning words branded upon my innermost self, I could recall, if I would, every horrifying word as well as every alluring, nauseating sweet tone of that frightful song.

Catching fire from their fire, I swayed and swirled and swung with abandonment equaling theirs. I spun and pirouetted wildly, frenziedly, until the serpent-locks upon my heads stood out horizontally, rigid; as I postured more vilely, if that were possible, than they; and, gradually finding my voice again, I too, took up the burden of that song.

That song I will not, dare not repeat! Were I even to *think* it from its tempting beginning to its sinful end this earth would become polluted beyond all hope, and would become but one more of the many hells in a long chain of hells. For that song, in full, would summon hither that entire flaming horde to ravage this fair planet until the Angels of the fur-

*(Continued on page 569)*




**"He dangled helplessly in the thing's embrace."**

## *CHAPTER 1*

## THE CANNELL MYSTERY

IN BEGINNING this account of our great adventure, it must be understood that I attempt no complete history of the matter. There will be gaps, many gaps, in the continuity of my story, for that story remains, after all, simply a record of my own contacts with the Raider, and with those people whose lives he entered and darkened. So that my tale here is necessarily one of personal experience, except for a few places where I have summarized general knowledge.

Besides this history of what I may term the more human side of our experience, Dr. Lantin has dealt with its scientific aspects in his epochal work on time-displacement and in our joint monograph on electronic acceleration. Although several salient features of the affair have been omitted, for reasons that will figure later, yet the two works mentioned and the present record give a broad outline of the whole matter, from the beginning.

From the beginning! But where was that beginning? Ages back in the past, or ages ahead in the future? To place the true beginning of it all would be to know much about it that we do not know. So I start at the

point where the matter definitely entered my own life and world. And that point, that event, is the Cannell Mystery, as it was then termed.

You will find it in the newspapers of the day, the bare facts wrapped in clouds of speculation. Professor Ferdinand Cannell, of New York, disappearing inexplicably in the jungles of Indo-China, vanishing from the world of men as though blotted out.

At that time, Cannell was undoubtedly one of the very greatest of living archeologists. Nominally attached to a great New York museum, he was really a free-lance student and excavator, roaming about the world in search of proof for his numerous and startling theories. His first fame had been established by his researches into the Dravidian remnants in lower India, and he had followed that brilliant achievement by another as great, the monumental Warren Society investigation into the walled ruins of Zimbabwe, in South Africa.

With two such successes behind him, Cannell then boldly proposed to make the subject of his next researches the mighty ruined city of Angkor, in the heart of the Cambodian jungle. Angkor has long been a colossal challenge to modern wisdom, a gigantic, towered metropolis of gray stone, once noisy with the life of swarming millions, but silent and dead now, unutterably dead. A thousand years the huge ruin has lain in the jungle, wrapped in silence, inhabited only by snakes and bats and tigers. Its past, the history of its builders, has been a vast enigma always, which Cannell had determined to solve.

So he sailed for Hongkong, and Dr. Lantin and I were on the dock when his ship cleared. My own acquaintance with Cannell was recent, but Lantin and he had been close friends for years. Their friendship dated back to their university days, and had continued after they diverged into different lines of work, Cannell's taking him to the remnants of past peoples, while Lantin's interest in radio-chemistry had brought him to the great New York laboratories of the Downe Foundation, with myself as his laboratory assistant.

For all their warm friendship, there was a strong contrast between the two men. Cannell was the younger by a few years, a blond giant of thirty-five or thirty-six, with snapping blue eyes and a habit of talking with machine-gun rapidity. Altogether the antithesis of Dr. Lantin, who was dark, medium of stature and quiet of manner, with friendly gray eyes that could take on the glint of steel, at times.

Together we had waved farewell to Cannell and a few weeks later had received a cable from Saigon, in Indo-China, briefly announcing his arrival. He had then proceeded up the Mekong River into the wilderness of the interior, and finally over a network of winding creeks to Angkor itself. The latter stage of the journey was made in canoes, some seven or eight natives poling along Cannell and his outfit, but no other white man was in the party.

No more was heard of the venture until a week later, when the natives of Cannell's party straggled into a little up-river village, without him. They explained, volubly, that on the third night after reaching Angkor, the white man had been seized and carried away by the devils of the ruins. None of them had actually seen this but they had heard his scream, from a distance, and when they conquered their fears enough to search the ruins, had found no trace of him. It was clear that the powerful spirits of the dead city were angered, and had snatched away the white man who dared to disturb them,

so the terror-stricken natives had at once fled from the place with all speed.

On hearing this tale, several French planters made their way to Angkor, forcing the unwilling natives to accompany them, but they found no trace of Cannell, who seemed to have vanished completely. His tent and outfit were found, quite undisturbed, which tended to corroborate the natives' story regarding their sudden flight.

So when the little search-party returned, it was advanced as its opinion that Cannell had been seized and carried away by a roving tiger, his scream and disappearance being interpreted by the natives as a visitation of demons, since they were known to be extremely superstitious in regard to the dead city. While this explanation was faulty enough, it seemed the only rational one available, and was accepted by the authorities at Saigon.

And so the matter rested. Cannell's only relatives had been distant connections, and except for Lantin he had had scarcely one intimate friend, so after the first shock of surprize his passing caused little stir. The newspapers speculated briefly, and the archeological journals expressed regrets, referring to his splendid achievements. But that was all. New stars soon rose to fill his place in the scientific firmament. And Cannell was forgotten.

Time drove on. Days . . . . months . . . . years . . . .

## *CHAPTER 2*

## CANNELL'S STORY

I PASS to that June night, over three years after Cannell's disappearance, when my own part in the drama may be said to begin. Lantin and I were working late in our laboratory at the Foundation, when we were interrupted by the telephone bell. We had reached a critical point in our experiment, and as Lantin hurried over to the instrument, I heard him muttering threats to have it removed. I did not catch his first answer, but after a minute's silence he flung out a single word, in a strange voice, that startled me.

"Cannell!"

At once I hastened over to his side, and as I did so, he turned toward me a face eloquent of astonishment, still holding the receiver to his ear. "I'll be there in ten minutes!" he shouted into the instrument, then hung up and turned to face my excited questions.

"Good God, Wheeler," he cried, "it's Cannell!"

"What?" I asked, stupidly, dumfounded by the assertion.

"Cannell," he repeated, "at my apartment. He says to meet him there at once. Where could he have been, these three years?"

But I was already reaching for my hat and a moment later we were on the street outside, hailing a cruising taxi. Lantin's bachelor home was in the west 70's, a little roof-bungalow set on top of a big apartment building, and we sped up the avenue toward it with the highest legal speed.

Lantin did not speak at all, on the way. He was plainly highly excited, but my own agitation was fast calming. After all, I thought, the thing might be a stupid practical joke, though an unforgivable one to perpetrate. Still, if Lantin had recognized the voice—— Before I could ask him about that, the cab stopped, and we hastened into the building, to the elevator.

When the cage stopped at its highest point in the building, Lantin was instantly out and striding eagerly across the foyer of his apartment. He flung the door open, then stopped short. Standing behind him, I peered over his shoulder into the room inside. There was a man there, a man

who jumped to his feet and came quickly toward us. It was Cannell, I saw at once. Cannell—but changed.

His face was drawn and haggard, and instead of his former impatient, challenging expression, it bore the impress of an unearthly fear. A fear that showed even in the tense, half-crouching position of his body, as he came across the room toward us, searching our faces with his burning eyes. He came closer, gripped Lantin's hands, struggled to speak.

"Thank God you came, Lantin!" he cried, chokingly.

We stood speechless, and with a sudden reaction of feeling he stepped back and sank wearily into a chair, running his hand tiredly over his eyes. Lantin found his voice then for the first time.

"Where have you been, man?" he shouted. "Three years! For God's sake, Cannell, what happened to you? Where were you all that time?"

Cannell gazed up at us, strangely, somberly, a brooding darkness settling on his face. "All that time?" he repeated, musingly. "Three years? Three years to you, perhaps, but not to me. But not to me."

A sudden glance flashed between Lantin and myself. Was the man mad? Did that account for his strange disappearance?

Cannell saw and interpreted that glance. "I know what you're thinking," he told us, "and sometimes I think you're right, that I really am crazy. I would be better off if I were," he concluded, darkly. But before we could comment on his strange words, his mood changed abruptly and he motioned us to chairs beside him, bending toward us in sudden eagerness.

"But you two," he said, "I can tell you what I saw, what happened. I could not tell others—no! They would never have believed, and it may be that even you will not. But it is all truth—truth, I tell you!" And on the last words his voice rose to a high-pitched, ragged scream. Then, mastering his shattered nerves with an effort, he went on.

"You know why I went to Angkor, what I planned to do there. I went up the Mekong by steamer, then hired natives to take me the rest of the way in canoes. Up winding waterways they took me, through narrow creeks and old canals, and out over a great lake, in which a forest lay submerged. Then up another creek and finally by bullock-cart to Angkor itself.

"There is no use trying to describe the place to you. I have seen most of the great ruins of the past and the great buildings of the present, but Angkor towers above them all, the most magnificent thing ever built by the hands of men. It is a vast city of carven gray stone, a city whose lacelike sculptured walls and crenelated battlements have looked down for a thousand years on nothing but the jungle that hems it in, and the silence and death that lie incarnate in itself. Literally acres of ruined buildings, square miles of crumbling stone, and set in the heart of that great mass of remnants, the palace, Angkor Thom, a great ruin whose courts and walls and terraces lie as desolate and broken as the city around them.

"A deep moat surrounds the city, and out over it leads a great causeway, built of huge blocks of stone, a wide, level highway that leads through the jungle for a short distance to the supreme glory of the place, Angkor Wat, the gigantic temple. Unlike the palace and city, the temple has not fallen into ruins but remains nearly the same as it must have been when the city was living and splendid. It towers up to a tremendous height, its dark, frowning walls looming far above the green jungle around it. When I walked into it for the first time, the mighty grandeur of the place was so awesome and compelling that I felt pre-

sumptuous—ashamed. The stifling, brooding silence seemed to flow down on me like a tangible wave, humbling me, dwarfing me.

"I spent my first two days in a superficial exploration of the palace and city, wandering through the miles of crumbling streets and fallen buildings. But I pass over that to the third day, when I started my examination of Angkor Wat. All of that day I spent in the temple, alone, for the natives feared to venture into it. Along its marching walls life-sized figures were carved in exquisite relief, warriors, kings and elephants, battles and ceremonies, literally miles of lavished, delicate sculptures. I lingered with them, absorbed, until the sun had set and the swift tropical darkness was descending, then abruptly came to a realization of my surroundings and started for my camp.

"Through the deepening shadows of the temple's halls I went, stumbling here and there against fallen stones, and finally came with a slight sensation of relief to the stone-paved courtyard in front of the edifice, from which the great causeway led back to the city and to my camp. It was quite dark, now, but I stopped for a moment there, since the moon was just rising and the scene was one of perfect beauty—the calm moonlight flooding over the silent ruins, the dark, looming walls behind me, the black shadows that lay across the silver-lit courtyard. For minutes I stood there, fascinated, but finally turned to go.

"I walked across the courtyard, then stopped abruptly and looked up. A strange sound had come to my ears from above, a sound that was like distant, shrill whistling. It hung for a moment, faint and eery, then grew much louder, like a score of men whistling piercingly in different keys, varied, tumultuous. I half expected to see birds passing above, but there were none. The air had been heavy and still for hours, but now a puff of wind smote me, a little, buffeting breeze that changed suddenly to a hard wind and then to a raging gale that whipped the sun-helmet off my head and nearly twisted me from my feet. And with that sudden change, the whistling chorus above had changed also, had waxed to a raging tumult of wind-shrieks, piercing, tempestuous! Abruptly, now, there flashed into being in the air forty feet above me—a thing!

"It was a swirling mass of dense gray vapor, looking in the moonlight much like a drifting cloud of steam. But this smoky mass was alive with motion of its own, spinning and interlacing, and from it came the shrill chorus and the raging winds. And, too, I saw that somewhere inside those shifting mists glowed three little circles of green light, one set above the other two, three tiny, radiant orbs whose brilliance stood out even in the mellow moonlight.

"ABRUPTLY, as I stared up at the thing, those three circles of vivid green luminescence changed to purple, no less brilliant. And at the same instant, there came a change to the spinning mists around them. Those mists seemed to contract, to shrink, to solidify, and then they had vanished and in place of them hung a thing of solid matter, a mass of what seemed to be gray, resilient flesh, and at the center of which hung steadily the little triangle of purple lights. Nor was this solid mass any more unchanging than the misty one had been, for it seemed to have no one form, flashing with incredible speed through a myriad half-glimpsed shapes. It folded and unfolded, contracted, elongated, spun and writhed, a protean changing of shapes that my eyes could scarcely follow. But always the three little orbs of purple hung unchanged at its center.

"Scarcely more than a minute had elapsed since the thing first had appeared above me, and now as I gazed up at it, stupefied, I sensed dimly that the whistling sounds and the winds had died away. Then, before my dazed mind could fully comprehend the strangeness of the creature that hung in the air above me, that creature floated swiftly down beside me, so near that I could have touched it. And out from the changing, inchoate mass of it reached a long, twisting tentacle, straight toward me!

"I staggered weakly back, and screamed. But that arm circled and gripped me, then pulled me in toward the central mass of the thing. It was cold to the touch, an utter, numbing cold, like the chill of something from outer space, utterly alien to our earth and life. That cold shock stabbed through me and paralyzed me, and I dangled helplessly in the thing's grip, while at its center, seen, somehow, *through* the mass of the thing, the triangle of purple orbs seemed to watch me.

"All this had been enacted in a few moments, and now the inexplicable thing that held me began to rise again, to float up some distance above the ground. It still gripped me tightly, and now the purple orbs changed again to brilliant green, while again the solid, twisting mass of the thing changed, expanding and swirling, until it was again the drifting, spinning mass of vapor which I had first glimpsed. I floated in those mists, gripped as tightly as ever by their unseen holds, and now began again the shrill, piercing whistling, from all around me, while a rising torrent of wind roared around the thing that held me.

"At the same time, glancing up, I saw the moon racing across the sky above with incredible speed, bounding across the zenith like a shooting star and sinking down in the west. Hardly had it disappeared when there was an up-gush of gray light from the eastern horizon, and then the sun leapt up, red and flaming, and hurtled across the sky with even greater speed. I caught a glimpse of Angkor beneath, bathed in tropical sunlight. And a half-minute before it had been deepest night!

"A deadly sickness seized me, and while I strove against it the sun raced down into the west and it was night again, with the shining moon again flashing across the sky with nightmare speed. Again it disappeared and again the sun sprang up and rocketed headlong across the zenith. And for the first time there came to my numbed brain some realization of what was happening.

"This inexplicable thing that held me—this being of changing mists and vapors—was taking me on through *time*. It was whirling me on into the future, with some undreamed-of power of its own.

"The sun was racing across the sky with comet speed, now, a streak of golden light, and day and night followed each other like the flipped leaves of a book, faster and faster. In a few minutes they had become indistinguishable, had merged into a green twilight in which I could see but dimly the ground below. And even as we thus sped on through time, with ever-increasing speed, the thing that held me began to move through space also, and I caught a glimpse of ruined Angkor sliding away from beneath me.

"The thundering roar of the winds grew even louder as we moved simultaneously through time and space. I caught fragmentary glimpses of land flashing by beneath, with tremendous speed. And all the while I hung there in the grip of the thing, held by the smoky mist-spirals, swinging helplessly around and around the three circles of radiant green light at the thing's center.

"With a sudden surge of desperate courage, I tried to move in the remorseless grip that prisoned me, endeavored to raise my right hand to my belt, putting all my force into the effort. Slowly my hand came up, inch by inch, struggling against the unseen grip of iron that grasped me. It came up, with infinite slowness, until it was high enough to grasp the automatic in my belt-holster. I clasped the pistol's stock and threw off the safety catch, then, with another great effort, swung up the pistol until it pointed directly at the triangle of radiant orbs, and pulled the trigger.

"The report snapped out thinly above the thundering of the winds. And instantly the grip of the unseen, vaporous arms around me relaxed, releasing me utterly, and I plunged down through space.

"Down I fell, all of a hundred feet, and struck water, sinking down and down into it, ever more slowly, then hurtling up to the surface again, gasping for air. It was night, and above was no sign of the thing that had held me, so I judged that it had gone on into time. The water I swam in was salt, and I knew from the long, easy swells that I was in the open sea. There was no shore in sight, nor any sign of one, so I wasted no effort in swimming but strove only to keep afloat.

"For over two hours I floated, treading water easily, and had just decided that it would be best to give over my useless efforts and sink down to rest and peace, when a spark of light showed on the horizon, a spark too low to be a star. It grew larger, coming nearer, until I could make it out as one of the upper lights of a ship. In the course it was following, it would pass me at some distance, so I struck out in a direction that would bring me across its path.

"My hours in the water had told on my strength, though, and my progress was so slow that the ship had nearly passed me when I came within hailing distance of it. There were few lights on its decks, and no answer to my frantic cries. But when it had passed a little beyond me, I heard voices shouting and the rattle of a boat's tackle. I knew then that I was saved.

"The ship proved to be an oil-tanker, bound from Hongkong to Galveston. And as I found out, it had picked me up in the open Pacific, at a spot some three hundred miles east of Manila. The thing that held me had carried me that far, in space.

"I represented myself as the sole survivor of a wrecked tramp-steamer, and was not questioned overmuch. I dared not tell my story to those sailors, lest they prison me as a madman. I asked them a few discreet questions, though, and received an answer to one that staggered me. For I was no longer in my own year, the year in which I had been seized there at Angkor. I was in a year three years later! Three years! And it had seemed only a few minutes to me. I had been carried on, that far, into time.

"I took my place as one of the crew, on the voyage to Galveston, and worked my passage, though I was hard put to it to uphold my assertion that I was a seaman. We sailed on, forging across the Pacific and heading toward Panama. A night came when we were only a few hundred miles west of the canal. I was stretched in a forecastle bunk, vainly trying to sleep away the haunting fears that still filled me. The night was quite calm, with only the throb of the engines and the slap of waves on the hull breaking the silence. Then, faint and far, but sounding to me like the thunder of doom, came a distant, eery whistling, a piercing chorus that I knew well.

"It grew, it waxed to a tumult of roaring winds, while I lay crouched in the bunk, trembling. It seemed to swoop down on the deck above, and there rang out a great scream, a shriek of horror that burned into my brain. The roaring winds began to lessen, to draw away. I ran up onto the deck and looked wildly around. To the north, a little above and beyond the ship, was a hazy mass that I glimpsed vaguely in the moonlight, and that suddenly disappeared, still heading straight north. And the whistling chorus of winds died away.

"I sank down on the deck, sick at heart. For I knew what I had seen, knew that half-glimpsed thing to be the thing that had seized me at Angkor, and from which I had freed myself. Two of the watch, the only men on deck at the time, were missing, and all around me the sailors who had poured up onto the deck were speculating as to their disappearance, and the cause of the sudden, roaring winds. But I told them nothing. I knew well that the thing that had snatched me away before had come again to seize me, tracking me down, God knows how, perhaps by some mystic mark or brand that its grip had sealed upon me. I knew that it had come for me, and not finding me, had taken the two men on deck at the time. But I said nothing.

"It was finally agreed by the ship's officers to report the event as the loss of two sailors, swept overboard by a sudden gale. It went down in the ship's log, thus, and we sailed on. But the crew was fearful, whispering. . . .

"The ship came safe to Galveston, though. The wages due me as a seaman were enough to get me to New York. I came at once to your apartment, and the rest you know.

"What is that thing that seized me, that enigmatic Raider through time? God alone knows, if even He is aware of its existence. But I know that it swept down on me through time and seized me, that it flashed with me through those three years in almost as few minutes. And I know that it has marked me for its victim and will come for me again, maybe in pure revenge for that shot of mine that released me.

"Where is there refuge from a thing like that, that can speed through time and space at will? Twice I have escaped it, but I fear I can not escape it again, when it comes to claim me. And sooner or later, it will come!"

## *CHAPTER 3*

## THE RAIDER

A SILENCE hung over the room when Cannell ceased to speak. I drew a long breath and turned to Lantin, my brain awhirl, but already he was calmly questioning the archeologist.

"This thing you call the Raider," he began; "I don't understand your description very well, Cannell. Do you mean that it was just misty gas or vapor, able to change into solid form at will, and change back? And, withal, a living, intelligent thing?"

"I mean just that," Cannell told him. "The thing is undoubtedly a sentient, living being of extraordinary intelligence and powers, able to assume either a solid or gaseous form. The phenomenon of the three shining orbs, changing from green to purple and back, is connected with that change in form, I assume. And at the same time I believe that triangle of the three lights to be the center of the thing's consciousness and intelligence, its brain and sense organs.

"Such a thing is not impossible, Lantin," he went on. "You and I, intelligent, living creatures, are composed of solid and liquid elements, but there is no real reason why life and intelligence could not be present in an entirely gaseous creature. And as I believe, this creature only as-

sumes the gaseous form when it is traveling through time. The winds that accompany its passage through time are undoubtedly caused by the fact that as it flashes on into a different time, it leaves in the atmosphere a sudden vacuum, and the surrounding atmosphere rushing in to fill this vacuum causes the gusts of wind."

"But where could the thing come from?" Lantin objected. "Where was it taking you?"

Cannell's face darkened. "I believe that it comes from the far future," he said slowly. "Who can say what manner of creatures will inhabit earth a million years from now? And it may be that this thing, a being of some future age, has discovered a way to travel through time and now sweeps back at will, snatching up luckless humans in every age. The purpose of these raids, who can say? Maybe for victims or slaves or food even. It is all a mystery, even to myself. One thing alone is clear to me, that the thing does come from some future time, since it was speeding back into the future with me when I escaped it."

I found a chance to interject a query. "But how?" I asked. "That's what interests me, the method of traveling through time at will. I've heard theories on that subject, but this actual accomplishment, this power to race into past or future—have you no idea as to how that is done, Cannell?"

He considered before answering. "The transformation into a gaseous form when time-traveling is a significant detail," he said. "I have an inkling of what power the Raider utilizes to speed through time. I was in the thing's grip only for a few minutes, but I noticed some things, even in that short time, that set me thinking, afterward. I formed a rough theory concerning the method of time-traveling, and on the voyage home I jotted down some notes concerning it, intending to investigate the matter later."

Reaching into an inside pocket, he brought forth a little packet of soiled envelopes and folded sheets. "My own idea about it——" he began, then suddenly broke off speaking and sat motionless, listening tensely. Astonished, we listened likewise, but the only sound was the far dim roar of the city below, and the curtains at the open French windows, billowing gently in a soft breeze. From an adjoining room came the faint chime of a clock.

Relief dropped on Cannell's face, and its tense outlines relaxed. "I thought I heard——" he murmured, then abruptly stopped and jumped to his feet, his eyes wild. My heart gave a sudden great throb, for through the open windows came the sound of a high, thin whistling, far and faint and crystal-clear, an eery chorus of piercing knife-blades of sound, that shrilled out louder and louder, swelling to a roaring tumult of wind-sounds. The window-curtains whipped up madly, in a buffeting gale, as through the windows came a breath of icy air.

Abruptly the lights of the room went out, plunging us into darkness. There was a shout from Lantin: "The switch!" and I heard him running toward it. Outside the wind-shrieks had risen to a thundering bellow, and there were cries and running feet, somewhere in the building below us. A dark, erect figure appeared in the open window, silhouetted blackly against the brilliant lights of the distant streets. It poised there a moment, then passed out onto the outside roof, walking stiffly and unhumanly, like a puppet pulled by unseen strings.

"Cannell!" I cried; "get back!" I raced across the room toward the window, and in the darkness collided with Lantin, who was making for the same objective. We staggered, re-

covered our balance, rushed together to the window, and then recoiled.

Standing at the roof's edge, darkly outlined against the city's splendid brilliance, was Cannell, and down upon him from the upper air was dropping—what? A changing, inchoate shape of gray, at the center of which burned a little triangle of three radiant circles of purple light, one above the other two. In the moment that the thing swept down on Cannell, the roaring winds hushed for an instant, and we saw a writhing, shapeless arm reach out from the central mass, grip Cannell and draw him in. The gray mass hung for a moment, then the purple lights flashed into green, and at the same time the thing had changed into a swirling cloud of dense gray vapor, the three green orbs at its center, and the roaring winds shouting again with renewed power. The thing rose swiftly above the roof, holding Cannell, hung for a moment above us, a tornado of whistling winds, then vanished like a clicked-off cinema scene.

But as it disappeared before our eyes, as its raging, piercing winds died away to a mere whisper, out from the empty air where it had been rang an eery, fading cry, Cannell's voice, coming faintly down through time.

"Lantin! Follow—follow——"

Then the last word, coming dimly to us like a ghostly echo out of space and time, but with a world of fear and horror in it:

"The Raider!"

## *CHAPTER 4*

## INTO TIME

"AND you really mean to try it?" I asked incredulously.

"I do," Lantin quietly replied. "I am going to find that secret of time-traveling and go after Cannell."

I stared at him doubtfully. A day had passed since we had seen Cannell seized by the misty shape of horror he called the Raider, and now, in the same room in Lantin's apartment, we were discussing what we had seen. After the first hours of dazed terror following the seizure of Cannell, I had fallen to sleep on a couch in that room, and when I woke in late afternoon, the whole thing seemed only a tortured nightmare.

"It seems impossible," I told Lantin. "We saw Cannell taken, yes, and we saw—the Raider. But after all, we have no proof that he was taken into time. That thing, the Raider, may have merely thrown a veil of invisibility around itself, and thus vanished. A crazy idea, I admit, but not as wild as this one of time-traveling."

"You do not believe your own words, Wheeler," answered my friend. "You heard Cannell's story, and in your heart you believe it. I believe it utterly, for it is the only way of accounting for that three-year disappearance. You noticed that Cannell seemed no older, after those three years? And then, as further proof, came the thing he described to us, the Raider itself."

"We saw that," I admitted, "but all argument aside, Lantin, this idea of moving through time at will seems absurd. Of course, I've heard fantastic ideas on the subject, but how could anyone really tamper with time, the most unalterable and remorseless quantity in life?"

Lantin considered me before replying. "Such an achievement is beyond our present science," he conceded, "but it may be quite possible to the science of the future. You see my meaning? Remember, Wheeler, it is only within the last few years that our science has learned anything at all about time. Previously it was considered one of the last mysteries, never to be investigated or explained. But now, with the recent work of Einstein and Lorentz and Minkow-

ski, we are beginning to learn something about this time. We have learned, for instance, that it is only another dimension of space itself, and that the four dimensions of any object are thus length, breadth, thickness, and *duration.*

"We know now that time is not fixed and unchangeable, but relative and varying, that the time of Venus is not the time of earth, and that the time of Sirius is different from either. And remember, all of this we have learned within the last few years.

"What, then, may not be learned in the next thousand years, the next ten thousand, the next million? Is it not reasonable to suggest that men will advance farther and farther in their knowledge concerning this elusive thing, time, until they finally will advance so far that they will be able to *control* time, to travel in it at will, and thus sweep back from their own day, back to our present age? Is it not possible that men can do this, in some century to come?"

"That *men* can do this?" I repeated. "*Men,* you say, but the thing we saw was no man, Lantin. That thing, the Raider, was very far from human."

"It is so," he admitted, "but that proves nothing. The Raider may be some thing of the far future, either a strange product of ages of change and evolution, or a visitor from another planet, racing through time and snatching up victims in every age and land. You remember that Cannell was seized at Angkor? And a thousand years ago, Angkor was a mighty city, and who knows but the Raider was speeding back to the days of Angkor's life and greatness, when it chanced on Cannell there? It is a strange business, Wheeler; but one thing I am certain of, and that is that the Raider does come from some time far in the future, and that it has taken Cannell back with it to that time."

"But the method," I insisted, "the method of traveling through time? How is that accomplished? Cannell spoke of a theory he had concerning it. And he gave you those notes——"

"I've examined those notes," Lantin said, "and rough and fragmentary as they are, I think that in them lies the secret of time-traveling. Cannell knew something of modern science, Wheeler, and the conclusions he drew concerning the Raider are significant. It was his theory that as time is the fourth dimension of matter, there is no basic reason why we can't move at will along that dimension. We can move as we wish in the other three, up-and-down, right-and-left, and back-and-forward, so why not in the fourth, that is, sooner-or-later?

"And his idea, as expressed in his notes, was that the Raider's movement along the time-dimension was based on electronic acceleration. You know the electronic system as well as I, and realize that the smallest division of matter, the atom, is nothing but a number of electrons, or particles of electricity, revolving around a nucleus. Cannell believed, and I think he was right, that that movement of electrons is the basis of the movement along the time-dimension.

"To make you understand that, let me take an example. Suppose all motion on earth stopped entirely, so that there was not the least bit of visible motion in earth or heavens. Sun, moon, stars, ships, clocks, trains, rivers, people, every form of motion stopping completely, so that the earth was a completely motionless world. Then would it not be a timeless world also? In other words, without change there would be no such thing as time, for time depends on and is measured by change. So that all movement along the fourth or time-dimension is intimately related to

movement along the other three or space-dimensions.

"It is exactly the same with a single, isolated object. Take a metal ball, for instance. It moves steadily along the time-dimension, *from* the past *toward* the future, only because the electrons that compose it are constantly moving along the space-dimensions, are constantly revolving around their nucleus, at the same unvarying speed. If you stopped that revolving of electrons, the ball of metal would become static, timeless, would cease to move along the time-dimension. But suppose instead of stopping the electronic movement, you accelerated it, speeded it up? Then the ball of metal whose electronic activity was thus accelerated would move on through time *faster*. Everything around it would still move along the time-dimension at the same rate, but it would be going faster, would speed on into the future, ahead of the things around it. And the more its electronic motion was accelerated, the farther into the future it would go.

"In the same way, if the electronic motion was reversed, the metal ball would go *backward* along the time-dimension, would speed back into the past. Thus you see how such a principle could be applied practically and enable one to speed into past or future at will, simply by accelerating or reversing the motion of the electrons making up his vehicle, or car."

"It seems reasonable," I admitted, "but the difficulty remains, for how could the movement of electrons be thus accelerated or reversed at will? Why, no man has ever even seen an electron, or ever will, they're so infinitesimally tiny. Then how affect their speeds, their directions?"

"You mention a difficulty," Lantin replied, "but it could be overcome, Wheeler. As you say, no man has ever seen an electron, but for all that, men have done some strange things with electrons. They have shot them through films of water-vapor and have thus been able to record their speeds and courses, without seeing the actual electrons. And just recently, an American scientist was able to change the course of electronic motion entirely, and shoot a stream of electrons in any direction at will, the so-called cathode rays. When that has been done, it doesn't seem altogether impossible to change their motion in another way, by accelerating or reversing it."

"But there's another thing, Lantin," I said; "even though you achieved the impossible and found a way of time-traveling, how would you find Cannell? How could you find him, without knowing what age or what place the Raider has taken him to? It seems like hunting for a needle in a haystack, a thousand times magnified in difficulty."

Without answering, Lantin went to a cabinet and brought forth a big globe, which he placed on the table before me. "I have a theory on that, too," he said. "Note the lines I've drawn on this globe," he added, indicating some long black pencil-lines that had been drawn on the round surface in the region of the Pacific Ocean.

"Cannell was seized at Angkor, as we know, and he was dropped in the open Pacific at a point a few hundred miles east of Manila. I have marked that point with a dot here, for Cannell learned the latitude and longitude of the spot and jotted it down. Now is it not reasonable to suppose that when the Raider dropped Cannell, through the pain or surprize of his shot, it was progressing in a straight line toward its own base, or home, or lair? Of course, it was moving through time also, but in space it was probably heading straight toward its home. So if we draw a straight line from Angkor to this dot, on the globe, and then con-

tinue that line straight across the globe, it's reasonable to assume that somewhere along that continued line is the Raider's home.

"Now, you heard Cannell say that when the thing came to the ship and fled away with the two sailors it seized, it was heading due north when it vanished from sight. So from this dot west of Panama, representing the ship's position, I have drawn another line straight north. You see, the same reasoning applies here, for the thing would again head straight toward its lair with its victims. The two lines cross each other, as you see, in southern Illinois. And if my theory is correct, somewhere near that point of crossing is the Raider's home, though in what age I do not know. So if one could find the secret of time-traveling, and speed into the future, hovering near that spot, there is a chance that you would find the Raider—and his victims. It is a long chance, of course, but the only one."

I was silent, pondering the things he had said. But I felt the question in his eyes, and sensed his appeal before he voiced it.

"And you, Wheeler, will you help me? Together we can do this, can find this secret of time-traveling and go after Cannell, follow him as he cried for me to do. I know that he was not your close friend, as he was mine, but I am asking you to help, nevertheless, for you are the only one I can go to for aid. Who would credit the thing we saw, if I told it? But you saw, and you know, you understand. And if we could work on this together——"

Without replying, I stepped to the window and looked out, inwardly struggling for an answer. While we talked, night had fallen, and again the brilliant lights of the city had blossomed, like burgeoning flowers of flame. A day had passed since we had seen Cannell seized, from this same window. Just twenty-four hours!

I must have spoken my thought aloud, for Lantin, who had come up and was standing beside me, repeated it. "Just twenty-four hours—to us, Wheeler. But how long to Cannell, I wonder? Where is he tonight, do you think; what thousands, what tens of thousands of years ahead? And wondering if we will come after him, if we will save him——"

He stopped, but the thought persisted. Where *was* Cannell, now? Caught in some web of utter evil, far in the future, some unholy lair of that hellish thing, the Raider? I remembered the fear on Cannell's face, the fear in my own heart when the Raider had flashed down on us. Could I venture against such a creature, even though we found the way to cross time? Would I dare to pit myself against a being like that?

There at the window I battled my own fear, and when I finally turned, it was to extend my hand to Lantin.

"I'm with you," I told him shortly; "if we can discover the secret of the Raider's power, we'll follow Cannell—into time!"

## *CHAPTER 5*

## THE BUILDING OF THE TIME-CAR

It is not my intention to relate here the details of the work that occupied our attention in the following weeks. It has been dealt with at length in two technical treatises by Lantin and myself. The theoretical side of our work has been very fully discussed in those two books, but the concrete details are purposely slurred over. The most valuable part of our achievement, the time-wave itself, is hardly mentioned in them.

There is a reason for this, and that reason is the firm intention of Dr. Lantin and myself not to impart any information that would enable

anyone to duplicate our own experiment. Thus it is of necessity that parts of this present record are vague and indefinite.

I may say, though, unquestionably, that without the notes that were left us by Cannell, we could never have achieved the success we did achieve. Those notes, brief and unsatisfactory as they were, were yet enough to set our feet on the right path, in our quest of the time-traveling secret. To us, then, the problem was one of accelerating electronic activity, and all our experiments were directed toward that goal.

Fortunately, Lantin had virtually a free hand at the Foundation, and we were able to use the matchless resources of its great laboratories to further our quest. Working constantly together and maintaining complete secrecy regarding the object of our experiments, we sought for some force capable of controlling the movement and speed of electrons, at will.

The weeks dragged by, and we seemed no nearer success than ever. And at the Foundation, some curiosity was being evinced regarding our work, which ill-fitted with our desires. We had made trial of every form of vibration, it seemed, and all without success, for none affected the electronic movement in the way we wished. In the end, it was by a combination of electro-magnetic waves and light rays that we finally achieved success.

I say "we," but it was Lantin's triumph. He had the inspiration to combine high-frequency Hertzian vibrations and light-rays, merging the two dissimilar vibrations into a single wave, which we called "the time wave" and which had power to affect the very electronic structure of matter, all electronic movement within its radius being stimulated and accelerated by it. And with it, we proved the correctness of Cannell's theory, for when we turned the wave upon small objects on the laboratory table, they vanished, reappearing a few seconds later, having been driven into the future for those few seconds by the force of the time-wave.

By reversing the action of the wave, the electronic movement was reversed also, and thus the basis of our needs was found and we had a force that could sweep all things in its radius into past or future at will. Then it was that Lantin began to speak of a car, a car containing a time-wave projector powerful enough to convey the car and all its occupants into past or future. It was vitally necessary, he thought, that such a car should be able to move in space, as well as time, and to acquire this power we had recourse to a discovery accidentally made in the course of our experiments.

In our efforts to change the movement of electrons, we had found that when a stream of them was shot out in a concentrated ray, in any one direction, it produced an invisible but powerful repulsion. It was on this fact that Lantin relied to move our car in space, directing electron-streams toward the ground to raise and hold us in space, and directing other rays obliquely down toward earth, to move the car from side to side in any direction.

The work went on. Six weeks after the seizure of Cannell, our car was nearing completion, and a strange-appearing vehicle it was. It was a short, thick cylinder of steel, tapering to a point at each end, its greatest diameter some five feet and with a total length of fifteen, from point to point. Windows of heavy glass were set at regular intervals along its length, and entrance into the car's interior was through a circular door or manhole in its upper surface, the car being quite air-tight when this was closed.

Inside, the cylinder's bottom was flat-decked and covered with up-

holstery, since the small diameter of the cylinder made it necessary for us to either sit or lie on that floor, when operating the car. The time-wave apparatus, covered by a metal shield, was placed in the fore end of the cylinder, with the mechanism that produced the repulsion ray beside it. A small, square switch-board held the centered controls of both these.

In the back end of the car was an oxygen-producing apparatus, which gave us independence of outside air for some hours, though normally our car was intended to be ventilated from the outside. A small heater held place beside this, and it was our intention to place what equipment we took with us in that end of the car.

Complete, the car weighed several thousand pounds. We had kept to secrecy in the making of it, having the main shell and other parts of it made for us by different firms, and assembling them in a room of Lantin's apartment. The actuating mechanisms we installed ourselves, and finally the car lay complete on the roof of the building, secured from prying eyes or hands by a padlocked cover of heavy wood.

One trial we made of the car's abilities, testing its power to move in space. Waiting until darkness concealed our trial, we entered the car and rose easily some five hundred feet above the city, the heavy car easily upheld and moved by the powerful repulsion rays. Then, circling once or twice, Lantin pointed the car east and opened up the power. A whistling gale rose outside as we rocketed across the Atlantic with tremendous speed, attaining a velocity of almost five hundred miles an hour, speeding through the atmosphere like a pointed bullet. We made no trial of the time-wave apparatus, postponing that until our real start, and returned to the roof of Lantin's apartment building without being sighted.

In a few days after that test flight, we had gathered our outfit and placed it in the car. Besides a complete but very compact camping outfit, we carried compressed foods that would be sufficient for a long period to keep us from starving. Our weapons were two high-power repeating rifles, with ample ammunition. Besides the rifles, we each carried a heavy automatic in a belt-holster.

Our last preparation was to stow away in the car apparatus with which it would be possible to construct a duplicate of the time-wave mechanism of the car. We intended taking no chance of being stranded in some age of the future.

Every detail of the car's working mechanism was given a final test and found satisfactory, a leave of absence from the Foundation was asked for and granted, and so, at last, two months after the seizure of Cannell, our preparations were completed and we stood on the very threshold of our unparalleled adventure.

## *CHAPTER 6*

## INTO THE FUTURE

"ZERO hour, Wheeler," said Lantin, who stood in the car itself, his head projecting through the round manhole in its upper side. Our strange vehicle lay ready for its flight into the future, on the apartment building's roof, for this was the night we had chosen for our departure.

I paused at the roof's edge to glance for a last time at the ever-new panorama of the metropolis around us. Though moonless, the sky above was brilliant, flecked with blazing stars, but even these were dimmed by the great up-gush of white light from the city's streets. A soft little breeze fanned my face as I looked out. Down in the bay, there was a great hooting

of tugs as a big liner went out to sea. And in the river, a battleship's great search-lights stabbed and circled.

I turned away, reluctantly enough, and followed Lantin into the car. Crouched on the padded floor, in a half-sitting, half-lying position, he was already giving the car's machinery a last inspection, and at his command I clanged shut the round metal door that sealed the entrance. I then took up a position on the floor beside him.

His hands were moving over the gleaming controlling switches, searching, pulling, twisting. Abruptly something clicked under his fingers and the car rose smoothly in the air some fifty feet above the roof and hung motionless. There was a curious little humming now, that seemed to come from the floor beneath us, caused, as I knew, by the invisible streams of electronic force that lifted and held us.

Under the pressure of a little wind, the car drifted a short distance sidewise, and now hung directly over the streets. I glanced down through the dead-light in the floor of the car, and saw that from the height we had already attained, autos and pedestrians were but tiny specks moving in the blurred glare of the street-lights.

Without turning, Lantin spoke. "We'd better try the power of the time-wave," he said, "before going any distance in space."

I nodded, and again his hands moved over the car's intricate controls. He turned a large knob, and a rising, purring whine filled the car, while outside there was a growing roar of sudden wind. At the same time there came to me a staggering sensation of falling, and for a moment I seemed to be plunging helplessly down into unfathomable abysses. It lasted but an instant, and when my mind cleared, I heard the winds outside the car shouting with higher and higher intensity, caused, as I knew, by our swift passage through time.

I looked down into the streets below, and for a second could see no obvious changes, then noted that the autos and people seemed to have suddenly vanished. In place of them were misty blurs of undefined motion, and even these vanished as our progress on through time grew greater. The winking electric signs of the city had ceased to flash on and off, and appeared to be steadily illuminated.

I looked up, through one of the glasses in the car's top surface, and then gasped, prepared as I was for what I saw. The whole firmament was moving, its starry hosts moving slowly but visibly toward the west. Steadily it turned, and in hardly more than a minute a gray light began to grow over the eastern horizon, flushing swiftly to rose. Then, from the center of the growing light, sprang up the sun, crimson and mighty, leaping up above the horizon in a single bound, it seemed, and moving swiftly, ever more swiftly, up toward the zenith.

The winds had steadily risen to a cyclonic gale, and now I heard Lantin's voice, striving to make itself heard above them.

"We're going through time all right," he shouted, his voice thin and piping in sound, above the roar of the gale. "We may as well head west now, too."

I did not answer, but saw the buildings and streets below slide away to the east, as the car moved off in the opposite direction. By now the sun had traversed its whole circuit in the sky and was tumbling down behind the western heights. Before we had crossed above the Hudson, darkness had plunged down upon us, and as we rocketed over the Jersey meadows, I saw the stars again wheeling across the sky, but much faster than before. Our time-speed was steadily accelera-

ting, now, as Lantin turned on more and more of the time-wave's power, and I knew that shortly we would be racing through the years with lightning speed.

Again the cycle of darkness and dawn was repeated, with the sun hurtling across the sky faster and faster, while the winds of our double progress through time and space were deafening. Day and night followed each other so rapidly that I could obtain but vague glimpses of the ground below us. We were progressing through space at the rate of a hundred and fifty miles an hour, holding an even altitude of a mile above the earth's surface.

Soon day and night had merged, had given way to a perpetual greenish dusk through which we raced with nightmare speed. I glanced at the dials that recorded our progress and position in time, and noted that already we had gone ahead almost four months into the future, while our progress was now doubling every few minutes. Passing over northern Pennsylvania, I saw the ground below turning to a blotched, patchy gray, the composite impression of weeks of snow and ice, below. The gray soon faded, changed to green, with the coming of spring. The cycle of green and white was repeated, again and again, until we were speeding through the years too swiftly to see it, and white and green had merged into a drab color that hung over all the landscape below.

By the time we passed over western Ohio, our car was racing into the future with a speed of nearly ten years a minute. At this speed, we saw little of human activities below. There were blurred, vague outlines of cities now and then, but these were only hazy, indefinite masses that passed from view as we fled on westward in the car.

Soon, though, Lantin slowed the car's progress through space and began to give close attention to the physical features of the country below us. He consulted maps constantly, now, and finally, after a number of stops and starts, brought the car to rest, in space, above the juncture of two small rivers. Hanging there, we still sped on through time, and above the winds Lantin shouted, "Stop there," pointing to the maps he held and then down toward the ground below. I understood his meaning, and knew that he had reached the spot in Illinois which he had calculated to be the Raider's home.

Intently we scanned the ground beneath the car. Gray and splotchy as it appeared, from alternate summer and winter, yet there were nowhere any buildings or signs of life, nothing but the two little rivers and the rolling fields that extended away to the horizon.

A glance at the dials told me that we had progressed through time some twelve thousand years, since our start. I heard Lantin utter a low exclamation, and looked up to see him gazing intently toward the north, through one of the side windows. Moving over beside him, I looked also, and saw, away on the distant northern horizon, a speck of gleaming white. We were still racing on through time, and as we watched, that white spot spread, expanded, grew to a thick line of dazzling white that lay across all the north horizon.

The white expanse grew still, coming nearer and nearer toward us, rolling slowly south and covering all the country it passed over with a blanket of whiteness. It came nearer toward us, moving with very slow speed, considering the rapidity of our progress in time. Now, above the shrill winds around us, there came the dull, grinding roar of the white blanket's passage. South rolled the gleaming sheet, until it had almost reached the ground directly beneath

the car. I recognized, now, the material of that gleaming expanse.

"Ice!" I shouted in Lantin's ear, and he started, glanced down toward it, then nodded. A moment he studied the grinding wave below, then leaned over and shouted a single word in my ear:

"Glacier!"

The word was like a blinding flood of light on my thoughts. A glacier! And that was the meaning of this white tide from the north, this vast, resistless flood of ice that was rolling south over the world as it had rolled ages before. The mightiest force on earth, and the slowest, moving with deliberate, unswerving steadiness, calm and majestic, carving mountains and valleys, changing the very face of the earth. It had swept down over the earth before, had forced primeval man down to the very equator before it receded, and now the thing was re-enacting itself before my eyes. Fascinated, I watched the white masses forging south.

WHILE we hung high above it, the gleaming, solid flood rolled on until it had obscured the last speck of land on the southern horizon, so that as far as we could see stretched nothing but the glistening fields of ice. The air in the car had become suddenly bitter cold, and as frost and rime began to congeal on the windows, I hastened over to the heating apparatus and switched it on. The glasses cleared soon, and we sped on into the future, but the white expanse below us seemed changeless.

I plucked at Lantin's sleeve, and when he turned, shouted to him, "Go back?", pointing to the gleaming frozen masses below.

"No!" he yelled, over the roar of the gale; "I'm going to circle a bit."

With the words, he snapped off the time-wave, and we came to a rest, in time. The dials now registered a little over fifteen thousand years, and with our stopping, the winds outside the car died away and we had a chance to converse in normal tones.

"Nothing but ice here," said Lantin, "and we can't tell how long it will last. I think the best plan would be to sweep around in a great circle, and look for any signs of the Raider's presence. If we see nothing we can go on into time and stop every few hundred years to circle again."

I agreed, and we put the idea into effect at once, rising to a height of nearly two miles and then racing away to the west in a curving course that would eventually bring us back to our starting point. As we sped on, both Lantin and myself were at the observation windows, scanning the landscape in every direction, but only boundless fields of ice met our eyes.

We reached a point some two hundred miles north of our starting position, and had begun to curve back toward that position, when Lantin uttered a sudden exclamation and hastily stopped the car's progress.

"Look!" he cried, excitedly, pointing away to the north.

At first I could see only the glaring ice, when I gazed in that direction, but gradually my eyes made out a distant spot of black against the horizon. Before I could comment on it, Lantin headed the car around and opened up on the power so that we shot north toward that distant spot with full speed.

On we went, until the spot had changed to a thick line, and its color from black to green. And as we neared it, we saw that there the ice ended, and beyond it were green fields and hills and valleys, with patches of gnarled, stunted trees here and there.

On we fled, still north, until the ice fields had faded from view behind us, and the chilling cold we had felt above them had given way to a summer warmth. And the first dwarfed

trees had changed to towering giants of the forest, though mostly the country below us was open fields and ranges of green-clad hills.

"I can't understand it," I told Lantin. "Who ever heard of a warm, semi-tropical country like this existing farther north than fields of glacial ice?"

"It is strange," he admitted, "but it's understandable, at that. You remember the explorer who found that warm, sunken valley in Alaska, somewhere? It was heated by steam, literally, for the interior fires of the earth had in some way bulged up near the surface of the ground, there, and their heat acting on the valley's springs and rivers made it a great steam-heated depression of almost tropical warmth. Probably the same thing has happened here, a shift of the earth's interior forcing up part of its inner molten core, the heat of which would counteract the glacier and keep it from covering this section of the country. Strange things happen under the earth's surface, Wheeler."

"You may be right," I said, "but there's no life here, Lantin. No——" I broke off, suddenly, staring out of the car's western windows. The western sky was glowing, for it was near to sunset, and there, far away, standing out black against the brilliant sky, was a city.

It was a city of enchantment, seen from our car. The jagged, serrated outline of its buildings loomed blackly against the glowing light, like the skyline of New York at the same hour. The buildings were all square and solid in appearance, and at the center of them there rose one building that towered far above the others, to a mighty height, its straight, perpendicular sides and flat roof standing up above the others, frowningly, brutally dominating them.

There was a gasp at my side, and I turned to see that Lantin was also gazing at the outline of the distant city. He had brought the car to rest, and together we looked away toward that metropolis of the future.

"We must go there," I said rapidly. "Spy out the place from a distance, learn what we can about it. Do you think that it is the home of the Raider?"

"It may be," he said, "but we must be careful, Wheeler. It wouldn't do to enter that place blindly, not knowing what manner of people inhabit it. Nor can we risk having the car destroyed or taken from us, as it's our only way to get back to our own time. The best plan would be to hide the car some distance from the city, and then go nearer on foot, learning as much as we can about the place before venturing inside."

And so we decided. Starting the car again, we sped along low over the ground, and finally, some five miles away from the city, came across a little range of rugged hills which appeared quite wild and uninhabited, like all the rest of the country we had traversed so far. On the slope of one of these hills was a little, shelflike clearing, patched with small trees, and we selected this for our hiding place, bringing the car gently down to rest on the ground there.

We stepped out, cramped and stiff from our hours in the car, and then proceeded at once to hide it, breaking off big branches from the trees around us and planting them in the ground in such fashion that any casual passer-by would never have suspected the car's existence. When it was concealed to Lantin's satisfaction, we made a hasty meal from the food brought with us, and then prepared for our trip toward the city.

The rifles we left in the car, as they were too heavy and cumbersome to carry through the thick underbrush that lined the slopes around us, but we looked to the pistols in our belts, which were of almost as heavy a cali-

ber as the rifles. Then, with a last look at the car, we made our way down the slope to the bottom of the little valley which was formed by two low ranges of hills, on one of the slopes of which our car lay hidden.

We followed this valley north for some distance, the hills on each side leveling down to mere dunes as we approached its ends. A thick little wood lay directly across the end of it, and through this we forced our way, as quietly as possible. It gradually grew thinner, and then with a sudden shock we emerged from it into open fields.

Instinctively, we looked first toward the west. The sun was setting, now, and we saw that the city was not of wide extent, not extraordinarily large, but that the buildings that made it up were very large and were closely grouped together. And above them all rose the titanic central pile, an edifice that we judged to be all of two thousand feet in height, and half that in width.

Behind us there was a sudden yelping shout, and we turned quickly and then shrank back. Across the open fields toward us was running a group of men, a score or more in number, men in brazen armor and helmets, who carried spears and swords and who were bearing down on us with their lances outstretched toward us. Their eyes were gleaming, and they uttered wolflike shouts as they came on.

Flight was impossible, so close were they, so I jerked forth the pistol in my belt and fired hastily at the oncoming men. Too hastily, in fact, for the shot went wild and the mechanism of the pistol jammed before I could fire again. Lantin's pistol barked behind me, and one of the men in front staggered and went down, with a neat hole drilled through his armor, but the rest never hesitated, and before Lantin could fire again, they were upon us.

## *CHAPTER 7*

## THE CITY OF CYLINDERS

I HAD a confused vision of bronzed, black-bearded faces leaping toward me, and I know that I struck out with my pistol-butt at these, but the weapon was knocked from my grasp by a blow on the wrist, my hands were seized from behind and pinioned, and I waited for the spear-thrust that I expected.

It did not come. Those who held me turned to one who was evidently their leader, a tall man with armor more rich than that of the others, who carried no spear. They spoke to him, in a tongue strange to my ears, evidently asking questions concerning our disposal. This leader came nearer and inspected me, felt my muscles for a moment, then snapped out a brief order. He made similar inspection of Lantin, gave another order, and then the men behind me pushed me forward, toward the city in the west, a prod from a spear-handle emphasizing their commands. Lantin was similarly treated, walking beside me, but when I attempted to speak to him, another prod from behind warned me that no conversation between us was allowed.

So we marched on toward the city, our captors talking and jesting in their own language. Twilight was descending on the land, now, darkening quickly, and as we drew nearer toward the city, lights flared out here and there on its heights, steady and brilliant lights of red and yellow. And high above all these shone a single flashing beam of vivid purple, which I knew must be placed on the top of the big building we had seen from a distance.

We struck a road, smooth and wide and hard-surfaced, and marched along it. In the broad fields on either side of this road were what appeared to be great machines of some sort, that seemed to be rooting in the

ground, with a panting, throbbing sound, but I could see these only dimly in the thickening dusk. And, too, we began to pass other men like those who had captured us, bronzed, bearded men in the same armor, who looked at us curiously and called out jests and greetings to our captors.

Buildings began to line the road, and I saw that all of these were of the same design, all being in the form of an erect cylinder, quite windowless and unbroken of surface, except for a single open entrance in their lower part. They were of white stone, I thought, glimmering faintly in the twilight, and were of many differing sizes, but whatever the size, all that we saw were of the same shape and proportions, that of a thick cylinder, standing erect.

Out of the doorways of these buildings streamed ruddy light, and now and then we passed one from which came shouting or laughter. More and more of the armored men met and passed us. And there were other men, not in armor, men black and brown and white and yellow, who were clad in a single robe of white cloth and who walked stiffly, like automatons. I shuddered as one of them brushed against me in passing, for he had come near enough for me to glimpse his face, and it was utterly repellent in the blankness of its expression. The eyes held no intelligence at all, staring straight ahead or turning mechanically from side to side, while the stiff movements, the rigid carriage of the body and the obliviousness to all around them made these men seem more dead than alive. All, or nearly all, were carrying tools or vessels of some sort, and it was easy to see that they were slaves.

I noticed now, scattered here and there among the buildings, little towers of metal on the top of which were placed globes of a gleaming material like glass. The towers were found at even intervals along the road, and each one could not have been less than thirty feet in height, much like a miniature Eiffel Tower, while the shining globe on top of each must have been five feet in diameter. Awhile I puzzled over their nature and purpose, but forgot even these in the wonder of the city we were now entering.

There was no wall or definite dividing line between the city and the suburbs around it. As we went on, the buildings grew thicker, larger, and the road became a street, a wide street that led directly toward the looming central pile, which I now saw was of the same cylindrical shape as all of the other buildings here. The white cylindrical buildings now were set farther back from the road, or street, and were very much closer to each other.

Overhead, aircraft were buzzing to and fro, flickering swiftly across the sky. They seemed to rise from and alight on the roofs of the cylindrical buildings, so that I could not glimpse their occupants.

There were throngs passing us in the street now, without attention, crowds of the armored guards and the white-robed slaves. The street itself was illuminated by glowing bulbs, set on top of metal pillars along the way, which emitted a ruddy, pulsating light. It was the same ruddy light that streamed out of the entrances of the buildings we passed, but how it was produced I could not conjecture.

MY MIND swung sharply back to my own predicament, when our captors suddenly halted in the street before a large building that was set some distance back from the street, in a smooth expanse of green lawn. A brief order was given and two of the guards seized me by my shoulders and hustled me toward the building I have spoken of, while the rest

marched on down the street toward the gigantic central edifice, taking Lantin with them. I saw him looking back as he went, and would have given much to have been able to call out to him, but my guards gave me no chance to do so, pushing me ahead of them toward the building in front of us.

A high arched entrance cut into the curving wall of the building, which was one of the largest I had yet noted. Through this open door led a broad flight of low steps, but my guards did not enter that way, taking me some distance around the building's side to a smaller door that was set in the wall close to the ground. Pushed ahead of them, I stumbled inside and found myself in a long, smooth-walled corridor, down which we went.

There were closed doors here and there along the hall's length, and in front of the last one lounged three or four of the guards, who looked up incuriously as we approached. My captors spoke a few words to these, who nodded, and unlocked the door they guarded. A rough shove sent me staggering through the door, and as I pitched forward on my face, I heard it clang shut behind me.

I rose to my feet and looked around. The room itself was quite unremarkable, about twenty feet square, walled with smooth stone, and windowless, being lit by several of the ruddy-glowing bulbs that were set in the ceiling. But the score or more of men who were in the room, and who had started up at my sudden entrance, were of intense interest to me.

Sinking down onto a bench against the wall, I regarded them. They were extraordinary in appearance and expression. All were dressed in ragged and torn costumes of cloth, save for one hulking fellow who wore a tunic of tanned skins. I was surprized to see that all of them carried sword or dagger at their belts, and some big battle-axes. Brown-skinned and white-skinned, with one or two blacks, they were a fierce-faced company, and after scrutinizing me for a second, went on pacing back and forth across the room, for all the world like a den of caged tigers. They spoke little, and glared as they passed one another.

While I stared at them, one of their number came up and seated himself beside me. He was a slender, dark-haired young man, dressed in a ragged coat of bottle-green trimmed in silver, with very tight knee-breeches of the same material. Like the rest, he was hatless, and carried at his belt a long, slender rapier. He caught my glance at his garments, and smiled in so winning a fashion that I smiled back, involuntarily. Then a wave of sudden warmth surged through me, for he spoke in English.

"Burn me," he drawled, in a soft, languid voice, "I don't blame you for eyeing my clothes, but then, y'see, the tailors here are cursed poor."

I leaned toward him, eagerly. "You speak English!" I cried. "Then how did you get here? What is this place, this city? And what are we brought here for?"

At my rush of questions he drew back a little, frowning in a puzzled manner. "What are we brought here for?" he repeated. "Why, man, you know as well as I do, why we're here."

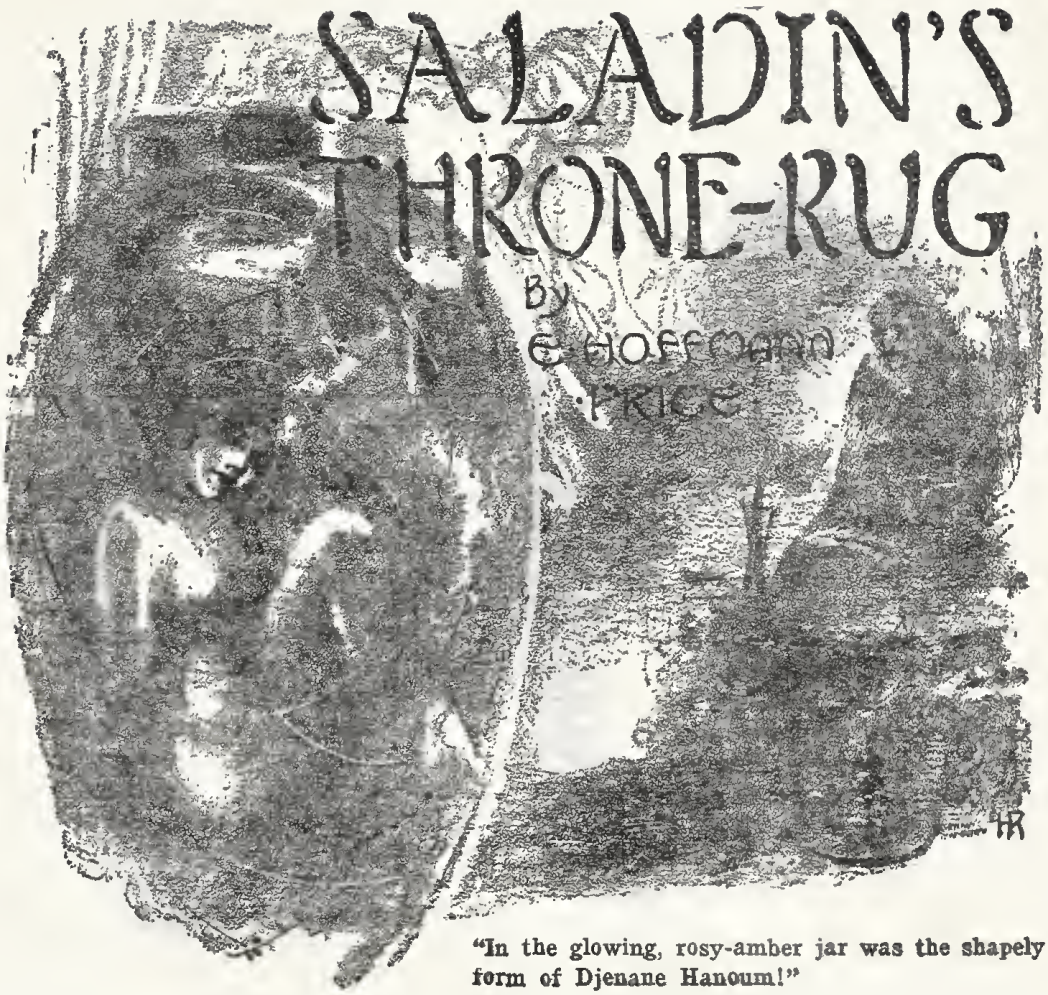
"Not I!" I said, and his frown deepened, as he doubtfully considered me.

"But you're from the pit," he said, "the same as the rest of us," and he waved a hand toward the others in the room.

"The pit!" I repeated, puzzled, and he must have seen from my expression that I did not understand

*(Continued on page 568)*

# SALADIN'S THRONE-RUG




"In the glowing, rosy-amber jar was the shapely form of Djenane Hanoum!"

"I WOULD cheerfully have committed murder for that rug; but as it is. . ."

Morgan Revell smiled at the memory of his exceeding cleverness, and regarded the throne-rug of Saladin with that fanatic affection comprehensible only to a collector. . .

The savage jest of it is that he did commit murder. Only he doesn't know it. Nor, for that matter, do I absolutely *know*. But, piecing it all together, and taking into account the emotions that take possession of a rug collector, I can draw but one inevitable conclusion. And that is——

But to approach the matter at all, some explaining is necessary. First of all, you who regard a rug as something to hide the nakedness of a floor must revise your conception of things. It is all very true that the machine-made atrocities of this country, as well as the precious weaves of the Orient, are indeed used as floor coverings; something on which to walk, something to give the vacuum cleaner its excuse for existing. But that is only a part of it: Oriental rugs are works of art, the peer of any of the numerous products of man's instinct to create unbelievable and imperishable beauty. And just as there are those who collect the works of ancient silversmiths, armorers, cabinetmakers, and bookbinders, so likewise are there those whose consuming passion and sole aim in life is

the accumulating of antique specimens of Oriental weaving: rugs from Bokhara and silken Samarcand, from Shiraz, and Herat of the Hundred Gardens; prayer rugs, palace carpets, or the priceless fabric that graced the floor of a nomad's tent in Turkestan. Rugs are many, and their enumeration lengthy; and the study of their personality and traits is the pursuit of a lifetime. Some are prized for their beauty and matchless craftsmanship; others for their exceeding rarity; and some for the sake of all those qualities.

Once one has succumbed to the sorcery of a Bijar that covered the dirt floor of a Kurdish hovel, or a silken Kashan that hung, suspended by silver rings, on the walls of a king's palace, one is beyond redemption, or the desire of redemption. It is even as though one had become addicted to the smoke of the poppy, or to the grain of hasheesh dissolved in wine. One's house becomes a place designed for the sheltering and storing of rare rugs; though, of course, the collector himself has no moral scruples about utilizing a bit of that same shelter for himself.

One may wear last year's overcoat, and have last year's shoes half-soled; but one can always raise the price, however exorbitant, of a threadbare Ladik, a battle-scarred Ghiordes, or a moth-eaten Feraghan.

Thus, though Morgan Revell was exaggerating when he smiled in a way reminiscent of a cat who has just had a pleasant *tête-à-tête* with a canary, and remarked, "I'd cheerfully have committed murder for that rug," he was well within the limits of poetic license. Not that he would actually consider going as far as rope, pistol, or poison; in fact, I think he would stop short of breaking and entering. But the fact remains that trifles can not stand in one's way when a really rare rug is in sight. And very often a jest is the essence of truth.

Well, and that is that: either you still maintain that a rug is but something to put on the floor, or else you have grasped some conception of the fanaticism that consumes the confirmed collector of antique rugs. If the former, well and good: *de gustibus non disputandum est.* But if the latter, if you have grasped the idea, then perhaps you will understand why I crave a bit of fresh air and a change of scene whenever I catch a whiff of attar of roses, or a glimpse of a fine, hard-spun silken cord.

I WAS making one of my customary reconnaissances, prowling tours in search of the perfect rug, the wondrous prize; though what I'd have done with it is a bit beyond me, unless I'd have tacked it to the ceiling. All other space is occupied. Furthermore, I am at times heretical enough to fancy that it is better to know that the rent, due on the morrow, will be in cash available for payment to the landlord instead of being draped over a lounge, or parked on the last bit of vacant wall or floor space.

A chubby, oily little fellow from somewhere in Asia Minor, with features that combined Mephisto with Kewpie, approached and offered his services, assuring me that some rare bargains would be auctioned off that afternoon. I assured him that I was merely prowling about.

"A fine Kirman. Worth seven hundred dollars," he began, just from force of habit. "Perhaps you will bid on it? Get it for two-three hundred."

I didn't bother to tell him that I'd not use it for a bath mat; that it was a sickly-looking mess, with its flabby texture, its aniline dyes, bleached to unnatural softness, and its fearful, glassy luster gained from glycerin and hot rollers, and that it would hardly be a fit companion for a Kirman rose-rug of the old school. So he left me to my own devices, to tear

down several piles, shoulder-high, of rugs of varying quality; mainly atrocities recently woven to satisfy the ever-increasing demand for Oriental rugs: wretched rags which the auctioneer would later exhibit, glassily agleam under a powerful floodlight and describe as "Royal" Bijar, "Royal" Sarouk, or "Royal" Kashan, or "Royal" whatever travesty it was on some ancient, honorable weave.

Weariness and more weariness. I worked my way through the second pile, and with like result. An old Feraghan tempted me, but I decided that though honest and ancient, it would cost too much to have the worn spots rewoven. Nor did the third pile bring forth anything of interest. Then, poking about in a dark corner, I found behind a baled, room-sized carpet, a scrap of something which even in that dim light had the look of antiquity, the stamp of personality possessed only by one of the old guard. And it had the feel of ancient weaving.

I dragged it out. Through all its coating of dust and dirt, the unbelievable richness of the dyes, the "bald-headedness" of the back and subdued luster of the face were apparent. Then—horrible sight!—I saw that I had but a portion of a rug, between half and two-thirds of one, the remnant of something which if complete would be priceless. Judging from the fragment, the complete piece would be about five feet wide and twelve feet long, or thereabout. Some barbarian had sliced it in two, crosswise, with a clean, sweeping cut that left in this fragment about half of the medallion which had been the central design of the complete piece.

What fool would commit such a wanton infamy, such an uncalled-for blasphemy? And then I recalled that classic incident of early Moslem history, wherein one of the prophet's fanatic generals, in apportioning the loot of a Persian palace, had dismembered a gold-threaded carpet, giving each of his captains a portion, saying that it would have been unfair to let any one individual retain the entire rug; and offering the equally good reason that such a pagan vanity deserved mutilation!

Under stronger light, I saw that my instinct for a rarity had indeed been true. The weave was incredibly fine, at least six or seven hundred knots to the square inch; the pile, worn to the warp, was of silk; and the ground inside the main border, and surrounding the central medallion, was of silver bullion thread, woven tapestry-wise about the warp threads instead of being tied and clipped so as to make a nap, as is the practise when weaving with silk or wool. Here, certes, was the adornment of a palace, the gift of one prince to another!

Fortunately for my chances of buying the fragment, the silver bullion ground was so tarnished and caked with dirt that its true nature would scarcely be noticed: for if some collector with a bottomless wallet would see, recognize, and bid against my poverty, I'd surely lose out. But the chances were that even a keen observer, unless he had examined the relic closely, would pass it up as a mere scrap unworthy of consideration.

But then I had to take the auctioneer into account. If in handling that fragment, displaying it to the assembled bidders, he ever noticed that its ground was of silver thread, I'd be strictly out of luck. However, there was little chance he'd notice the pile was of silk; for it was worn to the warp; and since all ancient rugs, either of silk or wool, have a greasy, slick surface, his sense of touch might not enlighten him.

I had to buy that ancient fragment; and I had to get it without the auctioneer's realizing what was going on.

Just what device would minimize his chances of noticing the true nature of what was passing through his hands? And then came the solution.

"Boy, come here a minute!"

One of the uniformed porters approached, I gave him his instructions, also a couple of dollar bills, and the promise of as much more if the ruse worked; also the promise that I'd hunt him up and down the earth with a sawed-off shotgun if he failed me.

It was now 1:30, and the auction was to begin at 2. Prospective bidders were already taking seats before the auctioneer's rostrum. The average bargain hunter has such sublime confidence in his or her ability to pick a rug or other precious article at first glance that few bother to examine the treasures before bidding; and thus no one intruded on my final study of the fragment I had unearthed.

I contrived to decipher the inscription in the remaining half of the central medallion I'd stumbled across. And although I'm no scholar, I can in a pinch hammer out a few words of Arabic, and get enough to supply at least the context of an inscription.

at the feet of my Lord I fall; I have bowed
me down seven times with breast and back;
and all that the King said to me,
well, well do I bear! Abimilki,
a servant of the King am I,
and the dust of thy two feet!

This much I could gather; the upper half of the inscription, in the missing upper half of the medallion, doubtless contained the preliminary honorifics, and perhaps even the name of the prince to whom the rug had been presented. Presented where? At Trebizond, Damascus, Ispahan, Baghdad. . .? What king? Shah Abbas? Nadir Shah? Who had received the servile protestations of this princeling, Abimilki?

THE opening of the daily auction broke into my reflections. I caught the eye of the porter I had bribed, and then found a seat. "Royal" Bijars and "Royal" Sarouks were extolled and lauded with all the dramatic art and perjury at the command of auctioneers hailing from the Near East. And under the floodlights, those pseudo-royal rugs did have a magnificent appearance.

"How much am I offered for this Royal Sarouk? This magnificent, lustrous carpet! It is worth a thousand dollars! Am I offered seven hundred? Seven hundred? They are getting scarcer every day! A genuine, Royal Sarouk! Do I hear five hundred? Is there no one here who really knows rugs? This is not a floor covering, this is—four hundred? Thank you. I am offered four hundred dollars. That shouldn't even buy the fringe! Will someone give me five hundred? Did I hear four fifty? Seventy-five. . . Eighty? Thank you. Who offers five hundred? . . ."

And thus through the heap of rugs. Then came some Bokhara saddle-bags, one at a time; then more "Royal" Bijars, and Kashans, and Kirmans. Valiantly the plump Mephisto, pleading, groaning, holding out for just one more dollar, perjured his way through the stacks beside the rostrum. And all the while the porter paraded up and down the aisle, giving the bidders a glimpse of the articles in question.

Finally, after an hour's exhorting, after the perspiration was trickling down his cheeks and glistening on his brow, after fatigue had left its marks on the chubby auctioneer, the porter handed him the fragment I had discovered.

Under that powerful light, its suave magnificence glowed forth through the coating of dust and dirt. Devil take that light! But thanks to the nap's being worn so close, the now weary auctioneer, somewhat dulled by fatigue, did not sense that he held the remains of a silken rug in his hands; nor did the silver bullion ground below the me-

dallion betray itself. The porter had handed him the end nearest the original center, where the medallion reached from border to border, and where consequently there was no silver ground to meet his fingertips. Then, scarcely had the orator opened his harangue, the porter snatched the precious fabric and was dashing down the aisle, holding it as well knotted up as he could contrive without seeming to do so.

Noble African! Nevertheless, it was a ticklish moment.

"How much am I offered for this antique rug?" he had begun, flashing it beneath the flaring floodlight, before yielding it to the eager porter. "Yes, sir, I know it is half of a rug, but it is old and very rare. It is an antique Tabriz. . ."

Which proved that he'd never seen it before I'd exhumed it from that dark, dusty corner! That he'd not noticed the silver ground! Tabriz. . . pure and simple improvisation on his part.

"Sixty dollars? Thank you. I am offered sixty. It is worth several hundred. A rare old Tabriz. Seventy? Thank you, madam!"

Damn that school-teacher! What made her think it was worth seventy? Though she might be a decoy to raise the bids.

So I came up five.

"Will anyone offer a hundred? Ninety? Give me ninety for this rare old—I am offered ninety! Will someone make it a hundred?"

I rather fancied that my ninety-five would land it.

"Ninety-five . . . once . . . ninety-five . . . twice . . ."

The porter was already thrusting another piece into the auctioneer's weary fingers.

But before the hammer could drop——

"*El hamdu li-lláh!*" gasped someone at my right. "One hundred!"

A lean foreigner with a nose like the beak of a bird of prey took the seat next to me; a Turk, perhaps, or a Kurd whom civilization had not robbed of his alert, predatory air and desert gauntness.

"And ten!" I snapped back.

"One-fifty," enunciated the newcomer.

Hell's hinges! Who was that fool? And who ever heard of an Oriental, unless he were a dealer, caring a happy hoot about the threadbare, worn fragment of an antique ring.

"And seventy-five!"

That ought to stop him. But it didn't. Not for a moment.

"Two hundred," he pronounced.

And when I raised him twenty-five, he did as much for me, and without batting an eyelash. I prayed that some angel would slip me the handle of a meat-ax, and then offered fifty more.

The auctioneer beamed and gloated and rubbed his hands, and praised heaven for connoisseurs who appreciated antiques. The porter, from force of habit, once more began to deploy the precious piece to egg on the bidders, but, catching my eye, he desisted; though it could have done no harm, for that relentless heathen at my right was out for that rug. That "*El-hamdu li-lláh!*" was the incredulous gasp of one who has stumbled around a corner and met fate face to face; it would be my roll against his.

"Three-fifty!" he announced, scarcely giving the overjoyed auctioneer a chance to acknowledge my last bid.

"Five hundred!" was my last despairing effort.

And five-fifty came like the crack of doom.

The stranger rose from his seat, peeled a wad of bills from a roll that would have choked a rhinoceros, and claimed his prize. Have it delivered? Absolutely not! And when I saw the look in his eye, and the gesture with which he

draped that scrap over his arm, I knew that all the wealth of the Indies could not separate him from one thread of that ancient relic.

I CLIMBED to my feet and strode down the aisle, talking to myself in non-apostolic tongues. But as I reached the paving, my meditations were interrupted.

"Allow me to thank you, *effendi.*"

It was the foreigner, still caressing the nap of the precious fragment he had draped over his arm.

"I owe you a great deal for having discovered this piece. Though I was almost too late."

I couldn't resist that courtly manner, that cordial good-fellowship. The bird of prey had laid aside his predatory manner and seemed really overjoyed about something; happiness, exaltation were mingled with his triumph.

"Don't thank me; thank my slim bank roll," I laughed, and swallowed the remnants of my disappointment.

"I have been hunting that piece for years," continued the stranger. "In Stamboul, Sultanabad, Tabriz . . . New York . . . London . . . wherever rugs are sold. And now I, or rather you, have found it. I regret your disappointment. But I had to have that rug," he concluded, speaking his last phrase in the tone of a bigoted Moslem announcing his belief in the unity of Allah.

"So I noted," was my reply; though it wasn't as ill-natured as it may sound.

"If you can spare the time, I shall tell you the story. And show you the other half of the rug. You knew of course that there was another half."

This was becoming interesting.

"I suspected as much; though who, and where——"

"I am Ilderim Shirkuh bin Ayyub," announced the stranger, and bowed in response to my acknowledgment of the introduction.

Ilderim Shirkuh bin Ayyub. Very impressive. But what of it? Though there was something familiar about that resonant handle.

He led the way to a car parked at the curbing.

DURING our drive north, bin Ayyub maintained a reflective silence that gave me a bit of time for my own thoughts. And as the long, aristocratic car purred its way toward the Gold Coast, I began to sense that I had indeed fallen into something. True, I had lost the prize I had sought to capture; but had I made the grade, I'd probably have remained in ignorance of its entire significance.

A few blocks past the Edgewater Beach Hotel we drew up before an ancient, bulky mansion set back of an acre of lawn; a great house, its dignity still overshadowing its approaching decrepitude; an outlaw, a rebel that still withstood the encroachment of apartments and apartment hotels.

A negro, arrayed in a striped *kuftán* and wearing a massive, spirally twisted turban, ushered us into a dimly lit salon which, though almost bare of furniture, was magnificently carpeted and tapestried with ancient, lustrous Persian rugs. Clusters of arms and armor placed at intervals along the walls gleamed icily in the dull light of several great, brazen floor-lamps. It seemed almost sacrilege to tread on that magnificent palace carpet whose exquisite loveliness, framed by a border of hardwood floor, reminded me of a diamond set off by its background of onyx.

Bin Ayyub finally broke the silence he had maintained; for as we entered, he had with a gesture invited me to be seated, he himself remaining on his feet, preoccupied, regarding the precious fragment he had captured, looking at it as though all the splendor about him was cheap and tawdry

in comparison to that threadbare, eroded scrap he held in his hands.

"Unintentionally—and involuntarily also—you have done me a great service," he at last began, as he seated himself. "As I told you, I am Ilderim Shirkuh bin Ayyub."

Again he paused, as if to let that impressive title sink home. And as I saw him against that background of lustrous rugs and damascened similtars and armor, I wondered whether I had been wrong in having omitted a salaam.

Bin Ayyub turned to the negro and —I can in no other way describe his manner—published an order. Then, to me, "You have heard of Salah ad Din Yusuf bin Ayyub? In your language, Saladin?"

"Certainly. Who has not?"

"I am descended in direct line from Saladin; that fragment is part of the throne-rug of my ancestor, the nephew of Shirkuh of Tekrit, and sultan of Syria and Egypt. Now do you begin to see why I value that scrap?"

"Do you mean to say that that rug covered the throne of Saladin?"

"Exactly. And I shall prove it."

Even as bin Ayyub spoke, the African returned, carrying a small chest of dark wood, elaborately carved, and bound in bands of discolored metal, bluish black, like age-old silver.

"Look how the pieces match!" exulted bin Ayyub, as he took from the chest that which I saw at a glance was the other part of the relic I had discovered. The pieces did indeed match perfectly; though the last-acquired fragment was somewhat the more worn and eroded by the rough use of those who had possessed it, ignorant of its worth.

"Read, *effendi!* Surely you can read, else you would never have bid this afternoon."

But I insisted that bin Ayyub read and translate into English. I felt rather foolish about strutting my halting Arabic before this polished Oriental whose very English was better than my own.

> In the name of Allah,
> the Merciful, the Compassionate! To my Lord Salah ad
> Din Yusuf bin Ayyub, the Sun of
> Heaven, thus hath spoken Abimilki, the
> groom of thy horse. I am the dust under the
> sandals of my Lord the King; seven and seven times
> at the feet of my Lord I fall; I have bowed
> me down seven times with breast and back;
> and all that the King said to me,
> well, well do I hear! Abimilki,
> a servant of the King am I,
> and the dust of thy two feet!

And here it was, threadbare and eroded by the passing of eight centuries, the throne-rug of Saladin, that great prince who elevated himself from the castle of Tekrit, in Kurdistan, to the throne of Syria and Egypt, and reigned as Defender of the Faith and Sword of Islam. . .

Had the auctioneer's hammer fallen just an instant earlier——

"*Alláhu akbar!*" ejaculated bin Ayyub, sensing my thoughts. "To think of how close a race it was! A second later, and I might now be bargaining with you for your prize, offering you all my possessions for that one fragment of carpet. And you would have refused. . . . I would go barefooted through the tall flames of *Gehennem* for what I took from you an hour ago." Then, to the negro: "Saoud! Prepare some coffee!

"I wonder," he resumed, "if you have any truly rare rugs in your collection? Like that Ispahan, for example?"

Bin Ayyub plucked from the wall what even in that dim light I recognized as an ancient Ispahan: that deep wine-red and solemn green, that classically perfect rendition of the Shah Abbas border and field were unmistakable. It was indeed an old Ispahan, that final, supreme prize of the collector; that rarest and most costly of all rugs.

I admitted that I had not attained, and probably never should attain, to such a fabulously scarce piece of weaving.

"You are wrong, quite wrong. For since I need that wall space for Saladin's throne-rug, I shall give you that Ispahan with my thanks and apologies——"

"Apologies?"

"Yes. For what I am giving you is a worthless rag compared with what I took from you this afternoon."

Such generosity is dizzying. That small, perfect Ispahan would be worth several thousand dollars even had it been ragged as a last year's bird's nest. I was stumped, stopped dead.

SAOUD, entering with coffee, interrupted my thanks. After having served the steaming, night-black, deathly bitter beverage, the negro took his post at the farther end of the salon, in front of a pair of heavy curtains that I fancied must conceal an alcove.

"In El-Káhireh it is the custom to perfume one's coffee with a tiny bit of ambergris," remarked bin Ayyub. "But I have devised a more subtle combination."

In response to the master's nod, Saoud parted the silver-embroidered curtains and caught them on the hilts of the simitars that hung at each side of the alcove. A great jar, fully as tall as the negro, and gracefully curved as a Grecian amphora, glowed in the level, sunset rays like a monstrous, rosy-amber bead.

He lifted the cover of the jar: and from it rolled a wave of overwhelming sweetness, an unearthly fragrance so curiously blended that I could not pick the dominant odor. Jasmine, or the rose of Naisháp̄úr, or all the mingled spices of Cebu and Saigon. . . with undertones of sandalwood and patchouli. . . A dizzying madness, a surge of intoxicating warmth and richness poured resistlessly from the glowing, pulsating, almost transparent depths of that great urn.

I wondered how Saoud could endure it at such close range. And then, drinking fully of the potent wave that swept past me, I lost all physical sensation save that of floating in a sea of torrid, confusing sweetness. And then the African replaced the cover of the jar. I fancied that he reeled ever so slightly as he withdrew from that throbbing luminous fountain of unbelievable fragrance, and wondered that he did not collapse.

Bin Ayyub had apparently forgotten my presence. He sipped his coffee, and with half-closed eyes stared into the depths of the urn. The unfathomable, perfect peace which Moslems wish each other with their *"Es-Salaam Aleika"* has descended upon him: *keyf*, the placid enjoyment of wakefulness that is half sleep.

The silence, the utter repose was contagious. I found myself gazing, eyes half out of focus, at the throne-rug. . .

And then I sensed that eyes were staring at me from some place of concealment. I turned and caught a glimpse of a dainty armful, shapely and elegantly contoured: a girl with smoldering, saracenic eyes, pools of dusky enchantment. Just for an instant I held her level, unabashed gaze which lingered long enough to let me fully sense her imperious calm and composure. It was just a glimpse, barely enough to let me recognize the transparent, olive complexion and faintly aquiline features of a Transcaucasian, a Gurjestani, the most flawlessly lovely of all Oriental women. And then the portières closed on the vision.

What a mad afternoon! The throne-rug of Saladin . . . and then the descendant of that great prince . . . and that girl, with her smoldering, kohl-darkened eyes . . . the familiar spirit of the urn whose

Byzantine curves imprisoned that glowing, rosy-amber sea of sweetness . . . wild thought! . . . but she was small and dainty enough to have emerged from that great jar, and then vanished back into its shimmering, pulsating depths. . . .

"The contents of that jar," began bin Ayyub, emerging from the silence, "would make a rich perfume of all the seas of the world. It would be folly to try to imagine the countless myriads of blossoms and herbs, spices and gums that are imprisoned in that essence. A drop, a thousandfold diluted, and a drop of that dilution, equally diluted, would be more potent than the strongest scents known to your *Feringhi* perfumers."

"It seems you took a fearful risk in shipping such a fragile and precious article in this country," I suggested.

"It was risky. Still, I would rather have had it shattered en route than fall into the hands of the spoilers who looted my house in Stamboul. But as luck would have it, there was a babbler among my enemies, so that I had warning. I packed my treasures, and smuggled them out, one at a time. And the night before the bowstring was to grace my throat, my family and I left in disguise."

Bin Ayyub paused to reflect a moment, wondering, perhaps, whether to carry on or change the subject. And then the darkness of his deep-set eyes flared fiercely.

"Do you see that cord?" He indicated a fine strand of hard-braided silk which hung from the peg that supported the simitar at the right of the alcove containing the Byzantine urn. "My enemy was so careless as to walk by moonlight the evening before a doom was to settle on my house. And as a souvenir of the promenade, I brought with me that fine, stout cord which, for all he cared, I might have left there to chafe his throat," concluded bin Ayyub, as he stroked his black mustache.

And then he showed me how the bowstring is employed; that flickering, swift gesture of his long, lean hands was gruesomely convincing. Bin Ayyub was indeed a versatile man.

"Swift and probably painless?" I volunteered.

"Yes. But if I had my choice of deaths," mused bin Ayyub, "I would elect to be drowned in a pool of that perfume, with my breath so rich with its fragrance that my senses would entirely forsake me. . . ."

A tinkle of bracelets interrupted his musings. The portières parted, and the lady from Gurjestan reappeared. In that strange atmosphere, it never occurred to me to commit the *faux pas* of rising as she entered. This was doubtless bin Ayyub's "family"; and, though the United States were on the street, they had not quite penetrated to this dim salon, so that I felt it would be tactful not to seem to take any notice of the girl. Upon more intimate acquaintance with bin Ayyub, I might be presented to her; but not at present.

Bin Ayyub replied to her purring, rippling syllables, speaking some language unknown to me; and then the tapestried portières closed and hid her from sight.

"You will surely pardon me, *effendi*. Though Djénane Hanoum speaks English, she prefers her native language," he remarked, then clapped his hands to summon Saoud.

Fresh coffee was served. And then, as my cigarette smoldered to its finish, bin Ayyub rose, rolled up the precious Ispahan and again offered it to me.

"And in ten days or two weeks the throne-rug of Saladin will be spliced by skilled weavers. I would be very glad to have you return and see it after it is restored."

The clicking of the latch behind me reminded me that I was again in the city of Chicago; and the Ispahan did not let me forget that I had actually been awake the past few hours.

WHENEVER there has been a killing, the vultures assemble. I had marveled that Morgan Revell had not stumbled across the throne-rug of Saladin before I did. Thus it was that I was not surprized to have him call at my apartment that very evening.

"Well . . . most extraordinary, that. Where did you get it?" he demanded, as he paused in the doorway, stripping off his gloves in preparation for the inspection of the Ispahan that bin Ayyub had so generously given me. "Shades of Shah Abbas! Strike me blind, but it seems genuine. And perfect."

He then parked his bulk in my favorite chair, and poured himself a drink, and proceeded to extract the story. And naturally I was not at all averse to enlightening him; for this would about even up for his eternal boasting of the mosque carpet of Eski Shehr: a remarkable tale, but one which eventually wears on one's nerves.

"On the level now, did anyone actually make you a present of this Ispahan?" he inquired as I concluded my account of the day's doings.

"Idiot," said I, "do you think I could have bought it?"

"Well, no. But still——" His features parted in a reminiscent grin. "Perhaps you remember the mosque carpet of Eski Shehr?"

"Lay off that mosque carpet! No, I got this honestly and without any of your clever devices."

"Score one for you! But really now, old egg, don't you know, this is a most unusual tale you're telling. Quite preposterous, quite! First of all, this bin Ayyub person is a *rara avis,* and all that, if at all. Who ever heard of one of those beggars who had any appreciation of an antique rug?"

"What about——?"

"Rot! Whoever you were going to cite is probably a dealer. It's simply preposterous, this bin Ayyub who collects ancient rugs. And that descendant of Saladin; why really, old fruit, that doesn't hold water at all."

I insisted that there were Orientals who did appreciate the beauty of the wondrous rugs which they wove.

"Quite so, quite so. But just consider," countered Revell, "that this Ispahan which you treasure as an antique was painfully new in the days when good old Shah Abbas was so partial to fine weaving and inventing new designs. That jolly prince had nothing but antiques on his hands, and he craved new ones; also new patterns. So much so that he sent artists to Italy to study design."

"But, damn it, I tell you——"

"Ah yes, surely. Nevertheless, I insist that the appreciation of antiques is an Occidental taste, and one which is jolly well artificial. Remember that little Armenian in Ashjian's showrooms and how much he felt that we were upset above the ears for preferring a threadbare Kabistan to a new Sarouk?"

I remembered.

"Well, now go to Ashjian's and let that same lad catch you admiring a Kirman rose-rug. Hear him sigh with much ecstasy; see him caper about; get the gallons of praise he pours on the heads of those fine old eggs who really knew how to weave a rug. He knows his litany now; but he wasn't born that way."

Revell scored.

"But bin Ayyub is a cultured gentleman. I'll take you out to his house, and then you'll be convinced about it all, including his being a descendant of Saladin."

"Very well, have it your own way. You know, it really may be quite possible. Only, it's just a bit unusual, if you know what I mean," Revell finally conceded as I completed my repetition of the story, and added bits of color I had omitted the first time. "Not that I doubted your word. But in all honesty, old onion, can you blame me for being a shade skeptical? When even the Shah's palace in Teheran is cluttered with gilt bric-à-brac, and modern Sultanieh rugs, and all that sort of atrocious thing. Beastly taste these beggars show. But this bin Ayyub fellow may be an exception. Though I contend that whatever the art the Orient provides is the result of instinct and not intent."

I granted most of his contentions. And then we discussed the great jar of attar, and the surpassing loveliness of bin Ayyub's "family."

"Most fascinating, really. This sounds like what people think the Orient ought to be, but never actually is. *Houris,* and incense, and all that sort of thing."

Then, just as he left: "By the way, did you ever read the quaint little tale of Aladdin's lamp?"

"Sure. What of it?"

"Nothing, really nothing at all. Merely curious, you know."

Now what had that buzzard meant by that remark? A subtle way of calling me an out-and-out romancer? Or did he mean that in getting my Ispahan I had stumbled into something, Aladdinlike?

And then I carefully examined the Ispahan. No, Revell had not palmed it and left a replica in its place. Strangely enough, he had not even tried to trade or bargain for it.

It was fully two weeks before I could find time to call on bin Ayyub to inspect the restoration of the throne-rug. But finally I did contrive to find some spare time, and just to convince Revell that I had not been releasing an Arabian fantasy, I decided to take him along.

"Cheers, old bean!" greeted Revell. "I was just thinking. . . . But how do you like it?"

It, the throne-rug of Saladin, stared me in the face: rich, lustrous, magnificent, now that it had been cleaned, and the pieces spliced together.

"Where in——?"

Revell laughed at my amazement.

"Most amazing, what? But don't rub your eyes. It is exactly what it looks like: the rug of the justly popular Saladin. I was just thinking of asking you to translate the inscription. Couldn't remember the exact wording you gave me several nights ago."

"Devil take inscriptions! How did you get it? Unless he suddenly needed the money."

"You could have done the same thing," Revell began, as he poured himself a drink, then painstakingly selected a cigar. "Especially after I told you in so many words how to go about it."

"How come, told me how to go about it?"

This was too much for me. He'd been up to dirty work of some kind. It was unbelievable that he had purchased that rug; and I doubted that he was clever enough to have outwitted bin Ayyub. Then what? Breaking and entering? Well, not very likely.

"The last thing I said the other night was something about Aladdin's lamp. I fancy you recollect. But I was jolly well certain you'd not follow my train of thought. Well . . . the magician from El Moghreb paraded up and down in front of Aladdin's palace, offering to exchange old lamps for new ones. And the princess — Mrs. Aladdin — was tickled pink to take an unfair advantage of an old man's foolishness.

So she joyously swapped the greasy, tarnished old magic lamp for a nice, new one. Never occurred to Aladdin to tell the young person his wife that the rather crude old lamp was of some value. Simple, really."

"Do you mean to say——?"

"Oh, yes, quite. Exactly, in fact. Mrs. bin Ayyub greatly fancied a lovely Anatolian silk rug about the same size as the revered Saladin's throne-rug, which, by the way, she thought was a bit *passé*. Liked my silk rug; bright colors, and not at all worn, and all that sort of thing. So we swapped; and I fancy I noted a gleam of triumph or something like that in her most fascinating eyes. Charming creature, yes?"

And then I exploded.

"You ought to be shot! He'll beat the tar out of her. He'll flay her alive——"

"Regrets, and all that, surely. But *caveat emptor* still holds good. She had no business messing around with the master's trinkets. After all, a bit of deceit——"

"And that girl will surely smell hell——"

"Much regret, certainly. But really, would you have me pass up such an opportunity? I'd cheerfully have committed murder for that rug. As it is——"

Revell smiled at the memory of his exceeding cleverness, and gazed at the throne-rug of Saladin with that fanatic affection comprehensible only to a collector.

And that smile drove me mad. Thanks to my babbling, Revell had turned a very clever trick; and thanks also to me, that dainty girl's shoulders . . . no, bin Ayyub wouldn't beat her himself; he'd have black Saoud lay aside his duties of footman, pipe-bearer and coffee-grinder, and peel every inch of skin off her shoulders. The noble Turk is a man of few words and short temper when dealing with his family. All of which went to my head, seeing that it was mainly my fault for having set Revell on the trail.

"Listen, you damned coyote!"

I gripped Revell by the shoulder by way of emphasis. He blinked in amazement.

"Listen and get me straight: you're going to return that rug here and now. Bin Ayyub treated me like a gentleman. And moreover, it's my fault if that girl gets the daylights hammered out of her; my fault, and yours."

"Come now, try and act naturally," mocked Revell, who had mastered his amazement at my outburst. "I, return that rug? Absurd. Really preposterous. Why, as I said, I'd have committed——"

And then Revell stared as I leaped to the arm of a davenport, reached up, and yanked Saladin's throne-rug from its place on the wall.

"Wait a minute. This is getting a bit thick. I say——"

By this time I was seeing red and also other colors.

"One more word out of you and I'll knock your head off! I'm taking this rug back to its owner. Get me?"

Revell is far from yellow. But somehow, I convinced him. The last glimpse I had of him, he was the color of an old saddle, and choking for breath.

"Really now, but this is a bit thick," he contrived, as I slammed the door. I missed the rest, but I am sure that for the next fifteen minutes it was a bit thick in the Revell apartment.

Throne-rug trailing over my shoulder, I hopped a taxi and proceeded to bin Ayyub's house.

BIN AYYUB himself admitted me. I recognized him simply because no mask could disguise those lean, aquiline features; but this which faced me was but a simulacrum of the vital personality I had met two weeks

ago. His face was unshaven; his eyes were cavernous and dull, lifeless; gone was all save the shell of Saladin's descendant. The change was so startling, so dismaying, that for the moment I forgot the throne-rug I carried, rolled up under my arm.

In view of the denunciation and wrath I expected, accusations of having played a part in the trickery of Revell, this listlessness of bin Ayyub left me dazed and wondering.

"I am glad to see you, *effendi*," he murmured, as he conducted me into the salon. He had not offered to take my hat and coat; had not noticed the bundle I carried.

"The throne rug," I began, offering him the precious roll. "I regret——"

"Spare your regrets. It was my fault. I should have told Djénane Hanoum of its value."

He took the rug with a listlessness that amazed me, and, moving as one suddenly aroused from sound sleep, spread it across a couch.

"I feared——"

"That I suspected you?" interrupted bin Ayyub. "No. I knew you were not guilty. You know who is guilty; but since he must be one who has eaten your bread and salt, I can not ask you to betray him."

Bin Ayyub seemed to forget that I was not bound by the Moslem's belief in the sanctity of bread and salt. But now that I had returned the rug, why bother about the trickster, Revell?

"Nor have I time to hunt him," continued bin Ayyub. "I have been waiting for you to return Saladin's throne-rug. And now that that is done, I have little time for hunting him."

"But now there's no need of hunting him," I suggested. "You have your rug."

Which I fancied was a sensible answer. But the look that flitted across bin Ayyub's face and took form in his eyes told me that my remark had been the thrust of incandescent iron.

Bin Ayyub rose. I wondered if this was to terminate the interview. It seemed that he might at least have thanked me, despite my having been the cause of his annoyance.

"I have dismissed Saoud for the day. But I myself will prepare coffee. One moment, please."

The aura of unbounded misery and corroding despair remained, lingering after the portières had hidden bin Ayyub from sight. Not even the clanging of the brazen pestle wherewith he pulverized the freshly roasted coffee could infuse a trace of life into the somber magnificence of that rich salon. The order of nature had been upset: this was the house of one whose spirit had died a thousand deaths without having deprived the body of life. Not even the return of the throne-rug had aroused a sparkle of the vital, predatory spirit of that fierce Kurd whose eyes had but two weeks ago flamed exultantly as he told of the enemy who had unwisely walked by moonlight.

Bin Ayyub's entry with a tray interrupted my reflections.

One of the tiny eggshell cups was white, the other, deep blue.

"No, *effendi*, blue is the color of mourning; take the white one."

A light began to dawn on me. The color of mourning . . . he had taken this tactful way of letting me know that my presence was an intrusion on his sorrow. But, if there had been a death in the family, why that flash of abysmal despair when a few moments ago I had suggested that since he once more had the throne-rug, he need not bother to hunt whoever it was that had tricked Djénane Hanoum?

"*Bismillahi!*" murmured bin Ayyub, then tasted his coffee. After a moment's silence, he continued, "I bear you no ill will for what has happened. Naturally you would speak to your friends of the Ispahan I gave

you, and of the throne-rug. It was my fault; I should have told her."

Worse and worse! That rug again. Hadn't I returned it? Wasn't he sitting on it even as he spoke? Well then. . .

"It was my fault. I should have told her," he repeated.

He drained his cup.

The brooding silence forbade even an attempt at making conversation. My nerves were rapidly getting on edge; and I hoped bin Ayyub would end the interview.

"I am leaving very soon, *effendi*," he finally resumed. "Saoud will pack up my goods. I have been waiting for you to return the throne-rug; and I was right in waiting. For the sake of my illustrious ancestor, I treasure it. But much has happened in the last few days. I do not care to have it in my house any longer. My brother's son in Tekrit will take it."

I could think of no appropriate comment.

"Here is the piece which was exchanged for the throne-rug. Take it with you when you leave, and return it to its owner."

Which was also fair enough; though Revell deserved no such fortune after his shabby trick. The loss might be a lesson to him.

"May I ask you to be so kind as to lift the cover of the jar of attar?" requested bin Ayyub, as he set aside his empty cup.

I could see that he was momentarily becoming paler. There was not a drop of blood beneath his bronzed skin. The corners of his mouth and the muscles of his cheeks twitched perceptibly; so that his request did not seem at all out of order. Though if I myself felt as he looked, the last thing in the world I'd want would be a whiff of that overpowering perfume.

"Certainly," I replied.

Poor devil! He seemed to be having a chill, shivering noticeably. No wonder he wanted me to take Saoud's place in the ritual of the perfume jar.

As I advanced across the wondrously carpeted floor, I heard him mutter to himself, "One is at times hasty. . ."

I parted the curtains that veiled the great urn of Byzantine glass, and lifted the heavy cover; then, dizzied by the overwhelming surge of sweetness, recoiled a pace.

And then I dropped the cover.

*Christ in heaven!* But why deny my own eyes? In the throbbing, glowing rosy-amber jar was the shapely form of Djénane Hanoum! Faintly distorted by the refraction of the curved surfaces of the urn and the attar, but nevertheless and beyond any mistake, that was the Gurjestani girl. I stared, fascinated. Then looked behind the jar, hoping. . . ridiculous hope! . . . to find that she was standing on the other side, and that I had seen her through, and not in, the urn.

It is strange how in such a moment one notices trifles.

*"La illah illa allah. . . wa Muhammad rasul allahi. . ."* came the murmuring accents of bin Ayyub, very low, but distinct.

Even in the grip of that horribly lovely sight, I had distinctly caught the Moslem's "There is no God but Allah. . ." And then, scarcely perceptible, "Djénane. . ."

My movements must have been those of a mechanical toy.

As I caught the curtains on the hilts of the simitars hanging at each side of the alcove, I noted that the fine, hard-woven cord of silk was missing. And then I found myself wondering what poison the blue cup of mourning had contained.

Not until fully a minute later did it dawn on me why bin Ayyub's eyes had flamed with immeasurable despair when I had reminded him that since I had returned the throne-rug

of Saladin, he had no cause to concern himself about the thief.

That awful sweetness was rolling from the uncovered jar, strangling me with its richness. I wondered how a girl in the heart of an ocean of perfume could endure its fragrance . . . and whether the silken cord was chafing her throat.

Bin Ayyub's drawn features were now overlaid with a shadow of a smile.

"If it were given me to elect the manner of my death, I would choose to be drowned in that perfume . . ." he had once said. So instead of covering the jar, I left Ilderim Shirkuh bin Ayyub enthroned on the rug of Saladin, and facing the loveliness which he had imprisoned in attar.

REVELL was still frothing when I returned and tossed his Anatolian silk rug on the floor.

"I'd have committed murder for that throne-rug," he growled. "And now———"

Some day I'm going to tie an anvil to Revell's ankles and then kick him into Lake Michigan.

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# The Ride of Falume

## *By* ROBERT E. HOWARD

Falume of Spain rode forth amain when twilight's crimson fell
To drink a toast with Bahram's ghost in the scarlet land of Hell.
His rowels clashed as swift he dashed along the flaming skies;
The sunset rade at his bridle braid and the moon was in his eyes.
The waves were green with an eery sheen over the hills of Thule
And the ripples beat to his horses' feet like a serpent in a pool.
On vampire wings the shadow things wheeled round and round his head,
Till he came at last to a kingdom vast in the Land of the Restless Dead.

They thronged about in a grisly rout, they caught at his silver rein;
"Avaunt, foul host! Tell Bahram's ghost Falume has come to Spain!"
Then flame-arrayed rose Bahram's shade: "What would ye have, Falume?"
"Ho, Bahram who on Earth I slew where Tagus' waters boom,
Now though I shore your life of yore amid the burning West,
I ride to Hell to bid ye tell where I may ride to rest.
My beard is white and dim my sight and I would fain be gone.
Speak without guile: where lies the isle of mystic Avalon?"

"A league behind the western wind, a mile beyond the moon,
Where the dim seas roar on an unknown shore and the drifting stars lie strewn:
The lotus buds there scent the woods where the quiet rivers gleam,
And king and knight in the mystic light the ages drowse and dream."
With sudden bound Falume wheeled round, he fled through the flying wrack
Till he came again to the land of Spain with the sunset at his back.
"No dreams for me, but living free, red wine and battle's roar;
I breast the gales and I ride the trails until I ride no more."

# HUNGER

## *By* JOHN D. SWAIN

HERITAGE had passed the stage where he was conscious of hunger. Indeed, there was an almost complete and ascetic severance of mental and physical consciousness, a serene exhilaration in which his mind functioned with amazing clarity.

Questions for whose answer he had often groped blindly were now revealed to him as vividly as a strange countryside is photographed upon the brain at night by a flash of lightning. He did not ponder on futile puzzles whose answer is a matter of numerals or statistical details, but for the first time he was able to grasp the meaning of eternity without beginning or end, of an universe without boundaries. Such a childish device as our Time conception amused him. He perceived the reasonableness of the Fourth Dimension, of other dimensions beyond.

Meanwhile, as he passed through the darkness, it seemed to him that he was immensely tall, his head among the stars, and that instead of walking he remained fixed in space while past him, on either hand, fled the trees and fields, the little hills and the scattered farmsteads. He realized that such a state could not long endure; that his mind was nicely balanced on a thin blade of consciousness from which the slightest breath would overbalance it and plunge him into dark hallucinations. He must eat soon, or delirium would claim him.

It was therefore with a fierce joy that at last, amid all these miles of darkened houses, he beheld a little house whose every window blazed with lights. Candle-lights; for as he drew near he observed that lighted candles stood in rows on every sill.

Candles are in cathedrals, and coffee-houses. They are lighted in joy and sorrow. They grace austere old houses where are much worn silver and old books and solid furniture polished by generations of hands, and frowning portraits on faded walls. They burn in thieves' cellars. They are gay, arrogant, furtive. Seen in this isolated house, and long past midnight, they could indicate but one occasion: death!

Heritage, forgetting his first impulse to ask for food, was moved to pause here to pay his respects to the dead. With the urbanity of famine, he would salute the still one, old man, woman, child, with a *hail and farewell.*

He entered in; and as he thrust open the unlocked door, a venerable man rose and bowed. "I have been waiting," he said simply. "I knew you would come."

"How could you know, when I only took this road, a strange one to me, by chance?"

The old man smiled. "There is no such thing as chance. Of course, I could not know that it would be you, in particular. But *someone* was bound to come. I need an acolyte, that I may complete my task."

He looked down upon a little trestleboard over which had been thrown a gaudy red tablecloth, and upon which lay a long roll of fine white linen cloth, like a cocoon, with two large candles burning at each end.

The old man, Heritage noted as his eyes became accustomed to the flicker of many little candle flames, wore across his shoulders what appeared to be one of a pair of velour por-

tières, woven with florid designs in red, gold and black. He pointed to the shrouded figure on the trestle-board.

"This is a princess royal," he explained. "Her history is well known to Egyptologists. Because she refused to marry her own brother, her father the *pharaoh* caused her to be strangled, and her body denied the sacred rites of sepulture. It was embalmed, but thrust into the dry vegetable cellar of a slave's house. I bought it from a great museum of art and antiquities. It took all that I had saved up by fifty years of toil with my pen. Before the Nile grooved its channel to the sea, it was written in the planets that I should perform this thing. But I can not accomplish it alone."

Heritage gravely nodded. "What then can I do?"

The old gentleman handed him two candles, which he had lighted.

"You shall kneel at her feet while I recite the essential part of the ancient rite," he said; and, directly Heritage had kneeled, he began rapidly to intone passages from the *Book of the Dead.*

The wavering candle-light served to set everything in the still room into fluidity. The shrouded mummy seemed to breathe rhythmically. In the far corners of the room ludicrous shadows leaped and gamboled. Over Heritage's hands ran little rivulets of hot wax; but he did not feel them, famine having already released him from the tyranny of pain.

Abruptly, the voice of the old man ceased. After a moment he said: "There is no mummy case. That I could not afford to buy. So I have prepared a simple cedar box, lined with soft silk, outside in the grave I have digged for her. And now I must lift her in my arms and take her out; but this is sacrilege, and so, according to the immutable law of old Egypt, you my acolyte must curse me, and make pretense of stoning me."

Heritage bowed. It seemed to him very fitting that he should do these things; and he carefully set down the candles, and took the stone that was handed him.

"*May the gods damn your soul for sacrilege,*" he said, his voice thin and high; and then he feebly cast the stone toward the old man, but not directly at him.

It struck the window at the back of the room; several candles were overturned, and there was a chuckle of glass as one pane was demolished.

From the black night there entered through the broken window-pane two black cats, with jade eyes. With solemn tread, eyes set hard ahead, they passed to the rude trestle, crouched, and leaped upon it, one at the head, the other at the foot, and there began ceremoniously to wash their faces, their soot-black paws making mysterious and cabalistic signs like the passes of a necromancer or the incantations of a priest.

The old man nodded. "It is well," he said; and stooping, lifted the light, dry mummy and bore it from the room and out into the night, followed by the two black cats.

Heritage was left alone with many candles, and the incense smoke from a cracked saucer upon which smoldered strange gums and spices.

Presently, since the old man did not return, he opened the front door and passed through the weed-choked garden and resumed his way down the turnpike, now lighted faintly by the first hint of dawn. By it he perceived that he was come to a covered toll-bridge spanning a river. Men had recently been at work restoring its planking; and just as Heritage was about to plunge into the black tunnel, his eyes made out the fragments of a lunch one of the workmen had left behind. There were dry crusts, the

fat rind of a slice of ham, a bit of cheese.

With a little sob he sank upon his knees in the wet grass and began to cram the morsels into his avid mouth.

And as he swallowed them without chewing, far away across the dark river a cock challenged the dawn.

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## Some "Old Masters"

THE ignorance of some of the medieval painters, even those now ranked as "masters," is astounding. Tintoretto, in a picture which represents the Israelites gathering manna in the desert, has armed them with guns; while a Dutch painter showed Abraham as about to sacrifice Isaac with a loaded blunderbuss! Brengheli, another Dutch painter, in a picture of the three Magi from the East, drew the Hindoo Wise Man in a full white surplice with boots and spurs and bearing in his hand as a present to the Holy Child a model of a Sixteenth Century Dutch warship. Lanfrane showed medieval churchmen in their robes at the feet of the infant Savior, and Paul Veronese introduced several Benedictine monks among the guests at the marriage feast at Cana of Galilee.

An altar-piece painted by Chella delle Puera, in a church at Capua, representing the Annunciation, shows the Virgin seated in a rich armchair of crimson velvet with gold flowers; a cat and a parrot near her seem very attentive to the whole scene, and on a table are a silver coffee-pot and cup. A later Italian version showed the Virgin on her knees before a crucifix, while thrown over a chair are a number of elegant gowns; near by is a cat with head turned up toward the angel, apparently listening attentively to the announcement. Another artist in painting the Crucifixion shows a monkish confessor holding a crucifix up before the repentant thief.

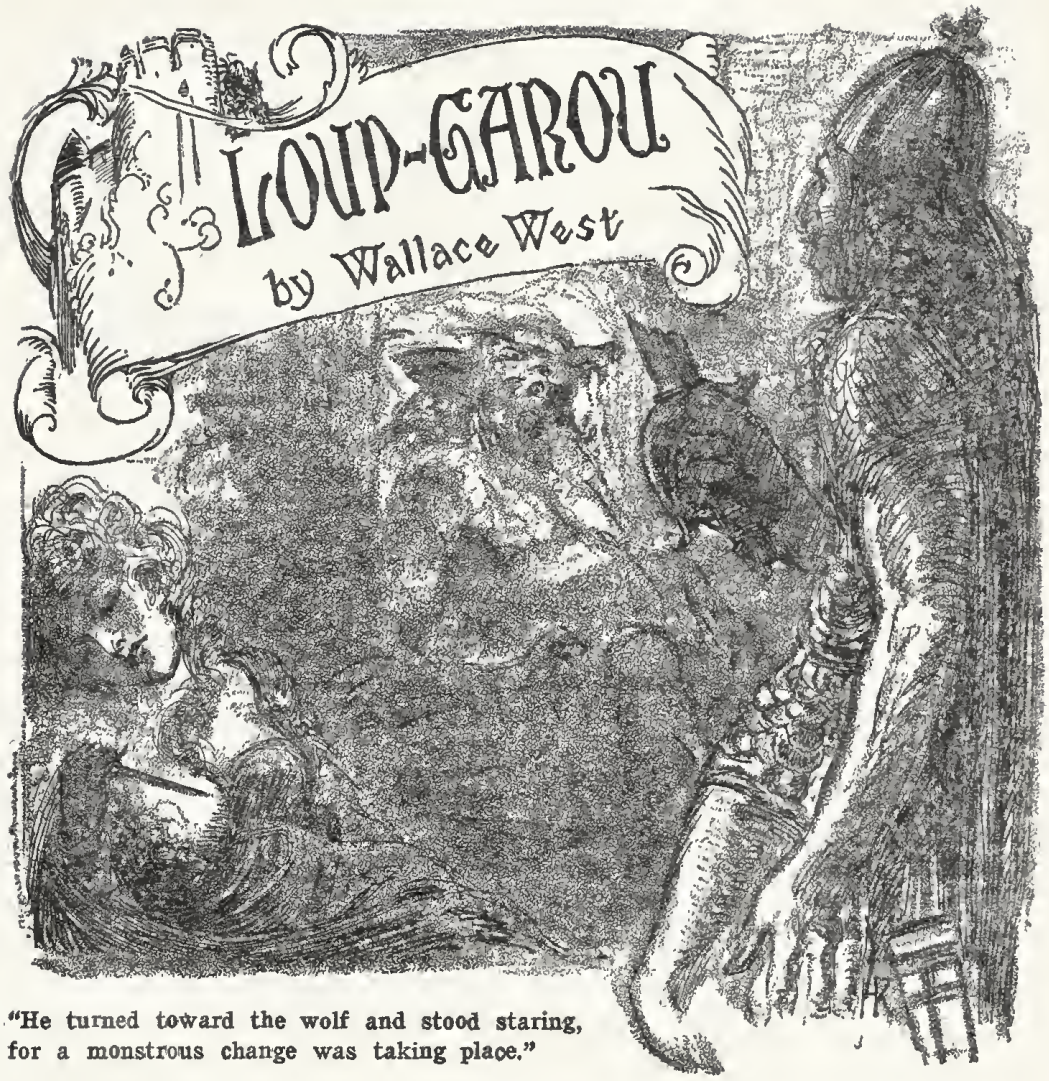
The miracle of transubstantiation was represented on an altar-piece at Worms in which the Virgin throws Jesus into the hopper of a mill, while from the other side He issues, changed into little morsels of bread, with which the priests feed the people.

Simon Memmi, a Fourteenth Century artist of Sienna, was the first to show speaking scrolls issuing from the mouths of his figures, a practise which afterward became common. On one of his paintings the devil, almost exhausted from his hot pursuit by a saint, exclaims despairingly, "Oh! Oh! It is all over with me!"

Paolo Mazzocchi, in painting the "four elements", used fish to represent the sea, moles the earth and a salamander the fire. He wished to represent the air by a chameleon; but as he did not know how to draw that scarce animal, he drew the one whose name sounded most like it—namely, a camel!

# LOUP-GAROU

by Wallace West



"He turned toward the wolf and stood staring, for a monstrous change was taking place."

GIL COUTEAU sat in the warm sunlight of the courtyard industriously polishing his long, straight sword. It was a good sword, he ruminated, scraping industriously at the dark stain which insisted on sticking in the crevices of the scrollwork hilt, but it was becoming thirsty from lack of use. His superstitious eye seemed to detect some subtle lessening of the keenness of the edge; some slight dullness in the polish of the blade since he had used it almost daily against the cursed Saracens in Palestine.

With the sword across his knees he leaned back against the wall and relaxed into sleepy comfort. It was good, he decided, to be done with wars, and with slicing heads from infidels; it was good to be in Merrie England, where nothing much had happened since his arrival; it was good to have the stout walls of Castle Randall about him, and a real bed to sleep on once more.

With half-closed eyes he watched the golden flash of flies across the sunlight and listened to the hum of wasps who had their nest somewhere up the tower. Two grooms were asleep against the stable wall. Two

more were trying to work up interest in a desultory cockfight near the portcullis. Ho hum! Life was good. His head nodded forward on his breast.

He was awakened by a ragged thunder of hoofs upon the lowered drawbridge. He leaped to his feet, all his sleepy content shattered, as a wild-eyed horse charged into the courtyard and plunged to a stop before him, in a great lather of sweat. From its back slid a bleeding bundle of a man whom he recognized as the serf Gomar. "Oh, sir," gabbled this one, in a mixture of Saxon and English which Gil still found hard to understand, "oh, sir; Lady Constance! I must to Lord Robert. Gray Henry, the Wolf, has stolen——"

Without pausing to finish, the serf started into the castle at a slouching, staggering run, and Couteau followed him, sword in hand.

They found Sir Robert Fitzgerald, lord of the castle, in an alcove off the main hall. He was dressed in a dust-colored robe, like the priest of some occult order, and, surrounded by an array of test-tubes and retorts, was poring over a huge volume as they rushed in.

He leaped to his feet, however, and strode forward with a step which belied his sixty-five years.

"Oh, sir," cried the serf, throwing himself at the old man's feet, "your daughter, Lady Constance, has been stolen——"

"By whom?" thundered Sir Robert, jerking him to his feet as though the burly Saxon had been a feather.

"By your foster-brother, Gray Henry," sobbed the man.

"Henry the Wolf," whispered the old man, his face growing pale beneath his long beard. "But that's impossible," he cried, shaking the serf savagely. "She had three men-at-arms with her. Where are they?"

"Dead! We were put upon in the forest," came the answer.

Sir Robert returned slowly to his seat behind the test-tubes. He seemed older—grayer. "Call my son Brian," he commanded at length. "This matter will require fighting, methinks. Couteau, stay with me."

He busied himself arranging his apparatus as the others departed. "You have heard of my foster-brother since you returned with us from Palestine?" he finally inquired.

"Merely his name, sir," replied the other, "and that he holds Castle Barnecan, up the river."

"There is more to it than that," said Sir Robert. "Henry has an evil reputation. He dabbles in sorcery as I do in alchemy. Perhaps he has had more success than I. So 'tis said by the country-folk."

He paused, paced back and forth for some moments, then resumed: "You have heard of the gray wolf of Barnecan?"

"Aye, sir, I have even thought a little of a hunt to kill it, since there is nothing else to do here, and the wolf's deviltries are so numerous."

" 'Tis lucky you haven't tried, Gil," retorted the old man fiercely. "He killed my uncle, you know, and people say—well I must out with it—the people say that my cursed foster-brother is——"

They were interrupted by a clatter of spurs on the flagstones. Young Brian, heir and only son of Sir Robert, rushed in.

"I have heard, Father," he cried. "Constance has been stolen by that fiend. Why do you stand there so quietly? Come! We must find her; we must storm Castle Barnecan at once."

He looked very handsome as he stood in his hunting clothes, for he was tall and blond and very, very young, or at least so it seemed to Couteau, who had fought seven weary years in Palestine.

"Sir Henry is too strong for us, boy," reasoned his father. "We

could never capture the castle. We must try other measures. Let us ride at once, and try to reason with him. I have known for years that he wished to marry Constance so that he might have a claim on my lands at my death, but I never thought he would try this scurvy trick. If parley fails then we shall try other measures."

YOUNG Brian fumed and raged at this, but he was no fool, so that afternoon the three of them, with fifty yeomen at their backs, rode through the dense forests which separated the two fiefs. Toward sunset they halted before the drawbridge of Castle Barnecan. In answer to a trumpet-blast Sir Henry himself appeared at a turret, but made no offer to lower the bridge.

"We have come to demand Lady Constance of you," shouted Brian.

"I know naught of her," came the answer in a deep, resonant voice. "I would ask you to enter, but the drawbridge is never lowered here after sunset; and the sun is almost down." He turned to face the sinking orb, which was gilding him and the castle with a lurid glow.

"Then you refuse to give us news of our lady?" shouted Brian.

"I have said I know naught of her. Is not that enough, young sir? Let you come again tomorrow. You may examine Castle Barnecan from turret to dungeon. But tonight, I regret to say, dear nephew, that you can not enter. Tomorrow I will send men into the forest to search for her, since I greatly admire Constance, as you well know. But tonight we can do nothing in the dark."

As he finished speaking the sun sank slowly out of sight. At the same time Sir Henry turned and strode from the turret without a farewell, leaving his visitors hesitating on the edge of the moat.

Brian cursed and fumed as they rode back through the dark woods. His horse, which felt the distress of his rider, plunged and fretted.

At last Brian pulled to a halt. "Father," he said firmly, "I am remaining here tonight to watch the castle. God knows what Gray Henry may try to do. I will keep Gomar with me, since he knows the country roundabout. We will keep a watch together. Come," he called to the serf. Together they wheeled and disappeared into the dusk.

The others rode in silence. The path under the trees grew darker at each moment. Besides the shuffle of the horses over the fallen leaves there was no sound except now and then the twitter of a sleeping bird, or the far-off howling of a lonely wolf.

"I like it not, Gil," said the knight, drawing his horse close to that of the Frenchman. "I would that I had not let him stay, but he is his father's son. Ah, I wish I were twenty years younger! Sir Henry would not have bearded me thus. Aye!" he cried fiercely, "and he shall not, even today. I'm not a dotard yet."

They were interrupted by the concerted baying of several wolves which had closed in upon the calvalcade. "A pack of them—and in September, too," murmured the old man, noting the gleaming eyes back among the trees. Note how bold they are. Truly, this means a bleak winter, unless—unless——" He grew silent.

They rode on, the horses nervous and shivering as the quavering call of the pack rose about them, the men-at-arms whispering among themselves; the wolves following them at a judicious distance, until the gray towers of Randall showed against the stars.

THERE was no sleep in the castle that night, but a hurried preparation for battle. Sir Robert realized there was no use appealing to

the king in far-away London, and prepared to take the law into his own hands, although he well knew that Castle Barnecan was better garrisoned than his own stronghold. Weapons were overhauled, equipment inspected and the fighting men given instructions.

The castle had sunk into comparative quiet at sunrise, but was immediately roused by a shouting at the drawbridge. Rushing to a turret they saw Gomar, his clothes again in ribbons, clinging to his horse's neck to steady himself and doing his best to attract the attention of the guards.

The bridge was lowered and he stumbled over, a pitiful figure, his body covered with long scratches and jagged rents; his horse a lather of sweat and blood, almost spent.

"Oh, sir," he babbled, sinking down at the knight's feet, "again I bring bad news. Your son Brian is dead."

"How?" croaked Sir Robert.

"By the wolves," wailed the man, shuddering and covering his face with his hands. "Hundreds of them. Gray devils! We had no chance, though we killed scores. And the great gray wolf of Barnecan led them. Oh sir, it is true Gray Henry is a werewolf, or a devil! The great wolf killed Brian, dragged down his horse, and tore the lad's throat out as I watched. I fled—they followed—miles and miles. Oh God!" He collapsed in a dead faint.

There was a hush in the castle that day. All had loved Brian. Now they waited for some action from Sir Robert. But he sat, old and gray, in his alcove, slowly thumbing the pages of his books on alchemy and staring at his impotent retorts.

At last he roused himself and sent for Couteau. "My friend," he said gently, when the latter appeared, "I saved your life once in Palestine. I have treated you as my foster-son since that day. You swore eternal devotion to me then. You are the only hope I have now, and I ask your aid."

"Sir," replied Gil, "I will give my life gladly to help you. Also you must know that I have loved Lady Constance since first we met. Therefore I am doubly bound. Command me." He stood, tall and dark, before Sir Robert.

"I would that we might storm that cursed castle," continued the old man, "but we are not strong enough to try, except as a last resort. Besides, many whom I love would be killed. Therefore, let us use strategy. Do you know aught of werewolves?"

"A little," replied Gil briefly. "They are called *loups-garoux* in my country."

"Then from what you have seen and heard, you must know that my foster-brother seems to have discovered that devilish art of changing himself into a wolf at will."

"I feared as much."

"Listen carefully, then. The nature of werewolves is such that they are allied to the powers of darkness. Therefore they can never appear in the light. One imbued with such powers, therefore, can, and at last must, change into the wolfish form at sundown—but—and here is what I wish you to remember, my son—he must change back into his normal shape again at sunrise."

"So I have heard."

"One thing more. Gray Henry had the fingers of his right hand injured years ago in the wars. This makes it hard for him to wield a sword, though on account of his giant stature no man could stand against him in his youth.

"Think well over these things, my boy, and do as you think best, but remember that the werewolf has killed my uncle and now my son, two of the best swordsmen of the country."

THAT afternoon Gil Couteau sat again in the courtyard with his sword across his knees while the people of the castle stared wonderingly at his set face and fixed expression.

At sunset, when the shadows were creeping out of the forest and when the howling of the wolves, with which the countryside seemed alive, had set the teeth of every man in the castle chattering with vague but awful horror, he strapped his long sword across his back, untied a skiff at the riverside and rowed slowly away toward Barnecan.

Dawn was faintly streaking the sky when he reached his destination. The fortress rose steeply out of the river on one side, but the stones of which it was built were so roughly laid that it was easy for him to tie the boat securely. Feeling his way inch by inch, he crept up the steep wall. There were ivy and a few window-slits to help him, but many times he was forced to retrace part of his way, thinking each move would be his last.

His fingers were torn and bleeding; his limbs ached as though he had been on a torture-rack, when at last he arrived at an embrasure for which he had been making since he had seen a light gleaming dully there as he approached the stronghold.

Carefully he raised his eyes above the bottom of the slit and peered within. What he saw there set his heart thumping, half with terror, half anger. On a stool in one corner of a small bare room crouched Lady Constance, her clothing torn and disheveled; her blond curls blood-smeared and tangled.

At the other side of the room, before the door, crouched a gigantic gray wolf. Couteau felt his scalp stir as he looked, for this was something uncanny; something dreadful that chilled his French blood, though he had heard of such horrors since his childhood.

Occasionally the beast would rise and pace stealthily back and forth before the door, walking with a slight limp of the right front leg, he noticed, and at such times its head was fully five feet above the floor. Then it would stop, and, sitting on its haunches, leer wickedly at the crouching girl, but never approach her.

Wondering at this, Gil looked at her again, and saw that she held against her breast a needlelike dagger, ready to press it home, should the beast come nearer. He felt his heart swell with pride in her, at her brave spirit and fearless courage.

It was quite light now, and daring to wait no longer, Gil loosened his sword and squeezed himself through the embrasure as quickly as the narrow space permitted. Quick as he was, the monster had heard him, and was upon him instantly as he leaped to the floor. Then began a struggle, the remembrance of which would sometimes, even years later, wake Couteau from sleep, sweating with terror.

It was like no fight he had ever had, nor was it like the wolf-hunts and boar-stickings in which he had taken part. The *loup-garou* fought with human intelligence, dodging Gil's swordthrusts with the speed of light, and always, always, parrying for a leap at his throat, which, if successful, would mean an instant end to the battle.

Gil's long sword was almost an impediment in that crowded space. He longed for a dagger as he felt himself slowly but surely giving ground before the plunges of the werewolf. Then, almost before he was aware, the end came. He aimed a slashing stroke at the animal's neck, just where it joined the shoulders, but the other, with an almost impossible contortion, jerked itself out of the way,

and the already-battered blade, striking the tiles of the floor, snapped short off.

In the same breath the devil was on him, hurling him to the floor and worrying at his arm, which he had flung up to protect his throat. The slavering fangs were but a few inches away; he knew that his time was short and that sunrise would come too late.

At that moment he heard a wild scream. Lady Constance, who had been crouched paralyzed with fear, in a corner, sprang forward, and picking up the stool, brought it down upon the beast's head with all her force.

The animal howled with pain, and reeled away, allowing Gil to retain his feet and—the first rays of the sun passed through the embrasure, splashing the chamber-wall with pale gold—like a blessing—like an aureole—Gil thought.

He turned toward the wolf and stood staring, for a monstrous change was taking place. The animal's outline seemed to blur, just as when strong sunlight strikes a translucent vase and changes its color and structure. The thing's fur disappeared, its snout shortened and ran together, it staggered upright, and, as the Frenchman watched spellbound, the blur again coalesced into the figure of Gray Henry, the knight whom he had seen at the turret two days before. But a Gray Henry naked and unarmed, still almost stunned by the blow and the agony of his metamorphosis.

Gil did not wait for him to recover but grappled again. This time the fight was not unequal. Gray Henry, although strong and agile, was no match for the younger man, who had spent much of his spare time in Palestine wrestling, and who now gave thanks for some things he had learned from Saracen prisoners.

Shifting from grip to grip on the writhing body, he at last slipped both his arms under his antagonist's arms from behind, and, clasping his hands behind the other's head, exerted a steady, ever-growing pressure. The werewolf fought valiantly, but could not break the hold. At last he tried to shout for help, but Gil forced his head forward, so that only a low moaning was heard. Another effort! There was a loud crack, like the snapping of a dry stick, and his opponent rolled loosely to the floor, his neck broken.

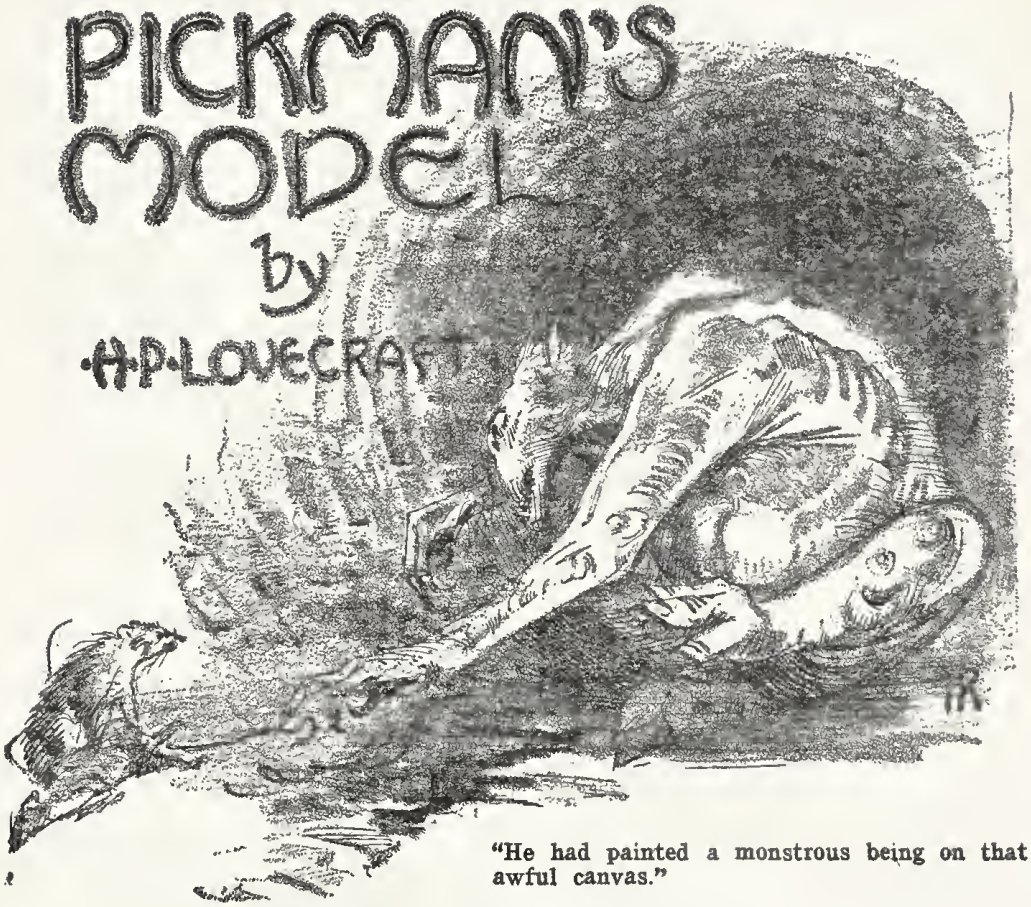
OF HOW Gil rescued Lady Constance and returned with her to Castle Randall, there is little more to tell. They arrived safely, and that ladies in distress are always gracious toward their protectors is well known.

Gil Couteau one day became master of Castle Randall, and a very worthy knight in his own right, but his greatest feat, so he sometimes said, was a certain battle with the devil.

# PICKMAN'S MODEL

by

H·P·LOVECRAFT



"He had painted a monstrous being on that awful canvas."

YOU needn't think I'm crazy, Eliot—plenty of others have queerer prejudices than this. Why don't you laugh at Oliver's grandfather, who won't ride in a motor? If I don't like that damned subway, it's my own business; and we got here more quickly anyhow in the taxi. We'd have had to walk up the hill from Park Street if we'd taken the car.

I know I'm more nervous than I was when you saw me last year, but you don't need to hold a clinic over it. There's plenty of reason, God knows, and I fancy I'm lucky to be sane at all. Why the third degree? You didn't use to be so inquisitive.

Well, if you must hear it, I don't know why you shouldn't. Maybe you ought to, anyhow, for you kept writing me like a grieved parent when you heard I'd begun to cut the Art Club and keep away from Pickman. Now that he's disappeared I go around to the club once in a while, but my nerves aren't what they were.

No, I don't know what's become of Pickman, and I don't like to guess. You might have surmised I had some inside information when I dropped him—and that's why I don't want to think where he's gone. Let the police find what they can—it won't be much, judging from the fact that they don't know yet of the old North End place he hired under the name of Peters. I'm not sure that I could find it again myself—not that I'd ever try, even in broad daylight! Yes, I do know, or am afraid I know, why he maintained it. I'm coming to that. And

I think you'll understand before I'm through why I don't tell the police. They would ask me to guide them, but I couldn't go back there even if I knew the way. There was something there—and now I can't use the subway or (and you may as well have your laugh at this, too) go down into cellars any more.

I should think you'd have known I didn't drop Pickman for the same silly reasons that fussy old women like Dr. Reid or Joe Minot or Bosworth did. Morbid art doesn't shock me, and when a man has the genius Pickman had I feel it an honor to know him, no matter what direction his work takes. Boston never had a greater painter than Richard Upton Pickman. I said it at first and I say it still, and I never swerved an inch, either, when he showed that *Ghoul Feeding*. That, you remember, was when Minot cut him.

You know, it takes profound art and profound insight into nature to turn out stuff like Pickman's. Any magazine-cover hack can splash paint around wildly and call it a nightmare or Witches' Sabbath or a portrait of the devil, but only a great painter can make such a thing really scare or ring true. That's because only a real artist knows the actual anatomy of the terrible or the physiology of fear—the exact sort of lines and proportions that connect up with latent instincts or hereditary memories of fright, and the proper color contrasts and lighting effects to stir the dormant sense of strangeness. I don't have to tell you why a Fuseli really brings a shiver while a cheap ghost-story frontispiece merely makes us laugh. There's something those fellows catch—beyond life—that they're able to make us catch for a second. Doré had it. Sime has it. Angarola of Chicago has it. And Pickman had it as no man ever had it before or—I hope to heaven—ever will again.

Don't ask me what it is they see. You know, in ordinary art, there's all the difference in the world between the vital, breathing things drawn from nature or models and the artificial truck that commercial small fry reel off in a bare studio by rule. Well, I should say that the really weird artist has a kind of vision which makes models, or summons up what amounts to actual scenes from the spectral world he lives in. Anyhow, he manages to turn out results that differ from the pretender's mince-pie dreams in just about the same way that the life painter's results differ from the concoctions of a correspondence-school cartoonist. If I had ever seen what Pickman saw—but no! Here, let's have a drink before we get any deeper. Gad, I wouldn't be alive if I'd ever seen what that man—if he was a man—saw!

You recall that Pickman's forte was faces. I don't believe anybody since Goya could put so much of sheer hell into a set of features or a twist of expression. And before Goya you have to go back to the medieval chaps who did the gargoyles and chimeras on Notre Dame and Mont· Saint-Michel. They believed all sorts of things—and maybe they saw all sorts of things, too, for the Middle Ages had some curious phases. I remember your asking Pickman yourself once, the year before you went away, wherever in thunder he got such ideas and visions. Wasn't that a nasty laugh he gave you? It was partly because of that laugh that Reid dropped him. Reid, you know, had just taken up comparative pathology, and was full of pompous "inside stuff" about the biological or evolutionary significance of this or that mental or physical symptom. He said Pickman repelled him more and more every day, and almost frightened him toward the last—that the fellow's features and expression were slowly developing in

a way he didn't like; in a way that wasn't human. He had a lot of talk about diet, and said Pickman must be abnormal and eccentric to the last degree. I suppose you told Reid, if you and he had any correspondence over it, that he'd let Pickman's paintings get on his nerves or harrow up his imagination. I know I told him that myself—then.

But keep in mind that I didn't drop Pickman for anything like this. On the contrary, my admiration for him kept growing; for that *Ghoul Feeding* was a tremendous achievement. As you know, the club wouldn't exhibit it, and the Museum of Fine Arts wouldn't accept it as a gift; and I can add that nobody would buy it, so Pickman had it right in his house till he went. Now his father has it in Salem—you know Pickman comes of old Salem stock, and had a witch ancestor hanged in 1692.

I GOT into the habit of calling on Pickman quite often, especially after I began making notes for a monograph on weird art. Probably it was his work which put the idea into my head, and anyhow, I found him a mine of data and suggestions when I came to develop it. He showed me all the paintings and drawings he had about; including some pen-and-ink sketches that would, I verily believe, have got him kicked out of the club if many of the members had seen them. Before long I was pretty nearly a devotee, and would listen for hours like a schoolboy to art theories and philosophic speculations wild enough to qualify him for the Danvers asylum. My hero-worship, coupled with the fact that people generally were commencing to have less and less to do with him, made him get very confidential with me; and one evening he hinted that if I were fairly close-mouthed and none too squeamish, he might show me something rather unusual—something a bit stronger than anything he had in the house.

"You know," he said, "there are things that won't do for Marlborough Street—things that are out of place here, and that can't be conceived here, anyhow. It's my business to catch the overtones of the soul, and you won't find those in a parvenu set of artificial streets on made land. Back Bay isn't Boston—it isn't anything yet, because it's had no time to pick up memories and attract local spirits. If there are any ghosts here, they're the tame ghosts of a salt marsh and a shallow cove; and I want human ghosts—the ghosts of beings highly organized enough to have looked on hell and known the meaning of what they saw.

"The place for an artist to love is the North End. If any esthete were sincere, he'd put up with the slums for the sake of the massed traditions. God, man! Don't you realize that places like that weren't merely *made*, but actually *grew*? Generation after generation lived and felt and died there, and in days when people weren't afraid to live and feel and die. Don't you know there was a mill on Copp's Hill in 1632, and that half the present streets were laid out by 1650? I can show you houses that have stood two centuries and a half and more; houses that have witnessed what would make a modern house crumble into powder. What do moderns know of life and the forces behind it? You call the Salem witchcraft a delusion, but I'll wager my four-times-great-grandmother could have told you things. They hanged her on Gallows Hill, with Cotton Mather looking sanctimoniously on. Mather, damn him, was afraid somebody might succeed in kicking free of this accursed cage of monotony—I wish someone had laid a spell on him or sucked his blood in the night!

"I can show you a house he lived in, and I can show you another one he was afraid to enter in spite of all his fine bold talk. He knew things he didn't dare put into that stupid *Magnalia* or that puerile *Wonders of the Invisible World.* Look here, do you know the whole North End once had a set of tunnels that kept certain people in touch with each other's houses, and the burying ground, and the sea? Let them prosecute and persecute above ground—things went on every day that they couldn't reach, and voices laughed at night that they couldn't place!

"Why, man, out of ten surviving houses built before 1700 and not moved since I'll wager that in eight I can show you something queer in the cellar. There's hardly a month that you don't read of workmen finding bricked-up arches and wells leading nowhere in this or that old place as it comes down—you could see one near Henchman Street from the elevated last year. There were witches and what their spells summoned; pirates and what they brought in from the sea; smugglers; privateers—and I tell you, people knew how to live, and how to enlarge the bounds of life, in the old times! This wasn't the only world a bold and wise man could know—faugh! And to think of today in contrast, with such pale-pink brains that even a club of supposed artists gets shudders and convulsions if a picture goes beyond the feelings of a Beacon Street tea-table!

"The only saving grace of the present is that it's too damned stupid to question the past very closely. What do maps and records and guidebooks really tell of the North End? Bah! At a guess I'll guarantee to lead you to thirty or forty alleys and networks of alleys north of Prince Street that aren't suspected by ten living beings outside of the foreigners that swarm them. And what do those Dagoes know of their meaning? No, Thurber, these ancient places are dreaming gorgeously and overflowing with wonder and terror and escapes from the commonplace, and yet there's not a living soul to understand or profit by them. Or, rather, there's only one living soul—for I haven't been digging around in the past for nothing!

"See here, you're interested in this sort of thing. What if I told you that I've got another studio up there, where I can catch the night-spirit of antique horror and paint things that I couldn't even think of in Marlborough Street? Naturally I don't tell those cursed old maids at the club—with Reid, damn him, whispering even as it is that I'm a sort of monster bound down the toboggan of reverse evolution. Yes, Thurber, I decided long ago that one must paint terror as well as beauty from life, so I did some exploring in places where I had reason to know terror lives.

"I've got a place that I don't believe three living Nordic men besides myself have ever seen. It isn't so very far from the elevated as distance goes, but it's centuries away as the soul goes. I took it because of the queer old brick well in the cellar—one of the sort I told you about. The shack's almost tumbling down, so that nobody else would live there, and I'd hate to tell you how little I pay for it. The windows are boarded up, but I like that all the better, since I don't want daylight for what I do. I paint in the cellar, where the inspiration is thickest, but I've other rooms furnished on the ground floor. A Sicilian owns it, and I've hired it under the name of Peters.

"Now if you're game, I'll take you there tonight. I think you'd enjoy the pictures, for as I said, I've let myself go a bit there. It's no vast tour—I sometimes do it on foot, for I don't want to attract attention with a taxi in such a place. We can take

the shuttle at the South Station for Battery Street, and after that the walk isn't much."

WELL, Eliot, there wasn't much for me to do after that harangue but to keep myself from running instead of walking for the first vacant cab we could sight. We changed to the elevated at the South Station, and at about 12 o'clock had climbed down the steps at Battery Street and struck along the old waterfront past Constitution Wharf. I didn't keep track of the cross streets, and can't tell you yet which it was we turned up, but I know it wasn't Greenough Lane.

When we did turn, it was to climb through the deserted length of the oldest and dirtiest alley I ever saw in my life, with crumbling-looking gables, broken small-paned windows, and archaic chimneys that stood out half-disintegrated against the moonlit sky. I don't believe there were three houses in sight that hadn't been standing in Cotton Mather's time—certainly I glimpsed at least two with an overhang, and once I thought I saw a peaked roof-line of the almost forgotten pre-gambrel type, though antiquarians tell us there are none left in Boston.

From that alley, which had a dim light, we turned to the left into an equally silent and still narrower alley with no light at all; and in a minute made what I think was an obtuse-angled bend toward the right in the dark. Not long after this Pickman produced a flashlight and revealed an antediluvian ten-paneled door that looked damnably worm-eaten. Unlocking it, he ushered me into a barren hallway with what was once splendid dark-oak paneling—simple, of course, but thrillingly suggestive of the times of Andros and Phips and the Witchcraft. Then he took me through a door on the left, lighted an oil lamp, and told me to make myself at home.

Now, Eliot, I'm what the man in the street would call fairly "hard-boiled," but I'll confess that what I saw on the walls of that room gave me a bad turn. They were his pictures, you know—the ones he couldn't paint or even show in Marlborough Street—and he was right when he said he had "let himself go." Here—have another drink—I need one anyhow!

There's no use in my trying to tell you what they were like, because the awful, the blasphemous horror, and the unbelievable loathsomeness and moral fetor came from simple touches quite beyond the power of words to classify. There was none of the exotic technique you see in Sidney Sime, none of the trans-Saturnian landscapes and lunar fungi that Clark Ashton Smith uses to freeze the blood. The backgrounds were mostly old churchyards, deep woods, cliffs by the sea, brick tunnels, ancient paneled rooms, or simple vaults of masonry. Copp's Hill Burying Ground, which could not be many blocks away from this very house, was a favorite scene.

The madness and monstrosity lay in the figures in the foreground—for Pickman's morbid art was preeminently one of demoniac portraiture. These figures were seldom completely human, but often approached humanity in varying degrees. Most of the bodies, while roughly bipedal, had a forward slumping, and a vaguely canine cast. The texture of the majority was a kind of unpleasant rubberiness. Ugh! I can see them now! Their occupations—well, don't ask me to be too precise. They were usually feeding—I won't say on what. They were sometimes shown in groups in cemeteries or underground passages, and often appeared to be in battle over their prey—or rather, their treasure-trove. And

what damnable expressiveness Pickman sometimes gave the sightless faces of this charnel booty! Occasionally the things were shown leaping through open windows at night, or squatting on the chests of sleepers, worrying at their throats. One canvas showed a ring of them baying about a hanged witch on Gallows Hill, whose dead face held a close kinship to theirs.

But don't get the idea that it was all this hideous business of theme and setting which struck me faint. I'm not a three-year-old kid, and I'd seen much like this before. It was the *faces,* Eliot, those accursed *faces,* that leered and slavered out of the canvas with the very breath of life! By God, man, I verily believe they *were* alive! That nauseous wizard had waked the fires of hell in pigment, and his brush had been a nightmare-spawning wand. Give me that decanter, Eliot!

There was one thing called *The Lesson*—heaven pity me, that I ever saw it! Listen—can you fancy a squatting circle of nameless doglike things in a churchyard teaching a small child how to feed like themselves? The price of a changeling, I suppose—you know the old myth about how the weird people leave their spawn in cradles in exchange for the human babes they steal. Pickman was showing what happens to those stolen babes—how they grow up—and then I began to see a hideous relationship in the faces of the human and non-human figures. He was, in all his gradations of morbidity between the frankly non-human and the degradedly human, establishing a sardonic linkage and evolution. The dog-things were developed from mortals!

And no sooner had I wondered what he made of their own young as left with mankind in the form of changelings, than my eye caught a picture embodying that very thought. It was that of an ancient Puritan interior—a heavily beamed room with lattice windows, a settle, and clumsy Seventeenth Century furniture, with the family sitting about while the father read from the Scriptures. Every face but one showed nobility and reverence, but that one reflected the mockery of the pit. It was that of a young man in years, and no doubt belonged to a supposed son of that pious father, but in essence it was the kin of the unclean things. It was their changeling—and in a spirit of supreme irony Pickman had given the features a very perceptible resemblance to his own.

By this time Pickman had lighted a lamp in an adjoining room and was politely holding open the door for me; asking me if I would care to see his "modern studies". I hadn't been able to give him much of my opinions—I was too speechless with fright and loathing—but I think he fully understood and felt highly complimented. And now I want to assure you again, Eliot, that I'm no mollycoddle to scream at anything which shows a bit of departure from the usual. I'm middle-aged and decently sophisticated, and I guess you saw enough of me in France to know I'm not easily knocked out. Remember, too, that I'd just about recovered my wind and gotten used to those frightful pictures which turned colonial New England into a kind of annex of hell. Well, in spite of all this, that next room forced a real scream out of me, and I had to clutch at the doorway to keep from keeling over. The other chamber had shown a pack of ghouls and witches overrunning the world of our forefathers, but this one brought the horror right into our own daily life!

Gad, how that man could paint! There was a study called *Subway Accident,* in which a flock of the vile things were clambering up from some unknown catacomb through a

crack in the floor of the Boylston Street subway and attacking a crowd of people on the platform. Another showed a dance on Copp's Hill among the tombs with the background of today. Then there were any number of cellar views, with monsters creeping in through holes and rifts in the masonry and grinning as they squatted behind barrels or furnaces and waited for their first victim to descend the stairs.

One disgusting canvas seemed to depict a vast cross-section of Beacon Hill, with antlike armies of the mephitic monsters squeezing themselves through burrows that honeycombed the ground. Dances in the modern cemeteries were freely pictured, and another conception somehow shocked me more than all the rest—a scene in an unknown vault, where scores of the beasts crowded about one who held a well-known Boston guidebook and was evidently reading aloud. All were pointing to a certain passage, and every face seemed so distorted with epileptic and reverberant laughter that I almost thought I heard the fiendish echoes. The title of the picture was, *Holmes, Lowell, and Longfellow Lie Buried in Mount Auburn.*

As I gradually steadied myself and got readjusted to this second room of deviltry and morbidity, I began to analyze some of the points in my sickening loathing. In the first place, I said to myself, these things repelled because of the utter inhumanity and callous cruelty they showed in Pickman. The fellow must be a relentless enemy of all mankind to take such glee in the torture of brain and flesh and the degradation of the mortal tenement. In the second place, they terrified because of their very greatness. Their art was the art that convinced—when we saw the pictures we saw the demons themselves and were afraid of them. And the queer part was, that Pickman got none of his power from the use of selectiveness or bizarrerie. Nothing was blurred, distorted, or conventionalized; outlines were sharp and lifelike, and details were almost painfully defined. And the faces!

It was not any mere artist's interpretation that we saw; it was pandemonium itself, crystal-clear in stark objectivity. That was it, by heaven! The man was not a fantaisiste or romanticist at all—he did not even try to give us the churning, prismatic ephemera of dreams, but coldly and sardonically reflected some stable, mechanistic, and well-established horror-world which he saw fully, brilliantly, squarely, and unfalteringly. God knows what that world can have been, or where he ever glimpsed the blasphemous shapes that loped and trotted and crawled through it; but whatever the baffling source of his images, one thing was plain. Pickman was in every sense—in conception and in execution—a thorough, painstaking, and almost scientific *realist.*

MY HOST was now leading the way down cellar to his actual studio, and I braced myself for some hellish effects among the unfinished canvases. As we reached the bottom of the damp stairs he turned his flashlight to a corner of the large open space at hand, revealing the circular brick curb of what was evidently a great well in the earthen floor. We walked nearer, and I saw that it must be five feet across, with walls a good foot thick and some six inches above the ground level—solid work of the Seventeenth Century, or I was much mistaken. That, Pickman said, was the kind of thing he had been talking about—an aperture of the network of tunnels that used to undermine the hill. I noticed idly that it did not seem to be bricked up, and that a heavy disk of wood formed the apparent cover. Thinking of the things

this well must have been connected with if Pickman's wild hints had not been mere rhetoric, I shivered slightly; then turned to follow him up a step and through a narrow door into a room of fair size, provided with a wooden floor and furnished as a studio. An acetylene gas outfit gave the light neeessary for work.

The unfinished pictures on easels or propped against the walls were as ghastly as the finished ones upstairs, and showed the painstaking methods of the artist. Seenes were blocked out with extreme care, and penciled guide lines told of the minute exaetitude which Pickman used in getting the right perspective and proportions. The man was great—I say it even now, knowing as mueh as I do. A large camera on a table excited my notice, and Piekman told me that he used it in taking scenes for backgrounds, so that he might paint them from photographs in the studio instead of carting his outfit around the town for this or that view. He thought a photograph quite as good as an actual scene or model for sustained work, and declared he employed them regularly.

There was something very disturbing about the nauseous sketches and half-finished monstrosities that leered around from every side of the room, and when Pickman suddenly unveiled a huge canvas on the side away from the light I could not for my life keep back a loud scream—the second I had emitted that night. It eehoed and echoed through the dim vaultings of that ancient and nitrous cellar, and I had to choke baek a flood of reaction that threatened to burst out as hysterical laughter. Merciful Creator! Eliot, but I don't know how much was real and how much was feverish fancy. It doesn't seem to me that earth ean hold a dream like that!

It was a eolossal and nameless blasphemy with glaring red eyes, and it held in bony claws a thing that had been a man, gnawing at the head as a child nibbles at a stick of candy. Its position was a kind of eroueh, and as one looked one felt that at any moment it might drop its present prey and seek a juicier morsel. But, damn it all, it wasn't even the fiendish subject that made it sueh an immortal fountain-head of all panic—not that, nor the dog face with its pointed ears, bloodshot eyes, flat nose, and drooling lips. It wasn't the scaly claws nor the mold-eaked body nor the half-hooved feet—none of these, though any one of them might well have driven an excitable man to madness.

It was the teehnique, Eliot—the cursed, the impious, the unnatural technique! As I am a living being, I never elsewhere saw the aetual breath of life so fused into a canvas. The monster was there—it glared and gnawed and gnawed and glared—and I knew that only a suspension of nature's laws could ever let a man paint a thing like that without a model—without some glimpse of the nether world which no mortal unsold to the Fiend has ever had.

Pinned with a thumb-tack to a vaeant part of the eanvas was a piece of paper now badly eurled up—probably, I thought, a photograph from which Pickman meant to paint a background as hideous as the nightmare it was to enhance. I reaehed out to uncurl and look at it, when suddenly I saw Pickman start as if shot. He had been listening with peculiar intensity ever since my shocked scream had waked unaceustomed echoes in the dark cellar, and now he seemed struck with a fright which, though not comparable to my own, had in it more of the physieal than of the spiritual. He drew a revolver and motioned me to silenee, then stepped out into the main cellar and elosed the door behind him.

I think I was paralyzed for an instant. Imitating Pickman's listening, I fancied I heard a faint scurrying sound somewhere, and a series of squeals or bleats in a direction I couldn't determine. I thought of huge rats and shuddered. Then there came a subdued sort of clatter which somehow set me all in gooseflesh—a furtive, groping kind of clatter, though I can't attempt to convey what I mean in words. It was like heavy wood falling on stone or brick—wood on brick—what did that make me think of?

It came again, and louder. There was a vibration as if the wood had fallen farther than it had fallen before. After that followed a sharp grating noise, a shouted gibberish from Pickman, and the deafening discharge of all six chambers of a revolver, fired spectacularly as a lion-tamer might fire in the air for effect. A muffled squeal or squawk, and a thud. Then more wood and brick grating, a pause, and the opening of the door—at which I'll confess I started violently. Pickman reappeared with his smoking weapon, cursing the bloated rats that infested the ancient well.

"The deuce knows what they eat, Thurber," he grinned, "for those archaic tunnels touched graveyard and witch-den and seacoast. But whatever it is, they must have run short, for they were devilish anxious to get out. Your yelling stirred them up, I fancy. Better be cautious in these old places—our rodent friends are the one drawback, though I sometimes think they're a positive asset by way of atmosphere and color."

Well, Eliot, that was the end of the night's adventure. Pickman had promised to show me the place, and heaven knows he had done it. He led me out of that tangle of alleys in another direction, it seems, for when we sighted a lamp-post we were in a half-familiar street with monotonous rows of mingled tenement blocks and old houses. Charter Street, it turned out to be, but I was too flustered to notice just where we hit it. We were too late for the elevated, and walked back downtown through Hanover Street. I remember that walk. We switched from Tremont up Beacon, and Pickman left me at the corner of Joy, where I turned off. I never spoke to him again.

Why did I drop him? Don't be impatient. Wait till I ring for coffee. We've had enough of the other stuff, but I for one need something. No—it wasn't the paintings I saw in that place; though I'll swear they were enough to get him ostracized in nine-tenths of the homes and clubs of Boston, and I guess you won't wonder now why I have to steer clear of subways and cellars. It was—something I found in my coat the next morning. You know, the curled-up paper tacked to that frightful canvas in the cellar; the thing I thought was a photograph of some scene he meant to use as a background for that monster. That last scare had come while I was reaching to uncurl it, and it seems I had vacantly crumpled it into my pocket. But here's the coffee—take it black, Eliot, if you're wise.

Yes, that paper was the reason I dropped Pickman; Richard Upton Pickman, the greatest artist I have ever known—and the foulest being that ever leaped the bounds of life into the pits of myth and madness. Eliot—old Reid was right. He wasn't strictly human. Either he was born in strange shadow, or he'd found a way to unlock the forbidden gate. It's all the same now, for he's

gone—back into the fabulous darkness he loved to haunt. Here, let's have the chandelier going.

Don't ask me to explain or even conjecture about what I burned. Don't ask me, either, what lay behind that mole-like scrambling Pickman was so keen to pass off as rats. There are secrets, you know, which might have come down from old Salem times, and Cotton Mather tells even stranger things. You know how damned lifelike Pickman's paintings were—how we all wondered where he got those faces.

Well—that paper wasn't a photograph of any background, after all. What it showed was simply the monstrous being he was painting on that awful canvas. It was the model he was using—and its background was merely the wall of the cellar studio in minute detail. But by God, Eliot, *it was a photograph from life.*

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# OBLITERATION

*By* **SAMUEL M. SARGENT, JR.**

When the fires are burned to ashes,
  And the hearth is gray and cold,
When the final sound of thunder
  From the battlefield has rolled;

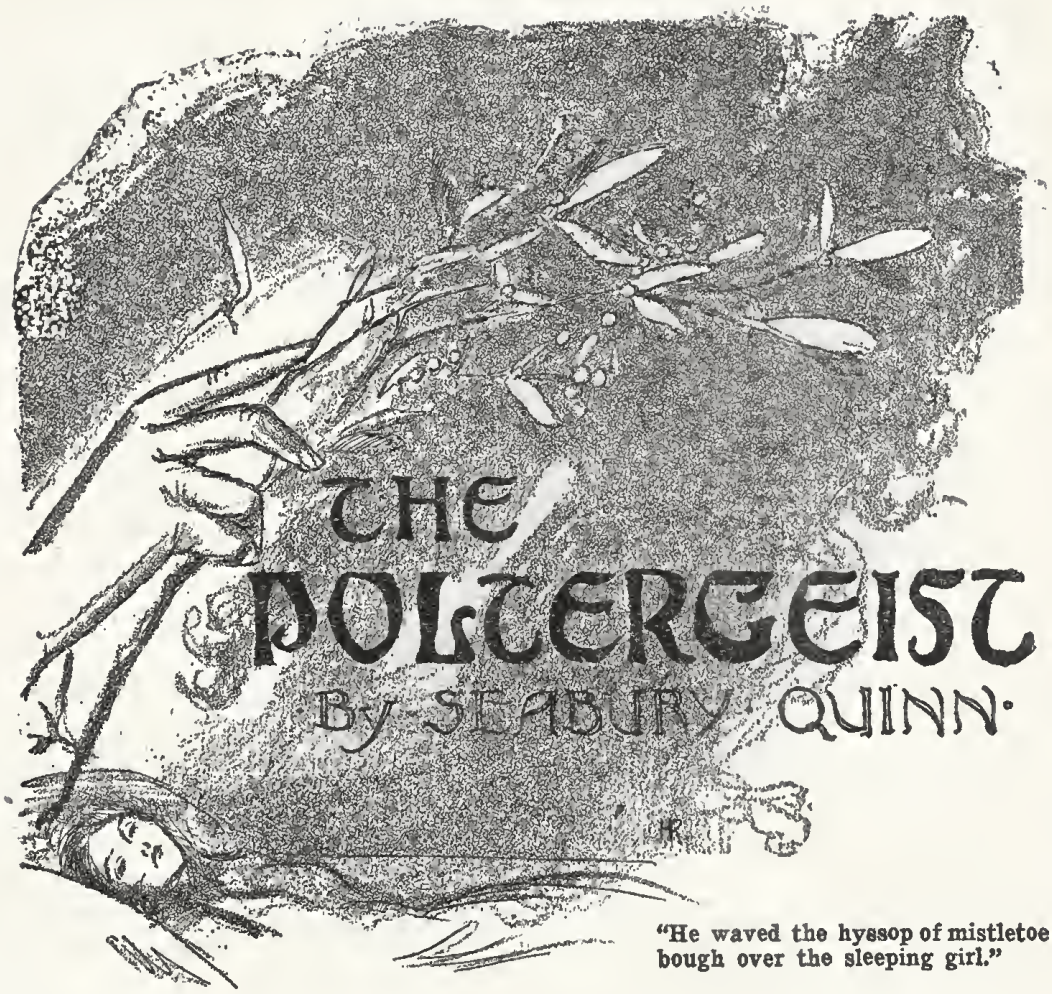
When the heart at length is silenced,
  And the brain at last is stark,
Let me go then like a candle
  Quenched and stifled in the dark

To a long sleep, and a deep one,
  With no soul's unsteady light
Burning like a candle guttering
  In the fearfulness of night.

For a candle flame in midnight
  Is a mockery of the noon,
And its shadows stand out ghoulish
  In the starlight or the moon.

But the slumberer is restful
  Lost in darknesses profound,
All unconscious of black shadows
  That may hover close around.

Oh, a long sleep, and a deep one!
  With no soul's uncertain glow
To arouse the spectral vapors
  Of the Border . . . . when I go.




"He waved the hyssop of mistletoe bough over the sleeping girl."

"AND so, Dr. de Grandin," our visitor concluded, "this is really a case for your remarkable powers."

Jules de Grandin selected a fresh cigarette from his engine-turned silver case, tapped its end thoughtfully against his well-manicured thumbnail and regarded the caller with one of his disconcertingly unwinking stares. "Am I to understand that all other attempts to effect a cure have failed, *Monsieur?*" he asked at length.

"Utterly. We've tried everything in reason, and out of it," Captain Loudon replied. "We've had some of the best neurologists in consultation, we've employed faith-healers, spiritualistic mediums, even had her given 'absent treatment', all to no avail. All the physicians, all the cultists and quacks have failed us; now——"

"Now, I do not think I care to be numbered among those quacks, *Monsieur,*" the Frenchman returned coldly, expelling a double column of smoke from his nostrils. "Had you called me into consultation with an accredited physician——"

"But that's just it," the captain interrupted. "Every physician we've had has been confident he could work a cure, but they've all failed. Julia is a lovely girl—I don't say it because

she's my daughter, I state it as a fact—and was to have been married this fall, and now this—this disorder has taken complete possession of her and it's wrecking her life. Robert—Lieutenant Proudfit, her fiancé—and I are almost beside ourselves, and as for my daughter, I fear her mind will give way and she'll destroy herself unless *somebody* can do *something!*"

"Ah?" the little Frenchman arched the narrow black brows which were such a vivid contrast to his blond hair and mustache. "Why did not you say so before, *Monsieur le Capitaine?* It is not merely the curing of one nervous young lady that you would have me undertake, but the fruition of a romance I should bring about? *Bien,* good, very well; I accept. If you will also retain my good friend Dr. Trowbridge, so that there shall be a locally licensed and respected physician in the case, my powers which you have been kind enough to call remarkable are entirely at your disposal."

"Splendid!" Captain Loudon agreed, rising. "Then it's all arranged. I can expect you to——"

"One moment, if you please," de Grandin interrupted, raising his slender, womanishly small hand for silence. "Suppose we make a *précis* of the case before we go further." He drew a pad of note-paper and a pencil toward him as he continued:

"Your daughter, Mademoiselle Julie, how old is she?"

"Twenty-nine."

"A most charming age," the little Frenchman commented, scribbling a note. "And she is your only child?"

"Yes."

"Now, these manifestations of the *outré,* these so unusual happenings, they began to take place about six months ago?"

"Just about; I can't place the time exactly."

"No matter. They have assumed various mystifying forms? She has refused food, she has had visions, she shouts, she sings uncontrollably, she speaks in a voice which is strange to her—at times she goes into a death-like trance and from her throat issue strange voices, voices of men, or other women, even of little children?"

"Yes."

"And other apparently inexplicable things occur. Chairs, books, tables, even such heavy pieces of furniture as a piano, move from their accustomed places when she is near, and bits of jewelry and other small objects are hurled through the air?"

"Yes, and worse than that, I've seen pins and needles fly from her work-basket and bury themselves in her cheeks and arms," the captain interrupted, "and lately she's been persecuted by scars—scars from some invisible source. Great weals, like the claw-marks from some beast, have appeared on her arms and face, right while I looked on, and I've been wakened at night by her screams, and when I rush into her room I find the marks of long, thin fingers on her throat. It's maddening, sir; terrifying. I'd say it was a case of demoniacal possession, if I didn't disbelieve all that sort of supernaturalism."

"U'm," de Grandin looked up from the pad on which he had been industriously scribbling. "There is nothing in the world, or out of it, which is supernatural, my friend; the wisest man today can not say where the powers and possibilities of nature begin or end. We say, 'Thus and so is beyond the bounds of our experience,' but does that therefore put it beyond the bounds of nature? I think not. Myself, I have seen such things as no man can hear me relate without calling me a liar, and my good, unimaginative friend Trowbridge has witnessed such wonders as no writer of fiction would dare set down on paper, yet I do declare we have never yet seen that which I would call supernatural.

"But come, let us go, let us hasten to your house, *Monsieur;* I would interview Mademoiselle Julie and see for myself some of these so remarkable afflictions of hers.

"Remember," he turned his fixed, unwinking stare on our patron as we paused for our outdoor things in the hall, "remember, if you please, *Monsieur,* I am not like those quacks, or even those other physicians who have failed you. I do not say I can work a cure. I can but promise to try. Good, we shall see what we shall see. Let us go."

ROBERT BEAUREGARD LOUDON was a retired navy captain, a widower with more than sufficient means to gratify his rather epicurean tastes, and possessed one of the finest houses in the fashionable new west side suburb. The furnishings spoke of something more than wealth as we surveyed them; they proclaimed that vague, but nevertheless tangible thing known as "background" which is only to be had from generations of ancestors to the manor born. Original pieces of mahogany by Sheraton and Chippendale and the Brothers Adam, family portraits from the brush of Benjamin West, silver in the best tradition of the early Eighteenth Century smiths, even the dignifiedly aloof, elderly colored butler, announced that our patient's father was in every way an officer and a gentleman in the best sense of the term.

"If you will give Hezekiah your things," Captain Loudon indicated the solemn old negro with a nod, "I'll go up and tell my daughter you're here. I know she will be glad to——"

A clanking, banging noise, like a tin can bumping over the cobbles at the tail of some luckless terrier, interrupted his remarks, and we turned in amazement toward the wide, curving staircase at the farther end of the long central hall. The noise grew louder, almost deafening, then ceased as abruptly as it began, and a young girl rounded the curve of the staircase, coming slowly toward us.

She was more than middle height, slender and supple as a willow withe, and carried herself with the bearing of a young princess. A lovely though almost unfashionably long gown of white satin and chiffon draped its uneven hem almost to her ankles, and about her slender bare shoulders and over her arms hung a richly embroidered shawl of Chinese silk. One hand rested lightly on the mahogany rail of the balustrade, as though partly for support, partly for guidance, as she slowly descended the red-carpeted steps. This much we saw at first glance, but our second look remained riveted on her sweet, pale face.

Almost unbeautifully long it was, pale with the rich, creamy pallor which is some women's birthright and not the result of poor health, and her vivid, scarlet lips showed in contrast to her ivory cheeks like a rose fallen in the snow. Brows as delicate as those of a French doll, narrow, curving brows which needed no plucking to accentuate their patrician lines, dipped sharply together above the bridge of her small nose, and lashes which even at the distance we stood from her showed their vivid blackness veiled her eyes. At first I thought her gaze was on the steps before her, and that she made each forward movement with slow care lest she fall from weakness or nervous exhaustion, but a second's scrutiny of her face told me the truth. The girl walked with lowered lids. Whether in natural sleep or in some supernatural trance, she was descending the stairs with tightly closed eyes.

"*La pauvre petite.*" de Grandin exclaimed under his breath, his gaze fixed on her. "*Grand Dieu,* Friend Trowbridge, but she is beautiful! Why did I not come here before?"

Out of the empty air, apparently some six feet above the girl's proudly poised head, a burst of mocking, maniacal laughter answered him, and from the thick-piled carpet suddenly rose again the clang-bang racket we had heard before she came into view.

"*Hélas!*" De Grandin turned a pitying glance on the girl's father, then: "*Nom de Dieu!*" he cried, ducking his head suddenly and looking over his shoulder with rounded eyes. Against the wall of the apartment, some twenty feet distant, there hung a stand of arms, one or two swords, a spear and several bolos, trophies of the captain's service in the Philippines. As though seized by an invisible hand, one of the bolos had detached itself from the wall, hurtled whistling through the air and embedded itself nearly an inch deep in the white wainscoting behind the little Frenchman, missing his cheek by the barest fraction of a centimeter as it flew whirring past.

The clanking tumult beneath the girl's feet subsided as quickly as it commenced, she took an uncertain step forward and opened her eyes. They were unusually long, purple rather than blue in color, and held such an expression of changeless melancholy as I had never seen in one so young. It was the look of one foredoomed to inescapable death by an incurable disease.

"Why"—she began with the bewildered look of one suddenly roused from sleep—"why—Father! What am I doing here? I was in my room, lying down, when I thought I heard Robert's voice. I tried to get up, but 'It' held me down, and I think I fell asleep. I——"

"Daughter," Captain Loudon spoke gently, the sobs very near the surface, for all his iron self-control, "these gentlemen are Dr. de Grandin and Dr. Trowbridge. They've come to——"

"Oh," the girl made an impatient gesture which yet seemed somewhat languid, as though even remonstrance were useless, "more doctors! Why did you bring them, Father? You know they'll be just like all the rest. Nothing can help me—nothing seems any good!"

"*Pardonnez-moi, Mademoiselle,*" de Grandin bent forward in a formal, European bow, heels together, elbows stiffly at sides, "but I think you will find us most different from the rest. To begin, we come to cure you and give you back to the man you love; and in the second place, I have a personal interest in this case."

"A personal interest?" she inquired, acknowledging his bow with a negligent nod.

"*Morbleu,* but I have. Did not the —the thing which troubles you, hurl a bolo-knife at me? *Sacré nom,* no *fantôme,* no *lutin* shall throw knives at Jules de Grandin, then boast of the exploit to his ghostly fellows. *Nom d'un petit Chinois,* I think we shall show them something before we are finished!

"Now, *Mademoiselle,* we must ask your pardon for these questions," he began when he had reached the drawing room. "To you it is an old and much-told tale, but we are ignorant of your case, save for such information as your father has imparted. Tell us, if you please, when did these so strange manifestations begin?"

The girl regarded him silently a moment, her brooding, plum-colored eyes staring almost resentfully into his agate-blue ones.

"It was about six months ago," she began in a lifeless monotone, like a child reciting a rote-learned but distasteful lesson. "I had come home from a dance in New York with Lieutenant Proudfit, and it must have been about 3 o'clock in the morning, for we had not left New York until midnight, and our train was delayed

by a heavy sleet-storm. Lieutenant Proudfit was stopping overnight with us, for we are—we were—engaged, and I had said good-night to him and gone to my room when it seemed I heard something fluttering and tapping at my window, like a bird attracted by the light, or—I don't know what made me think so, but I got the impression, somehow—a bat beating its wings against the panes.

"I remember being startled by the noise, at first, then I was overcome with pity for the poor thing, for it was bitter cold outside and the sleet was driving down like whiplashes with the force of the east wind. I went over to the window and opened it to see what was outside. I"—she hesitated a moment, then went forward with her narrative—"I was partly undressed by this time, and the cold wind blowing through the open window cut like a knife, but I looked out into the storm to see if I could find the bird, or whatever it was."

"Ah?" de Grandin's little eyes were sparkling with suppressed excitement, but there was neither humor nor warmth in their flash. Rather, they were like two tiny pools of clear, adamant-hard ice reflecting a cloudless winter sky and bright, cold winter sunshine. "Proceed, if you please," he commanded, his voice utterly toneless. "You did open your window to the tapping which was outside. And what did you next?"

"I looked out and said, 'Come in, you poor creature!' " the girl replied. "Even though I thought it was a bat at the pane, my reason told me it couldn't be, for bats aren't about in the dead of winter, and if it had been one, much as I hate the things, I couldn't have slept with the thought of its being outside in my mind."

"Ah?" de Grandin repeated, his voice raised slightly in interrogation. "And so you did invite what was outside to come in?" Level as his tone was, there was a certain pointedness in the way he spoke the words, almost as though they were uttered in faintly shocked protest.

"Of course," she returned. "I know it was silly for me to speak to a bird that way, as if it could understand, but, you know, we often address animals in that way. At any rate, I might have saved myself the chilling I got, for there was nothing there. I waited several minutes till the cold wind almost set my teeth to chattering, but nothing was visible outside, and there were no further flutterings at the window."

"Probably not," the Frenchman commented dryly. "What then, please?"

"Why, nothing—right away. It seemed as though the room had become permanently chilled, though, for even after I'd closed the window the air was icy cold, and I had to wrap my dressing gown about me while I made ready for bed. Then——" She stopped with an involuntary shudder.

"Yes, and then?" he prompted, regarding her narrowly while his lean white fingers tapped a devil's tattoo on his chair arm.

"Then the first strange thing happened. As I was slipping my gown off, I distinctly felt a hand grasp me about the upper arm—a long, thin, deathly cold hand!"

She looked up defiantly, as though expecting some skeptical protest, but: "Yes," he nodded shortly. "And after that?"

The girl regarded him with a sort of wonder. "You believe me—believe I actually felt something grasp me?" she asked incredulously.

"Have you not said so, *Mademoiselle?*" he returned a thought irritably. "Proceed, please."

"But every other doctor I've talked to has tried to tell me I didn't —couldn't have *actually felt* such a thing," she persisted.

"*Mademoiselle!*" the little man's annoyance cut through the habitual courtesy with which he treated members of the gentler sex as a flame cuts through wax. "We do waste time. We are discussing you and your case, not the other physicians or their methods. They have failed. We shall give them none of our valuable time. *Bien.* You were saying——"

"That I felt a long, cold hand grasp me about the arm, and a moment later, before I had a chance to cry out or even shrink away, something began scratching my skin. It was like a long, blunt fingernail—a human nail, not the claw of an animal, you understand. But it had considerable force behind it, and I could see the skin turning white in its wake. Dr. de Grandin"—she leaned forward, staring with wide, frightened eyes into his face—"the welts *formed letters!*"

"U'm?" he nodded unexcitedly. "You do recall what they spelled?"

"They didn't spell anything. It was like the ramblings of a Ouija board when the little table seems wandering about from letter to letter without spelling any actual words. I made out a crude, printed *D*, then a smaller *r*, then an *a*, and finally a *c* and *u*—D-r-a-c-u. That was all. You see, it wasn't a word at all."

De Grandin was sitting forward on the extreme edge of his chair, his hands grasping its arms as though he were about to leap from his seat. "*Dracu,*" he repeated softly to himself, then, still lower, "*Dieu de Dieu!* It is possible; but why?"

"Why, what is it?" the girl demanded, his tense attitude reflecting itself in her widened eyes and apprehensive expression.

He shook himself like a spaniel emerging from the water. "It is nothing, *Mademoiselle,*" he assured her with a resumption of his professionally impersonal manner. "I did think I recognized the word, but I fear I must have been mistaken. You are sure there were no other letters?"

"Positive. That was all; just those five, no more."

"Quite yes. And after that?"

"After that all sorts of terrible things began happening to me. Father has told you how chairs and tables rise up when I come near them, and how little objects fly through the air?"

He nodded, smiling. "But of course," he returned, "and I, myself, did see one little thing fly through the air. *Parbleu,* it did fly unpleasantly close to my head! And these so strange sleeps you have?"

"They come on me almost any time, mostly when I'm least expecting them. One time I was seized with one while on the train and"—her face flushed bright coral at the recollection—"and the conductor thought I was *drunk!*"

"*Bête!*" de Grandin murmured. "And you have not heard the voices—the noises which sometimes accompany you, *Mademoiselle?*"

"No, I've been told of them; but I know nothing of what occurs while I'm in one of these trances. I don't even dream; at least, I have no dreams I can remember when I wake up. I only know that I am apt to fall asleep at any time, and frequently wander about while unconscious, waking up in some totally different place. Once I walked half-way to the city while asleep, and narrowly escaped being run down by a taxicab when I came to in the middle of the street."

"But this is villainous!" he burst out. "This is infamous; this must not be allowed. *Mordieu,* I shall not permit it!"

Something of the girl's weary manner returned as she asked, "How are you going to stop it? The others all said——"

"*Chut!* The others! We shall not discuss them, if you please, *Mademoi-*

*selle.* Me, I am not as the others; I am Jules de Grandin!

"First, my friend," he turned to me, "I would that you obtain a competent nurse, one whose discretion is matched only by her ability. You know one such? *Très bien.* Hasten, rush, fly to procure her at once. Bid her come to us with all celerity and be prepared to serve until relieved.

"Next"—he seized a pad and scribbled a prescription—"I would that *Monsieur le Capitaine* has this filled and administers one dose dissolved in hot water at once. It is somnol, a harmless mixture of drugs, pleasant to the taste and of undoubted efficacy in this case. It will act better than chloral."

"But I don't want to take chloral," the girl protested. "I have enough trouble with sleep as it is; I want something to ward off sleep, not to induce it."

"*Mademoiselle,*" he replied with something like a twinkle in his keen little eyes, "have you never heard of combating the devil with flames? Take the medicine as directed. Dr. Trowbridge and I shall return soon, and we shall not rest until we have produced a cure, never doubt it."

"THIS is the strangest case I ever saw," I confided as we drove toward town. "The girl's symptoms all point to hysteria of the most violent sort, but I'm hanged if I can account for those diabolical noises which accompanied her down the stairs, or that laugh we heard when she reached the hall, or——"

"Or the knife which nearly split the head of Jules de Grandin?" he supplied. "No, my friend, I fear medical science can not account for those things. Me, I see part of it, but not all, *parbleu,* not near enough. Do you recall the ancient medical theory concerning icterus?"

"Jaundice?"

"But of course."

"You mean it used to be considered a disease, rather than a symptom?"

"Precisely. One hundred, two hundred years ago the craft knew the yellow color of the patient's skin was due to diffused bile in the system, but what caused the diffusion? Ah, that was a question left long unanswered. So it is with this poor girl's case. Me, I recognize the symptoms, and some of their cause is plain to me, but—ten thousand little red devils!—why? Why should she be the object of this persecution? One does not open a window in the wintertime to bid a non-existent bat or bird enter one's house, only to fall victim to such tricks as have plagued Mademoiselle Loudon since that winter's night. No, *morbleu,* there was a reason for it, the thing which tapped at her pane, being outside that night, Friend Trowbridge, and the writing on her arm, that too, came not without cause!"

I listened in amazement to his tirade, but one of his statements struck a responsive chord in my memory. "You spoke of 'writing' on her arm, de Grandin," I interposed. "When she described it I thought you seemed to recognize some connection between the incomplete word and her symptoms. Is 'dakboo' a complete word, or the beginning of one?"

"*Dracu,*" he corrected shortly. "Yes, my friend, it is a word. It is Rumanian for devil, or, more properly, demon. You begin to see the connection?"

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

"So am I," he replied laconically, and lapsed into moody silence from which my best attempts at conversation failed to rouse him.

LULLED into counterfeit rest by the drug de Grandin prescribed, Julia Loudon passed the night comfortably enough, and seemed brighter

and happier when we called to interview her next morning.

"*Mademoiselle,*" de Grandin announced, after the usual medical mummery of taking temperature and pulse had been completed, "the day is fine. I prescribe that you go for a drive this morning; indeed, I strongly urge that you accompany Dr. Trowbridge and me forthwith. He has a number of calls to make, and I would observe what effect the fresh air has upon you. I venture to say you have had little enough of it lately."

"I haven't," the girl confessed. "You see, since that time when I wandered off in my sleep, I've been afraid to go anywhere by myself, and I've even shrunk from going out with Father or Rob—Lieutenant Proudfit. I've been afraid of embarrassing them by one of my seizures. But it will be all right for me to go if you and Dr. Trowbridge are along, I know," she smiled wistfully at him.

"Of a surety," he agreed, twisting the ends of his trim little blond mustache. "Have no fear, dear lady; I shall see no harm comes to you. Make haste, we would be off."

Miss Loudon turned to mount the stairs, a suggestion of freedom and returning health in the spring of her walk, and de Grandin turned a puzzled countenance to Captain Loudon and me. "Your daughter's case is far simpler than I had supposed, *Monsieur le Capitaine,*" he announced. "So much I have been accustomed to encountering what unthinking persons call the supernatural that I fear I have become what you Amerieans call 'hipped' on the subject. Now, when first *Mademoiselle* detailed her experiences to me, I was led to certain conelusions which, happily, have not seemed justified by what we have since observed. Medicine is helpful in most cases of the kind, but I had feared——"

A perfect pandemonium of cacophonous dissonances, like the braying of half a dozen jazz bands suddenly gone crazy, interrupted his speech. Clattering tin cans, jangling cowbells, the wailings of tortured fiddles and discordant shrieks of wood-wind instruments all seemed mingled with shouts of wild, demoniac laughter as a bizarre figure emerged in view at the turn of the stairs and half leaped, half fell to the hall.

For an instant I failed to recognize patrician Julia Loudon in the grotesque thing before us. Her luxuriant black hair had escaped from the Grecian coronel in which she habitually wore it and hung fantastically about her breast and shoulders, half veiling, half disclosing a face from which every vestige of serenity had disappeared and on which a leer—no other word expresses it—of mingled craft and cunning and idiotic stupidity sat like a toad enthroned upon a fungus. She was barearmed and barelegged; indeed, the only garment covering her supple, white body was a Spanish shawl wound tightly about bust and torso, its fringed ends dragging over the floor behind her flying feet as she capered like a female satyr across the hall drugget to the bedlam accompaniment of infernal noises which seemed to hover over her like a swarm of poisonous flies above a wounded animal struggling through the mire of a swamp.

"*Ai, ai, ai-ee!*" she cried in a raucous voice, bending this way and that in time to the devilish racket. "Behold my work, foolish man, behold my mastery! Fool that you are, to try to take mine from me! Today I shall make this woman a scandal and disgrace, and tonight I shall require her life. *Ai, ai, ai-ee!*"

For a fleeting instant de Grandin turned an appalled face to me, and I met his flying glance with one no less

surprized, for the voice issuing from the girl's slender throat was not her own. No tone or inflection of it was reminiscent of Julia Loudon. Every shrilling syllable spoke of a different individual, a personality instinct with evil vivacity as hers seemed instinct with sweetness and melancholy.

"*Cordieu!*" de Grandin exclaimed between set teeth, springing toward the girl, then halting in horrified amazement as though congealed to ice in his tracks. From every side of the room, like flickering beams of light, tiny bits of metal flew toward the girl's swaying body, and in an instant her arms, legs, throat, even her cheeks, were encrusted with glittering pins and needles buried point-deep in her creamy skin like the torture-implements driven into the bodies of the pain-defying fakirs of India. Almost it seemed as though the girl had suddenly become a powerful electro-magnet to which every particle of movable metal in the apartment had leaped.

For an instant she stood swaying there, the cruel points embedded in her flesh, yet seemingly causing no pain, then a wild, heart-rending shriek broke from her lips, and her eyes opened wide in sudden terror and consternation. Instantly it was apparent she had regained consciousness, realized her position, her almost complete nudity and the biting, stinging points of the countless needles all at once.

"Quick, Trowbridge, my friend!" de Grandin urged, leaping forward. "Take her, my old one. Do not permit her to fall—those pins, they will surely impale her if she drops."

Even as I seized the fainting girl in my arms, the Frenchman was furiously garnering the pins from her flesh, cursing volubly in mingled French and English as he worked.

"*Parbleu,*" he swore, "it is the devil's work, of a surety. By damn, I shall have words to say to this accursed *dracu* who sticks pins in young ladies and throws knives at Jules de Grandin!"

Following him, I bore the swooning girl up the stairs, placed her on her bed and turned furiously in search of the nurse. What could the woman have been thinking of to let her patient leave her room in such a costume? "Miss Stanton," I called angrily. "Where are you?"

A muffled sound, half-way between a scream and an articulate cry, and a faint, ineffectual tap-tap on the door of the closet answered me. Snatching the door of the clothes-press open, I found her lying on the floor, half smothered by fallen dresses, her mouth gagged by a Turkish towel, wrists tied behind her and ankles lashed together with knotted silk stockings.

"A-a-ah, oh!" she gasped as I relieved her of her fetters and helped her, half fainting, to her feet. "It took me, Dr. Trowbridge. I was helpless as a baby in its hands."

De Grandin looked up from his ministrations to Julia Loudon. "What was the 'It' which took you, *Mademoiselle?*" he inquired, folding back the shawl from the girl's injured limbs and deftly shoving her beneath the bedclothes. "Was it Mademoiselle Loudon?"

"No!" the nurse gasped, her hands still trembling with fright and nervousness. "Oh, no, not Miss Loudon, sir. It was—I don't know what. Miss Loudon came upstairs a few moments ago and said you and Dr. Trowbridge were taking her motoring, and she must change her clothes. She began removing her house dress, but kept taking off her garments until she was—she was——" she hesitated a moment, catching her breath in long, laboring gasps.

"*Mordieu,* yes!" de Grandin cut in testily. "We do waste time, *Mademoiselle.* She did remove her cloth-

ing until she was what? Completely nude?"

"Yes," the nurse replied with a shudder. "I was about to ask her if she needed to change *all* her clothes, when she turned and looked at me, and her face was like the face of a devil, sir. Then something seemed to come down on me like a wet blanket. No, not like a blanket, either. It clung to me and bore me down, and smothered me all at once, but it was transparent, sir. I could feel it, but I couldn't see it. It was like a—like a terrible, big jelly-fish, sir. It was cold and slimy and strong, strong as a hundred giants. I tried to call out, and *it* oozed into my mouth—choked me; ugh!" She shuddered at the recollection. "Then I must have fainted, for the next thing I knew everything was dark, and I heard Dr. Trowbridge calling me, so I tried to call out and kicked as hard as I could, and——"

"And *voilà*—here you are!" de Grandin interrupted. "I marvel not you are *nerveuse, Mademoiselle. Cordieu,* are we not all so?

"Attend me, Trowbridge, my friend," he commanded, "do you remain with Mademoiselle Stanton and the patient. Me, I shall go below and procure three drinks of brandy for us—yes, *morbleu,* four I shall obtain, for one I shall drink myself immediately, right away, at once, before I return. Meantime, watch well Mademoiselle Julie, for I think she will require much watching before all is done."

A moment later the clatter of his heels sounded on the polished boards of the hall floor as he hastened below stairs in search of stimulant.

"IT IS damnable, damnable, my friends!" the little Frenchman cried a few moments later as he, Captain Loudon and I conferred in the lower hall. "This *poltergeist,* it has complete possession of the poor Mademoiselle Julie, and it has manifested itself to Mademoiselle Stanton, as well. *Pardieu,* if we but knew whence it comes, and why, we might better be able to combat it; but all, all is mystery. It comes, it wreaks havoc, and it remains. *Dieu de Dieu de Dieu de Dieu!*" He strode fiercely back and forth across the rug, twisting first one, then the other end of his diminutive mustache until I thought he would surely drag the hairs from his lip.

"If only we could——" he began again, striding across the hall and bringing up before a buhl cabinet which stood between two low windows. "If only we could—ah! What—who is this, *Monsieur le Capitaine,* if you please?"

His slender, carefully manicured forefinger pointed to an exquisite little miniature which stood in a gold easel-frame on the cabinet's top.

Looking over his shoulder, I saw the picture of a young girl, black-haired, oval-faced, purple-eyed, her red lips showing against the pallor of her face almost like a wound in healthy flesh. There was a subtle something of difference—more in expression than in feature—from the original, nevertheless I recognized the likeness as a well-executed portrait of Julia Loudon, though it had been made, I imagined, several years earlier. "Why," I exclaimed in astonishment at his question, "why, it's Miss Loudon, de Grandin!"

Ignoring my remark, he kept his fixed, unwinking stare upon the captain, repeating, "This lady, *Monsieur,* she is who?"

"It's a picture of my niece, Julia's cousin," Captain Loudon returned shortly; then: "Don't you think we could occupy our time better than with trifles like that? My daughter——"

"Trifles, *Monsieur!*" de Grandin cut in. "There are *no* trifles in a case such as this. All, all is of the

importance. Tell me of this young lady, if you please. There is a so remarkable resemblance, yet a look in the eyes which is not the look of your daughter. I would know much of her, if you please."

"She was my niece, Anna Wassilko," the captain replied. "That picture was made in St. Petersburg—Petrograd—or Leningrad, as it is called now—before the World War."

"Ah?" de Grandin stroked his mustache gently, as though making amends for the furious pulling to which he had subjected it a moment before. "You did say 'was', *Monsieur*. May I take it, then, that she 'is' no more?" He cast a speculative glance at the portrait again, then continued: "And her name, so different from yours, yet her appearance so like your daughter's. Will you not explain?"

Captain Loudon looked as though he would like to wring the inquisitive little Frenchman's neck, but complied with his request instead. "My wife was a Rumanian lady," he began, speaking with evident annoyance. "I was stationed for duty at our legation at Bukharest in 1895, and there I met my wife, who was a Mademoiselle Seracki. I was married before returning to floating service, and my wife's twin sister, Zoë, married Leonidas Wassilko, a young officer attached to the Russian embassy, about the same time.

"Things were beginning to move a little, even in those days. One or two near-quarrels with European nations over the Monroe Doctrine had warned even the lunkheads at Washington that we'd best be getting some sort of navy in the water, and there was no time for a protracted honeymoon after our marriage. I had to leave my bride of two months and report for duty to the flagship of the Mediterranean Squadron. Anna, my wife, stayed on at Bukharest for a time, then moved from one port to another along the European coast so as to be fairly near me when I could get infrequent furloughs. Finally I was moved to the China station, and she went to live with her sister and brother-in-law at St. Petersburg. Our baby Julia and their little girl, Anna, were born on the same day and resembled each other even more than their mothers did.

"Following the Spanish War and my transfer to home service, my wife divided her time between America and Europe, spending almost as much time in Russia as she did in Washington. Julia and Anna were educated together in a French convent and later went to the Smolny Institute in St. Petersburg.

"Anna joined up as a nurse in the Russian Red Cross at the outbreak of the World War, and was in France when the Revolution broke. That probably saved her life. Both her parents were shot by the Bolshevists as reactionaries, and she came to live with us after the Armistice.

"Somehow, she didn't take very well to American ways, and when Robert—Lieutenant Proudfit—came along and began paying court to Julia, Anna seemed to take it as a sort of personal affront. Seems she had some sort of fool idea she and Julie were more than cousins, and ought to remain celibate to devote their lives to each other. To tell the truth, though, I rather fancy she was more than a little taken by Proudfit herself, and when he preferred Julia to her—well, it didn't please her any too much."

"Ah?" de Grandin breathed, a trace of the heat-lightning flash which betokened excitement showing in his cool eyes. "And Mademoiselle Anna, she is——"

"She—died, poor child," Loudon responded.

"She did commit suicide?" the Frenchman's words were so low we could scarcely hear them.

"I didn't say that," the captain returned coldly.

"*Pardonnez-moi, Monsieur le Capitaine,*" the other shot back, "but you did not say otherwise, and the pause before you mentioned her death —surely that was something more than a tribute of momentary regret?"

"Humph! Yes, you're right. The poor youngster committed suicide by drowning herself about six months ago."

"Six months, did you say?" the little Frenchman's face was so near his host's that I feared the spike of his waxed mustache would scratch the captain's cheek. "Six months ago she did drown herself. In the ocean? And Mademoiselle Julie's engagement to Lieutenant Proudfit, it was announced—when?"

"It had just been announced—but look here, I say, see here——" Captain Loudon began violent protest, but de Grandin was grinning mirthlessly at him.

"I look there, *Monsieur,*" he replied, "and I see there. *Parbleu,* I see far past! Six months, six months, everything, it dates from six months of yore! The death of Mademoiselle Anna, the engagement of Mademoiselle Julie, the tapping at her window, the beginning of these so strange signs and wonders—all are six months old. *Grâce à Dieu,* my friend, I begin to see the light at last. Come, Trowbridge, my friend, first for the information, then the action!"

Turning on his heel, he mounted the stairs, three at a time, beckoning me violently as he did so.

"MADEMOISELLE — Mademoiselle Julie!" he cried, bursting into the patient's room with hardly a perceptible pause between his knock and the nurse's summons to enter. "You have not told me all, *Mademoiselle,* no, nor near all! This Mademoiselle Anna, who was she, and what relation was there between you and her? Of haste, speak quickly, it is important that I should know all!"

"Why," Miss Loudon looked at him with startled eyes, "she was my cousin."

"But yes, that much I know. What I desire to learn is if there was some close bond, some secret understanding between you."

The girl regarded him fixedly a moment, then: "Yes, there was. Both of us were in love with Lieutenant Proudfit; but he seemed to prefer me, for some reason. When Anna saw he was proof against all her wiles—and she was an accomplished coquette—she became very morose, and talked constantly of suicide. I tried to laugh her out of the idea, but she persisted. Finally, I began to believe she was serious, and I told her, 'If you kill yourself, so will I, then there'll be two of us dead and nobody any the happier.'"

"Ah?" de Grandin regarded her intently. "And then?"

"She gave me one of those queer, long looks of hers, and said, 'Maybe I hold you to that promise, cousin. *Jizn kopyeka*—life is but a kopeck—maybe we spend him, you and I.' And that was all she said at the time. But two months later, just before Lieutenant Proudfit and I announced our engagement, she left me a note:

Have gone to spend my kopeck. Remember your promise and do likewise.

"Next morning——"

"Yes?" de Grandin prompted.

"Next morning they took her from the bay—drowned."

"A-a-h!" he let the single syllable out slowly through his teeth with a sort of hissing finality. "A-a-ah, at last, *Mademoiselle,* I do understand."

"You mean——"

"*Parbleu,* I mean nothing less. Tonight, she did say? *Morbleu,* to-

night we shall see what we shall see!

"Stay you here, Friend Trowbridge," he ordered. "Me, I go to procure that which is necessary for our work this night!"

He was through the door like a shot, rushing down the stairs three steps at a stride, banging the front door behind him without a word of farewell or explanation to his astounded host.

DARKNESS had fallen when he returned, a small black bag in his hand and an expression of unbridled excitement on his face. "Any change in our patient?" he demanded as he entered the house. "Any further manifestations of that accursed *poltergeist?*"

"No," I reported, "everything has been singularly calm this afternoon."

"Ah, so? Then we shall have the harder fight tonight. The enemy, she does marshal his forces!"

He tiptoed to the sickroom, entered quietly, and took a seat beside the bed, detailing his experiences in the city with lively interest. Once or twice it seemed to me the patient's attention wandered as he continued his recital, but his conversation never faltered. He had seen the beautiful flowers in Fifth Avenue! The furs in the shops were of the exquisiteness! Never was there such a parade of beauty, culture and refinement as could be found in that so wonderful street!

I listened open-mouthed with wonder. Time given to extraneous matters when he was engaged in a case was time wasted according to his ideas, I knew, yet here he sat and chattered like a gossiping magpie to a girl who plainly took small interest in his talk.

Eight o'clock struck on the tall clock in the hall below, still he related humorous incidents in his life, and described the chestnut trees and the whistling blackbirds at St. Cloud or the students' masked balls in the Latin Quarter. "What ails the man?" I muttered to myself. "He rambles on like a wound-up phonograph!"

It must have been about a quarter of 9 when the change began to show itself in our patient. From polite inattention her attitude toward the Frenchman became something like open hostility. In another five minutes she seemed to have lost all remembrance of his presence, and lay with her eyes turned toward the ceiling. Then, gradually but surely, there came into her already too thin face a pinched, drawn look, the sure sign of physical and nervous exhaustion.

"Ah-ha, we do begin to commence!" de Grandin exclaimed exultantly, reaching beneath his chair and opening the little black bag he had deposited there.

From the satchel he produced an odd-looking contrivance, something like the toy rotary fans to be bought at novelty shops—the sort of fan which consists of three twisted blades, like reversed propeller wings, and which is made to whirl by the pressure of the thumb against a trigger fitted in the handle. But this fan, instead of having blades of colored metal, was supplied with brightly nickeled arms which shone in the lamplight like a trio of new mirrors.

"Observe, *Mademoiselle;* behold!" de Grandin cried sharply, signing to me to turn the electric bulbs on full strength at the same time.

The girl's languid gaze lowered from the ceiling a moment and rested on the little Frenchman. Instantly he advanced the mirror-fan to within six inches of her face and began spinning it violently with quick, sharp jerks at the rotating loop. "*Regardez, si'l vous plaît,*" he ordered, spinning the whirling mirrors faster and faster.

The three bright pieces of metal seemed to merge into a single disk, but from their flying it seemed that countless tiny rays of light fell away, like water scattered from a swiftly-turning paddle-wheel. For an instant the girl regarded the bright, whirling mirrors without interest, then her eyes seemed gradually to converge toward the bridge of her nose as they sought to follow the fan's rotations, and a fixed, rapt expression began to steal over her features.

"Sleep, sleep and rest. Sleep and hear no orders from those who wish you ill. Sleep, sleep—*sleep!*" de Grandin commanded in low, earnest tones.

Slowly, peacefully, her lids lowered over her fascinated eyes, her breast rose and fell convulsively once or twice, then her gentle breathing told us she had obeyed his command and lay fast in quiet sleep.

"What——" I began, but he waved me back impatiently.

"Another time, my friend," he promised with a quick gesture of warning. "At present we must not talk; there is too much at stake."

All through the night he sat beside the bed, raising his whirling mirrors and commanding sleep in tones of suppressed fury each time the girl stirred on her pillow. And each time his order was implicitly obeyed. The patient slept continuously till the first faint streaks of dawn began to show against the eastern sky.

"Now, then," he cried, springing from his chair, reopening his black bag and bringing forth—of all things!—a hyssop of mistletoe bough. Around and around the room he dashed with a sort of skipping step, for all the world like a country woman fanning flies from the house in summertime.

"Anna Wassilko, Anna Wassilko, who has wandered beyond the bounds of the tomb," he ordered as he waved his little brush-broom, "I command that you return whence you came. To Death you have said, 'Thou art my lord and my master,' and to the Grave, 'Thou art my lover and my betrothed.' Your business in this world is done, Anna Wassilko; get you to the world you chose for your dwelling place when you cast your body into the sea!"

Near the window, where the dimming electric bulbs' light mingled with the beams of the waning moon and the flushing rays of the coming morning, he repeated his command three times, waving his brush forward and outward toward the ocean which surged and boomed on the beach a quarter-mile away.

Something seemed to brush by him, something invisible, but tangible enough to stir the white scrim curtains trailing lazily in the still air, and for a moment I thought I caught the faint penumbra of a shadow cast against the ivory wall. A monstrous thing it was, large as a lion, yet like nothing I had ever seen or imagined, for it seemed to resemble both a bat and fox, with long, pointed snout, claw-armed forepaws and great, spike-edged wings extending to each side from close behind the head.

"Get you gone, unfortunate one," de Grandin cried, striking directly at the shadow with his sprigs of mistletoe. "Poor soul who would collect the wager of a thoughtless promise, hie you back to your own place and leave the ordering of other lives to God."

The terrible shadow rested against the pale wall another fraction of a second, then, like smoke borne away in a rising breeze, it was gone.

"Gone," de Grandin repeated softly, closing the window and shutting off the lights. "Call the nurse, I pray you, Friend Trowbridge. Her duties will be simpler hereafter. A little medicine, a little tonic, and

much rest and food will see Mademoiselle Julie as well as ever."

Together we tiptoed into the hall, roused the sleeping nurse and turned the patient over to her care.

"AND now the other time you spoke of last night has come, I suppose?" I said, rather huffily, as we drove home. "You were close-mouthed enough about it all while it was happening. Will you explain now?"

"Most certainly," he returned in high good humor, lighting a cigarette, breathing in a great lungful of smoke, then discharging the vapor with a sigh of gusty content. "It was most simple—like everything else—when once I knew the answer.

"To begin: When first Captain Loudon explained his daughter's case, it seemed like one of simple hysteria to me, and one which any capable physician could cure. 'Why, then,' I ask me, 'does *Monsieur le Capitaine* seek the services of Jules de Grandin? I am not a great physician.' I have no answer, and at first I decline the case, as you know.

"But when we go to his house and behold Mademoiselle Julie all unconscious as she wandered about, I was of another mind; and when I hear the noises which accompanied her, I was of still a third mind. But when that evil one hurled a knife at my head, I said to me, '*Parbleu*, it is the challenge! Shall Jules de Grandin fly from such a contest?'

"Now, across the Rhine from France, those *boches* have some words which are most expressive. Among them is *poltergeist*, which signifies a pelting ghost, a ghost which flings things around the house. But more often he is not a ghost at all, he is some evil entity which plagues a man, or more frequently a woman. Not for nothing, my friend, did the ancients refer to Satan as the Prince of the Powers of the Air, for there are many very evil things in the air which we can no more see than we can behold the germs of disease. Yes." He nodded solemn affirmation.

"But when Mademoiselle Julie tells me of the mark which came on her arm, and I recognized the Rumanian word for demon, I think some more. And when she tells me of the bird or bat which fluttered at her window and yet was not there, I recognize many things in common with other cases I have observed.

"Foolish people, my friend, sometimes say, 'Come in,' when they think the wind has blown their door ajar. It is not well to do so. Who knows what invisible terror awaits without, needing only the spoken invitation unthinkingly made to enter? For attend me, my friend, very rarely can the evil ones come in unless they are first invited, and very rarely can they be gotten out once they have been bidden to enter. So all these things fit together in my mind, and I say to me, '*Morbleu*, we have here a *poltergeist*, and nothing else. Certainly.'

"But why should a *poltergeist* attach his evil self to that sweet Mademoiselle Julie? True, she are very pretty, but there are other pretty women in the world of whom the *poltergeister* do not seek shelter.

"Then when the demon tell us he hold her completely in his power and makes her to dance almost nude in her father's house and sticks pins and needles in her, I hear something else. I hear him promise to take her life.

"Why? What have she done that she must die?

"Then I see the picture of Anna Wassilko. Very like Mademoiselle Julie she was, but there was a subtle something in her face which makes me know she was not the same. And what story does *Monsieur le Capitaine* tell when I ask about her? Ah, now we begin to see the light! She

were Rumanian by birth and partly by ancestry. Very good. She had gone to school with her cousin, Mademoiselle Julie. Again good. She had lived in the same house here, she had loved the same man, and she had committed suicide; best of all. I need now only a little reassuring as to the reason why—the result I already know.

"You know what Mademoiselle Julie told us; it all fitted in well with the theory I had formed. But there was work to be done that night.

"The demon which made Julie do all kinds of things she knew not of had promised to take her life. How to circumvent her? That were the question.

"I think. 'This young woman goes off into trances, and does all manner of queer things without knowing of them,' I inform me. 'Would she not do much the same in a state of hypnosis?' Assuredly. Very well, then.

"I procure me a set of whirling mirrors, not because there is any magic in them but because they are the easiest thing to focus the subject's attention. Last night I use them, and hypnotize Mademoiselle Julie before the *poltergeist* has a chance to conquer her consciousness. Hypnotism, when all is said and done, is the rendering of a subject's objective mind passive while the mind of the operator is substituted for that of the subject. The *poltergeist,* which was really the *revenant* of Anna, had substituted *her* mind for Julie's on former occasions; now I get there first, and place my mind in her brain. There is no room for the other, and Mademoiselle Julie can not take suggestions or brain-hints from the ghost and destroy herself. No, Jules de Grandin is already in possession of her brain-house, and he says 'No Admission' to all others who try to come in. Mademoiselle Julie slept peacefully through the night, as you did observe."

"But what was all that monkey business with the mistletoe?" I demanded.

"*Tiens,* my friend, the monkey's business had nothing to do with that," he assured me. "Do you, perhaps, remember what the mistletoe stands for at *Noël?*"

"You mean a kiss?"

"What else? It is the plant held sacred to lovers in this day, but in the elder times it was the holy bush of the Druids. With it they cast many spells, and with it they cast out many evil-workers. Not by mistake is it the lover's tree today, for it is a powerful charm against evil and will assuredly lay the unhappy ghost of one who dies because of unfortunate love. *Voilà*—you do catch the connection?"

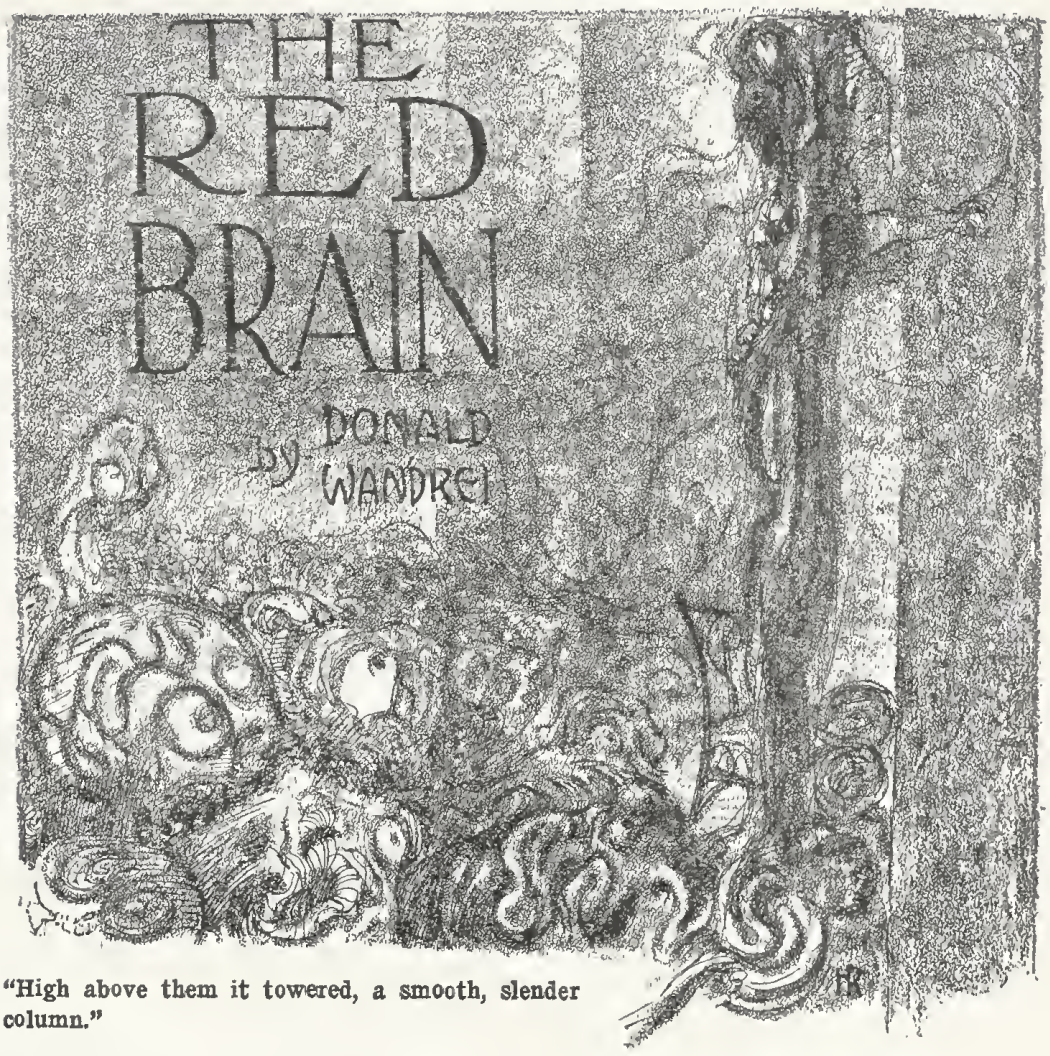
"I never heard that before——" I began, but he cut me short with a chuckle.

"Much you have never heard, Trowbridge, my friend," he accused, "yet all of it is true, none the less."

"And that hideous shadow?"

He sobered instantly. "Who can say? In life Mademoiselle Anna was beautiful, but she went forth from the world uncalled and in an evil way, my friend. Who knows what evil shape she is doomed to wear in the next life? The less we think on that subject the better for our sleep hereafter.

"Come, we are at your house once more. Let us drink one glass of brandy for luck's sake, then to sleep. *Mordieu,* me, I feel as though I had been stranger to my bed since my fifth birthday!"




**"High above them it towered, a smooth, slender column."**

ONE by one the pale stars in the sky overhead had twinkled fainter and gone out. One by one those flaming lights had dimmed and darkened. One by one they had vanished forever, and in their places had come patches of ink that blotted out immense areas of a sky once luminous with stars.

Years had passed; centuries had fled backward; the accumulating thousands had turned into millions, and they, too, had faded into the oblivion of eternity. The earth had disappeared. The sun had cooled and hardened, and had dissolved into the dust of its grave. The solar system and innumerable other systems had broken up and vanished, and their fragments had swelled the clouds of dust which were engulfing the entire universe. In the billions of years which had passed, sweeping everything on toward the gathering doom, the huge bodies, once countless, that had dotted the sky and hurtled through unmeasurable immensities of space had lessened in number and disintegrated until the black pall of the sky was broken only at rare intervals by dim spots of light—light ever growing paler and darker.

No one knew when the dust had begun to gather, but far back in the for-

gotten dawn of time the dead worlds had vanished, unremembered and unmourned.

Those were the nuclei of the dust. Those were the progenitors of the universal dissolution which now approached its completion. Those were the stars which had first burned out, died, and wasted away in myriads of atoms. Those were the mushroom growths which had first passed into nothingness in a puff of dust.

Slowly the faint wisps had gathered into clouds, the clouds into seas, and the seas into monstrous oceans of gently heaving dust, dust that drifted from dead and dying worlds, from interstellar collisions of plunging stars, from rushing meteors and streaming comets which flamed from the void and hurtled into the abyss.

The dust had spread and spread. The dim luminosity of the heavens had become fainter as great blots of black appeared far in the outer depths of Space. In all the millions and billions and trillions of years that had fled into the past, the cosmic dust had been gathering, and the starry horde had been dwindling. There was a time when the universe consisted of hundreds of millions of stars, planets, and suns; but they were ephemeral as life or dreams, and they faded and vanished, one by one.

The smaller worlds were obliterated first, then the larger, and so in ever-ascending steps to the unchecked giants which roared their fury and blazed their whiteness through the conquering dust and the realms of night. Never did the Cosmic Dust cease its hellish and relentless war on the universe; it choked the little aerolites; it swallowed the helpless satellites; it swirled around the leaping comets that rocketed from one black end of the universe to the other, flaming their trailing splendor, tearing paths of wild adventure through horizonless infinitudes the dust already ruled; it clawed at the planets and sucked their very being; it washed, hateful and brooding, about the monarchs and plucked at their lands and deserts.

Thicker, thicker, always thicker grew the Cosmic Dust, until the giants no longer could watch each other's gyres far across the void. Instead, they thundered through the waste, lonely, despairing, and lost. In solitary grandeur they burned their brilliant beauty. In solitary defeat and death they disappeared.

Of all the stars in all the countless host that once had spotted the heavens, there remained only Antares. Antares, immensest of the stars, alone was left, the last body in the universe, inhabited by the last race ever to have consciousness, ever to live. That race, in hopeless compassion, had watched the darkening skies and had counted with miserly care the stars which resisted. Every one that twinkled out wrenched their hearts; every one that ceased to struggle and was swallowed by the tides of dust added a new strain to the national anthem, that indescribable melody, that infinitely somber pæan of doom which tolled a solemn harmony in every heart of the dying race. The dwellers had built a great crystal dome around their world in order to keep out the dust and to keep in the atmosphere, and under this dome the watchers kept their silent sentinel. The shadows had swept in faster and faster from the farther realms of darkness, engulfing more rapidly the last of the stars. The astronomers' task had become easier, but the saddest on Antares: that of watching Death and Oblivion spread a pall of blackness over all that was, all that would be.

The last star, Mira, second only to Antares, had shone frostily pale, twinkled more darkly—and vanished. There was nothing in all Space except an illimitable expanse of dust that stretched on and on in every di-

rection; only this, and Antares. No longer did the astronomers watch the heavens to glimpse again that dying star before it succumbed. No longer did they scan the upper reaches—everywhere swirled the dust, enshrouding Space with a choking blackness. Once there had been sown through the abyss a multitude of morbidly beautiful stars, whitely shining, wan—now there was none. Once there had been light in the sky—now there was none. Once there had been a dim phosphorescence in the vault—now it was a heavy-hanging pall of ebony, a rayless realm of gloom, a smothering thing of blackness eternal and infinite.

"WE MEET again in this Hall of the Mist, not in the hope that a remedy has been found, but that we find how best it is fitting that we die. We meet, not in the vain hope that we may control the dust, but in the hope that we may triumph even as we are obliterated. We can not win the struggle, save in meeting our death heroically."

The speaker paused. All around him towered a hall of Space rampant. Far above spread a vague roof whose flowing sides melted into the lost and dreamy distances, a roof supported by unseen walls and by the mighty pillars which rolled upward at long intervals from the smoothly marbled floor. A faint haze seemed always to be hanging in the air because of the measureless lengths of that architectural colossus. Dim in the distance, the speaker reclined on a metal dais raised above the sea of beings in front of him. But he was not, in reality, a speaker, nor was he a being such as those which had inhabited the world called Earth.

Evolution, because of the unusual conditions on Antares, had proceeded along lines utterly different from those followed on the various bodies which had dotted the heavens when the deep was sprinkled with stars in the years now gone. Antares was the hugest sun that had leaped from the primeval chaos. When it cooled, it cooled far more slowly than the others, and when life once began it was assured of an existence not of thousands, not of millions, but of billions of years.

That life, when it began, had passed from the simple forms to the age of land juggernauts, and so by steps on and on up the scale. The civilizations of other worlds had reached their apex and the worlds themselves become cold and lifeless at the time when the mighty civilization of Antares was beginning. The star had then passed through a period of warfare until such terrific and fearful scourges of destruction were produced that in the Two Days War seven billion of the eight and one-half billion inhabitants were slaughtered. Those two days of carnage ended war for eons.

From then on, the golden age began. The minds of the people of Antares became bigger and bigger, their bodies proportionately smaller, until the cycle eventually was completed. Every being in front of the speaker was a monstrous heap of black viscidity, each mass an enormous brain, a sexless thing that lived for Thought. Long ago it had been discovered that life could be created artificially in tissue formed in the laboratories of the chemists. Sex was thus destroyed, and the inhabitants no longer spent their time in taking care of families. Nearly all the countless hours that were saved were put into scientific advance, with the result that the star leaped forward in an age of progress never paralleled.

The beings, rapidly becoming Brains, found that by the extermination of the parasites and bacteria on Antares, by changing their own or-

ganic structure, and by *willing* to live, they approached immortality. They discovered the secrets of Time and Space; they knew the extent of the universe, and how Space in its farther reaches became self-annihilating. They knew that life was self-created and controlled its own period of duration. They knew that when a life, tired of existence, killed itself, it was dead forever; it could not live again, for death was the final chemical change of life.

These were the shapes that spread in the vast sea before the speaker. They were shapes because they could assume any form they wished. Their all-powerful minds had complete control of that which was themselves. When the Brains were desirous of traveling, they relaxed from their usual semi-rigidity and flowed from place to place like a stream of ink rushing down a hill; when they were tired, they flattened into disks; when expounding their thoughts, they became towering pillars of rigid ooze; and when lost in abstraction, or in a pleasurable contemplation of the unbounded worlds created in their minds, within which they often wandered, they resembled huge, dormant balls.

From the speaker himself had come no sound although he had imparted his thoughts to his sentient assembly. The thoughts of the Brains, when their minds permitted, emanated to those about them instantly, like electric waves. Antares was a world of unbroken silence.

The Great Brain's thoughts continued to flow out. "Long ago, the approaching doom became known to us all. We could do nothing. It does not matter greatly, of course, for existence is a useless thing which benefits no one. But nevertheless, at that meeting in an unremembered year, we asked those who were willing to try to think of some possible way of saving our own star, at least, if not the others. There was no reward offered, for there was no reward adequate. All that the Brain would receive would be glory as one of the greatest which has ever been produced. The rest of us, too, would receive only the effects of that glory in the knowledge that we had conquered Fate, hitherto, and still, considered inexorable; we would derive pleasure only from the fact that we, self-creating and all but supreme, had made ourselves supreme by conquering the most powerful menace which has ever attacked life, time, and the universe: the Cosmic Dust.

"Our most intelligent Brains have been thinking on this one subject for untold millions of years. They have excluded from their thoughts everything except the question: How can the dust be checked? They have produced innumerable plans which have been tested thoroughly. All have failed. We have hurled into the void uncontrollable bolts of lightning, interplanetary sheets of flame, in the hope that we might fuse masses of the dust into new, incandescent worlds. We have anchored huge magnets throughout Space, hoping to attract the dust, which is faintly magnetic, and thus to solidify it or clear much of it from the waste. We have caused fearful disturbances by exploding our most powerful compounds in the realms about us, hoping to set the dust so violently in motion that the chaos would become tempestuous with the storms of creation. With our rays of annihilation, we have blasted billion-mile paths through the ceaselessly surging dust. We have destroyed the life on Betelgeuse and rooted there titanic developers of vacua, sprawling, whirring machines to suck the dust from Space and heap it up on that star. We have liberated enormous quantities of gas, lit them, and sent the hot and furious fires madly flashing through the affrighted dust. In our

desperation, we have even asked for the aid of the Ether-Eaters. Yes, we have in finality exercised our Will-Power to sweep back the rolling billows! In vain! What has been accomplished? The dust has retreated for a moment, has paused—and has welled onward. It has returned silently triumphant, and it has again hung its pall of blackness over a fear-haunted, nightmare-ridden Space."

Swelling in soundless sorrow through the Hall of the Mist rose the racing thoughts of the Great Brain. "Our chemists with a bitter doggedness never before displayed have devoted their time to the production of Super-Brains, in the hope of making one which could defeat the Cosmic Dust. They have changed the chemicals used in our genesis; they have experimented with molds and forms; they have tried every resource. With what result? There have come forth raging monstrosities, mad abominations, satanic horrors and ravenous foul things howling wildly the nameless and indescribable phantoms that thronged their minds. We have killed them in order to save ourselves. And the Dust has pushed onward! We have appealed to every living Brain to help us. We appealed, in the forgotten, dream-veiled centuries, for aid in any form. From time to time we have been offered plans, which for a while have made terrific inroads on the Dust, but plans which have always failed.

"The triumph of the Cosmic Dust has almost come. There is so little time left us that our efforts now must inevitably be futile. But today, in the hope that some Brain, either of the old ones or of the gigantic new ones, has discovered a possibility not yet tried, we have called this conference, the first in more than twelve thousand years."

THE tense, alert silence of the hall relaxed and became soft when the thoughts of the Great Brain had stopped flowing. The electric waves which had filled the vast Hall of the Mist sank, and for a long time a strange tranquillity brooded there. But the mass was never still; the sea in front of the dais rippled and billowed from time to time as waves of thought passed through it. Yet no Brain offered to speak, and the seething expanse, as the minutes crept by, again became quiet.

In a thin column on the dais, rising high into the air, swayed the Great Brain; again and again it swept its glance around the hall, peering among the rolling, heaving shapes in the hope of finding somewhere in those thousands one which could offer a suggestion. But the minutes passed, and time lengthened, with no response; and the sadness of the fixed and changeless end crept across the last race. And the Brains, wrapped in their meditation, saw the Dust pushing at the glass shell of Antares with triumphant mockery.

The Great Brain had expected no reply, since for centuries it had been considered futile to combat the Dust; and so, when its expectation, though not its wish, was fulfilled, it relaxed and dropped, the signal that the meeting was over.

But the motion had scarcely been completed, when from deep within the center of the sea there came a violent heave; in a moment, a section collected itself and rushed together; like a waterspout it swished upward and went streaming toward the roof until it swayed thin and tenuous as a column of smoke, the top of the Brain peering down from the dimness of the upper hall.

"I have found an infallible plan! The Red Brain has conquered the Cosmic Dust!"

A terrific tenseness leaped upon the Brains, numbed by the cry that wavered in silence down the Hall of the Mist into the empty and dream-

less tomb of the farther marble. The Great Brain, hardly relaxed, rose again. And with a curious whirling motion the assembled horde suddenly revolved. Immediately, the Red Brain hung upward from the middle of a sea which had become an amphitheater in arrangement, all Brains looking toward the center. A suppressed expectancy and hope electrified the air.

The Red Brain was one of the later creations of the chemists, and had come forth during the experiments to produce more perfect Brains. Previously, they had all been black; but, perhaps because of impurities in the chemicals, this one had evolved in an extremely dark, dull-red color. It was regarded with wonder by its companions, and more so when they found that many of its thoughts could not be grasped by them. What it allowed the others to know of what passed within it was to a large extent incomprehensible. No one knew how to judge the Red Brain, but much had been expected from it.

Thus, when the Red Brain sent forth its announcement, the others formed a huge circle around, their minds passive and open for the explanation. Thus they lay, silent, while awaiting the discovery. And thus they reclined, completely unprepared for what followed.

For, as the Red Brain hung in the air, it began a slow but restless swaying; and as it swayed, its thoughts poured out in a rhythmic chant. High above them it towered, a smooth, slender column, whose lofty end was moving ever faster and faster while nervous shudders rippled up and down its length. And the alien chant became stronger, stronger, until it changed into a wild and dithyrambic pæan to the beauty of the past, to the glory of the present, to the splendor of the future. And the lay became a moaning praise, an exaltation; a strain of furious joy ran through it, a repetition of, "The Red Brain has conquered the Dust. Others have failed, but he has not. Play the national anthem in honor of the Red Brain, for he has triumphed. Place him at your head, for he has conquered the Dust. Exalt him who has proved himself the greatest of all. Worship him who is greater than Antares, greater than the Cosmic Dust, greater than the Universe."

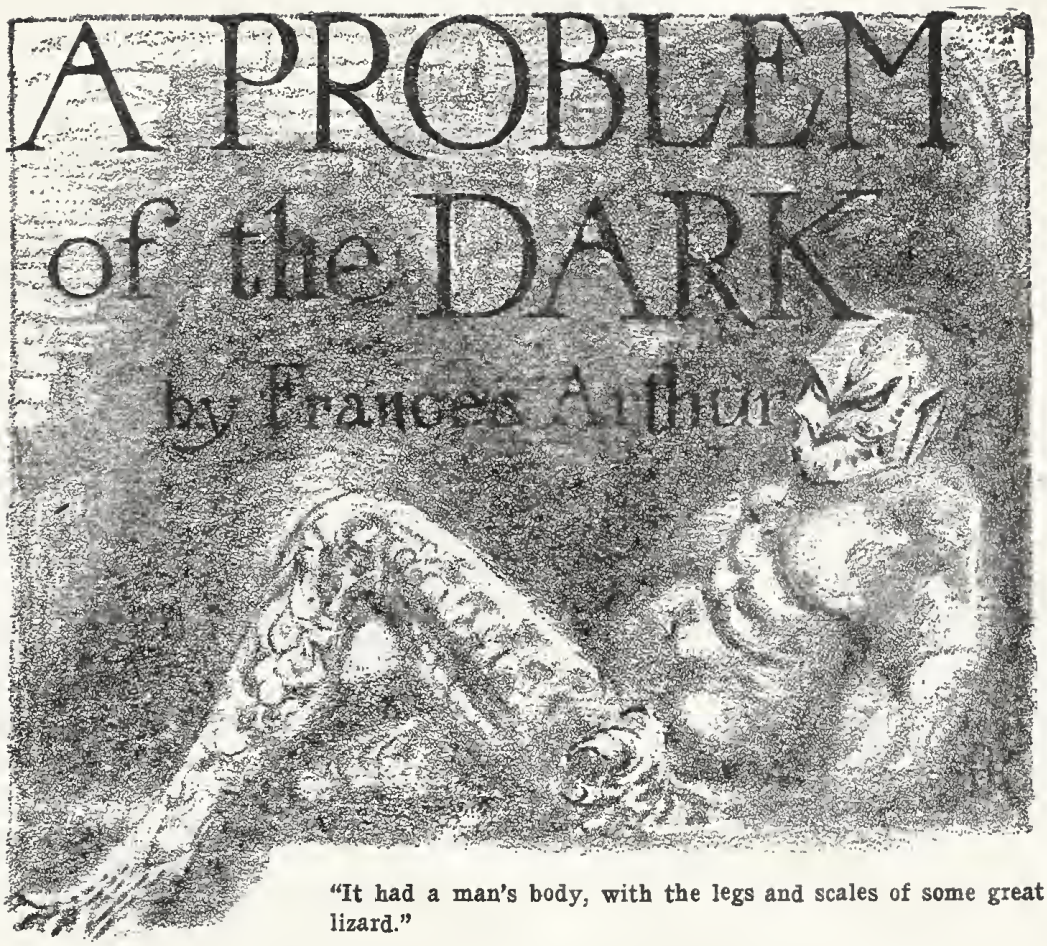
Abruptly it stopped. The puzzled Brains looked up. The Red Brain had ceased its nodding motion for a moment, and had closed its thoughts to them. But along its entire length it began a gyratory spinning, until it whirled at an incredible speed. Something antagonistic suddenly emanated from it. And before the Brains could grasp the situation, before they could protect themselves by closing their minds, the will-impulses of the Red Brain, laden with hatred and death, were throbbing about them and entering their open minds. Like a whirlwind spun the Red Brain, hurtling forth its hate. Like half-inflated balloons the other Brains had lain around it; like cooling glass bubbles they tautened for a second; and like pricked balloons, as their thoughts and thus their lives were annihilated, since Thought was Life, they flattened, instantaneously dissolving into pools of evanescent slime. By tens and by hundreds they sank, destroyed by the sweeping, unchecked thoughts of the Red Brain which filled the hall; by groups, by sections, by paths around the whole circle fell the doomed Brains in that single moment of carelessness, while pools of thick ink collected, flowed together, crept onward, and became rivers of pitch rushing down the marble floor with a soft, silken swish.

The hope of the universe had lain with the Red Brain.

And the Red Brain was mad.

# A PROBLEM of the DARK

by Frances Arthur



"It had a man's body, with the legs and scales of some great lizard."

THE Dennison home is a quiet, roomy place, neither new nor old. It has wide, kindly spaces; the walls smile at you.

The house has many closets, but not a skeleton in any of them—and as for ghosts, no one has ever died there.

There is no luxury, and equally, no mystery—not at all the place to tempt a night-marauding visitor, from this or any other world; and Mollie Dennison, its gentle mistress, finds it strange that her husband should be so insistent, of late, about having every door and window on the first floor tightly locked every night. Only last summer, many of them were commonly left open, and even when he forgot to hook the screens, he laughed at her for remonstrating.

What caused this change in him, she is never to know; so John Dennison has vowed to himself, to his son Robert, and to his friend Dr. Hedges.

"A woman couldn't know a thing like that!" he has told them.

At breakfast, on that day, late in the previous summer, which he is never to forget, he had asked Mollie casually, "Robert up yet?"

"Yes—or he was; he's lying on the couch in the library and he wants to see you before you go; he said wouldn't you please come in?"

"Nonsense! Why doesn't he come to the table?"

"John, dear, the boy's sick; and

you're so hard with him! You wouldn't listen yesterday——"

"Dreams again, eh?"

"Yes, but he's very hoarse, too. I'm worried."

Dennison left the breakfast table impatiently.

The summer was passing; and the boy, who had come home from college in June with shadowed eyes and a puzzled frown between them, seemed more preoccupied, more listless, every day.

He was thinner, too; not in any way like the big, rollicking chap who had left them last September. He had visited a friend over the Christmas holidays, and both parents had anxiously noted the change in him, after nine months of absence.

"Keep having nightmares—guess I'm bilious!" was the only explanation they had been able to win from him; it had not seemed a sufficient one. Dennison resented the boy's lack of interest in the business (an automobile agency), and gave him hard work to do, tersely remarking that he'd sleep better for it. The tasks were well but wearily performed, and nothing gained besides.

"Morning, sir," he said as Dennison entered. He swung his slippered feet to the floor and sat up dizzily, supporting himself with a hand at each side upon the couch.

He was "his mother's boy", tall and fair; for Dennison was shorter, darker, more muscular.

"If you won't help me, Dad, I'll have to get somebody else."

"What's the matter, anyway?"

"I tried to tell you yesterday. Listen, Dad! This thing's killing me! Look here!" He showed a swollen and discolored throat; his eyes were bloodshot, and he was hoarse, as his mother had said.

"Hurt yourself?"

"It's that thing I dream about, I tell you—if it *is* dreaming. He—or It——"

"You do it yourself, in your sleep—but that's bad enough; need more exercise."

"I exercise until I can hardly crawl to bed. No trouble about going to sleep; it's all I can do—but afterward——"

"Well, what can I do about it?"

"Dad" — the boy's pale face flushed—"you'll say it's babyish, because you don't know—you don't know! I—want you to stay with me tonight!"

"Babyish enough! Ever leave the light on?"

"Yes. He came just the same! I couldn't see him, but——"

"Aha! And yet you're still afraid of him?"

"It was worse than ever. I can't move, you see, or fight, or even breathe; but I get wide awake, and then he goes away, but I don't sleep any more."

"Just a regular nightmare, Bob."

"Maybe. But oh, God! How I'd like to have one night of peace—one night when Bull Bayman——"

"Bull Bayman! So that's who it is, you think?"

"I don't know; it seems like him, somehow; only of course Bull didn't have—scales all over him."

"Scales!" There was an underlying note of panic in the man's exasperation. Was it more than dreams, then? Was it insanity?

"Honest, Dad. And claws."

His father observed in a tolerably controlled tone, "Bull Bayman was the quarterback who choked you because he thought you gave away the signals to the other team?"

"Did he choke me?" the lad returned vaguely.

"Don't you remember it? He knocked you down first. Kent Taylor told me about it; said they threw water on you to bring you out of it."

"I know we had a mix-up; I didn't play any more, of course, but in the very next scrimmage Bull got

that welt on the head that sent him —where he is now."

"And you think he comes back every night to choke you?"

"I'd forgotten he choked me," mused the boy.

"But he comes back in a dream, Rob! Don't you see now that it's all a dream?"

"And don't you see that I'll lose my mind if this thing doesn't let up? And will you stay with me tonight, anyway until midnight, or—say—1 o'clock?"

John Dennison rose sharply.

"I will—to keep you from calling on somebody else. Nice thing to get around—ghosts!"

"Dad! You promise?"

"I said I would, didn't I?"

"Oh, God!" sobbed the boy hoarsely, as a flood of relief rolled over his parched nerves. "Oh, God!"

He flung himself face down on the leather couch, and his slender body shook in hysteria. His father looked down at him sadly.

"I didn't know it was so bad, Robby," he gruffly admitted.

"Don't tell him, but I'm going to see Hedges about him," he told his wife in the front hall, as he was leaving the house. "It's nerves. Let him sleep it off, if he can."

She had tried to believe, as John did, that the dreams would "wear off", but she was glad and relieved to know that their good friend Dr. Hedges, whose studies of late had taken a psychopathic turn, was to be asked to help her boy.

"IT ISN'T as if Rob ever drank a drop, or smoked too much," John told this friend, at the latter's office, "and he was never afraid of the fellow; had forgotten, even, that he choked him!"

"Bull hadn't forgotten, though," muttered Hedges.

"Bull's dead."

"His body is. But what was he living for, just as he got that blow on the head that finished him? To be revenged on Rob, because he thought he had queered the game. Now, if the mass of molecules, or atoms, or even electrons, that must be released at death (for something is released, John), could retain an impression, a purpose—can't you find it possible to suppose that it could animate another body—even an elemental one?"

"But—even supposing that, Bob had the light on one night, and—he says he felt him, but couldn't see him!"

"It is by no means probable that all the elemental forms are visible to us. You've seen those beautiful little sea-creatures, John, that are exactly like glass, yet have life and motion; and even that familiar thing, the eel, is transparent at one stage. You could imagine a being so perfectly transparent as to be invisible, yet alive. Now, supposing that the freed human particles enter into and animate an elemental, transparent body——"

"Where would they find such a thing? Why don't we ever hear of them?"

"Perhaps, being invisible, it is easy for them to keep out of our way. There are hundreds of religious beliefs—but we won't go into that. John, something living made those marks on that boy's neck. It's up to us to find out what it is."

"If—if there is anything, why hasn't it—or he—killed him?"

"That's the Bull Bayman part of it! He repeats the choking incident; possibly he has memory without intelligence.

"I think, John," he added after a pause, "that I'll show you something."

He unlocked a small safe, and paused again before he beckoned Dennison to his side. He had taken

from the safe an envelope, the seal of which he now broke.

"These are photographs — of 'dreams'," he said in a low tone; "I made them myself." He exposed them slowly, placing one behind another.

John staggered to a seat, nauseated, horror-stricken.

"I don't believe it!" he cried out suddenly.

"You wouldn't. But, John, if you want me to help Rob, you will have to do as I say. Your belief has nothing whatever to do with the case, you see. Now, first, I want the house quiet by 11; you're to sleep with Rob; Mollie's to sneak me into a room near him, without his knowing I'm there; then I want her to go and stay with her sister; I'd rather not have her in the house at all."

"No!" shuddered John, with an involuntary glance at the safe—a sarcophagus of nightmares.

"No lights, remember, and the doors unlocked. Now, I'll stop at your office and arrange about the films. Yes, as you say, if there's anything to make a film of. A corner of your basement will do for that; and I'll give you all the final instructions. Good-bye, John."

THE daily routine calmed Dennison, though he felt rather old, rather lacking in the cocksureness of his own judgment. Had it made him cruel to the boy?

"You don't know—you don't know!" Robert had said.

"You wouldn't," Frank Hedges had told him, when he had given his friend the lie. Well, tonight—if he must——

AT 11 o'clock, all had been arranged according to Dr. Hedges' instructions, and he himself waited in the room across the hall. Robert, who had worked that day with something like his old boyish enthusiasm, now lay sound asleep beside his father. The lights were out, but there was a switch near Dennison's left hand.

The streets grew more quiet; fewer vehicles passed.

Midnight tolled.

An even deeper quiet settled upon the house.

The quarter struck. Robert was still breathing deeply, softly, like a child. His father tried to believe that he was not listening for any other sound.

Two strokes announced the half-hour. His attention was gradually relaxing. There would be nothing tonight. Rob had felt so safe, to have him near; just as he himself had felt, to have Frank near.

Nonsense! He had always felt safe enough.

Those films—someone had fooled Frank, that was all.

And yet—he remembered the doctor's habit of accuracy; his extreme nicety of perception. Tomorrow he would ask him—but now he became aware that Robert was gradually drawing away from him. He still lay relaxed, not a muscle tense, and breathing easily, yet he was moving, or being moved, slowly away. Then, with a deep sigh, he rolled over on his back.

Nothing, after all, but an involuntary change of position.

But his breathing was getting shorter, thicker—he began to strangle, to moan—his whole body labored.

"Nightmare!" thought Dennison, and had almost reached out his hand to rouse the boy, when he remembered Hedges' command, "If he chokes I shall hear him. Don't move! Don't call!"

But suppose Frank had fallen asleep?

It was growing more terrible every second!

Dennison's head and hands were wet with the effort of holding still, when the sounds ceased—Robert lay as if dead.

His father could bear no more; he threw out his hands—they encountered the thick, rough, scaly neck of something bending over the bed. This he clutched desperately, shouting, "Frank! Help! Help!" For horrible claws snatched at his face, yet he dared not loose his hold.

"I'm—right here!" grated the doctor's voice, through set teeth, and Dennison knew that he, too, was struggling with the intruder; that they had attacked it simultaneously.

Was it to elude them both after all? It was a fearful antagonist, because of its strength, its sinuous, twisting motions, the repeated attacks on their hands and faces from its hideous claws—it was like some struggle of brute forces in the primordial darkness.

"There!" panted the doctor at last, "I've—got him—handcuffed! The light, John!

"Lie still, Bull Bayman, or I'll break your elbows!" he thundered; and then John turned the switch.

Staring half-dazed in the sudden light, he beheld his friend with one knee apparently poised in the air above the bed; his face swollen and set with the effort of holding something down; something that neither of them could see!

Rob's words raced through his mind, even while he again hurled himself forward to the doctor's assistance: "He came just the same—I couldn't see him——"

And he had jeered!

"Hold his shoulders down, while I hold his legs," directed Dr. Hedges.

"Listen, you! Are you Bull Bayman?"

There was not an instant's cessation in the thing's efforts to free itself.

"Listen, Bull Bayman! You're wrong about Robert Dennison—he never gave the other team your signals!"

There was no sign of understanding; only the continued struggle. They could feel and hear the harsh rattle of its breath, the heavily beating heart. As they held him, or it, firmly, but without too great a pressure, they felt the heart-beat becoming slower, the breath fluttering strangely.

The paroxysms grew weaker, then ceased. The shape lay inert.

"I don't believe he understands you," murmured Dennison.

"Yet he may be able to both hear and see us! As for his understanding—he is trying to leave this hulk even now! . . . In other words, he's dying!

"I gave him a shot of cyanide solution before you ever called," he added, "as soon as I felt those damned scales. I knew then he wasn't human."

"Cyanide!"

"Enough to kill a horse; or an alligator. Well—he's dead."

"Frank, for God's sake, look after Rob, won't you?"

"Rob's all right; didn't even wake up, though we had this fellow right across his knees all the time. Let him sleep it off."

Only a few hours ago Dennison had used those words himself; it seemed to him that he had forged through strange worlds since then. Dr. Hedges' nonchalance as he rolled "the fellow" to the floor and reached to the table for his first-aid kit roused a sort of dull resentment in Dennison's mind.

"We'll bind up our wounds," said Dr. Hedges, "and then—say,

John, this long scratch came mighty near the jugular!"

"It felt like it," muttered John.

"I've got one that just missed my left eye. We'll have a beautiful photo of our unseen friend in a few days, though."

"Good heavens, Frank!" exploded Dennison, "what do you want of a photo?"

"Want to see how it looks, of course!"

"Well, I don't! Feeling it was bad enough; let's chop it up and burn it in the furnace—it's a cool night."

"See here, John! These things belong to the hidden side of nature—but they exist, as I've told you, and they're very dangerous!"

"Well, you've killed it."

"Yes, and I'm going to study it. There must be some clue to its identity. They're rare, I grant you, but suppose they should increase on the earth?"

"Horrible!"

"Is the paint ready to smear on? And the stuff for the flashlight?"

"It's all in the back basement."

"Let's snake him down, then."

THE doctor's safe holds another dream-photo now; Dennison refuses to look at it, and Robert does not know of its existence, though the rest of the story has been told him in detail. He was informed that the body was burned in the furnace, which was true. The photo shows a man's body, with the legs and scales of some great reptile or lizard, and with the face protected by ridges of bone. It is a truly horrific object, yet Dr. Hedges declares that it shows a decided resemblance to Bull Bayman.

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*Here Are the Final Chapters of*

# The Bride of Osiris

## *By* OTIS ADELBERT KLINE

### *The Story So Far*

DORIS LEE is kidnaped and carried to the underground city of Karneter, under Chicago, there to become the bride of Mezzar Hashin, who, as Osiris, rules Karneter in true Egyptian fashion. Alan Buell and Dan Rafferty, trying to rescue Doris, are captured and led before Osiris for trial. Rafferty is assigned a post as electrician, and conspires with Alcibar, former High Priest but now a slave in the dungeons of Karneter, to slay Mezzar Hashin and the High Priest Sethral, and liberate Doris and Buell. Rafferty, trying to protect Delra, the vestal virgin (nee Mary Mooney), from one of the temple guards, is captured by Sethral's men and chained in the deepest dungeon in Karneter. Buell is sentenced to impersonate the Osiris N at the Festival of Re, when he will be put to death. Doris sees him enter the inner temple; and as a huge bird with body, wings and claws like those of an owl and head of a man, with the features of Alan Buell, emerges from the inner temple and disappears, Thansor, the priestess, tells her: "That was the *Ba*—the soul of the Osiris N."

### *CHAPTER 15*

### BEHIND THE SCENES

IN THE inky solitude of the deepest dungeon, Dan Rafferty, his feet braced against the slimy wall, was trying, as he had tried times without end, to break the heavy chain that held him. As day and night were alike to him and sleep came only with utter exhaustion, he had no idea how long he had been confined there. A few days, a week perhaps, but it seemed an age. True, an attendant had brought him food

This story began in WEIRD TALES for August

from time to time, but whether one, two or three meals a day, he had no means of knowing, for he was always hungry.

As he struggled grimly at his hopeless task the sound of a human voice, the first he had heard since his incarceration, came eerily to him from the darkness at his back. Someone was softly calling his name. Startled, he ceased his efforts and dropped, catlike, to his feet, turning as he dropped.

Again the unseen presence addressed him.

"Is that you, Dan Rafferty?"

"Sure, it's nobody else. And who the divvil may you be?"

"Hush! Not so loud!" He heard the unseen owner of the voice move stealthily closer. "I am Alcibar, the prisoner you befriended three days ago. Ever since I slipped my metal collar, thanks to your sharp file, I have been searching for you. Only today did I learn that you were confined here, so I have hastened to keep my promise."

"Did yez bring the file?"

"I did. Here, let me cut your collar for you. I believe that practise has made me quite adept."

Crouching there in the darkness, Dan waited stoically while the hard tool, stroke by stroke, cut into the metal that held him, nor did he more than wince on those occasions when it slipped and mingled his blood with the bits of metal that were falling on his neck.

After fully an hour of patient labor on the part of Alcibar and heroic endurance on the part of Rafferty, the stubborn metal yielded and Dan stood up. He shook himself like a beast of burden just freed from the yoke.

"Begorry, it feels good to have that damned thing off," he said, "even though most of me skin went with it. Where do we go from here?"

"We must make haste," replied Alcibar, "but we must also be cautious. First, remove your clothing. I have brought apparel more suitable than that you are wearing, for the work that lies before us."

Quickly slipping out of his slave garments, the Irishman donned the new clothing which Alcibar provided.

"They are the robes of a priest of Re," he explained. "I am similarly attired and have gone about the temple all day undetected, so they should prove an excellent disguise for you."

"Righto," said Dan. "Let's go. Do yez know where we can find me friend Buell?"

"If I mistake not, he is now on his way to the temple, where he will shortly re-enact the story of the death of Osiris."

"Yez mane he's going to be kilt?"

"Precisely. We go now to save him. Re grant that we will be in time! Here, give me your hand."

Guided by Alcibar, Dan hurried through numerous passageways and corridors. The ex-priest, it seemed, had an almost uncanny knowledge of every twist and turn and a marvelous sense of direction. Presently they mounted a dark stairway, then another, faintly lighted, and still another in which they could see quite plainly.

"Pull your cowl over your head," admonished Alcibar. "We will have to pass many guards now, and the way is better lighted farther on."

They encountered two guards at the foot of the next stairway and passed them unchallenged. More guards and several priests were met and passed on the next level with the same result.

At the second basement level, the fifth above the dungeon from which they had come, Rafferty's companion led him away from a stairway and through a gigantic storeroom piled with boxes, bales and casks.

"Our progress from now on," he said, "will be through a secret way

known only to Mezzar Hashin, Sethral and myself. It is intended solely for the use of the Osiris and the High Priest of Re."

Walking behind a pile of boxes he stepped before a blank wall, apparently of solid masonry, reached upward to a chink above his head, inserted his finger and pushed. To the astonishment of Rafferty, a cunningly concealed door, made of metal and faced with stone that exactly matched the stone around it, swung open. Behind it was a spiral, metal stairway.

The two men entered the aperture. Then Alcibar pulled the door shut after him and led the way up the steps.

AFTER climbing for some distance they arrived at a square landing, from which two narrow passageways branched in opposite directions. Hearing footsteps above him, Dan judged that they were just beneath one of the floors of the temple. They took the passageway which led to the right and, following it for some distance, arrived at the foot of a short, straight stairway.

Turning, the ex-priest placed his hand on Dan's arm.

"From now on," he said, "we must preserve absolute quiet. The slightest sound may mean sudden death for both of us."

He mounted the steps with catlike tread and Dan followed, scarcely permitting himself to breathe. At the top, Alcibar cautiously raised a trap-door and peered through the orifice. Then he pushed it up silently and stepped to the floor above, beckoning Rafferty to follow. They were in a narrow, dimly lighted space between a paneled wall and a thick, yellow curtain.

Alcibar lowered the trap-door once more, tiptoed to the end of the curtain, and peered around it.

"All is well so far," he whispered. He next applied his single eye to a tiny hole in the paneled wall. "Come," he said. "I will show you one of your friends."

Dan looked through the hole. A semicircle of yellow-robed priests knelt before the altar, which was slightly to the left of his line of vision, while Sethral walked back and forth before it, muttering incantations and throwing incense in the flames. At his right he saw the huge image of Isis, the lighting switches of which he had twice repaired. A priest of Re was operating them. In the hall beyond he saw a vast crowd of people, and quite near him a beautiful girl in a blue-canopied litter, surrounded by blue-garbed virgins, priestesses and giant Amazonian guards.

"Don't see anybody I know," he said.

"The girl beneath the blue canopy. Do you not know her? She is the fiancée of your friend, Alan Buell."

"Begorry, is that Doris Lee? Sure and the bye picked himself a peach! If I'd nivver seen Mary Mooney I'd call her the prettiest girl I ivver clapped eyes on."

As Dan turned away from the opening a hollow, rhythmic booming sounded above their heads.

"Your friend has arrived at the temple gates," said Alcibar. "The great drum beats the welcome of Re to the Osiris N."

While Alcibar talked he lifted the lid of a huge, gilded chest that stood in one corner, searched among its contents for a moment, and then drew forth a gaudy yellow robe similar to that worn by the High Priest. Removing his plain robe, he donned it. From another section of the chest he took two weapons that made Dan Rafferty dance with delight. They were short clubs, each weighted at one end with a ball of iron the size of a lemon and ringed with a leather wrist-loop at the other end.

"Faith, that's a pretty pair of shillalahs," said Dan.

Alcibar flung his old robe into the chest and closed the lid. Then he handed one of the clubs to Dan.

The beating of the great drum was suddenly stilled, and the plaintive strains of Oriental music burst forth from somewhere behind them.

"The dance begins," said Alcibar. "If you will look out the spy-hole you may be able to see Delra."

Dan looked.

"The dirty divvils!" he exclaimed. "Oh, the dirty, cowardly divvils! Would yez look at that poor little white back all covered with bloody welts. If I ivver get me two hands on that High Priest I'll——"

"Stop!" The single eye of the former High Priest regarded him sternly. "Remember, when the time comes, the life of Sethral belongs to me. It is I who have suffered most at his hands."

"In that case," replied Dan, "here's wishin' yez luck, and I hope yez break ivvery bone in his body."

"If things work out as planned I can at least guarantee that he will never see the light of another day. Better let me at the spy-hole now. It will soon be time for our part in the ceremony."

Chafing with impatience, Dan leaned against the paneled wall while his companion kept watch. Presently the music changed.

"Is Mary—I mane Delra, out there yet?"

"No, she has gone with the rest of the dancers, but have no fear. I will know where to find her when the time comes."

Rafferty fidgeted uneasily as he stood listening to the sounds from without. This waiting jarred on his nerves. Here he was, a fighting, two-fisted Irishman with a perfectly good club in his hands, and only a few feet from him were a score of polls he would dearly love to crack. He took a turn up and down the narrow space, hefting the weapon, testing its balance, and swinging, now and then, at an imaginary enemy. Tiring of this amusement at length, he stopped and peered around the heavy yellow curtain. Beyond it he saw a small, empty room, across the opposite side of which was stretched another similar curtain. A door in the wall at his right was closed.

Presently an odd, clattering noise came from the direction of the altar. Alcibar bounded noiselessly past him and crouched beside the door, his club gripped in his right hand.

"Get behind the curtain," he said, "and make not the slightest sound or movement until I call to you. The time for action has come."

## *CHAPTER 16*

## THE BRIDE OF OSIRIS

When Doris Lee saw the unearthly thing that fluttered upward from the room which Buell had entered, she did not, of course, give credence to the statement of the fat priestess that it was the soul of Alan Buell. She believed that the vaunted magic of the Egyptian priests was legerdemain, pure and simple, even though they sometimes appeared to work miracles. What she really feared was that the harpylike creature *symbolized* the flight of his soul—in short, that he had really been slain. Her hand stole to the keen dagger beneath her girdle and rested there uncertainly for a moment. No. She would wait. She must make sure that all hope was lost before plunging alone into the great, dark beyond.

With fear-filled eyes she watched the preparations for the next part of the ceremony. A group of soldiers in suits and helmets of crocodile leather rushed in through a side door in disorderly array, shouting hoarsely and waving their simitars aloft. Her instructress had taught her to know

the various masks, uniforms and insignia, and she recognized them as followers of Set, the crocodile god, mortal enemy of Osiris. Ten of their number carried a crucible of molten lead with charcoal blazing beneath it. Six more bore a huge gilded chest of strange design. On each side were four planes, slanting upward toward the front. A small propeller and rudder were attached to the rear.

The crucible was placed before the altar. The chest was laid directly in front of it. Still shouting and brandishing their weapons, the leather-clad soldiers danced about it.

A flash of yellow at the right of the altar caught her eye. It was the High Priest, still wearing the crocodile mask and gnashing the teeth as he moved the hideous muzzle from side to side. Behind him he dragged a limp, white-clad form.

At sight of the priest the soldiers redoubled their cries and several of their number rushed up the steps to meet him. They picked up the white-clad body and carried it toward the chest while two of their comrades removed the massive lid.

Was it the body of Buell? The features were still covered with the black mask, but she strove for a view of the disk that fronted the head-piece. As four men raised the body, preparatory to placing it in the chest, the head fell back and she saw a black "N" standing out boldly on the disk. The dancing figures swam mistily before her eyes. She tried to pluck the dagger from her girdle, but, weakened and half fainting as she was, she was scarcely able to move her hand. She must wait—wait until strength returned.

When her vision cleared once more the followers of Set were fastening the lid and sealing it with the molten lead. This task completed, they swung the chest to their shoulders and, led by the High Priest, carried it out of the room, still shouting and brandishing their weapons. A group of temple slaves removed the sizzling crucible.

Thansor, her fat instructress, looked up with a gloating expression on her moonlike face.

"The chest will now be shot into the lake," she said, "symbolizing the hurling of the chest containing the body of Osiris into the Nile after Set and his followers had betrayed him."

Too numb with horror to reply, Doris leaned back in her palanquin with half-closed eyes and prayed for strength.

When the last leather-clad figure had disappeared through the doorway, the followers of Osiris set up an unearthly wailing that was joined in by her own women. The moon-faced priestess again addressed Doris.

"Weep," she said. "Weep for the departed Osiris N. It is in the ritual that Isis should so weep."

Doris looked down at her dully.

"I can not," she replied, and turned her head away.

The cries of the mourners were interrupted by a shout from behind her palanquin. Then, hurtling past her she saw the hawk-masked Horus. At his heels a horde of men in jackets that bristled with hawk feathers followed, shouting: "Where is Set? Where is the cowardly assassin of our lord, Osiris?"

"Who seeks Set?" The High Priest, still wearing the crocodile mask, appeared in the doorway and advanced threateningly, followed by the leather-clad soldiers.

"Horus, son of Osiris. Horus, the avenger, seeks the slayer of his father."

There followed a realistic sham battle between the followers of Set and those of Horus. Presently the leather-clad men were put to flight and the High Priest was brought, manacled, before the palanquin of Isis.

It was here that Doris' part in the

ritual commenced, but she sat, gazing dully at the prisoner until the fat priestess prompted her. Then she repeated the lines automatically, like one in a dream.

"Unlock the fetters," whispered the priestess, handing her a key.

Like a person in a trance, she rose, stepped down from the palanquin, and released the High Priest. Things took the semblance of a vivid, terrifying dream. She saw Horus, shouting—gnashing his great hawk bill as if enraged by her action. Then he rushed up to her, tore the diadem from her head, and hurled it to the floor.

From behind her now came Thoth of the ibis mask. In his hands he carried a mask shaped like a cow's head—the mask of the cow goddess, Athor. Doris' knees were trembling weakly as he slipped the thing over her head.

Through the slits in the stuffy mask she saw the High Priest run up the steps to the right of the altar and disappear. The thunderous voice of the great temple drum resounded through the place, and again the lights flashed on the giant image of Osiris. A deafening shout went up from the multitude.

"Welcome, O son of Re! Thrice welcome, mighty Osiris, Lord of Karneter!"

All about her, people were prostrating themselves, their faces toward the altar. Then she saw a figure, clad in the white garments of Osiris, descending the steps. Instead of a black mask and diadem, the shoulders were crowned with the horned mask of the bull, Apis.

The figure advanced toward her, reached for a hand and clasped hers. Came a shout from the kneeling multitude.

"Hail to Isis, Bride of Osiris and co-ruler of Karneter!"

At the shock of these words she awakened as from a dream. Strength came to her—the strength of desperation. Wrenching her hand free, she tore the keen dagger from her girdle and plunged it into her bosom.

## *CHAPTER 17*

## IN THE MOST HOLY PLACE

ALTHOUGH Buell appeared passive to the onlookers as he went through his part of the ritual, observing every detail with the utmost nicety, his nerves were taut as bowstrings, his every faculty alert. At some point in the ceremonies lurked death, waiting to leap out at him—carry him into the black void of eternity. For Doris' sake as well as for his own, he must be ready to avoid the hand of the grim reaper until he had accomplished his purpose—the death of Mezzar Hashin.

As he stood before the altar, mirroring the motions of Hashin in accordance with the teachings of Odd, he tried to devise a way to end the life of his enemy. He thought of the crook, but no. It was too light. It might stun yet not kill. He would leap forward and throttle him. But again, no. It took time to throttle a man, and the guards would be upon him in an instant.

They mounted the steps at the right of the altar and entered a room across two ends of which were stretched heavy yellow curtains. The High Priest, still wearing the crocodile mask, awaited them. This was better. Here there would be but two men to fight. Outside there were thousands. The High Priest spoke.

"The Osiris and the Osiris N will kneel with their backs to the blazing disk that they may receive the *Sa*, the divine blessing of Re."

Both men knelt with their backs to the priest. As he bent forward, Buell twisted his black mask slightly to the right, that he might watch the movements of the priest, for he had seen his hand steal beneath his

robe. Perhaps it concealed a deadly weapon.

As he watched from the corner of his eye his suspicions were confirmed, for the High Priest, while mumbling some incoherent incantations, drew an iron-headed mace from beneath his yellow robe and raised it to strike. When the blow fell he threw himself to one side, then leaped to his feet and swung for where he judged the priest's jaw to be beneath the crocodile mask.

To his intense surprize a powerful hand reached out from behind the curtain and caught his arm, checking the blow and whirling him about. The owner of the hand spoke softly.

"Not so fast, me bye. Not so fast. Would yez punch a friend in the face?"

"Dan Rafferty!" he exclaimed. "How in blazes did you get here?"

"Shush. Not so loud. Yez'll have the army down on us like a swarm av bees. Now that Hashin's dead——"

"What?"

He turned and saw, for the first time, that the blow had fallen on the head of Mezzar Hashin, who was sprawled on the floor with a tiny stream of blood trickling from the back of his head. The priest had dragged something from beyond the farther curtain. It was a cage in which a great horned owl sat, blinking in the unaccustomed glare of light.

Opening the door of the cage, the priest removed the bird, avoided a vicious peck from its sharp, curved beak, and quickly slipped a mask over its head, fastening it with tough strands of thin, barely visible thread, which he wound about the body just beneath the wings. With a start of surprize, Buell saw that the mask was a hideously contorted likeness of his own face.

The mask in place, the priest pulled a cord that opened a panel in the ceiling of the small room, and tossed the bird up through it.

Rafferty caught at his sleeve and took the arm of Alan.

"Buell," he said, "I want you to meet up wid me friend, Alcibar. Alcie, shake hands wid Mr. Buell. Take off yer masks so yez'll know what each other looks like."

The former High Priest removed his mask, and Buell his. They shook hands gravely. Buell scanned the hideous, mutilated features.

"I should rather meet you any day than Sethral," he said.

"Sethral will never slay another Osiris N," replied Alcibar. "Behold."

He lifted the yellow curtain. The body of the High Priest of Re was huddled on the floor behind it. A bloody dent in the right temple showed how he had died.

"Alcie croaked him as soon as he stuck his head in the door," said Dan. "It was wan peach of a wallop."

The ex-priest dropped the curtain.

"We must go on with the ceremony," he said. "If there is a break, someone may suspect that all is not well. Here, help me with this carcass."

From a pocket of his gown he took tape and gauze, with which he bound the bleeding wound in the head of Hashin, while Rafferty held it up. Then, taking Buell's mask and headdress, he placed them on the head of the corpse, donned his own mask, and dragged the body from the room.

"A slick bye, Alcie," said Dan when he was gone. "Used to be High Priest himself. Knows all the ropes."

"He isn't much for looks," replied Buell, "but he seems to be a square shooter."

"It was Hashin spoiled his looks and Sethral put him up to it," explained Dan. "That's how it happens that he's on our side. They did him dirt and they've paid the penalty, but he ain't through yet. He told me there's

several more lubbers he wants to get before he checks out. Says he's livin' only for revenge, but he'll help us get out of this place before he settles wid the other bozos."

"That's generous of him," answered Buell.

"It ain't so much generosity. He made a bargain wid me, and he's a man of his word. I got him out of the dungeon. Now he's going to try to get us out of Karneter."

He drew back the yellow curtain and stepped behind it. Presently he called softly to Buell.

"Come here, lad," he said, "and take a peek at the grand funeral they're givin' for yez."

Peering through the spy-hole, Buell saw the leather-clad soldiers place the body of Hashin in the chest, nail down the lid, and seal it with molten lead. He turned his gaze in the direction of Doris and noticed that her hand stole toward her girdle, then dropped listlessly. How pale she looked, and how utterly forlorn! If only he might reveal the truth to her! But there was no way. The ceremony must be concluded.

He and Rafferty took turns watching the battle between the followers of Set and those of Horus, and the ceremonies that followed. Shortly after his fetters had been unlocked by Doris, Alcibar rushed into the room. Flinging back the lid of the gilded chest in the corner, he took therefrom a mask like the shaggy head of a bull.

"You are now to wear this mask of the bull, Apis," he said. "Stand on the topmost step until the people have welcomed you. Then walk down and take the hand of Isis. Stand with her until they have proclaimed her the Bride of Osiris. At that point you are supposed to unmask. To do so, however, would be fatal, as the people would tear you, limb from limb. Instead you must lead her back up the steps as quickly as possible. It may be that I can then find a way of escape for you."

Straightening his heavy bull mask, Buell stepped out in full view of the people. Pausing for a moment to receive their adulation, he advanced to where Doris stood and took her hand. At the words: "Hail to Isis, Bride of Osiris and co-ruler of Karneter," he started to lead her back toward the altar in accordance with their prearranged plan. It was then that she twisted her hand free, whipped out the dagger and plunged it into her breast. He leaped forward, caught her wrist in a grip of steel, and forced it back, but the point of the dagger was wet with her blood. She slumped limply into his arms.

With an agonized cry, he tore the mask of Athor from her head. Her eyes were closed, her nostrils moving slightly. A mixed crowd had gathered closely around them. Thoth and Horus drove them back.

"Doris," he cried, "it is I, Alan, come to save you."

She opened her eyes slowly—looked up at the ugly bull mask.

"Lies!" she said. "Lies! Lies!"

Thoth, however, was not so incredulous. He knew the sound of Hashin's voice so well that Alan's first word had aroused his suspicion. Stepping quickly behind him, he jerked off the mask of Apis.

"A usurper!" he shouted. "It is the Osiris N! Slay him!"

Instantly Buell faced a ring of bared simitars and couched spears. Horus whipped out his keen blade and presented it at Buell's heart.

"Surrender!" he rasped. "Surrender or die!"

### *CHAPTER 18*

### THE VENGEANCE OF ALCIBAR

As he stood there in the midst of the hostile multitude holding the half-fainting Doris and expecting instant death, Buell heard two sounds

simultaneously—the twang of a bowstring and an encouraging shout from Rafferty.

Horus, with an arrow through his throat, uttered a choking cry and slumped forward. Buell wrenched the simitar from his death-grip and, supporting Doris with his left arm, laid about him with the keen weapon. The crowd drew back a little at his furious onslaught. Then a giant form bore down on him—the huge commander of the guards of Osiris. He swung his six-foot simitar in a blow that would have sheared off Buell's head as easily as a blade of grass. Alan ducked, leaped forward, and ran him through the middle. As he crashed back on those behind him, Buell caught a glimpse of two figures behind the altar. A vestal virgin and a yellow-robed priest were firing arrows into the crowd as fast as they could fit them to the bowstrings. Another figure, also attired as a priest of Re, was smashing through the crowd toward him, cracking heads and arms to right and left as he swung two heavy maces with flail-like blows.

In another instant Buell and Rafferty were fighting side by side with Doris between them, supported by the arm of the former.

The arrows continued to take deadly toll of those around them as they backed toward the altar. Time and again the lives of one or the other were saved by the swift shafts of Delra or Alcibar, who had turned the toy weapons of the vestal virgins to good advantage.

At length they made the steps. Here Buell and Rafferty held the crowd at bay while Delra helped Doris to the temporary safety of the Holy Place.

Alcibar, his arrows gone, seized the brazier of burning incense and hurled it in the faces of the attackers, momentarily blinding those who stood in front.

"Come quickly," he called. "Follow me."

As they ran into the room behind the blazing disk, several heavy spears struck around them. Alcibar slammed the door and slid the bolt in place. Delra was binding the wound in Doris' breast, a wound that was not deep because of the quick intervention of Buell.

Raising the heavy curtain, the ex-priest opened the trap-door behind it.

"Down the steps, all of you!" he cried. "There is not a moment to lose. The soldiers may be deterred for a time by fear of the Holy Place, but it will not be for long."

Securing his simitar to his wrist by its tasseled cord, Buell helped Doris down the steps. Rafferty followed with Delra, and Alcibar came after them, pausing only to close and bolt the trap-door. He called to Buell.

"Turn to the left. I will lead the way in a moment."

They hurried down the dimly lighted passageway as directed. Presently Alcibar caught up with them, then took the lead.

"We are now beneath the temple gardens," he said. "From here we pass directly under the city."

They pressed forward in silence. Buell's numerous wounds, unnoticed until now in the heat of battle, smarted painfully. His once beautiful silk costume hung on him in shreds. Alcibar had apparently come through unscathed, though his magnificent robes were bedraggled and there was a bloodstain on his sleeve. Doris' self-inflicted wound had left a crimson stain on the breast of her pale blue garment. Like Alcibar, Delra was unwounded in the recent encounter, but her scant dancing costume revealed the welts she had received from the whip, some of which had been reopened by her exertions. Swinging along beside her with her slender arm in his huge left

hand and the two maces dangling from his right, Dan Rafferty proudly carried the marks of battle. His yellow robe was full of rents and covered with bloodstains, and the cowl had been completely torn away. A simitar-cut above his left eyebrow gave him a rather ferocious expression. When they had traveled for a considerable distance he called to Alcibar.

"Where the divvil is that boat yez were tellin' me about, Alcie? Is it in Port Said or Honolulu?"

"About a half-mile farther on. We should be there in a few minutes."

Faintly at first, but gradually growing more distinct, came the sound of voices and footsteps in the passageway behind them.

"They're coming," called Buell. "Hurry ahead, all of you. I'll be the the rear-guard."

"Now be the bones of St. Patrick's toe, where do yez get that stuff?" replied Rafferty indignantly. "I'll be the rear-guard."

"No time for argument. We'll guard the rear together. The girls can go forward with Alcibar."

Buell clutched his simitar, Rafferty took a mace in each hand, and they fell back about fifty feet behind the others. The expected attack came a few minutes later. Fortunately for the pursued, the pursuers were the giant guards of Osiris, who fought at a disadvantage in the low, narrow passageway, as they could only come forward one at a time and all had to stoop to avoid the arched ceiling.

Rafferty beat down the guard of the first man with a mace and Buell thrust him through the throat. The next man fought more warily, but finally succumbed to a blow from an iron shillalah, falling across the body of his companion. The third guard carried a spear. He made a lunge at Rafferty, but the Irishman seized the weapon and jerked him forward so that he stumbled across the bodies of the other two. Again Buell's simitar drank blood.

"Come on," said Dan. "They'll have to pull thim three hulks out av the way before they can get through now."

They hurried forward once more and presently saw Alcibar and the two girls waiting for them.

"Go on. What're yez waitin' for?" asked Dan.

"We're waiting for you," replied Alcibar. "I now have a way of stopping further pursuit, for a time at least."

He reached up to a crack in the masonry and thrust his finger within it. There was a hum of hidden motors, and a heavy section of wall dropped into the passageway behind them just as the shouts of their pursuers began to grow audible again.

"Another was opened on the other side which leads into a passageway that circles and ends in a blank wall about a half-mile back," explained the ex-priest. "It is a clever thing, and was devised by Mezzar Hashin the Second when he improved the original tunnel built by his father. We have only a short distance to go now."

THE tunnel ended at the foot of a flight of narrow steps. Ascending these, they emerged in a small room, one end of which was paneled with thick glass in the center of which a metal door was set.

The ex-priest opened this door, which Buell noticed was rimmed with rubber gaskets. The room beyond, much larger than the first one, was also of steel, paneled on two sides with thick glass. A cigar-shaped boat, evidently a submarine, for it was equipped with vertical and horizontal rudders, planes, and a screw propeller, stood on a pair of high skids that slanted downward toward an arched glass panel, and Buell saw a

small fish swim down into the circle of light and look inquiringly at them, its gills moving slowly, its scales glistening in the artificial light.

Alcibar closed and fastened the gasketed door.

"Like his distinguished forebears, Mezzar Hashin the Fourth thought of many things," he said. "Foreseeing that Karneter might some day be discovered and perhaps captured, he planned a mode of escape, and with it a way to destroy the conquering hosts. You now behold the result of his forethought."

He climbed the iron ladder which led to the top of the submarine. Leaning forward, he worked at a catch for a moment and swung back a heavy, circular door. Then he disappeared inside the craft. A short time after there was a throbbing hum from inside the boat and the propeller blade cut the air with a roar like that of an airplane.

The ex-priest's head appeared at the top of the ladder.

"Come," he shouted, his voice barely audible above the roar of the whirling blade.

Buell helped Doris up the ladder and Rafferty followed with Delra. Descending a small stairway that led down from the round hatch, they found themselves in a snug cabin with a round window of heavy glass on each side. At the front end of the cabin, steps led up to the steersman's seat, which was under a rounded dome, also paneled with thick glass.

"Begorry, this seems like home," said Dan. "Yez gave me the straight dope, Alcie old kid."

"Do you think you can run her?"

"Just show me what thim levers are for and I'll run her clear to Halifax. I didn't spend four years on a submarine for nothing."

Taking Dan aloft, the ex-priest explained the uses of the various wheels, buttons and levers. Then he descended. He motioned to Buell.

"Everything is in readiness now," he said. "You must come up with me and close the hatch from the inside."

"Why, aren't you going with us?" asked Buell in surprize.

"No. My place is here in Karneter, and here I remain. The upper world offers no inducements to me."

"But you will surely be killed."

"That is my lookout. Come."

When they reached the round hatchway, Alcibar stepped over to the top of the iron ladder. He pointed to two long levers that hung down from the ceiling just above his head.

"This lever," he said, "opens the glass panel at the end of the skids and shoots the submarine out into the lake as soon as the room is half filled with water. This one," indicating the other, "sets off six enormous bombs that will blast every pane of glass between the lake and the doomed city." Suddenly he pointed toward the glass panel in the side of the room. Buell looked, and saw that a crowd of armed men was rushing toward them.

"They come," cried Alcibar, "the minions of Hashin, yelping like hounds after a fox, but this time the fox will turn on them—this time the hounds will die with their victim."

He pulled back the first lever. The panel at the end of the skids moved upward and Buell saw that the room was filling rapidly.

"Fasten the hatch," shouted Alcibar.

Buell grabbed for his legs, intending to draw him within the submarine before he could touch the deadly second lever, but the ex-priest was too quick for him. Leaping aloft, he threw his full weight on it and a terrific concussion shook the room. A wall of yellow water shot past the

*(Continued on page 575)*

## WEIRD STORY REPRINT

# *The Old Nurse's Story*

### *By* MRS. GASKELL

YOU know, my dears, that your mother was an orphan, and an only child; and I dare say you have heard that your grandfather was a clergyman up in Westmoreland, where I come from. I was just a girl in the village school, when one day your grandmother came in to ask the mistress if there was any scholar there who would do for a nurse-maid; and mighty proud I was, I can tell ye, when the mistress called me up, and spoke to my being a good girl at my needle, and a steady, honest girl, and one whose parents were very respectable, though they might be poor. I thought I should like nothing better than to serve the pretty young lady, who was blushing as deep as I was, as she spoke of the coming baby, and what I should have to do with it. However, I see you don't care so much for this part of my story, as for what you think is to come, so I'll tell you at once.

I was engaged and settled at the parsonage before Miss Rosamond (that was the baby, who is now your mother) was born. To be sure, I had little enough to do with her when she came, for she was never out of her mother's arms, and slept by her all night long; and proud enough was I sometimes when missis trusted her to me. She took after her mother, who was a lady born; a Miss Furnivall, a granddaughter of Lord Furnivall's, in Northumberland. I believe she had neither brother nor sister, and had been brought up in my lord's family till she had married your grandfather, who was just a curate, son to a shopkeeper in Carlisle—but a clever, fine gentleman as ever was—and one who was a right-down hard worker in his parish, which was very wide, and scattered all abroad over the Westmoreland Fells. When your mother, little Miss Rosamond, was about four or five years old, both her parents died in a fortnight—one after the other. Ah! that was a sad time. My pretty young mistress and me was looking for another baby, when my master came home from one of his long rides, wet and tired, and took the fever he died of; and then she never held up her head again, but just lived to see her dead baby, and have it laid on her breast, before she sighed away her life. My mistress had asked me, on her death-bed, never to leave Miss Rosamond; but if she had never spoken a word, I would have gone with the little child to the end of the world.

The next thing, and before we had well stilled our sobs, the executors and guardians came to settle the affairs. They were my poor young mistress's own cousin, Lord Furnivall, and Mr. Esthwaite, my master's brother, a shopkeeper in Manchester; not so well-to-do then as he was afterward, and with a large family rising about him. Well! I don't know if it were their settling, or because of a letter my mistress wrote on her death-bed to her cousin, my lord; but somehow it was settled that Miss Rosamond and me were to go to Furnivall Manor House, in Northum-

berland, and my lord spoke as if it had been her mother's wish that she should live with his family, and as if he had no objections, for that one or two more or less could make no difference in so grand a household. So, though that was not the way in which I should have wished the coming of my bright and pretty pet to have been looked at—who was like a sunbeam in any family, be it never so grand—I was well pleased that all the folks in the Dale should stare and admire, when they heard I was going to be young lady's maid at my Lord Furnivall's at Furnivall Manor.

But I made a mistake in thinking we were to go and live where my lord did. It turned out that the family had left Furnivall Manor House fifty years or more. I could not hear that my poor young mistress had ever been there, though she had been brought up in the family; and I was sorry for that, for I should have liked Miss Rosamond's youth to have passed where her mother's had been.

My lord's gentleman, from whom I asked as many questions as I durst, said that the Manor House was at the foot of the Cumberland Fells, and a very grand place; that an old Miss Furnivall, a great-aunt of my lord's, lived there, with only a few servants; but that it was a very healthy place, and my lord had thought that it would suit Miss Rosamond very well for a few years, and that her being there might amuse his old aunt.

I was bidden by my lord to have Miss Rosamond's things ready by a certain day. He was a stern, proud man, as they say all the Lords Furnivall were; and he never spoke a word more than was necessary. Folk did say he had loved my young mistress; but that, because she knew that his father would object, she would never listen to him, and married Mr. Esthwaite; but I don't know. He never married, at any rate. He sent his gentleman with us to the Manor House, telling him to join him at Newcastle that same evening; so there was no great length of time for him to make us known to all the strangers before he, too, shook us off; and we were left, two lonely young things (I was not eighteen) in the great old Manor House.

It seems like yesterday that we drove there. We had left our own dear parsonage very early, and we had both cried as if our hearts would break, though we were traveling in my lord's carriage, which I thought so much of once. And now it was long past noon on a September day, and we stopped to change horses for the last time at a little smoky town, all full of colliers and miners. Miss Rosamond had fallen asleep, but Mr. Henry told me to waken her, that she might see the park and the Manor House as we drove up. I thought it rather a pity; but I did what he bade me, for fear he should complain of me to my lord. We had left all signs of a town, or even a village, and were then inside the gates of a large wild park—not like the parks here in the south, but with rocks, and the noise of running water, and gnarled thorn-trees, and old oaks, all white and peeled with age.

The road went up about two miles, and then we saw a great and stately house, with many trees close around it, so close that in some places their branches dragged against the walls when the wind blew; and some hung broken down; for no one seemed to take much charge of the place. Only in front of the house all was clear. The great oval drive was without a weed; and neither tree nor creeper was allowed to grow over the long, many-windowed front; at both sides of which a wing projected, which were each the ends of other side fronts; for the house, although it was so desolate, was even grander than I expected. Behind it rose the

Fells, which seemed unenclosed and bare enough; and on the left hand of the house, as you stood facing it, was a little, old-fashioned flower-garden, as I found out afterward. A door opened out upon it from the west front; it had been scooped out of the thick, dark wood for some old Lady Furnivall; but the branches of the great forest-trees had grown and overshadowed it again, and there were very few flowers that would live there at that time.

When we drove up to the great front entrance, and went into the hall, I thought we should be lost—it was so large, and vast, and grand. There was a chandelier all of bronze, hung down from the middle of the ceiling; and I had never seen one before, and looked at it all in amaze. Then, at one end of the hall, was a great fireplace, as large as the sides of the houses in my country, with massy andirons and dogs to hold the wood; and by it were heavy, old-fashioned sofas. At the opposite end of the hall, to the left as you went in —on the western side—was an organ built into the wall, and so large that it filled up the best part of that end. Beyond it, on the same side, was a door; and opposite, on each side of the fireplace, were also doors leading to the east front; but those I never went through as long as I stayed in the house, so I can't tell you what lay beyond.

The afternoon was closing in, and the hall, which had no fire lighted in it, looked dark and gloomy, but we did not stay there a moment. The old servant, who had opened the door for us, bowed to Mr. Henry, and took us in through the door at the further side of the great organ, and led us through several smaller halls and passages into the west drawing room, where he said that Miss Furnivall was sitting. Poor little Miss Rosamond held very tight to me, as if she were scared and lost in that great place; and as for myself, I was not much better. The west drawing room was very cheerful-looking, with a warm fire in it, and plenty of good, comfortable furniture about.

Miss Furnivall was an old lady not far from eighty, I should think, but I do not know. She was thin and tall, and had a face as full of fine wrinkles as if they had been drawn all over it with a needle's point. Her eyes were very watchful, to make up, I suppose, for her being so deaf as to be obliged to use a trumpet. Sitting with her, working at the same great piece of tapestry, was Mrs. Stark, her maid and companion, and almost as old as she was. She had lived with Miss Furnivall ever since they both were young, and now she seemed more like a friend than a servant; she looked so cold, and gray, and stony, as if she had never loved or cared for anyone; and I don't suppose she did care for anyone, except her mistress; and, owing to the great deafness of the latter, Mrs. Stark treated her very much as if she were a child. Mr. Henry gave some message from my lord, and then he bowed good-bye to us all, and left us standing there, being looked at by the two old ladies through their spectacles.

I was right glad when they rung for the old footman who had shown us in at first, and told him to take us to our rooms. So we went out of that great drawing room, and into another sitting room, and out of that, and then up a great flight of stairs, and along a broad gallery—which was something like a library, having books all down one side, and windows and writing-tables all down the other —till we came to our rooms, which I was not sorry to hear were just over the kitchens; for I began to think I should be lost in that wilderness of a house. There was an old nursery, that had been used for all the little

lords and ladies long ago, with a pleasant fire burning in the grate, and the kettle boiling on the hob, and tea-things spread out on the table; and out of that room was the night-nursery, with a little crib for Miss Rosamond close to my bed. And old James called up Dorothy, his wife, to bid us welcome; and both he and she were so hospitable and kind, that by-and-by Miss Rosamond and me felt quite at home; and by the time tea was over, she was sitting on Dorothy's knee, and chattering away as fast as her little tongue could go.

I soon found out that Dorothy was from Westmoreland, and that bound her and me together, as it were; and I would never wish to meet with kinder people than were old James and his wife. James had lived pretty nearly all his life in my lord's family, and thought there was no one so grand as they. He even looked down a little on his wife; because, till he had married her, she had never lived in any but a farmer's household. But he was very fond of her, as well he might be. They had one servant under them, to do all the rough work. Agnes they called her; and she and me, and James and Dorothy, with Miss Furnivall and Mrs. Stark, made up the family; always remembering my sweet little Miss Rosamond! I used to wonder what they had done before she came, they thought so much of her now. Kitchen and drawing room, it was all the same. The hard, sad Miss Furnivall, and the cold Mrs. Stark, looked pleased when she came fluttering in like a bird, playing and pranking hither and thither, with a continual murmur, and pretty prattle of gladness. I am sure, they were sorry many a time when she flitted away into the kitchen, though they were too proud to ask her to stay with them, and were a little surprized at her taste; though to be sure, as Mrs. Stark said, it was not to be wondered at, remembering what stock her father had come of.

The great, old rambling house was a famous place for little Miss Rosamond. She made expeditions all over it, with me at her heels; all, except the east wing, which was never opened, and whither we never thought of going. But in the western and northern part was many a pleasant room; full of things that were curiosities to us, though they might not have been to people who had seen more. The windows were darkened by the sweeping boughs of the trees, and the ivy which had overgrown them; but, in the green gloom, we could manage to see old china jars and carved ivory boxes, and great heavy books, and, above all, the old pictures!

Once, I remember, my darling would have Dorothy go with us to tell us who they all were; for they were all portraits of some of my lord's family, though Dorothy could not tell us the names of every one. We had gone through most of the rooms, when we came to the old state drawing room over the hall, and there was a picture of Miss Furnivall; or, as she was called in those days, Miss Grace, for she was the younger sister. Such a beauty she must have been! but with such a set, proud look, and such scorn looking out of her handsome eyes, with her eyebrows just a little raised, as if she wondered how anyone could have the impertinence to look at her, and her lip curled at us, as we stood there gazing. She had a dress on, the like of which I had never seen before, but it was all the fashion when she was young: a hat of some soft white stuff like beaver, pulled a little over her brows, and a beautiful plume of feathers sweeping round it on one side; and her gown of blue satin was open in front to a quilted white stomacher.

"Well, to be sure!" said I, when I had gazed my fill. "Flesh is grass,

they do say; but who would have thought that Miss Furnivall had been such an out-an-out beauty, to see her now?''

''Yes,'' said Dorothy. ''Folks change sadly. But if what my master's father used to say was true, Miss Furnivall, the elder sister, was handsomer than Miss Grace. Her picture is here somewhere; but, if I show it you, you must never let on, even to James, that you have seen it. Can the little lady hold her tongue, think you?'' asked she.

I was not so sure, for she was such a little sweet, bold, open-spoken child, so I set her to hide herself; and then I helped Dorothy to turn a great picture, that leaned with its face toward the wall, and was not hung up as the others were. To be sure, it beat Miss Grace for beauty; and, I think, for scornful pride, too, though in that matter it might be hard to choose. I could have looked at it an hour, but Dorothy seemed half frightened at having shown it to me, and hurried it back again, and bade me run and find Miss Rosamond, for that there were some ugly places about the house, where she should like ill for the child to go. I was a brave, high-spirited girl, and thought little of what the old woman said, for I liked hide-and-seek; so off I ran to find my little one.

As WINTER drew on, and the days grew shorter, I was sometimes almost certain that I heard a noise as if someone was playing on the great organ in the hall. I did not hear it every evening; but, certainly, I did very often, usually when I was sitting with Miss Rosamond, after I had put her to bed, and keeping quite still and silent in the bedroom. Then I used to hear it booming and swelling away in the distance.

The first night, when I went down to my supper, I asked Dorothy who had been playing music, and James said very shortly that I was a gowk to take the wind soughing among the trees for music; but I saw Dorothy look at him very fearfully, and Bessy, the kitchen-maid, said something beneath her breath, and went quite white. I saw they did not like my question, so I held my peace till I was with Dorothy alone, when I knew I could get a good deal out of her. So, the next day, I watched my time, and I coaxed and asked her who it was that played the organ; for I knew that it was the organ and not the wind well enough, for all I had kept silence before James. But Dorothy had had her lesson, I'll warrant, and never a word could I get from her. So then I tried Bessy, though I had always held my head rather above her, as I was evened to James and Dorothy, and she was little better than their servant. So she said I must never, never tell; and if ever I told, I was never to say *she* had told me; but it was a very strange noise, and she had heard it many a time, but most of all on winter nights, and before storms; and folks did say it was the old lord playing on the great organ in the hall, just as he used to do when he was alive; but who the old lord was, or why he played, and why he played on stormy winter evenings in particular, she either could not or would not tell me. Well! I told you I had a brave heart; and I thought it was rather pleasant to have that grand music rolling about the house, let who would be the player; for now it rose above the great gusts of wind, and wailed and triumphed just like a living creature, and then it fell to a softness most complete, only it was always music, and tunes, so it was nonsense to call it the wind.

I thought at first that it might be Miss Furnivall who played, unknown to Bessy; but one day, when I was in the hall by myself, I opened the organ and peeped all about it and

around it, as I had done to the organ in Crosthwaite Church once before, and I saw it was all broken and destroyed inside, though it looked so brave and fine; and then, though it was noon-day, my flesh began to creep a little, and I shut it up, and run away pretty quickly to my own bright nursery; and I did not like hearing the music for some time after that, any more than James and Dorothy did. All this time Miss Rosamond was making herself more and more beloved. The old ladies liked her to dine with them at their early dinner. James stood behind Miss Furnivall's chair, and I behind Miss Rosamond's all in state; and after dinner she would play about in a corner of the great drawing room as still as any mouse, while Miss Furnivall slept, and I had my dinner in the kitchen. But she was glad enough to come to me in the nursery afterward; for, as she said, Miss Furnivall was so sad, and Mrs. Stark so dull; but she and I were merry enough; and by-and-by, I got not to care for that weird rolling music, which did one no harm, if we did not know where it came from.

THAT winter was very cold. In the middle of October the frosts began, and lasted many, many weeks. I remember one day, at dinner, Miss Furnivall lifted up her sad, heavy eyes, and said to Mrs. Stark, "I am afraid we shall have a terrible winter," in a strange kind of meaning way. But Mrs. Stark pretended not to hear, and talked very loud of something else. My little lady and I did not care for the frost; not we! As long as it was dry, we climbed up the steep brows behind the house, and went up on the Fells, which were bleak and bare enough, and there we ran races in the fresh, sharp air; and once we came down by a new path, that took us past the two old gnarled holly-trees, which grew about halfway down by the east side of the house. But the days grew shorter and shorter, and the old lord, if it was he, played away, more and more stormily and sadly, on the great organ.

One Sunday afternoon—it must have been toward the end of November—I asked Dorothy to take charge of little missy when she came out of the drawing room, after Miss Furnivall had had her nap; for it was too cold to take her with me to church, and yet I wanted to go. And Dorothy was glad enough to promise, and was so fond of the child, that all seemed well; and Bessy and I set off very briskly, though the sky hung heavy and black over the white earth, as if the night had never fully gone away, and the air, though still, was very biting and keen.

"We shall have a fall of snow," said Bessy to me. And sure enough, even while we were in church, it came down thick, in great large flakes—so thick, it almost darkened the windows. It had stopped snowing before we came out, but it lay soft, thick, and deep beneath our feet, as we tramped home. Before we got to the hall, the moon rose, and I think it was lighter then—what with the moon, and what with the white dazzling snow—than it had been when we went to church, between 2 and 3 o'clock. I have not told you that Miss Furnivall and Mrs. Stark never went to church; they used to read the prayers together, in their quiet, gloomy way; they seemed to feel the Sunday very long without their tapestry-work to be busy at. So when I went to Dorothy in the kitchen, to fetch Miss Rosamond and take her upstairs with me, I did not much wonder when the old woman told me that the ladies had kept the child with them, and that she had never come to the kitchen, as I had bidden her, when she was tired of behaving pretty in the drawing room.

So I took off my things and went to find her, and bring her to her supper in the nursery. But when I went into the best drawing room, there sat the two old ladies, very still and quiet, dropping out a word now and then, but looking as if nothing so bright and merry as Miss Rosamond had ever been near them. Still I thought she might be hiding from me; it was one of her pretty ways,—and that she had persuaded them to look as if they knew nothing about her; so I went softly peeping under this sofa, and behind that chair, making believe I was sadly frightened at not finding her.

"What's the matter, Hester?" said Mrs. Stark sharply. I don't know if Miss Furnivall had seen me, for, as I told you, she was very deaf, and she sat quite still, idly staring into the fire, with her hopeless face. "I'm only looking for my little Rosy Posy," replied I, still thinking that the child was there, and near me, though I could not see her.

"Miss Rosamond is not here," said Mrs. Stark. "She went away, more than an hour ago, to find Dorothy."

My heart sank at this, and I began to wish I had never left my darling. I went back to Dorothy and told her. James was gone out for the day, but she, and me, and Bessy took lights, and went up into the nursery first; and then we roamed over the great, large house, calling and entreating Miss Rosamond to come out of her hiding place, and not frighten us to death in that way. But there was no answer; no sound.

"Oh!" said I, at last, "can she have got into the east wing and hidden there?"

But Dorothy said it was not possible, for that she herself had never been in there; that the doors were always locked, and my lord's steward had the keys, she believed; at any rate, neither she nor James had ever seen them; so I said I would go back, and see if, after all, she was not hidden in the drawing room, unknown to the old ladies; and if I found her there, I said, I would whip her well for the fright she had given me; but I never meant to do it.

Well, I went back to the west drawing room, and I told Mrs. Stark we could not find her anywhere, and asked for leave to look all about the furniture there, for I thought now that she might have fallen asleep in some warm, hidden corner; but no! we looked—Miss Furnivall got up and looked, trembling all over—and she was nowhere there; then we set off again, everyone in the house, and looked in all the places we had searched before, but we could not find her. Miss Furnivall shivered and shook so much, that Mrs. Stark took her back into the warm drawing room; but not before they had made me promise to bring her to them when she was found. Well-a-day! I began to think she never would be found, when I bethought me to look into the great front court, all covered with snow. I was upstairs when I looked out; but, it was such clear moonlight, I could see, quite plain, two little footprints, which might be traced from the hall-door and round the corner of the east wing.

I don't know how I got down, but I tugged open the great stiff hall-door, and, throwing the skirt of my gown over my head for a cloak, I ran out. I turned the east corner, and there a black shadow fell on the snow; but when I came again into the moonlight, there were the little footmarks going up—up to the Fells. It was bitter cold; so cold that the air almost took the skin off my face as I ran; but I ran on, crying to think how my poor little darling must be perished and frightened. I was within sight of the holly-trees, when I saw a shepherd coming down the hill, bearing something in his arms

wrapped in his maud. He shouted to me, and asked me if I had lost a bairn; and, when I could not speak for crying, he bore toward me, and I saw my wee bairnie, lying still, and white, and stiff in his arms, as if she had been dead. He told me he had been up the Fells to gather in his sheep, before the deep cold of night came on, and that under the holly-trees (black marks on the hillside, where no other bush was for miles around) he had found my little lady —my lamb—my queen—my darling —stiff and cold in the terrible sleep which is frost-begotten.

Oh! the joy and the tears of having her in my arms once again! for I would not let him carry her; but took her, maud and all, into my own arms, and held her near my own warm neck and heart, and felt the life stealing slowly back again into her little gentle limbs. But she was still insensible when we reached the hall, and I had no breath for speech. We went in by the kitchen door.

"Bring the warming-pan," said I; and I carried her upstairs, and began undressing her by the nursery fire, which Bessy had kept up. I called my little lammie all the sweet and playful names I could think of,— even while my eyes were blinded by my tears; and at last, oh! at length she opened her large blue eyes. Then I put her into her warm bed, and sent Dorothy down to tell Miss Furnivall that all was well; and I made up my mind to sit by my darling's bedside the livelong night. She fell away into a soft sleep as soon as her pretty head had touched the pillow, and I watched by her till morning light; when she wakened up bright and clear—or so I thought at first—and, my dears, so I think now.

She said, that she had fancied that she should like to go to Dorothy, for that both the old ladies were asleep, and it was very dull in the drawing room; and that, as she was going through the west lobby, she saw the snow through the high window falling—falling—soft and steady; but she wanted to see it lying pretty and white on the ground; so she made her way into the great hall, and then, going to the window, she saw it bright and soft upon the drive; but while she stood there, she saw a little girl, not so old as she was, "but so pretty," said my darling, "and this little girl beckoned to me to come out; and oh, she was so pretty and so sweet, I could not choose but go." And then this other little girl had taken her by the hand, and side by side the two had gone round the east corner.

"Now you are a naughty little girl, and telling stories," said I. "What would your good mamma, that is in heaven, and never told a story in her life, say to her little Rosamond, if she heard her—and I dare say she does—telling stories!"

"Indeed, Hester," sobbed out my child, "I'm telling you true. Indeed I am."

"Don't tell me!" said I, very stern. "I tracked you by your foot-marks through the snow; there were only yours to be seen: and if you had had a little girl to go hand-in-hand with you up the hill, don't you think the footprints would have gone along with yours?"

"I can't help it, dear, dear Hester," said she, crying, "if they did not; I never looked at her feet, but she held my hand fast and tight in her little one, and it was very, very cold. She took me up the Fell-path, up to the holly-trees; and there I saw a lady weeping and crying; but when she saw me, she hushed her weeping, and smiled very proud and grand, and took me on her knee, and began to lull me to sleep; and that's all, Hester—but that is true; and my dear mamma knows it is," said she, crying. So I thought the child was in a fever, and pretended to believe

her, as she went over her story—over and over again, and always the same. At last Dorothy knocked at the door with Miss Rosamond's breakfast; and she told me the old ladies were down in the eating parlor, and that they wanted to speak to me. They had both been into the night-nursery the evening before, but it was after Miss Rosamond was asleep; so they had only looked at her—not asked me any questions.

"I shall catch it," thought I to myself, as I went along the north gallery. "And yet," I thought, taking courage, "it was in their charge I left her; and it's they that's to blame for letting her steal away unknown and unwatched." So I went in boldly, and told my story. I told it all to Miss Furnivall, shouting it close to her ear; but when I came to mention of the other little girl out in the snow, coaxing and tempting her out, and wiling her up to the grand and beautiful lady by the holly-tree, she threw her arms up—her old and withered arms—and cried aloud, "Oh! Heaven forgive! Have mercy!"

Mrs. Stark took hold of her; roughly enough, I thought; but she was past Mrs. Stark's management, and spoke to me, in a kind of wild warning and authority.

"Hester; keep her from that child! It will lure her to her death! That evil child! Tell her it is a wicked, naughty child." Then, Mrs. Stark hurried me out of the room; where, indeed, I was glad enough to go; but Miss Furnivall kept shrieking out, "Oh, have mercy! Wilt Thou never forgive! It is many a long year ago——"

I was very uneasy in my mind after that. I durst never leave Miss Rosamond, night or day, for fear lest she might slip off again, after some fancy or other; and all the more, because I thought I could make out that Miss Furnivall was crazy, from their odd ways about her; and I was afraid lest something of the same kind (which might be in the family, you know) hung over my darling. And the great frost never ceased all this time; and, whenever it was a more stormy night than usual, between the gusts, and through the wind, we heard the old lord playing on the great organ. But, old lord, or not, wherever Miss Rosamond went, there I followed; for my love for her, pretty, helpless orphan, was stronger than my fear for the grand and terrible sound. Besides, it rested with me to keep her cheerful and merry, as beseemed her age. So we played together, and wandered together, here and there, and everywhere; for I never dared to lose sight of her again in that large and rambling house. And so it happened, that one afternoon, not long before Christmas day, we were playing together on the billiard-table in the great hall (not that we knew the right way of playing, but she liked to roll the smooth ivory balls with her pretty hands, and I liked to do whatever she did); and, by-and-by, without our noticing it, it grew dusk indoors, though it was light in the open air, and I was thinking of taking her back into the nursery, when all of a sudden, she cried out——

"Look, Hester! look! there is my poor little girl out in the snow!"

I turned toward the long narrow windows, and there, sure enough, I saw a little girl, less than my Miss Rosamond—dressed all unfit to be out-of-doors such a bitter night—crying, and beating against the window-panes, as if she wanted to be let in. She seemed to sob and wail, till Miss Rosamond could bear it no longer, and was flying to the door to open it, when, all of a sudden, and close upon us, the great organ pealed out so loud and thundering, it fairly made me tremble; and all the more,

when I remembered that, even in the stillness of that dead-cold weather, I had heard no sound of little battering hands upon the window-glass, although the phantom child had seemed to put forth all its force; and, although I had seen it wail and cry, no faintest touch of sound had fallen upon my ears. Whether I remembered all this at the very moment, I do not know; the great organ sound had so stunned me into terror; but this I know, I caught up Miss Rosamond before she got the hall-door opened, and clutched her, and carried her away, kicking and screaming, into the large bright kitchen, where Dorothy and Agnes were busy with their mince-pies.

"What is the matter with my sweet one?" cried Dorothy, as I bore in Miss Rosamond, who was sobbing as if her heart would break.

"She won't let me open the door for my little girl to come in; and she'll die if she is out on the Fells all night. Cruel, naughty Hester," she said, slapping me; but she might have struck harder, for I had seen a look of ghastly terror on Dorothy's face, which made my very blood run cold.

"Shut the back-kitchen door fast, and bolt it well," said she to Agnes. She said no more; she gave me raisins and almonds to quiet Miss Rosamond; but she sobbed about the little girl in the snow, and would not touch any of the good things. I was thankful when she cried herself to sleep in bed. Then I stole down to the kitchen, and told Dorothy I had made up my mind. I would carry my darling back to my father's house in Applethwaite; where, if we lived humbly, we lived at peace. I said I had been frightened enough with the old lord's organ-playing; but now that I had seen for myself this little moaning child, all decked out as no child in the neighborhood could be, beating and battering to get in, yet always without any sound or noise—with the dark wound on its right shoulder; and that Miss Rosamond had known it again for the phantom that had nearly lured her to her death (which Dorothy knew was true); I could stand it no longer.

I saw Dorothy change color once or twice. When I had done, she told me she did not think I could take Miss Rosamond with me, for that she was my lord's ward, and I had no right over her; and she asked me would I leave the child that I was so fond of just for sounds and sights that could do me no harm; and that they had all had to get used to in their turns? I was all in a hot, trembling passion; and I said it was very well for her to talk, that knew what these sights and noises betokened, and that had, perhaps, had something to do with the specter child while it was alive. And I taunted her so, that she told me all she knew at last; and then I wished I had never been told, for it only made me more afraid than ever.

She said she had heard the tale from old neighbors that were alive when she was first married; when folks used to come to the hall sometimes, before it had got such a bad name on the countryside; it might not be true, or it might, what she had been told.

The old lord was Miss Furnivall's father—Miss Grace, as Dorothy called her, for Miss Maude was the elder, and Miss Furnivall by rights. The old lord was eaten up with pride. Such a proud man was never seen or heard of; and his daughters were like him. No one was good enough to wed them, although they had choice enough; for they were the great beauties of their day, as I had seen by their portraits, where they hung in the state drawing room. But, as the old saying is, "Pride will have a fall;" and these two haughty beauties fell in love with the same man, and he no better than a foreign

musician, whom their father had down from London to play music with him at the Manor House. For above all things, next to his pride, the old lord loved music. He could play on nearly every instrument that ever was heard of; and it was a strange thing it did not soften him; but he was a fierce, dour old man, and had broken his wife's heart with his cruelty, they said. He was mad after music, and would pay any money for it. So he got this foreigner to come; who made such beautiful music, that they said the very birds on the trees stopped their singing to listen. And, by degrees, this foreign gentleman got such a hold over the old lord, that nothing would serve him but that he must come every year; and it was he that had the great organ brought from Holland, and built up in the hall, where it stood now. He taught the old lord to play on it; but many and many a time, when Lord Furnivall was thinking of nothing but his fine organ, and his finer music, the dark foreigner was walking abroad in the woods with one of the young ladies; now Miss Maude, and then Miss Grace.

Miss Maude won the day and carried off the prize, such as it was; and he and she were married, all unknown to anyone; and, before he made his next yearly visit, she had been confined of a little girl at a farmhouse on the Moors, while her father and Miss Grace thought she was away at Doncaster Races. But though she was a wife and a mother, she was not a bit softened, but as haughty and as passionate as ever; and perhaps more so, for she was jealous of Miss Grace, to whom her foreign husband paid a deal of court—by way of blinding her—as he told his wife. But Miss Grace triumphed over Miss Maude, and Miss Maude grew fiercer and fiercer, both with her husband and with her sister; and the former—who could easily shake off what was disagreeable, and hide himself in foreign countries—went away a month before his usual time that summer, and half threatened that he would never come back again.

Meanwhile, the little girl was left at the farmhouse, and her mother used to have her horse saddled and gallop wildly over the hills to see her once every week, at the very least; for where she loved she loved, and where she hated she hated. And the old lord went on playing—playing on his organ; and the servants thought the sweet music he made had soothed down his awful temper, of which (Dorothy said) some terrible tales could be told. He grew infirm too, and had to walk with a crutch; and his son—that was the present Lord Furnivall's father—was with the army in America, and the other son at sea: so Miss Maude had it pretty much her own way, and she and Miss Grace grew colder and bitterer to each other every day; till at last they hardly ever spoke, except when the old lord was by.

The foreign musician came again the next summer, but it was for the last time; for they led him such a life with their jealousy and their passions, that he grew weary, and went away, and never was heard of again. And Miss Maude, who had always meant to have her marriage acknowledged when her father should be dead, was left now a deserted wife, whom nobody knew to have been married, with a child that she dared not own, although she loved it to distraction; living with a father whom she feared, and a sister whom she hated.

When the next summer passed over, and the dark foreigner never came, both Miss Maude and Miss Grace grew gloomy and sad; they had a haggard look about them, though they looked handsome as ever. But, by-and-by, Miss Maude brightened; for her father grew more and

more infirm, and more than ever carried away by his music; and she and Miss Grace lived almost entirely apart, having separate rooms, the one on the west side, Miss Maude on the east—those very rooms which were now shut up. So she thought she might have her little girl with her, and no one need ever know except those who dared not speak about it, and were bound to believe that it was, as she said, a cottager's child she had taken a fancy to. All this, Dorothy said, was pretty well known; but what came afterward no one knew, except Miss Grace and Mrs. Stark, who was even then her maid, and much more of a friend to her than ever her sister had been. But the servants supposed, from words that were dropped, that Miss Maude had triumphed over Miss Grace, and told her that all the time the dark foreigner had been mocking her with pretended love—he was her own husband. The color left Miss Grace's cheek and lips that very day forever, and she was heard to say many a time that sooner or later she would have her revenge; and Mrs. Stark was forever spying about the east rooms.

ONE fearful night, just after the New Year had come in, when the snow was lying thick and deep, and the flakes were still falling—fast enough to blind anyone who might be out and abroad—there was a great and violent noise heard, and the old lord's voice above all, cursing and swearing awfully, and the cries of a little child, and the proud defiance of a fierce woman, and the sound of a blow, and a dead stillness, and moans and wailings, dying away on the hillside!

Then the old lord summoned all his servants, and told them, with terrible oaths, and words more terrible, that his daughter had disgraced herself, and that he had turned her out of doors—her, and her child—and that if ever they gave her help, or food, or shelter, he prayed that they might never enter heaven. And, all the while, Miss Grace stood by him, white and still as any stone; and, when he had ended, she heaved a great sigh, as much as to say her work was done, and her end was accomplished. But the old lord never touched his organ again, and died within the year; and no wonder! for, on the morrow of that wild and fearful night, the shepherds, coming down the Fell side, found Miss Maude sitting, all crazy and smiling, under the holly trees, nursing a dead child, with a terrible mark on its right shoulder. "But that was not what killed it," said Dorothy: "it was the frost and the cold. Every wild creature was in its hole, and every beast in its fold, while the child and its mother were turned out to wander on the Fell! And now you know all! and I wonder if you are less frightened now!"

I was more frightened than ever; but I said I was not. I wished Miss Rosamond and myself well out of that dreadful house forever; but I would not leave her, and I dared not take her away. But oh, how I watched her, and guarded her! We bolted the doors, and shut the window-shutters fast, an hour or more before dark, rather than leave them open five minutes too late. But my little lady still heard the weird child crying and moaning; and not all we could do or say could keep her from wanting to go to her, and let her in from the cruel wind and the snow.

All this time I kept away from Miss Furnivall and Mrs. Stark, as much as ever I could; for I feared them—I knew no good could be about them, with their gray, hard faces, and their dreamy eyes, looking back into the ghastly years that were gone. But, even in my fear, I had a kind of pity for Miss Furnivall, at least. Those gone down to the pit can hardly have a more hopeless look than that which

was ever on her face. At last I even got so sorry for her—who never said a word but what was quite forced from her—that I prayed for her; and I taught Miss Rosamond to pray for one who had done a deadly sin; but often when she came to these words, she would listen, and start up from her knees, and say, "I hear my little girl plaining and crying, very sad,—oh, let her in, or she will die!"

One night,—just after New Year's Day had come at last, and the long winter had taken a turn, as I hoped —I heard the west drawing room bell ring three times, which was the signal for me. I would not leave Miss Rosamond alone, for all she was asleep—for the old lord had been playing wilder than ever—and I feared lest my darling should waken to hear the specter child; see her I knew she could not. I had fastened the windows too well for that. So I took her out of her bed, and wrapped her up in such outer clothes as were most handy, and carried her down to the drawing room, where the old ladies sat at their tapestry-work as usual. They looked up when I came in, and Mrs. Stark asked, quite astounded, "Why did I bring Miss Rosamond there, out of her warm bed?" I had begun to whisper, "Because I was afraid of her being tempted out while I was away, by the wild child in the snow," when she stopped me short (with a glance at Miss Furnivall), and said Miss Furnivall wanted me to undo some work she had done wrong, and which neither of them could see to unpick. So I laid my pretty dear on the sofa, and sat down on a stool by them, and hardened my heart against them, as I heard the wind rising and howling.

Miss Rosamond slept on sound, for all the wind blew so; and Miss Furnivall said never a word, nor looked around when the gusts shook the windows. All at once she started up to her full height, and put up one hand, as if to bid us listen.

"I hear voices!" said she. "I hear terrible screams—I hear my father's voice!"

Just at that moment my darling wakened with a sudden start: "My little girl is crying, oh, how she is crying!" and she tried to get up and go to her, but she got her feet entangled in the blanket, and I caught her up; for my flesh had begun to creep at these noises, which they heard while we could catch no sound. In a minute or two the noises came, and gathered fast, and filled our ears; we, too, heard voices and screams, and no longer heard the winter's wind that raged abroad. Mrs. Stark looked at me, and I at her, but we dared not speak.

Suddenly Miss Furnivall went toward the door, out into the anteroom, through the west lobby, and opened the door into the great hall. Mrs. Stark followed, and I durst not be left, though my heart almost stopped beating for fear. I wrapped my darling tight in my arms, and went out with them. In the hall the screams were louder than ever; they seemed to come from the east wing—nearer and nearer—close on the other side of the locked-up doors—close behind them. Then I noticed that the great bronze chandelier seemed all alight, though the hall was dim, and that a fire was blazing in the vast hearth-place, though it gave no heat; and I shuddered up with terror, and folded my darling closer to me. But as I did so the east door shook, and she, suddenly struggling to get free from me, cried, "Hester! I must go. My little girl is there! I hear her; she is coming! Hester, I must go!"

I held her tight with all my strength; with a set will, I held her. If I had died, my hands would have grasped her still, I was so resolved in my mind. Miss Furnivall stood listening, and paid no regard to my

darling, who had got down to the ground, and whom I, upon my knees now, was holding with both my arms clasped round her neck; she still striving and crying to get free.

All at once, the east door gave way with a thundering crash, as if torn open in a violent passion, and there came into that broad and mysterious light the figure of a tall old man, with gray hair and gleaming eyes. He drove before him, with many a relentless gesture of abhorrence, a stern and beautiful woman, with a little child clinging to her dress.

"O Hester! Hester!" cried Miss Rosamond; "it's the lady! the lady below the holly-trees; and my little girl is with her. Hester! Hester! let me go to her; they are drawing me to them. I feel them—I feel them. I must go!"

Again she was almost convulsed by her efforts to get away; but I held her tighter and tighter, till I feared I should do her a hurt; but rather that than let her go toward those terrible phantoms. They passed along toward the great hall-door, where the winds howled and ravened for their prey; but before they reached that, the lady turned; and I could see that she defied the old man with a fierce and proud defiance; but then she quailed —and then she threw up her arms wildly and piteously to save her child —her little child—from a blow from his uplifted crutch.

And Miss Rosamond was torn as by a power stronger than mine, and writhed in my arms, and sobbed (for by this time the poor darling was growing faint).

"They want me to go with them on to the Fells—they are drawing me to them. Oh, my little girl! I would come, but cruel, wicked Hester holds me very tight." But when she saw the uplifted crutch, she swooned away, and I thanked God for it. Just at this moment—when the tall old man, his hair streaming as in the blast of a furnace, was going to strike the little shrinking child—Miss Furnivall, the old woman by my side, cried out, "O father! father! spare the little innocent child!" But just then I saw—we all saw—another phantom shape itself, and grow clear out of the blue and misty light that filled the hall; we had not seen her till now, for it was another lady who stood by the old man, with a look of relentless hate and triumphant scorn. That figure was very beautiful to look upon, with a soft, white hat drawn down over the proud brows, and a red and curling lip. It was dressed in an open robe of blue satin. I had seen that figure before. It was the likeness of Miss Furnivall in her youth; and the terrible phantoms moved on, regardless of old Miss Furnivall's wild entreaty,—and the uplifted crutch fell on the right shoulder of the little child, and the younger sister looked on, stony, and deadly serene. But at that moment, the dim lights, and the fire that gave no heat, went out of themselves, and Miss Furnivall lay at our feet stricken down by the palsy—death-stricken.

Yes! she was carried to her bed that night, never to rise again. She lay with her face to the wall, muttering low, but muttering always: "Alas! alas! what is done in youth can never be undone in age! What is done in youth can never be undone in age!"

# The Eyrie

*(Continued from page 438)*

three X's excellent; four X's better yet; five X's excellence raised to the Nth power. Well, *The Curse of Everard Maundy* got the five X's, as did *A Suitor From the Shades.* Greye La Spina's serial, *Fettered,* gets the five X's also. I noticed in The Eyrie a criticism of it which called it silly because the cat jumped over the corpse and made a vampire. Not at all. Ten thousand cats could jump over ten thousand cadavers and not affect them at all, but one who in life was affected with the vampire curse needed that artistic leap and nothing more to bring it to life as a ghoul. I think maybe I had better mark *Fettered* with even six X's instead of five, thus: XXXXXX. Poe, Wells and Stoker combined could not have written a better story."

"Just had to write you a few lines and congratulate you on your new serial, *The Dark Chrysalis,*" writes W. A. B., of Indianapolis. "I have just finished reading it, and it held me spellbound to the end. Eli Colter is a wonderful author; please give us more stories by him."

"The reprints charm me much," writes Allen Julian Weil, of Alexandria, Louisiana, "but I suggest that instead of reprinting old authors, you reprint from former WEIRD TALES. I like to have all kinds of weird tales in the magazine, from ghost to scientific stories."

Readers, what is your favorite story in this issue? It will help us to keep the magazine in accordance with your wishes if you will let us know what kind of stories you like best. Your favorite stories in the August issue, as shown by your votes, are *The Man With a Thousand Legs,* by Frank Belknap Long, Jr., and *Satan's Fiddle,* by George Malcolm-Smith.

MY FAVORITE STORIES IN THE OCTOBER WEIRD TALES ARE:

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# The Time-Raider

*(Continued from page 480)*

him. An odd, calculating light leaped into his eyes. "You are not of the guards," he said, half-musingly, "and you say you are not of the pit. But if you came from outside——"

"I was captured," I told him, "outside the city, and brought here. But why?"

"You're here to fight," he said, shortly, and I started.

"Fight! With whom?"

"Why, with these," he answered, indicating again the score of men in the room. "This is——"

Before he could finish the sentence, there was a sudden clanging of metal and the door of the room swung open. A guard stepped in and gave brief orders in his own tongue. At once the men around me began to file out of the room, into the corridor. As I passed out, beside my new-found friend, I saw that in the hall a heavy force of the guards awaited us, some fifty men being ranged along its length. We passed together down the corridor's length, but instead of leaving the building by the door I had entered, we turned to the right and proceeded up a long flight of steps, the guards following and preceding us, in two separate companies.

As we went up those steps, I turned to my companion and asked him, "You are English, aren't you?"

He nodded, and made a graceful half-bow. "Viscount Charles Denham, at your service," he said in a low voice, "captain in the armies of his Majesty, King George the Third."

The words were like a thunderclap in my ears. A soldier of King George the Third? A man of a hundred and fifty years before my own time? And here, fifteen thousand years in the future, in this strange city! And these other prisoners, these strange, ragged figures!

But before I could collect my dazed thoughts, our company was marching up the last few steps. Over the shoulders of those in front of me I saw the walls of a great room, and the crimson light of the glowing bulbs that illuminated it. There was a sound of crystal music, and laughter —a high, ringing laughter that was very different from the coarse mirth of the guards. Then we were surmounting the very last steps, marching up and over them. . . .

*The horrors of the City of the Pit, the lair of the Raider, and the dead who were brought back to life, are thrillingly described in next month's chapters of this story*

# The Dark Lore

*(Continued from page 458)*

therest spheres would shed tears of unavailing sorrow over its wo!

But the refrain of that chant terminated with:

"Sister, Sister, Sister, Sister,
Sister, Sister, ha-ha-*hah!*"

That word—"Sister!" What stirred within me? It shook me, not at all pleasantly, nor evilly. Rather it was agonizingly, mournfully saddening. Again! *Sister!*

Rose an inward vision, fleeting, lasting but a brief moment, of a pale, white face; clear blue eyes; soft, tenderly smiling mouth; a small, gracefully poised head surmounted by sunny, golden, wavy locks . . . *Sister!*

Something swelled within my burning breast until I deemed it would burst asunder from the internal pressure. I stopped swirling and ceased from participation in that song—a—a—something — rose — in my—throat—it—it sounded like—"*glub!*" . . . forgive me, but it can not be expressed in any other way!

Something, not burning but *scalding*, gathered in each of my six eyes and ran adown my three faces! I—I—whispered:

"*My* little sister knows naught, in her spotless innocence, of such frightful things as do I in my sin. Thank—God—she is—spared . . ."

A howl of rage arose—a chorus of hate voiced from every fiery throat of that most abhorrent, malignant band.

"She *weeps!* Has dared whisper the name forbidden in all these realms!"

As one they hurled themselves upon me, clawing, kicking, biting, gouging, tearing, rending me apart, limb from limb, ripping me into shreds—oh anguish untellable, unthinkable—my last conscious idea...

"Oh, that I were where—naught—was—but—*myself*. . ."

I WAS nothing but Spirit; all trace of form had vanished, and but a dingy spark was hurtling through Space! It was so black, so black, above, and below, and ahead of me; but yet it was not that Great Blackness wherein I had so long sojourned. Naught but a Spark was I, soulless, only remained to me the Spirit; the ever-living Spark from the Eternal, Ineffable Flame. Yet still was I conscious of identity and remembered all the torments through which I had passed since Hesperus had bestowed me upon Grarhorg. . .

Away and away ahead of me I "saw" a tiny point of light. After flight lasting for a few more ages I knew it for a—star! Back in the known universe once again! Until the skies were ablaze with myriad lights that were not—hell-lights!

On and on, past planets and suns and constellations, galaxies and nebulæ and asteroids; into, through, and beyond the great solar system hurtled that Spirit-Spark that was I. Until, finally, at the furtherest limits of the universe, my Spark hovered, swooped, and settled on a little whirling globe.

It was a dull, barren, burned-out world. A world devoid of vegetation, lacking in moisture, without heat, and weak of illumination. A globe that once had been a fair planet, eons and eons ago—but which was now but gray, harsh rock, and sad white ashes, and blackened, scoriated lava-beds.

And then I noted a strange thing. At the time I did not understand how it had happened nor why it was necessary. Although now I know

that no matter where in all the infinitude of Space the Spirit may be; by operation of a natural law it promptly attracts to itself—or sloughs off from itself—matter, or atoms, until it is covered by an envelope, a proper vehicle through and in which to function to its best advantage within such environment as it has attained to.

All I did know then, was that I had in some manner accumulated a tenuous body. And I did not want that form. Formless, I had little to fear save extinction of that spark which was my "Self". And that same extinction was naught to be feared by such as I, but was rather a hope; for annihilation would be a boon; a wondrous rest; a perpetual cessation of consciousness, identity, and—worst torment of all—the ending of *memory.*

For that faculty of "memory", abiding when all else is stripped from the sinful Spirit, constitutes the truest and most terrible torment; is, in itself, the greatest hell! A hell from which none may escape, though they flee to the outermost star; yet will such a spirit bear along its own peculiar hell, for that hell has become an integral part of the Self who evolved it. Nor is *absolute* extinction ever possible!

But I knew that, once I were again possessed of a definite form, tenuous though it might be, and were on a tangible world, there was no guessing what new and very terrible torments were in store for me. Doubtless, however, tortures afresh of some sort there would surely be. And I was so wearied of agonies and horrors inflicted.

"What had I done to deserve——?"

And then and there hell let loose!

Such hell as never yet had I undergone. Pictures, thrown outward from the seat of memory; taking visibility at a little distance, against the curtain of that dull air. Sounds, emanating primarily in my consciousness, impinging upon that same heavy air; echoed and thrown back again to my outward hearing; to penetrate in turn deeply into consciousness once more, laden with stinging anguish worse, far worse, than any virus instilled into my system by kiss of Flaming Furies or stroke of serpent-hair from Flaming Furies' tripled heads.

All I had thought, said, or heard, or did, or desired! Not one infinitesimal thing, however trivial, but what, with merciless exactitude, I was obliged to witness. I tried covering eyes and ears with my hands. And to no avail. Too tenuous! So *thin* I must, perforce, look through all attempts at self-blindness and see, and hear. . .

And again and again, repeated, circumstance by circumstance; episode followed by episode. On earth, from childhood to maturity—from evocation of the Dark Angel Hesperus to my present isolate estate. And repeated yet again!

"What had I done to deserve——?"

*That which I had done deserved ten thousand fold . . . !*

And that denunciation came from no god, nor angel, nor demon, but from—*within!* It was the fiat of that last great judge, my *Self*, whose sentence, though long delayed, is inexorable! For it is very just.

The sole moisture that burned-out world had known for countless ages past burst from my eyes in ineffectual tears. Whence the moisture came I can not explain. Do *I* know the Universal Laws? Nay, hardly do I know myself—except as very sinful, very vile, immeasurably fallen, and, were it not for the Ultimate Mercy, as one *lost* beyond all hope of redemption.

Gradually the fountain of my tears

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dried up. No moisture left wherewith to weep. Yet the haunting, torturing fantasmagoria continued. I could no more bear it, despite my innate conviction that it was all fully merited.

I rose to my feet and realized as I rose that I was become still more thick. Had, in fact, a body nearly as solid as I had possessed while in the halls of Hesperus. A lingering trace of self-pity told me that if I walked, and walked, and walked, fatigue would eventually assert itself; and I knew that a tired consciousness receives but poorly any extraneous impressions.

Why, I thought to myself, I might even *sleep!* Which was a thing I'd not done since first I gave myself over to the will of Hesperus. Not in all the many hells has ever one lost spirit slept! My idea was good. I wandered until my feet ached and my limbs ached, while every part of me reveled in pain that was for once wholly physical.

Until, finally, exhausted, I laid me down by the side of a great rock, on a soft bed of ashes, and then—at last, I slept. And it was but a terrific nightmare, compounded of all the past experiences I had endured; but by no means in any sort of conceivable sequence. Rather, it was a jumble worse than the actual events. And awoke, weeping anew; awoke to the realization that I was even thicker, was as solid as though I still dwelt upon my native planet.

Like a child I sought to wipe my streaming eyes on the sleeve of my robe, and saw, to my amazement, that the tears I was shedding were of blood. And then the fantasmagoria of my sins and sufferings recommenced in merciless detail. And still those tears flowed. Tears of hopeless anguish. Tears of impotent weariness. Could I never be freed from the torment of my deeds?

"Oh, that I were back upon earth in the most hideous body ever beheld! I would be so—so—g—g—good!"

Came a flash of rose and gold more beauteous than earth's fairest dawnrise. Before me there stood, stately, serene——

I leaped to my feet. Shrieking in terror I turned to flee.

"*Stay!*"

Those tones so commanding, yet so —*gentle.* In desperation I faced about. Although within me I was sick with a ghastly fear.

"Thou art a *demon*—well do I know thy sort! What torment hast *thou* in store for lost me? Let it begin, swiftly! Since needs must, I can endure. . ."

Never a word that radiant one spoke, but the light shining all about It became brighter, more glorious; and the pity I read on that serene countenance——

Awe-stricken I sank to my knees: "Thou art one of the Celestials, a—Helper of the Lost? Forgive. . ."

"Poor, sorrow-laden child!"

I looked up into that countenance. I was well-nigh incredulous; finding it hard to realize that for such as I there was pity. But what I saw was unmistakable—and then, I *did* weep.

"Thou wouldst return to earth, hideous where formerly thou wert beautiful—why?"

"Can you ask?" I sobbed. "To escape—this!" I meant that haunting fantasmagoria.

"For that reason?"

"Aye!"

The Shining Helper vanished.

AFTER prolonged grieving I knew my fault. And while I grieved, still the fantasmagoria continued, hammering home the lesson I was slowly commencing to assimilate. For now I knew that each past agony

had but counterbalanced some evil deed, some wicked thought. . .

Yet it was a long while after I began to comprehend ere that Helper came the second time to where I sat in self-loathing inexpressible. Boldly, with the courage of the hopeless, than which is no greater desperation possible, I said:

"Earth I shall never behold again. That I know, for such were too great mercy for me. But were I only worthy, one boon alone would I ask——"

"I listen."

"Is there not some borderland wherefrom I can—mayhap—*help*, in some small way, some other sinful soul lest—lest—it, too——"

*No comet ever shot through Space so swiftly as did that Helper, bearing me!*

And how or why I knew not, but I was but a Spark once more; shining not so brightly, it is true; yet not dingy nor lurid. There was even a slightly yellowish tinge——

Above a great city of earth, we hovered finally. I could see, oh, what could I *not* see? Earth-life, its familiar evils, its sins, its hatreds, and its self-caused woes!

"Is not here work enough for thee?"

"Too much, too much," I wailed, knowing my own unfitness. "I can not——"

"*One* soul, thou didst say. . ."

"Let me descend—and try."

On a bed of rags in a barely furnished chamber in a decaying house located in a dirty slum, lay a woman, dying. Dwarfed, crippled, worn and wasted. Not in any wise a pleasing sight, even were she not at the last extremity. And, while I watched, I saw the vital spark fade out. Very clearly, gratefully, I realized my most glorious opportunity.

"What have I done to deserve——?"

"Naught hast thou done—yet!

But thy slain sister made intercession for her slayer; so—this!''

''And yet she knew?''

''It was because she did know that she interceded, besought mercy—for thee!''

*''Oh! What have I been?''*

The Helper indicated that twisted, stunted body from whence the Spark of Life had so recently departed. . .

''Well?''

''I am content.''

''With *that?*''

''Aye!''

''So low. . .''

''Leaven rises from beneath. . .''

''Thou hast said!''

Death may be painful, but such birth as I then experienced was—there are no words adequately descriptive. . . The Helper had vanished.



Slowly that new body I had been granted, as fit instrument through which to atone, grew well again, gained strength. On a street, one day, I heard someone speaking of a ''soul-doctor''; and — I — would — *work.* For thus far, I have sought in vain. . .

* * * * *

WHAT I said to that grieving soul I may not reveal. Yet never will I forget the look in her eyes, nor the expression on her features as she departed.

''You give me—hope,'' she stated simply.

But I do not think that she who was Lura Veyle sinned, suffered, and repented in vain. To believe thus were to doubt the Infinite Wisdom. Just and perfect is the working out of the Great Law.

For I believe that the world is nearing the dawn-light of a great spiritual awakening. Science, with its inexorable exactitude, will—nay, has commenced to—investigate, and is finding that many things heretofore labeled ''superstition'' have in reality a solid basis of fact as foundation.

The powers and forces and potentialities latent in the universe are manifold, limitless in possibility. But as there are true, good spirits dwelling within these our bodies of the flesh; so, too, are there others—evil, self-seeking, unscrupulous. Armed with intangible yet very real forces—against such, the Powers of Light, even, may not avail nor suffice to guard this world. . .

Yet, mayhap, the story of Lura Veyle will help to deter some such unscrupulous ones. As it may suffice to turn away, perchance—should any such read it—some erring soul who has already held, or who seeks to hold, intercourse with the Destroyers Who Tempt with Bribes. . .

So may it be!

# The Bride of Osiris

*(Continued from page 552)*

side panels, carrying the group of human figures before it like straws.

"Close the hatch, you fool," yelled Alcibar. "You will be shot into the lake in a few seconds! You will be drowned!"

Again Buell reached unsuccessfully for the swinging figure. The water was lapping around the sides of the craft. Suddenly he felt it sliding forward. He could not save this maniac, and there were others to think of besides himself. With a quick jerk he pulled the door shut just before the waters closed over it. . . .

"LAND ho!"

This cheery call came from Dan Rafferty in the steersman's seat some ten minutes after they had plunged beneath the lake. It had taken him that long to find out just how to get to the surface.

"Come up and I'll show yez a sight for sore eyes."

Buell and the two girls mounted the steps, and cries of joy escaped their lips at sight of Chicago's rugged skyline silhouetted against a roseate sunset that was partly obscured by the pall of winter smoke. Quite near them the Municipal Pier, its foundations sheathed in ice, jutted out into the foam-flecked water.

There were tears in the eyes of Doris Lee—tears of happiness. She nestled close to Buell.

"It all seems too impossible, too like a fairy-story, to be really true," she murmured.

Dan Rafferty, his arm around the slender form of Mary Mooney, was steering with one hand.

"Sure now, it's all too true to be impossible," he said.

[THE END]

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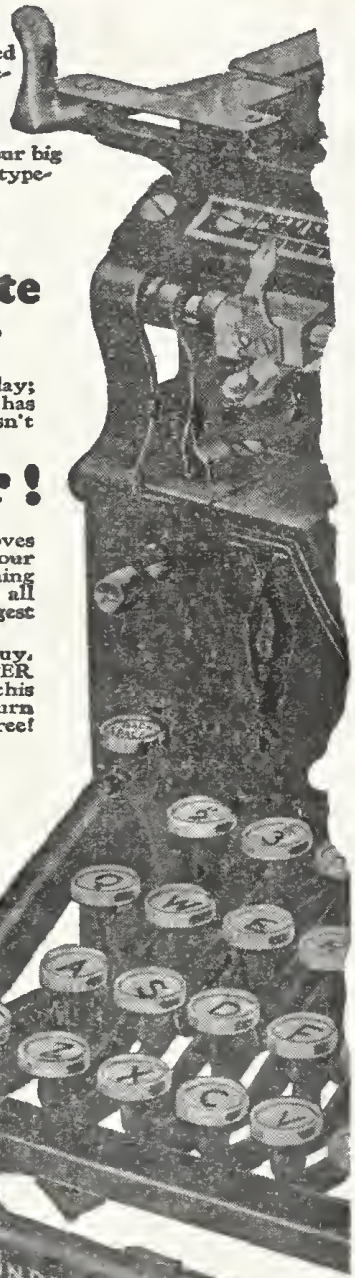


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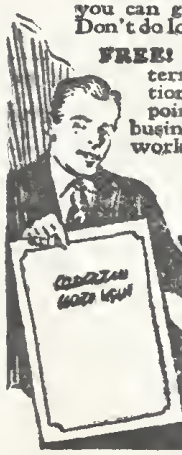

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