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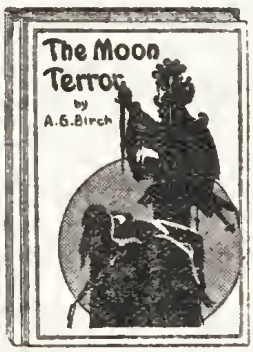

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FARNSWORTH WRIGHT, Editor.

Contents for June, 1929

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The House of Masks

BY SEABURY QUINN

"AN' SO, Dr. de Grandin, sor," Detective Sergeant Costello concluded with a pitying sidelong glance at his companion, "if there's annything ye can do for th' pore lad, 'tis meself that'll be grateful to ye for doin' it. Faith, if sumpin like this had happened to me whilst I was a-courtin' Maggie, I'd 'a' been a dead corpse from worry in less time than this pore felley's been sufferin'.

"Th' chief won't raise his hand in th' matter wid th' coroner's verdict starin' us in th' face, an' much as I'd like to do sumpin for th' boy, me hands is tied tighter'n th' neck of a sack. But with you, now, 'tis a different matter entirely. Meself, I'm inclined to agree with th' chief an' think th' pore gur-rl's dead as a herring, but if there's sumpin in th' case th' rest of us can't see, sure, 'tis Dr. Jools de Grandin can spot it quicker than a hungry tom-cat smells a rat!"

Jules de Grandin turned his quick, birdlike glance from the big, red-headed Irishman to the slender, white-faced young man seated beside him. "What makes you assume your beloved survives, *Monsieur?*" he asked. "If the jury of the coroner returned a verdict of suicide——"

"But, I tell you, sir, the jury didn't know what they were talking about!"

Young Everett Wilberding rose from his chair and faced the little Frenchman, his knuckles showing

Golden

"He strode forward, striking right and left with mailed fists, smashing jawbones with his iron-shod knuckles."

white with the intensity of his grip on the table edge. "My Ewell *didn't* commit suicide. She didn't kill herself, neither did Mazie. You *must* believe that, sir!"

Resuming his seat, he fought back to comparative calm as he laced his fingers together nervously. "Last Thursday night Ewell and I were going to a dance out at the country club. My friend, Bill Stimpson, was to take Mazie, Ewell's twin sister. The girls had been out visiting an aunt and uncle at Reynoldstown, and were to meet us at Monmouth Junction, then drive out to the club in Ewell's flivver.

"The girls took their party clothes out to Reynoldstown with them, and were to dress before leaving to meet us. They were due at the Junction at 9 o'clock, but Ewell was hardly ever on time, so I thought nothing of it when they failed to show up at half-past. But when 10 o'clock came, with no sign of the girls, we began to think they must have had a blow-out or engine trouble. At half-past 10 I went to the drug store and 'phoned the girls' uncle at Reynoldstown, only to

be told they had left at a quarter past 8—in plenty of time to reach the Junction by 9, even if they had bad going. When I heard that I began to worry sure enough. By 11 o'clock I was fit to be tied.

"Bill was getting worried, too, but thought that one of 'em might have been taken ill and that they'd rushed right to Harrisonville without coming through the Junction, so we 'phoned their house here. Their folks didn't know any more than we did.

"We caught the next bus to Harrisonville, and went right up to the Eatons'. When nothing was heard of the girls by 4 the next morning, Mr. Eaton notified the police."

"U'm?" de Grandin nodded slowly. "Proceed, if you please, young *Monsieur.*"

"The searching parties didn't find a trace of the girls till next day about noon," young Wilberding answered; "then a State Trooper came on Ewell's Ford smashed almost out of shape against a tree half a mile or more from the river, but no sign of blood anywhere around. A little later a couple of hunters found Ewell's party dress, stockings and slippers on the rocks above Shaminee Falls. Mazie——"

"They found th' pore child's body up agin th' grilles leadin' to th' turbine intakes o' Pierce's Mills next day, sor," Costello put in softly.

"Yes, they did," Wilberding agreed, "and Mazie was *wearing* her dance frock—what was left of it. Why didn't Ewell jump in the falls with hers on, too, if Mazie did? But *Mazie didn't!*"

Sergeant Costello shook his head sadly. "Th' coroner's jury——" he began, as though reasoning with a stubborn child, but the boy interrupted angrily:

"Oh, damn the coroner's jury! See here, sir"—he turned to de Grandin as if for confirmation—"you're a physician and know all about such things. What d'ye say to this? Mazie's body was washed through the rapids above Shaminee Falls and was terribly mauled against the rocks as it came down, so badly disfigured that only the remnants of her clothes made identification possible. No one could say definitely whether she'd been wounded before she went into the water or not; but *she wasn't drowned!*"

"Eh, what is it you say?" de Grandin straightened in his chair, his level, unwinking stare boring into the young man's troubled eyes. "Continue, if you please, *Monsieur;* I am interested."

"I mean just what I say," the other returned. "They didn't find a half-teacupful of water in her lungs at the autopsy; besides, this is March, and the water's almost ice-cold—yet they found her *floating* next morning; if——"

"*Barbe d'un chauve canard,* yes!" de Grandin exclaimed. "*Tu parles, mon garçon!* In temperature such as this it would be days—weeks, perhaps—before putrefaction had advanced enough to form sufficient gas to force the body to the surface. But of course, it was the air in her lungs which buoyed her up. *Morbleu,* I think you have right, my friend; undoubtlessly the poor one was dead before she touched the water!"

"Aw, Doc, ye don't mean to say *you're* fallin' for that theory?" Costello protested. "It's true she mightn't 'a' been drownded, but th' coroner said death was due to shock induced by——"

De Grandin waved him aside impatiently, keeping his gaze fixed intently on Everett. "Do you know any reason she might have had for self-destruction, *mon vieux?*" he demanded.

"No, sir—none whatever. She and Bill were secretly married at Hacketstown last Christmas Eve. They'd been keeping it dark till Bill got his promotion—it came through last week, and they were going to tell the world last Sunday. You see, they

couldn't have concealed it much longer."

"Ah?" de Grandin's narrow brows elevated slightly. "And they were happy together?"

"Yes, sir! You never saw a spoonier couple in your life. Can you imagine——"

"*Tiens*, my friend," the Frenchman interrupted with one of his quick, elfish grins, "you would be surprized at that which I can imagine. Howeverly, let us consider facts, not imaginings." Rising, he began pacing the floor, ticking off his data on his fingers as he marched. "Let us make a *précis:*

"Here we have two young women, one in love, though married — the other in love and affianced. They fail to keep an appointment; it is not till the day following that their car is discovered, and it is found in such position as to indicate a wreck, yet nowhere near it is sign of injury to its passengers. *Alors*, what do we find? The frock of one of the young ladies, neatly folded beside her shoes and stockings upon a rock near the Shaminee Falls. In the river, some miles below, next day is found the floating corpse of the other girl—and the circumstances point conclusively that she did not drown. What now? The mishap to the car occurred a half-mile from the river, yet the young women were able to walk to the stream where one of them cast herself in fully clothed; the other is supposed to have disrobed before immersing herself.

"*Non, non*, my friends, the facts, they do not make sense. Women kill themselves for good reasons, for bad reasons, and for no reasons at all, but they do it characteristically. Me, I have seen ropes wherewith despondent females have strangled themselves, and they have wrapped silken scarves about the rough hemp that it might not bruise their tender necks. *Tiens*, would a delicately nurtured girl strip herself to the rude March winds before plunging into the water? I think not."

"So do I," rumbled Costello's heavy voice in agreement. "Th' way you put it, Dr. de Grandin, sor, makes th' case crazier than ever. Faith, there's no sense to it from beginnin' to end. I think we'd better be callin' it a day an' acceptin' th' coroner's decision."

"*Zut!*" de Grandin returned with a smile. "Are you then so poor a poker player, *mon sergent?* Have you not learned the game is never over until the play is done? Me, I shall give this matter my personal attention. I am interested, I am fascinated, I am intrigued.

"To your home, Monsieur Wilberding," he ordered. "When I have some word for you, you will hear from me. Meantime do not despair."

"TROWBRIDGE, *mon vieux*," de Grandin greeted next morning when I joined him in the dining-room, "I am perplexed; but yes, I am greatly puzzled; I am mystified. Something has occurred since last night which may put a different face upon all. Consider, if you please: Half an hour ago I received a telephone call from the good Costello. He tells me three more young women have disappeared in a manner so similar to that of Monsieur Wilberding's sweetheart as to make it more than mere coincident. At the residence of one Monsieur Mason, who resides in West Fells, there was held a meeting of the sorority to which his daughter belongs. Many young women attended. Three, Mesdemoiselles Weaver, Damroche and Hornbury, drove out in the car of Mademoiselle Weaver. They left the Mason house sometime after midnight. At 6 o'clock this morning they had not returned home. Their alarmed parents notified the police, and"—he paused in his restless pacing, halting directly before me as he continued—"a state dragoon discovered the motor in which they rode

lying on its side, mired in the swamps beside the Albemarle Road, but of the young women no trace could be found. Figure to yourself, my friend. What do you make of it?"

"Why——" I began, but the shrill stutter of the office 'phone cut my reply in two.

"*Allo?*" de Grandin called into the transmitter. "Yes, Sergeant, it is I —*grand Diable!* Another? You do not tell me so!"

To me he almost shouted as he slammed the receiver back into its hook: "Do you hear, my friend? It is another! Sarah Thompford, an employée of Braunstein frères' department store, left her work at half-past 5 last evening, and has been seen no more. But her hat and cloak were found upon the piers at the waterfront ten little minutes ago. *Nom d'un chou-fleur,* I am vexed! These disappearances are becoming epidemic. Either the young women of this city have developed a sudden mania for doing away with themselves or some evil person attempts to make a monkey of Jules de Grandin. In either case, my friend, I am aroused. *Mordieu,* we shall see who shall laugh in whose face before this business of the fool is concluded!"

"What are you going to do?" I asked, striving to keep a straight face.

"Do?" he echoed. "Do? *Parbleu,* I shall investigate, I shall examine every clue, I shall leave no stone unturned, but"—he sobered into sudden practicality as Nora McGinnis, my household factotum, entered the dining-room with a tray of golden-brown waffles—"first I shall eat breakfast. One can accomplish little on an empty stomach."

A WIDESPREAD, though fortunately mild, epidemic of influenza kept me busy in office and on my rounds all day. Rainy, fog-bound darkness was approaching as I turned toward home and dinner with a profound sigh of thankfulness that the day's work was done, only to encounter fresh disappointment.

"Trowbridge, Trowbridge, *mon vieux,*" an excited voice hailed as I was waiting for the crosstown traffic lights to change and let me pursue my homeward way, "draw to the curb; come with me—I have important matters to communicate!" Swathed from knees to neck in a waterproof leather jacket, his Homburg hat pulled rakishly down over his right eye and a cigarette glowing between his lips, Jules de Grandin stood at the curb, his little blue eyes dancing with excited elation.

"Name of a little blue man!" he swore delightedly as I parked my motor and joined him on the sidewalk; "it is a fortunate chance, this meeting; I was about to telephone the office in hopes you had returned. Attend me, my friend, I have twisted my hand in the tail of something of importance!"

Seizing my elbow with a proprietary grip, he guided me toward the illuminated entrance of a café noted for the excellence of its food and its contempt of the XVIIIth Amendment, chuckling with suppressed delight at every step.

"The young Monsieur Wilberding was undoubtlessly right in his surmises," he confided as we found places at one of the small tables and he gave an order to the waiter. "*Parbleu,* what he lacked in opportunity of observation he made up by the prescience of affection," he continued, "for there can be no doubt that Madame Mazie was the victim of murder. *Regardez-vous*: At the police laboratories, kindly placed at my disposal through the offices of the excellent Sergeant Costello, I examined the tattered remnants of the frock they took from the poor girl's body when they fished her from the river, and I did discover what the coroner, cocksure of his suicide theory, had completely overlooked—a small, so tiny stain. Hardly darker than the original

pink of the fabric it was, but sufficient to rouse my suspicions. *Alors,* I proceeded to shred the chiffon and make the benzidine test. You know it? No?

"Very good. A few threads from the stained area of the dress I placed upon a piece of white filter paper; thereafter I compounded a ten per cent. solution of benzidine in glacial acetic acid and mixed one part of this with ten parts of hydrogen peroxide. Next, with a pipette I proceeded to apply one little, so tiny drop of the solution to the threads of silk, and behold! a faint blue color manifested itself in the stained silken threads and spread out on the white filter paper. *Voilà,* that the stain of my suspicion had been caused by blood was no longer to be doubted!"

"But mightn't this bloodstain have been caused by an injury to Mazie's body as it washed over the falls?" I objected.

"*Ah bah,*" he returned. "*You* ask that, Friend Trowbridge? *Pardieu,* I had looked for better sense in your head. Consider the facts: Should you cut your finger, then immediately submerge it in a basin of water, would any trace of blood adhere to it? But no. Conversely, should you incise the skin and permit even one little drop of blood to gather at the wound and to dry there to any extent, the subsequent immersion of the finger in water would not suffice to remove the partly clotted blood altogether. Is it not so?

"*Très bon.* Had a sharp stone cut poor Madame Mazie, it would undoubtlessly have done so after she was dead, in which case there would have been no resultant hemorrhage; but even if a wound had been inflicted while she lived, bethink you of her position—in the rushing water, whirled round and round and over and over, any blood which flowed would instantly have been washed away, leaving no slightest stain on her dress. *Non,* my friend, there is but one explanation, and I have found it. Her gown was stained by blood before she was cast into the river. Recall: Did not poor young Monsieur Wilberding inform us the car in which she rode was found a half-mile or more from the river? But certainly. Suppose, then, these girls were waylaid at or near the spot where their car was found, and one or both were done to death. Suppose, again, Madame Mazie's life-blood flowed from her wound and stained her dress while she was in transit toward the river. In that case her dress would have been so stained that even though the foul miscreants who slew her cast her poor, broken body into the water, there would remain stains for Jules de Grandin to find today. Yes, it is so.

"But wait, my friend, there is more to come. Me, I have been most busy this day. I have run up and down and hither and yon like Satan seeking for lost souls. Out on the Albemarle Road, where the unfortunate Mademoiselle Weaver's car was discovered this morning, I repaired when I had completed my researches in the city. Many feet had trampled the earth into the semblance of a pig-coop's floor before I arrived, but *grâce à Dieu,* there still remained that which confirmed my worst suspicions.

"Finding nothing near the spot where the mired car lay, I examined the earth on the other side of the road. There I discovered that which made my hair to rise on end. *Pardieu,* my friend, there is the business of the Fiend himself being done here!

"Leading from the road were three distinct sets of footprints—girl's footprints, made by small, high-heeled shoes. Far apart they were, showing they had been made by running feet, and all stopped abruptly at the same place.

"Back from the roadway, as you doubtless remember, stands a line of trees. It was at these the foot-tracks halted, in each instance ending in two

little pointed depressions, set quite close together. They were the marks of girls' slippers, my friend, and appeared to have been made as the young women stood on tiptoe.

"'Now,' I ask me, 'why should three young women leave the motor in which they ride, run from the road, halt on their toes beneath these trees, *and leave no footprints thereafter?*'

"'It seems they must have been driven from the road like game in a European preserve at hunting-time, then seized by those lying in wait for them among the tree-boughs as they passed beneath,' I reply. 'And you are undoubtlessly correct,' I answer me.

"Nevertheless, to make my assurance sure, I examined all those trees and all the surrounding land with great injury to my dignity and clothing, but my search was not fruitless; for clinging to a tree-bough above one of the girls' toe-prints I did find this." From his pocket he produced a tiny skein of light-brown fiber and passed it across the table to me.

"U'm?" I commented as I examined his find. "What is it?"

"Burlap," he returned. "You look puzzled, my friend. So did I when first I found it, but subsequent discoveries explained it—explained it all too well. As I have said, there were no footprints to be found around the trees, save those made by the fleeing girls, but, after much examination on my knees, I found three strange trails leading toward the road, away from those trees. Most carefully, with my nose fairly buried in the earth, I did examine those so queer depressions in the moist ground. Too large for human feet they were, yet not deep enough for an animal large enough to make them. At last I was rewarded by finding a bit of cloth-weave pattern in one of them, and then I knew. They were made by men whose feet had been wrapped in many thicknesses of burlap, like the feet of choleric old gentlemen suffering from gout.

"*Nom d'un renard,* but it was clever, almost clever enough to fool Jules de Grandin, but not quite.

"Feet so wrapped make no sound; they leave little or no track, and what track they do leave is not easily recognized as of human origin by the average Western policeman; furthermore, they leave no scent which may be followed by hounds. Howeverly, the miscreants failed in one respect: They forgot Jules de Grandin has traveled the world over on the trail of wickedness, and knows the ways of the East no less than those of the West. In India I have seen such trails left by robbers; today, in this so peaceful State of New Jersey, I recognized the spoor when I saw it. Friend Trowbridge, we are upon the path of villains, assassins, *apaches* who steal women for profit. Yes"—he nodded solemnly—"it is undoubtlessly so."

"But how——" I began, when his suddenly upraised hand cut me short.

Seated in the next booth to that we occupied was a pair of young men who had dined with greater liberality than wisdom. As I started to speak they were joined by a third, scarcely more temperate, who began descanting on the sensational features of a current burlesque show.

"Aw, shut up, how d'ye get that way?" one of the youths demanded scornfully. "Boy, till you've been where Harry and I were last night you ain't been nowhere and you ain't seen nothin'. Say, d'je ever see the *chonkina?*"

"*Dieu de Dieu!*" de Grandin murmured excitedly even as the other young man replied:

"*Chonkina?* What d'ye mean, *chonkina?*"

"You'd be surprized," his friend assured him. "There's a place out in the country—mighty exclusive place, too—where they'll let you see some-

thing to write home about—if you're willing to pay the price."

"I'm game," the other replied. "What say we go there tonight? If they can show me something I never saw before, I'll blow the crowd to the best dinner in town."

"You're on," his companions accepted with a laugh, but:

"Quick, Friend Trowbridge," de Grandin whispered, "do you go straightway to the desk and settle our bill. I follow."

In a moment we stood before the cashier's desk, and as I tendered the young woman a bill, the Frenchman suddenly reeled as though in the last stages of drunkenness and began staggering across the room toward the booth where the three sportively inclined youths sat. As he drew abreast of them he gave a drunken lurch and half fell across their table, regaining his balance with the greatest difficulty and pouring forth a flood of profuse apologies.

A few moments later he joined me on the street, all traces of intoxication vanished, but feverish excitement shining in his small blue eyes.

"*C'est glorieux!*" he assured me with a chuckle. "Those three empty-headed young rakes will lead us to our quarry, or I am more mistaken than I think. In my pretended drunkenness, I fell among them and took time to memorize their faces. Also, I heard them make a definite appointment for their trip tonight. Trowbridge, my friend, we shall be there. Do you return home with all speed, bring the pistols, the flashlight and the horn-handled knife which you will find in my dressing-case, and meet me at police headquarters at precisely a quarter of midnight. I should be glad to accompany you, but there is a very great much for me to accomplish between now and then, and I fear there will be little sleep for Jules de Grandin this night. *Allez*, my friend, we have no time to waste!"

DE GRANDIN had evidently perfected his arrangements by the time I reached headquarters; for a police car was waiting, and we drove in silence, with dimmed lights, through the chill March rain to a lonely point not far from the country club's golf links, where, at a signal from the little Frenchman, we came to a halt.

"Now, Friend Trowbridge," he admonished, "we must trust to our own heels, for I have no desire to let our quarry know we approach. Softly, if you please, and say anything you have to say in the lowest of whispers."

Quietly as an Indian stalking a deer he led the way across the rolling turf of the links, pausing now and again to listen attentively, at length bringing up under a clump of mournful weeping willows bordering the Albemarle Road. "Here we rest till they arrive," he announced softly, seating himself on the comparatively dry ground beneath a tree and leaning his back against its trunk. "Name of a name, but I should enjoy a cigarette; but"—he raised a shoulder in a resigned shrug—"we must have the self-restraint, even as in the days when we faced the *sale boche* in the trenches. Yes."

Time passed slowly while we maintained our silent vigil, and I was on the point of open rebellion when a warning ejaculation in my ear and the quick clasp of de Grandin's hand on my elbow told me something was toward.

Looking through the branches of our shelter, I beheld a long, black motor slipping noiselessly as a shadow down the road, saw it come to a momentary halt beside a copse of laurels some twenty yards away, saw three stealthy figures emerge from the bushes and parley a moment with the chauffeur, then enter the tonneau.

"Ha, they are cautious, these birds of evil," the Frenchman muttered as he leaped from the shadows of the willows and raised an imperative hand beckoningly.

It was with difficulty I repressed an exclamation of surprize and dismay as a dozen shadowy figures emerged, phantomlike, from the shrubbery bordering the highway.

"Are you there, *mon lieutenant?*" de Grandin called, and I was relieved as an answering hail responded and I realized we were surrounded by a cordon of State Troopers in command of a young but exceedingly business-like-looking lieutenant.

Motorcycles—two of them equipped with sidecars—were wheeled from their covert in the bushes, and in another moment we were proceeding swiftly and silently in the wake of the vanishing limousine, de Grandin and I occupying the none too commodious "bathtubs" attached to the troopers' cycles.

It was a long chase our quarry led us, and had our machines been less powerful and less expertly managed we should have been distanced more than once, but the automobile which can throw dust in the faces of the racing-cycles on which New Jersey mounts its highway patrols has not been built, and we were within easy hail of our game as they drew up before the gateway of a high-walled, deserted-looking country estate.

"Now, my lieutenant," de Grandin asked, "you thoroughly understand the plans?"

"I think so, sir," the young officer returned as he gathered his force about him with a wave of his hand.

Briefly, as the Frenchman checked off our proposed campaign, the lieutenant outlined the work to his men. "Surround the place," he ordered, "and lie low. Don't let anyone see you, and don't challenge any one going in, but—nobody comes out without permission. Get me?"

As the troopers assented, he asked, "All set?"

There was a rattle of locks as the constables swung their vicious little carbines up to "'spection arms," and each man felt the butt of the service revolver and the riot stick swinging at his belt.

"All right, take cover. If you get a signal from the house, rush it. If no signal comes, close in anyhow at the end of two hours. I've got a search warrant here"—he patted his blouse pocket—"and we won't stand any monkey business from the folks inside. Dr. de Grandin's going in to reconnoiter; he'll give the signal to charge with his flashlight, or by firing his pistol when he's ready, but——"

"But you will advance, even though my signal fails," de Grandin interrupted grimly.

"Right-o," the other agreed. "Two hours from now—3 o'clock—is zero. Here, men, compare your watches with mine; we don't want to go into action in ragged formation."

Two husky young troopers bent their backs and boosted de Grandin and me to the rim of the eight-foot brick wall surrounding the grounds. In a moment we had dropped silently to the yard beyond and de Grandin sent back a whispered signal.

Flattening ourselves to the ground we proceeded on hands and knees toward the house, taking advantage of every shrub and bush dotting the grounds, stealing forward in little rushes, then pausing beneath some friendly evergreen to glance cautiously about, listening for any sign or sound of activity from the big, darkened huse.

"I'm afraid you've brought us out on a fool's errand, old chap," I whispered. "If we find anything more heinous than bootlegging here I'll be surprized, but——"

"*S-s-sh!*" his hissing admonition silenced me. "To the right, my friend, look to the right and tell me what it is you see."

Obediently, I glanced away from the house, searching the deserted park for some sign of life. There, close to the ground, shone a faint glimmer of light. The glow was stationary, for

we watched it for upward of ten minutes before the Frenchman ordered, "Let us investigate, Friend Trowbridge. It may betoken something we should know."

Swerving our course toward the dim beacon, we moved cautiously forward, and as we approached it I grew more and more puzzled. The illumination appeared to rise from the ground, and, as we drew near, it was intercepted for an instant by something which passed between it and us. Again and yet again the glow was obscured with methodical regularity. For a moment I thought it might be some signal system warning the inmates of the house of our approach, but as we crawled still nearer my heart began to beat more rapidly, for I realized the light shone from an old-fashioned oil lantern standing on the ground and the momentary interruptions were due to shovelfuls of earth being thrown up from a fairly deep excavation. Presently there was a pause in the digging operations and two objects appeared above the surface about three feet apart—the hands of a man in the act of stretching himself. Assuming he were of average height, the trench in which he stood would be some five feet deep, judging by the distance his hands protruded above its lip.

Circling warily about the workman and his work we were able to get a fairly clear view. The hole was some

"Hoi!"

two feet wide by six feet long, and, as I had already estimated, something like five feet deep.

"What sort of trench usually has those dimensions?" The question crashed through my mind like an unexpected bolt of thunder, and the answer sent tiny ripples of chills through my cheeks and up my arms.

De Grandin's thought had paralleled mine, for he whispered, "It seems, Friend Trowbridge, that they prepare sepulture for someone. For us, by example? *Cordieu*, if it be so, I can promise them we shall go to it like kings of old, with more than one of them to bear us company in the land of shadows!"

Our course brought the grave-digger into view as we crept about him, and a fiercer, more bloodthirsty scoundrel I had never before had the misfortune to encounter. Taller than the average man by several inches he was, with enormously wide shoulders and long, dangling arms like those of a gorilla. His face was almost black, though plainly not that of a negro, and his cheeks and chin were adorned by a bristling black beard which glistened in the lantern light with some sort of greasy dressing. Upon his head was a turban of tightly twisted woolen cloth.

"U'm?" de Grandin murmured quizzically. "A Patan, by the looks of him, Friend Trowbridge, and I think no more of him for it. In upper India they have a saying, 'Trust a serpent or a tiger, but trust a Patan never,' and the maxim is approved by centuries of unfortunate experience with gentlemen like the one we see yonder.

"Come, let us make haste for the house. It may be we shall arrive in time to cheat this almost-finished grave of its intended tenant."

Wriggling snakelike through the rain-drenched grounds, our progress rendered silent by the soft turf, we made a wide detour round the dark-faced grave-digger and approached the big, forbidding mansion through whose close-barred windows no ray of light appeared.

THE place seemed in condition to defy a siege as we circled it warily, vainly seeking some means of ingress. At length, when we were on the point of owning defeat and rejoining the troopers, de Grandin came to a halt before an unbarred window letting into a cellar. Unbuttoning his leather topcoat, he produced a folded sheet of flypaper and applied the sticky stuff to the grimy window-pane, smoothed it flat, then struck sharply with his elbow. The window shattered beneath the impact, but the adhesive paper held the pieces firm, and there was no telltale clatter of broken glass as the pane smashed. "One learns more tricks than one when he associates with *les apaches*," he explained with a grin as he withdrew the flypaper and glass together, laid them on the grass and inserted his hand through the opening, undoing the window-catch. A moment later we had dropped to the cellar and de Grandin was flashing his electric torch inquiringly about.

It was a sort of lumber room into which he had dropped. Bits of discarded furniture, an old rug or two and a pile of miscellaneous junk occupied the place. The stout door at the farther end was secured by an old-fashioned lock, and the first twist of de Grandin's skeleton key sprung the bolt.

Beyond lay a long, dusty corridor from which a number of doors opened, but from which no stairway ascended. "U'm?" muttered the Frenchman. "There seems no way of telling where the stairs lie save by looking for them, Friend Trowbridge." Advancing at random, he inserted his key in the nearest lock and, after a moment's tentative twisting, was re-

warded by the sound of a sharp click as the keeper shot back.

No ray of moonlight filtered through the windows, for they were stopped with heavy wooden shutters. As we paused irresolute, wondering if we had walked into a *cul-de-sac*, a faint, whimpering cry attracted our attention. *"Un petit chat!"* de Grandin exclaimed softly. "A poor little pussy-cat; he has been locked in by mistake, no doubt, and ha! *Dieu de Dieu de Dieu de Dieu; regardez, mon ami!* Do you, too, behold it?"

The beam of his questing flashlight swept through the darkness, searching for the feline, but it was no cat the ray flashed on. It was a girl.

She lay on a rough, bedlike contrivance with a net of heavily knotted, coarse rope stretched across its frame where the mattress should have been, and was drawn to fullest compass in the form of a St. Andrew's cross; for leathern thongs knotted to each finger and toe strained tautly, holding hands and feet immovably toward the posts which stood at the four corners of the bed of torment. The knots were cruelly drawn, and even in the momentary flash of the light we saw the thongs were of rawhide, tied and stretched wet, but now dry and pulling the tortured girl's toes and fingers with a fury like that of a rack. Already the flesh about fingers and toe-nails was puffy and impurpled with engorged blood cut off by the vicious cinctures of the tightening strings.

The torment of the constantly shortening thongs and the cruel pressure of the rope-knots on which she lay were enough to drive the girl to madness, but an ultimate refinement had been added to her agony; for the bed on which she stretched was a full eight inches shorter than her height, so that her head hung over the end without support, and she was obliged to hold it up by continued flexion of the neck muscles or let it hang downward, either posture being unendurable for more than a fraction of a minute.

"O Lord," she moaned weakly between swollen lips which had been gashed and bitten till the blood showed on them in ruddy froth, "O dear Lord, take me—take me quickly —I can't stand this; I can't—oh, oh, —o-o-oh!" The prayerful exclamation ended in a half-whispered sob and her anguished head fell limply back and swung pendulously from side to side as consciousness left her.

"Ohé, la pauvre créature!" De Grandin leaped forward, unsheathing his knife as he sprang. Thrusting the flashlight into my hand, he slashed the cords from her hands and feet, cutting through each group of five strings with a single slash of his razor-sharp knife, and the thongs hummed and sang like broken banjo strings as they came apart beneath his steel.

As de Grandin worked I took note of the swooning girl. She was slight, almost to the point of emaciation, her ribs and the processes of her wrists and ankles showing whitely against the flesh. For costume she wore a wisp of printed cotton twisted bandeauwise about her bosom, a pair of soiled and torn white-cotton bloomers which terminated in tattered ruffles at her ankles and were held in place at the waist by a gayly dyed cotton scarf secured by a sort of four-in-hand knot in front. A close-wrapped bandanna kerchief swathed her head from brow to nape, covering hair and ears alike, and from the handkerchief's rim almost to the pink of her upper lip a gilded metal mask obscured her features, leaving only mouth, nose-tip and chin visible.

As de Grandin lifted her from the bed-frame and rested her lolling head against his shoulder, he tugged at the mask, but so firmly was it bound that it resisted his effort.

Again he pulled, more sharply this time, and, as he did so, we no-

ticed a movement at the side of her head beneath the handkerchief-turban. Snatching off the headgear, the Frenchman fumbled for the mask cords, then started back with a low cry of horror and dismay. The mask was not tied, but *wired to her flesh*, two punctures having been made in each ear, one in the lobe, the other in the pinna, and through the raw wounds fine golden wires had been thrust and twisted into loops, so that removal of the mask would necessitate clipping the wire or tearing the tender, doubly pierced ears.

"Oh, the villains, the assassins, the ninety-thousand-times-damned beasts!" de Grandin gritted through his teeth, desisting in his effort to take off the metallic mask. "If ever Satan walked the earth in human guise, I think he lodges within this accursed kennel of hell-hounds, Friend Trowbridge, and, *cordieu*, though the monster have as many gullets as the fabled hydra, I shall slit them all for this night's business!"

What more he would have said I do not know, for the fainting girl rolled her head and moaned feebly as she lay in his arms, and he was instantly all solicitude. "Drink this, *ma pauvre*," he commanded, drawing a silver flask from his pocket and pressing it to her pale lips.

She swallowed a bit of the fiery brandy, choked and gasped a little, then lay back against his arm with a weak sigh.

Again he applied the restorative; then: "Who are you, *ma petite?*" he asked gently. "Speak bravely; we are friends."

She shuddered convulsively and whimpered weakly again; then, so faint we could scarcely catch the syllables, "Ewell Eaton," she whispered.

"*Cordieu*, I did know it!" de Grandin exclaimed delightedly. "*Gloire à Dieu*, we have found you, *ma petite!*

"The door, Friend Trowbridge—do you stand guard at the portal lest we be surprized. Here"—he snatched a pistol from his pocket and thrust it into my hand—"hesitate not to use it, should occasion arise!"

I took station at the entrance of the torture chamber while de Grandin set about making the half-conscious girl as comfortable as possible. I could hear the murmur of their voices in soft conversation as he worked frantically at her swollen feet and hands, rubbing them with brandy from his flask and massaging her wrists and ankles in an effort to restore circulation, but what they said I could not understand.

I was on the point of leaving my post to join them, for the likelihood of our being interrupted seemed remote, when it happened. Without so much as a warning creak from without, the door smashed suddenly back on its hinges, flooring me as the kick of a mule might have done, and three men rushed pell-mell into the room. I saw de Grandin snatch frantically at his pistol, heard Ewell Eaton scream despairingly, and half rose to my feet, weak and giddy with the devastating blow I had received, but determined to use my pistol to best advantage. One of the intruders turned savagely on me, brought the staff of a long, spearlike weapon he carried down upon my head, and caught me a smashing kick on the side of the head as I fell.

"TROWBRIDGE, my friend, are you living—do you survive?" Jules de Grandin's anxious whisper cut through the darkness surrounding me.

I was lying on my back, wrists and ankles firmly bound, a bump like a goose-egg on my head where the spear-butt had hit me. Through the grimy window of our cellar prison a star or two winked mockingly; otherwise the place was dark as a cave. How long we had lain there I had no way of telling. For all I knew the troopers might have raided the place,

arrested the inmates and gone, leaving us in our dungeon. A dozen questions blazed through my mind like lightning-flashes across a summer night as I strove to roll over and ease the pressure of the knots on my crossed wrists.

"Trowbridge, *mon vieux,* do you live, are you awake, can you hear?" the Frenchman's murmured query came through the darkness again.

"De Grandin—where are you?" I asked, raising my head, the better to locate his voice.

"*Parbleu,* here I lie, trussed like a capon ready for the spit!" he returned. "They are prodigal with their rope, those assassins. Nevertheless, I think we shall make apes of them all. Roll toward me if you can, my friend, and lie with your hands toward me. *Grâce à Dieu,* neither age nor overeating has dulled my teeth. Come, make haste!"

Followed a slow, dragging sound, punctuated with muttered profanities in mingled French and English as he hitched himself laboriously across the rough cement floor in my direction.

In a few moments I felt the stiffly waxed hairs of his mustache against my wrists and the tightening of my bonds as his small, sharp teeth sank into the cords, severing strand after strand.

Sooner than I had hoped, my hands were free, and after a few seconds, during which I wrung my fingers to restore circulation, I unfastened the ropes binding my feet, then released de Grandin.

"*Morbleu,* at any rate we can move about, even if those *sacré* rogues deprived us of our weapons," the Frenchman muttered as he strode up and down our prison. "At least one thing is accomplished—Mademoiselle Ewell is relieved of her torture. Before they beat me unconscious I heard her told tomorrow she would be strangled, but as the Spaniards so sagely remark, tomorrow is another day, and I trust we shall have increased hell's population by that time.

"Have you a match, by any kind of chance?" he added, turning to me.

Searching my pockets, I found a packet of paper matches and passed them over. Striking one, he held it torchwise above his head, surveying our prison. It was a small, cement-floored room, its single window heavily barred and its only article of furniture a large, sheet-iron-sheathed furnace, evidently the building's auxiliary heating-plant. The door was of stout pine planks, nailed and doweled together so strongly as to defy anything less than a battering-ram, and secured with a modern burglar-proof lock. Plainly, there was no chance of escape that way.

"U'm?" murmured de Grandin, surveying the old hot-air furnace speculatively. "U'm-m-m? It may be we shall find use for this, if my boyhood's agility has not failed me, Friend Trowbridge."

"Use for that furnace?" I asked incredulously.

"*Mais oui,* why not?" he returned. "Let us see."

He jerked the heater's cast-iron door open, thrusting a match inside and looking carefully up the wide, galvanized flues leading to the upper floors. "It is a chance," he announced, "but the good God knows we take an equal one waiting here. *Au revoir,* my friend, either I return to liberate us or we say good morning in heaven."

Next instant he had turned his back to the furnace, grasped the iron door-frame at each side, thrust his head and shoulders through the opening and begun worming himself upward toward the flue-mouth.

A faint scraping sounded inside the heater's interior, then silence broken only by the occasional soft thud of a bit of dislodged soot.

I paced the dungeon in a perfect fever of apprehension. Though de

Grandin was slight as a girl, and almost as supple as an eel, I was certain I had seen the last of him, for he would surely be hopelessly caught in the great, dusty pipes, or, if not that, discovered by some of the villainous inmates of the place when he attempted to force himself through a register. His plan of escape was suicide, nothing less.

Click! The strong, jimmy-proof lock snapped back. I braced myself for the reappearance of our jailers, but the Frenchman's delighted chuckle reassured me.

"*Mordieu,* it was not even so difficult as I had feared," he announced. "The pipes were large enough to permit my passage without great trouble, and the registers—God be thanked!—were not screwed to the floor. I had but to lift the first I came to from its frame and emerge like a jack-in-the-box from his case. Yes. Come, let us ascend. There is rheumatism, and other unpleasant things, to be contracted in this cursed cellar."

Stepping as softly as possible, we traversed a long, unlighted corridor, ascended two flights of winding stairs and came to an upper hallway letting into a large room furnished in a garish East Indian manner and decorated with a number of mediæval sets of mail and a stand of antique arms.

The Frenchman looked about, seeking covert, but there was nothing behind which an underfed cat could hide, much less a man. Finally: "I have it!" he declared. "*Parbleu, c'est joli!*"

Striding across the room he examined the nearest suit of armor and turned to me with a chuckle. "Into it, *mon ami,*" he commanded. "Quick!"

With de Grandin's help I donned the beavered helmet and adjusted the gorget, cuirass, brassards, cuisses and jambs, finding them a rather snug fit. In five minutes I was completely garbed, and the Frenchman, laughing softly and cursing delightedly, was clambering into another set of mail. When we stood erect against the wall no one who had not seen us put on the armor could have told us from the empty suits of mail which stood at regular intervals about the wall.

From the stand of arms de Grandin selected a keen, long-bladed misericorde, and gazed upon it lovingly. Nor had he armed himself a moment too soon, for even as he straightened back against the wall and lowered the visor of his helmet there came the scuffle of feet from the corridor outside and a bearded, muscular man in Oriental garb dragged a half-fainting girl into the room. She was scantily clad in a Hindoo version of a Parisian night club costume.

"By Vishnu, you shall!" the man snarled, grasping the girl's slender throat between his blunt fingers and squeezing until she gasped for breath. "Dance you must and dance you shall—as the Master has ordered—or I choke the breath from your nostrils! Shame? What have *you* to do with shame, O creature? Daughter of a thousand iniquities, tomorrow there shall be *two* stretched upon the 'bed of roses' in the cellar!"

"*Eh bien,* my friend, you may be right," de Grandin remarked, "but I damn think you shall not be present to see it."

The fellow toppled over without so much as a groan as the Frenchman, with the precise skill of a practised surgeon, drove his dagger home where skull and spine met.

"Silence, little orange-pip!" the Frenchman ordered as the girl opened her lips to scream. "Go below to your appointed place and do as you are bidden. The time comes quickly when you shall be liberated and we shall drag such of these sow-suckled sons of pigs as remain alive to prison. Quick, none must suspect that help approaches!"

The girl ran quickly from the room, her soft, bare feet making no sound on the thick carpets of the hall, and de Grandin walked slowly to the door. In a moment he returned, lugging a suit of armor in his arms. Standing it in the place against the wall he had vacated, he repeated the trip, filling my space with a second empty suit, then motioning me to follow.

"Those sets of mail I did bring were from the balcony at the stair-head," he explained softly. "In their places we shall stand and see what passes below. Perhaps it is that we shall have occasion to take parts in the play before all is done."

STIFF and still as the lifeless ornaments we impersonated, we stood at attention at the stairway's top. Below us lay the main drawing-room of the house, a sort of low stage or dais erected at its farther end, a crescent formation of folding-chairs, each occupied by a man in evening clothes, standing in the main body of the room.

"Ah, it seems all is ready for the play," the Frenchman murmured softly through the visor-bars of his helmet. "Did you overhear the tale the little Mademoiselle Ewell told me in the torture chamber, my friend?"

"No."

"*Mordieu,* it was a story to make a man's hair erect itself! This is a house of evil, the abode of *esclavage,* no less, Friend Trowbridge. Here stolen girls are brought and broken for a life of degradation, even as wild animals from the jungle are trained for a career in the arena. The master of this odious cesspool is a Hindoo, as are his ten retainers, and well they know their beastly trade, for he was a dealer in women in India before the British *Raj* put him in prison, and his underlings have all been *corah-bundars*—punishment-servants—in Indian harems before he hired them for this service. *Parbleu,* from what we saw of the poor one in the cellars, I should say their technique has improved since they left their native land!

"The headquarters of this organization is in Spain—I have heard of it before—but there are branches in almost every country. These evil ones work on commission, and when the girls they steal have been sufficiently broken in spirit they are delivered, like so many cattle, and their price paid by dive-keepers in South America, Africa or China — wherever women command high prices and no questions are asked.

"Hitherto the slavers have taken their victims where they found them —poor shop-girls, friendless waifs, or those already on the road to living death. This is a new scheme. Only well-favored girls of good breeding are stolen and brought here for breaking, and every luckless victim is cruelly beaten, stripped and reclothed in the degrading uniform of the place within half an hour of her arrival.

"*Mordieu,* but their tactics are clever! All faces obscured by masks which can not be removed, all hair covered by exactly similar turbans, all clothing exactly alike—twin sisters might be here together, yet never recognize each other, for the poor ones are forbidden to address so much as a word to each other—Mademoiselle Ewell was stretched on the bed of torture for no greater fault than breaking this rule."

"But this is horrible!" I interrupted. "This is unbelievable——"

"Who says it?" he demanded fiercely. "Have we not seen with our own eyes? Have we not Mademoiselle Ewell's story for testimony? Do I not know how her sister, poor Madame Mazie, came in the river? Assuredly: Attend me: The fiends who took her prisoner quickly discovered the poor child's condition, and they thereupon deliberately beat out her brains and cast her murdered body into the

water, thinking the river would wash away the evidence of their crime.

"Did not that execrable slave-master whom I slew command the other girl to dance—what did it mean?" He paused a moment, then continued in a sibilant whisper:

"This, *pardieu!* Even as we send the young conscripts to Algeria to toughen them for military service, so these poor ones are given their baptism into a life of infamy by being forced to dance before half-drunken brutes to the music of the whip's crack. *Non d'une pipe,* I damn think we shall see some dancing of the sort they little suspect before we are done —no more, the master comes!"

As de Grandin broke off, I noticed a sudden focusing of attention by the company below.

Stepping daintily as a tango dancer, a man emerged through the arch behind the dais at the drawing-room's farther end. He was in full Indian court dress, a purple satin tunic, high at the neck and reaching half-way to his knees, fastened at the front with a row of sapphire buttons and heavily fringed with silver at the bottom; trousers of white satin, baggy at the knee, skin-tight at the ankle, slippers of red Morocco on his feet. An enormous turban of peach-bloom silk, studded with brilliants and surmounted by a vivid green aigrette was on his head, while round his neck dangled a triple row of pearls, its lowest loop hanging almost to the bright yellow sash which bound his waist as tightly as a corset. One long, brown hand toyed negligently with the necklace, while the other stroked his black, sweeping mustache caressingly.

"Gentlemen," he announced in a languid Oxonian drawl, "if you are ready, we shall proceed to make whoopee, as you so quaintly express it in your vernacular." He turned and beckoned through the archway, and as the light struck his profile I recognized him as the leader of the party which had surprized us in the torture chamber.

De Grandin identified him at the same time, for I heard him muttering through the bars of his visor: "Ha, toad, viper, worm! Strut while you may; comes soon the time when Jules de Grandin shall show you the posture you will not change in a hurry!"

Through the archway stepped a tall, angular woman, her face masked by a black cloth domino, a small round samisen, or Japanese banjo, in her hand. Saluting the company with a profound obeisance, she dropped to her knees and picked a short, jerky note or two on her crude instrument.

The master of ceremonies clapped his hands sharply, and four girls came running out on the stage. They wore brilliant kimonos, red and blue and white, beautifully embroidered with birds and flowers, and on their feet were white-cotton *tabi* or foot-mittens with a separate "thumb" to accommodate the great toe, and *zori,* or light straw sandals. Golden masks covered the upper part of their faces, and their hair was hidden by voluminous glossy-black wigs arranged in elaborate Japanese coiffures and thickly studded with ornamental hairpins. On their brightly rouged lips were fixed, unnatural smiles.

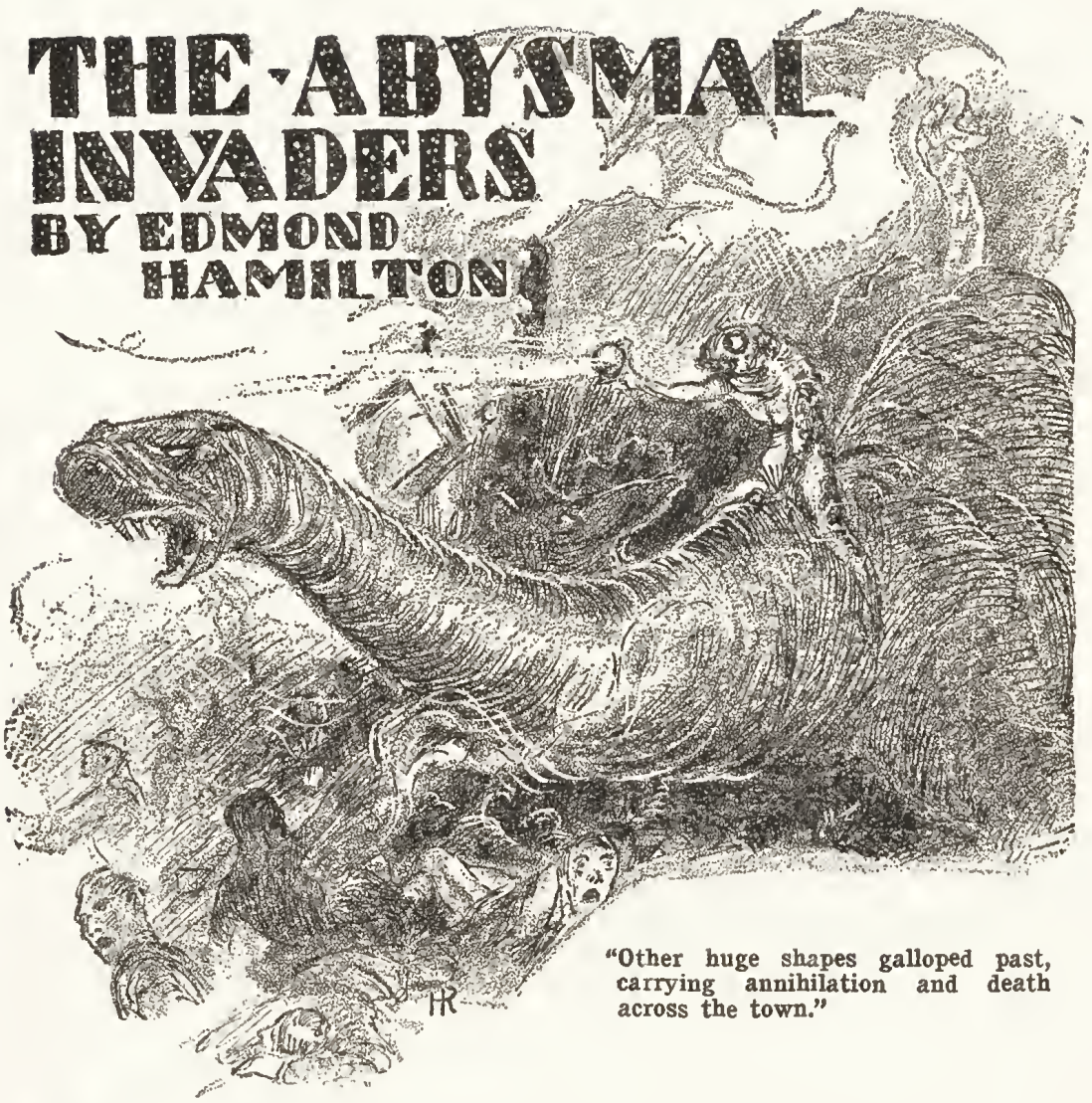
Running to the very edge of the platform, with exaggeratedly short steps, they slipped their sandals off and dropped to their knees, lowering their foreheads to the floor in greeting to the guests; then, rising, drew up in rank before the musician, tittering with a loud, forced affectation of coy gayety and hiding their faces behind the flowing sleeves of their kimonos, as though in mock-modesty.

Again the master clapped his hands, the musician began a titillating tune on her banjo, and the dance was on. More like a series of postures than a dance it was, ritualistically

(Continued on page 859)

THE ABYSMAL INVADERS

BY EDMOND HAMILTON



"Other huge shapes galloped past, carrying annihilation and death across the town."

MUCH of the story, no doubt, we shall never know. Much concerning that staggering, deadly invasion which leapt out upon an unsuspecting world will remain forever hidden by that dark curtain of mystery which screens from us the workings of the unknown. Theories, suggestions, surmises — with these alone can we fill the gaps in our knowledge, and these are valueless. It were better to ignore them entirely, in any history of the thing, and record only the known facts. And such a record begins, inevitably, with the disappearance of Dr. Morton, and with the sensational circumstances surrounding that disappearance.

It is easy enough to understand the sensation caused by the thing, for Dr. Morton—Dr. Walter Morton—was considered the world's foremost living paleontologist at the time. Attached to the great Northcote Museum in Chicago for a dozen years, he had risen in those years to the summit of eminence in his chosen field of science. It was he who had found in a Kentucky cavern the first perfect specimen of the ichthyornis, rarest of Mesozoic birds; he who had completely shattered the "dinosaur-transition" theory by his brilliant comparison of sauropodian and ornithischian characteristics; and he who had discovered the rich bone-fields at Salty

Gulch, in Montana, unearthing there the superb allosaurus and stegosaurus skeletons which made the Northcote collections unrivaled.

Such achievements would have brought fame to any man, and in Morton's case that fame was heightened by the fact that most of his work he had carried out single-handed. It was his custom, indeed, to conduct his prospective surveys quite alone, securing help only for the actual unearthing of his own discoveries. So that it was alone that he had gone into the dark fastnesses of Sutter's Swamp, early in May, in search of the traces of prehistoric animal life which he believed might exist there.

Sutter's Swamp was an area of perhaps a dozen square miles which lay in the Illinois farming country some scores of miles southwest of Chicago, and a few miles east of the modern little city of Brinton. It was a place of almost incredible desolation, considering its nearness to the busy little town, a great, forest-covered tangle of sluggish streams and stagnant pools. Lying in a perpetual twilight beneath its canopy of vine-choked trees, its surface was a confusion of green water and treacherous quicksands and fallen logs, with here and there a mound of solid ground. To most scientists, no doubt, the place would have seemed unpromising enough for a paleontological survey, since never had prehistoric fossils been found in that section. Morton, however, had merely stated in his quiet way that he intended to carry out an exploration of the place, and had departed for it without further announcement.

Arriving in Brinton, quite alone, he had lodged at a hotel and had immediately plunged into his work. Each morning at sunrise he sallied out to the great morass in rough tweed and hip-boots, armed with a long probing-rod of slender steel. To those in Brinton he must have been a perplexing figure, for the great swamp was avoided by them, always, but after a few days they became accustomed to him and took no further note of his comings and goings. And then, a week after his arrival, there burst upon them the sensation of his disappearance.

On that day Morton had set forth for the swamp at sunrise as usual, and one Brinton-bound farmer had glimpsed him entering the western edge of the morass. Through that day nothing further was heard of him, but as it was Morton's habit to linger in the swamp until darkness compelled his return, no anxiety was felt when he was still absent by nightfall. It was only on the next morning, when his absence had lasted for twenty-four hours, that it began to be commented on by some of his Brinton acquaintances.

Discussing it, their doubt and anxiety grew to such a point that shortly before noon two of them drove out to the swamp in the hope of finding some trace of Morton's whereabouts. It was some hours later that they returned, and when they did so they brought with them a tale which spread over the town like flame, and which set the wires between Brinton and Chicago humming with dispatches to the latter city's newspapers.

As told by them, the two had left their car at the swamp's edge and ventured for more than a mile into the morass, without finding any trace of the missing scientist. A mile in, though, they had abruptly come upon some things quite as inexplicable as the absence of Morton. These were great lanes of destruction which some force had torn across the forested swamp, wide paths in which the trees had been smashed down and crushed as though by the passage of some gigantic creature or creatures. And on the mounds and spots of solid ground along these pathways of destruction they had found strange large tracks, which could have been

made by no conceivable living creature but which were entirely unexplainable otherwise. Gigantic and five-toed, these tracks were sunken deep in the soft earth, and were each a full square yard in size. Wherever the lanes of smashed trees lay the great tracks had been found also, seeming to lead inward toward the center of the swamp. The two men had stared at these for a time, dumfounded, and then, not daring to venture farther into the gloomy recesses of the swamp, had hastened back to Brinton with their story.

Within minutes that story had spread over all of Brinton, and within hours it was being shouted forth by yelling newsboys in the Chicago streets. In itself the disappearance of so noted a scientist as Morton would have been startling, but coupled with the mysterious phenomena of the swamp it was sensational. By nightfall a dozen reporters and photographers had arrived in Brinton in quest of further details, and with them had come as a representative of the Northcote institution young Edward Rowan, who had been Morton's chief assistant.

Rowan and the reporters found the little town in a state of turmoil that night, the one topic of excited discussion being the phenomena of the swamp. A posse was being formed, they learned, with which to beat the swamp from end to end on the next morning, in the hope of finding the missing scientist somewhere in its recesses. Young Rowan himself instantly volunteered as a member of the posse and was accepted.

To those in Brinton, however, the disappearance of the scientist was almost a secondary consideration beside the strange tracks and pathways which had been found in the morass. Morton's disappearance, after all, might be due to his stepping into a quicksand, but no natural force or forces could account for the lanes of smashed trees and the giant tracks. No animal on earth, of course, was mighty enough to cause those tracks and pathways, yet what could have done so? Was the thing only a practical joke or hoax of some kind?

Until late that night the town's bright-lighted streets remained crowded with unaccustomed throngs of citizens arguing the matter, sometimes heatedly, or exchanging jests concerning it with passing friends. By most, indeed, the matter was treated more as an elaborate joke than anything else, yet one might have sensed also among those shifting throngs an unspoken elation, a curious pride. Whatever was behind the thing, they felt, it was at least bringing fame to Brinton. North and south and east and west, they knew, the wires would be flashing the story. All the nation would read of it, in the morning. And in the morning, too, the swamp would be searched, the thing cleared up. In the morning . . .

Thus ran the speech and thoughts of those in the streets that night. And strange it seems, to us, that the people in the streets of Brinton could have spoken thus, that night, could have thought thus. Incredible it seems, indeed, that of them all none ever suspected what dark horror out of long-dead ages was even then rising from behind their little mystery, what mighty, resistless menace was even then crashing gigantically through the outside night, to sweep down upon the little town in one great avalanche of destruction and death.

2

It is in the account of young Rowan that one finds, now, the clearest picture of the coming of the terror to Brinton. There are other accounts, for though the survivors of that terror were but few most of them have recorded their experiences; yet for the most part their narratives are too horror-stricken and incoherent to be of any real value. Rowan, on the

other hand, not only saw the thing as well or better than any other single man, but set down his impressions of it in vivid style.

His narrative begins with the events already detailed, the disappearance of Dr. Morton and his own coming to Brinton. It had been some time after nightfall that he had arrived, and after making arrangements to accompany the posse into the swamp on the next morning he had ventured out into the streets of the town, which were still filled with the shuffling throngs discussing the sensation of the day. Along the streets the windows of stores were still brilliant, their proprietors taking advantage of the unaccustomed throngs, while a few raucous-voiced newsboys were selling late editions of a Chicago daily which had featured the sensation. For an hour or more Rowan strolled on through the streets and then, yawning, began to move back toward his hotel, through the thinning crowds. He had just reached the building's door when he suddenly halted.

From away toward the street's eastern end had come a sudden, high-pitched cry, a thrilling scream which was repeated in the distance by a score of voices, and then succeeded by a dull roar. Rowan stepped out into the street, gazing down its length, lit by the suspended brilliance of the street-lights. A few of the groups on the sidewalks near by had stepped out beside him, and with these he stared down the long street's length toward the source of the shouting cries.

He glimpsed, in a moment, a horde of figures running up the street toward him, a disorganized little mob which was giving utterance to a medley of hoarse shouts and screams. The mob parted, for a moment, and there roared through it a crowded automobile, racing up the street with immense speed, and past the wondering Rowan and those around him. And now he heard, simultaneously, a wild ringing of bells toward the south and a far-away crash which murmured faintly to his ears from the east. With every moment the clamor around him was increasing, the whole city awakening, and lights flashing out in windows on every side.

By then the people around him had caught the contagion of panic and were hastening away toward the west also, but Rowan held his ground until the first running figures of the mob farther down the street were racing past him. Then he reached out and seized one of these, a shabby, middle-aged man whose face was contorted with panic.

"What's the matter?" he cried, striving to make himself heard over the thunderous, increasing clamor about him. "What's happening?"

The man he held bawled something indistinguishable in his ear, and at the same time wrenched frantically loose from his grasp, hurrying on. Some hundreds of feet down the street the main body of the mob was now racing toward Rowan, and then, beyond that mob, Rowan saw by the brilliant street-lamps the cause of their panic flight.

Far down the street there was thundering toward him a gigantic creature which his eyes refused for the moment to credit, a titanic, dark thing whose tremendous, rumbling tread shook the very ground on which he himself stood. A hundred feet in length and a third of that in height it loomed, a colossal dark bulk upheld by four massive legs, tapering into a huge tail behind and carrying before it a long, sinuous neck which ended in a small, reptilian head. High up on the great thing's mighty, curving back clung some smaller creature which he could but vaguely glimpse, and down the street behind it were thundering a half-dozen more like itself, vast, incredible, charging down the street upon the madly screaming mob which fled before them. For one

mad, whirling moment Rowan stared, and then he shouted aloud.

"Brontosaurs!" he cried, standing there for the moment quite unconscious of his own peril from the onward-thundering monsters. Brontosaurs! Monsters out of earth's dawn, thundering through a Twentieth Century city! Mighty dinosaurs of the Mesozoic age, the most terrible creatures ever to appear on this planet, bridging the gap of millions of years to crash through the little town! Rowan stood rigid as they thundered on toward him, heard their mighty, throaty bellows as they overtook the fleeing mob, and then saw them trampling over that mob as bulls might trample ants, smashing them beneath gigantic feet, annihilating them with sweeps of the huge tails, thundering, crashing on.

And now they were within yards of him and he found himself staggering back from the street into a crevice between two buildings at its side. The next moment the great monsters had thundered past him, their gigantic tread shaking the earth beneath him, and in that moment he glimpsed clearly the creatures who rode upon their backs. Small and manlike shapes were these, but lizardlike, too, their limbs and bodies green-scaled, their extremities armed with sharp talons, their heads thick and conical and featureless, except for the big, dark, disklike eyes and the wide-fanged mouths. And as they thundered past on their gigantic mounts he saw one raise an arm with a white globe in its grasp, saw a beam of pale and feeble light which flickered out from that globe and struck buildings to right and left, buildings which burst into great masses of flame as the pale beam touched them.

And now the great creatures had swept past him and from farther up the street came their bellowing clamor, pierced by sharp, agonized screams from the tiny running figures there. Around Rowan flames were shooting up in great roaring bursts, and beyond he saw one of the great brontosaurs rearing up against the side of a building, saw that building's walls collapse and crash beneath the huge beast's weight. From right and left came other mighty crashes throughout the city, and an unceasing, thunderous clamor of sounds, the deep and terrible bellowing of the dinosaurs as they crashed across the town, the screams of their victims trampled beneath giant feet, the hiss of the flickering beams, the roar of bursting flames. Down the street, too, was the rumbling of more of the great brontosaurs, racing up the street and past the spot where Rowan crouched, galloping gigantically to the attack.

After them came a single dark, great shape, almost as huge, a great reptilian form whose huge paws gleamed with mighty claws, whose broad-gaping mouth showed immense fangs, leaping forward in quick, gigantic hops like some giant toad, its small eyes glittering in the flame-light of the burning buildings. In a moment it had whirled past Rowan in a series of mighty hops and he glimpsed it farther up the street, pouncing upon the few surviving little figures who ran screaming for shelter, inconceivably swift and catlike in its resistless rushes. And as Rowan saw it leaping on he felt reason deserting him.

"God!" he whispered. "A tyrannosaurus!"

Crouched there at the street's edge he huddled, the buildings around him a storm of leaping flame, while down through that lane of fire there thundered into the town from the east the creatures of a long-dead age, the mighty beasts of earth's youth extinct for millions of years. Rowan was never afterward able to recall all that he saw and heard in the minutes that he crouched there. He knew that other brontosaurs rumbled past, bellowing, ridden by the lizard-creatures whose pale rays swept and

stabbed in great circles of fiery destruction; that other tyrannosaurs swept by with swift and mighty leaps, pawing human victims from the wreckage at the street's sides, pouncing and whirling like gigantic cats; that other colossal reptilian shapes, their mighty, curving backs armored by great, upstanding plates, rushed past like great battering-rams of flesh and bone, crashing into buildings and through walls as though of paper, great stegosaurs that thundered on after the others who carried annihilation and death across the town; that still other huge rhinoceroslike shapes galloped past, triceratops who crashed resistlessly on with lowered heads, impaling all before them on their three terrible horns.

All of these Rowan saw, dimly, as though from a great distance, while in his ears beat all the vast roar of sound from the stricken town around him, screams and shouts and hissing cries and vast bellows, roar of flame and crash of falling walls. The great wave of destruction, the mass of the attacking monsters, had swept past and was rolling now over the town toward the west, but still Rowan crouched, motionless. Then behind him was a mounting roar of swiftly catching flame, and out toward him crept little tongues of red fire as the walls between which he crouched began to burn. Then, at last, Rowan rose to his feet and staggered out into the street.

The street-lights had vanished with the bursting of their poles and cables by the rush of the great dinosaurs, but all around him was illumined brilliantly by the light of the flaming buildings. North and south and west the city was burning, vast sheets of murky flame roaring up from it in scores of places, and by the light of those distant fires Rowan glimpsed the scores of titanic dark shapes that crashed still through streets and walls, glimpsed the play of the livid rays and heard the thin cries of those who still fled before the mighty, bellowing dinosaurs. A moment he stood at the street's center, motionless, and then above him was a whirring and flapping of colossal wings, and he looked up to see a vast, dark shape swooping swiftly down upon him.

In a single moment he glimpsed the thing, the forty-foot spread of its huge, batlike wings, the great reptilian head thrust down toward him as it swooped, white fangs gleaming and red eyes shining in the firelight, and in that flashing moment recognized the thing for what it was, a pterodactyl, a flying monster out of the dead ages. Then he saw that upon it rode one of the scaled, dark-eyed lizard-creatures, whose arm was coming up with a white globe in its grasp as its dragon-mount dove down toward Rowan.

The next moment Rowan had thrown himself suddenly aside, and as he did so felt the great pterodactyl sweep over him by a few feet, glimpsed a beam of pale light that flickered down from the upheld globe and struck the street beside him, cracking and rending the pavement there with its intense heat and scorching his own shoulder as it grazed it. Then the giant thing had passed and was flapping on to the west, while behind and above it flew others of its kind, mighty flying reptiles ridden by the lizard-creatures, whose pallid rays struck down with fire and death as they swooped on with whirring wings.

And then suddenly Rowan was running, dazed and blind with terror, down the street toward the east, between the flaming lines of buildings and over the crushed fragments of humanity which lay there. Down the street's length he ran, and out between its last buildings, and on and on into the night, crazedly, aimlessly. The roar of flames and thunderous din of the town behind him dwindled as he ran, but he did not look back, throw-

ing himself blindly forward through the darkness, weeping and wringing his hands, stumbling, staggering on.

3

How long it was before the mists of terror that clouded his brain finally cleared and lifted, how long he stumbled blindly through the night, Rowan could never guess. When he finally came back to realization of his surroundings he found himself standing knee-deep in water and mud, standing in a thick forest whose dark trees formed over him a great canopy of twisted foliage, and whose floor was a swampy expanse of shallow pools and yielding sands. Far behind him there glowed feebly in the sky a glare of ruddy light, half glimpsed through the rifts in the foliage overhead, and as his eyes took in that crimson glare sudden memory came to his dazed brain.

"God!" he whispered. And again, the single syllable: "God!"

For minutes he stood there, paying no attention to his own surroundings, his mind on that tremendous and unthinkable attack which had crashed upon Brinton from the outside night, of the terrible dinosaurs and their strange riders who had descended upon the town. Whence had they come, those gigantic reptilian monsters whose like earth had not seen for hundreds of millions of years? And who, what, were those lizard-shapes who had ridden and directed them, whose pale rays had swept fiery death across the town?

Abruptly Rowan's mind snapped back to consideration of his own predicament, and swiftly he looked about him. The thick forest around him, the mud and stagnant water in which he stood, the odor of rotting vegetation in his nostrils—in a moment he recognized them.

"The swamp!" he whispered. "I came eastward from the town, and this——"

A moment he paused, glancing around and back toward the glare of red light in the sky behind, then turned and began to move forward. Through stagnant, scummy pools he splashed, feeling himself sinking once into treacherous sands but jerking out of them in swift panic, clambering over fallen trees and across ridges and mounds of solid ground, through thick tangles of shrubs and briars. Once he lay for moments on one of the mounds, panting for breath, and staring up through the twisted branches above to where the shining, unchanging constellations marched serenely across the heavens. Then he rose and pressed on, conscious only of the desire to put more and more distance between himself and the inferno of terror which Brinton had become.

Abruptly he stepped out of the close forest into a wide clear space, a broad pathway cut through that forest by some great force, in which the trees and bushes had been ground down into crushed and splintered masses. Rowan stepped into this broad lane of destruction, wonderingly, and saw that it ran east and west, apparently across the swamp. Then into his mind leapt remembrance of those great pathways of smashed trees which the searchers for Morton had found near the swamp's edge. Could it be that——?

Before he could complete the thought there came a sudden dull reverberation from the swamp to eastward, a quivering of the ground beneath him, a rumbling thunder rapidly nearing him. In sudden panic he shrank back into the forest at the broad path's edge, and the next moment their appeared in the east along that path a mighty shape, thundering down the path toward him and dimly visible in the starlight. It was a brontosaur, he saw, bearing one of the dark lizard-shapes which rode at the base of its great neck, thundering down the path toward the west in giant, earth-shaking strides. Another

followed it, and another, until four had passed, and then the thunder of their great tread died away in the west, as they galloped on toward Brinton. Rowan stared after them and then, as a sudden thought flared in his brain, he crept again from the sheltering trees and moved steadily eastward into the swamp, following the great path by which the brontosaurs had come.

The path was beaten hard and flat, he found, and seemed to lead due eastward into the heart of the swamp. And as he followed it, as he crept onward, light came to his eyes from far ahead, a white brilliance which filtered faintly through the ranks of close-packed trees. Steadily Rowan crept on toward it, and then as its radiance began to strengthen he left the broad path and slipped again into the shelter of the forest, creeping forward ever more cautiously between the close-ranked trees and over the rotting, stagnant slime toward the source of the pallid light ahead.

A dull roar of sound came to his ears as he went on, a whistling, shrieking clamor as of some great wind which raged ceaselessly, louder and louder as he neared it. Through the trees ahead he glimpsed a broad open space lit by the white radiance, and dropped to his knees, crawling silently on. At last he had crept to the very edge of the open space and lay crouched in the slime behind a great tree, peering tensely forward.

Before him lay a great, flat mound of solid ground, elevated a few feet above the ooze of the swamp, roughly square in shape and fully one thousand feet across. It was quite bare and treeless, all vegetation upon it having apparently been sheared away, and was lit by a single globe of radiant white light suspended by a slender shaft of metal high above the great mound's surface. At the center of the broad, flat surface there yawned a tremendous pit which occupied half the mound's expanse, a vast circular shaft some hundreds of feet across whose smooth, perpendicular sides gleamed dully as though coated with metal. From where he crouched at the great mound's edge he could glimpse only the round mouth of the great shaft and a few feet of its downward-sinking sides, but he perceived that it was from this mighty pit that there roared upward the thunderous torrent of unceasing winds. Then his attention shifted from the great pit to the creatures grouped near its rim.

At the far edge of the great shaft there rose from the ground a strange, three-pillared structure of gleaming metal, bearing on an upheld plate a number of shining studs and a single large dial or wheel of metal. And beside this structure stood a knot of unearthly creatures, green-scaled, dark-eyed lizard-shapes like those he had glimpsed in the attack on Brinton. These were standing across the pit from him, at the very rim of the great shaft, and one or two of them were apparently staring down into the darkness of the shaft itself.

And now, over the raging shriek of winds from the pit, came another sound to the crouching Rowan's ears, a faint but deep bellowing which grew swiftly louder. He saw the lizard-men at the pit's edge stir, look downward, and then suddenly there rose up out of the great shaft's depths a great, round platform of metal, a mighty, disklike platform fully four hundred feet across which all but filled the mouth of the great pit as it rose, separated from that pit's edge by a tiny circular gap of a yard or less. Up from the dark depths of the shaft *floated* this great platform, slower and slower, and he saw that upon it were standing two of the gigantic, bellowing brontosaurs and some half-dozen more of the lizard-men. Smoothly the vast disk and its great burden drifted up-

ward, until it hung level with the edges of the pit, its vast weight and the weight it bore suspended incredibly above the abyss. A moment it hung there, and in that moment the lizard-men on it stepped swiftly out onto the mound, prodding the two brontosaurs on before them. The empty platform hovered a moment longer at the pit's edge, and then began to sink slowly downward, gathering speed swiftly and dropping smoothly out of sight into the dark depths of the giant shaft.

Rowan gasped. That mighty platform, moving up the great shaft and down it, with upon it the great brontosaurs—from what unguessed depths below had it come? He saw that the lizard-men now were swinging up into curious, saddle-like seats affixed upon the backs of the giant beasts, and then heard them utter rasping cries, at which the two dinosaurs moved obediently forward, off the mound and onto the broad, beaten path which led from its edge westward through the swamp toward Brinton. In a moment the two great beasts and their riders had thundered down that path and disappeared, while on the mound were left only three of the lizard-creatures, who conversed in low, rasping tones.

MINUTES passed while Rowan crouched there, watching them, and then one pointed downward into the shaft again, and in a moment there floated up once more the great disk-platform, but empty this time. It swept smoothly up once more to the edge of the shaft's mouth, hung motionless momentarily again at that edge, and then sank from sight once more. Rowan saw, then, that its motion was apparently automatic, and then before he could speculate further on it all his attention focused on the three lizard-men on the mound, who were walking together toward the great path which led west from that mound.

One seemed to point westward, where the red glare of light from burning Brinton still quivered in the sky, and then the three had disappeared down the path, evidently for a better view, since Rowan still could hear over the shriek of winds from the pit the rasping of their harsh, insectlike voices in the distance. Minutes he crouched, while the white-lit mound before him lay unoccupied, and then rose suddenly from his place of concealment and crept silently across the mound to the rim of the great pit. Tensely he craned forward, staring downward.

In his ears was the deafening roar of the winds from beneath, winds which tore at him with cyclonic fury as they rushed up from the dark depths of the shaft. Staring down into that shaft Rowan could see nothing, since its interior was of intense and unrelieved blackness, without spark of light. As seconds passed, though, and his eyes became more accustomed to the blackness beneath, he seemed to sense, rather than see, a quiver of light far below, a wavering, flickering of light that lasted for but a moment and then vanished. And then he glimpsed something far below that was rising swiftly toward him, something that gleamed a little in the white light from above him. The platform!

Abruptly there was a sound of sharp movement behind Rowan, and he whirled around, then stood motionless. At the mound's west edge there stood a single one of the scaled, inhuman lizard-creatures, his eyes full upon Rowan. From down the great path came the rasping squeak of the voices of the other two, but the one was silent, staring straight toward him. Then, with a movement inconceivably swift, he had leapt forward.

Rowan cried out as the creature

leapt, then felt himself grasped by powerful, taloned claws, thrown to the ground, whirling about at the pit's edge in threshing combat. He heard a harsh cry from the creature that grasped him, heard the cries of the other two as they raced now to his aid. The two struggling figures were at the very rim of the great shaft, now, rolling and twisting, and in one uppermost moment Rowan glimpsed the mighty disk-platform sweeping up out of the depths of that shaft, hovering motionless at its mouth, beside him.

He staggered to his feet, still in the other's grasp, striking frantically out with clenched fists. Now the other two had raced up on the mound, he saw, and were leaping toward the combat. Then Rowan gave a frantic wrench and twist, felt himself and the creature holding him tottering at the rim of the abyss, and then they had fallen, still striking and twisting, had fallen upon the great disk as it hovered momentarily at the pit's edge beside them, and locked still in deadly combat upon that disk were sinking ever more swiftly downward, into the darkness of the giant shaft, into the raging of the deafening winds, down, down, down. . . .

•

4

For how many minutes he struggled thus with his lizard-thing opponent on the great disk, Rowan could not guess. Twisting, squirming, striking, the two rolled about, and then as the powerful muscles of the creature began to wear down his own resistance, Rowan put forth all his strength in one last effort. Grasping the scaled body of the creature with his left arm he encircled its conical head with his right and twisted that head back with all his force. There was a moment of intense effort, a frantic threshing of the creature in his grasp, and then a muffled snap as of breaking bones, and the thing lay limp and still. Rowan scrambled up to his knees, panting.

Around him now roared the deafening torrents of ascending and descending winds, and a few feet away from him the smooth metal wall of the great shaft was flashing upward with immense speed as the disk shot downward. From high above a pale white light fell down upon him, a little circle of white radiance that was swiftly contracting, dwindling, as the disk flashed down. In a moment it had dwindled to a spark of light, and then had vanished entirely. And then about Rowan was only darkness—darkness and the thundering bellow of the raging winds.

He crept to the edge of the great disk, now, peered down over the low protecting rail that rimmed it, straining his eyes down through the darkness. The flicker of light he had glimpsed from above was clear now to his eyes, a tiny patch of quivering red light that was growing rapidly stronger, larger, as the disk flashed down toward it. Crouched at the great descending platform's edge Rowan gazed down toward it, hair blown back by the great winds that raged past him, clinging to his hold against their tremendous force. The patch of illumination was swiftly broadening, until it lay across all the shaft far below, a crimson, quivering glare.

And now it seemed to Rowan that the downward-shooting disk-platform was slowing a little its tremendous speed. The gleaming walls around him were not flashing upward so swiftly, he thought, and then even as that thought came to him the great disk shot down out of the darkness of the shaft and into a glare of lurid crimson light, into a titanic, cavernous space which seemed to his eyes in that moment limitless.

He was conscious first of a mighty

curving roof of rock close above him, from which the disk was dropping smoothly downward, and in which there yawned a black circle which was the opening of the shaft down which he had come. A full mile below lay the floor of the mighty cavern, stretching away for miles on every side, a colossal underworld lit by the crimson, wavering glare. Then Rowan's stunned eyes made out, far away, the titanic, precipitous walls of gray rock which formed the great cavern's sides, miles in the distance, stretching from floor to rocky roof. And as his eyes swept along them they came to rest upon the blinding, dazzling source of the crimson light that illuminated all this cavern world.

In the gray wall to his right, miles away, was a great, slitlike opening near the roof, an opening through which there poured down a mighty torrent of blazing, liquid fire, a colossal Niagara of molten flame whose crimson, blazing radiance shot out a quivering glare which lit luridly the whole mighty cavern. For thousands of feet the great torrent of raging fires tumbled downward, caught at the base of the cliff in a canal of gray stone which conveyed it, a river of living flame, into a central basin of stone of the same diameter as the great shaft above, and which lay just beneath the opening of that shaft in the roof and beneath the descending disk, a lake of leaping flame. Around it were grouped a circle of strange, blunt-nosed machines of some sort, and down toward it the disk-platform was smoothly sinking.

And beyond and around it, on the stupendous cavern's floor, there stretched mass upon mass of huge buildings, gray and mighty and ancient in appearance, buildings which resembled masses of gigantic gray cubes piled upon each other in neatly geometrical designs. Broad streets cut through their square-cut masses, and in those streets moved great throngs of large and smaller shapes, mighty dinosaurs and masses of the lizard-men. Far away to the distant, encircling walls stretched the massed buildings, and over them hovered here and there great pterodactyls bearing lizard-riders, flitting across the cavern from place to place on their immense, flapping wings.

Rowan stared, stupefied, stunned, crouching at the edge of his descending disk, and then became suddenly aware of fierce and increasing heat beating up toward him. He looked down, saw that the disk was dropping straight toward the lake of fire below, sprang to its edge in sudden fear as it dropped on.

Down, down—ever more slowly the great disk was sinking, now, down until at last it hovered motionless a scant fifty feet above the surface of the molten lake, hanging level with the edges of the circular stone basin which held that lake, and level with the floor of the mighty cavern. A moment only it hovered there, and in that moment Rowan saw that awaiting it at the great basin's edge stood a half-score of the lizard-men. Even in the moment he saw them they glimpsed him crouching at the disk's edge, and instantly two of them leapt upon the disk, with the white globes that held the heat-beam outstretched toward him. He cowered back, but instead of loosing the ray upon him one grasped him by the shoulder and jerked him from the platform onto the basin's edge, just as the great disk began to move upward from that edge. Standing there for the moment Rowan saw the great disk floating smoothly up once more into the lurid light toward the black round opening of the shaft in the roof of rock above, rising swiftly into that shaft and disappearing from view inside it as it flashed upward once more on its endless, automatic motion.

As one of his captors tugged suddenly at his arm, though, he turned, and the creature pointed toward the gigantic gray buildings ahead, at the

same time jerking him forward. Slowly Rowan started toward them, while on each side of him walked one of the lizard-men, their deadly white globes ready for action.

A moment and they had left the broad clear plaza of stone where lay the fiery lake, and were entering one of the wide streets which cut across the masses of the city's buildings. As he marched down that street between his two guards Rowan all but forgot his own predicament, so intensely interesting was the panorama before his eyes, a shifting pageant of creatures of the world's youth, enthralling to the eyes of the paleontologist.

For through the streets were pouring masses of the lizard-men, bearing tools or weapons, hurrying along on taloned feet or riding huge brontosaurs, who tramped majestically along the street's center while the walking crowds clung to its sides. Here and there, too, moved other dinosaurs, almost as huge, bearing burdens or ridden by lizard-men, the reptilian beast-servants of a lizard race. Tyrannosaurs there were, moving along in their swift, hopping gait, the fiercest and most terrible of all the dinosaurs, yet servants, like the rest, of the green-scaled lizard-folk; allosaurs, like smaller replicas of the great tyrannosaurs; mighty-armored stegosaurs and great-horned triceratops, and over all the whirring wings of the great pterodactyls.

As they marched on down the street, attracting but little attention from the hurrying lizard-creatures, Rowan saw that in the great gray buildings on each side the doors opening into the street were of immense size, forty to fifty feet in height, and saw here and there a giant dinosaur entering or emerging from one of those great open doorways in obedience to the command of its lizard master. Then abruptly his two guards turned with him into one of them, and he found himself in a long, colossal corridor, its gray roof fifty feet above him and its width almost as great. Here and there along this great corridor were open doorways, and into one of these he was jerked by his guards, finding himself in the presence of three other of the lizard-creatures who sat behind a metal block much like a legless table.

To these his guards spoke in their harsh voices. There was a moment of silence, and then a rasping command from one of the three, at which he was instantly reconducted from the room and down the corridor's length to a smaller, bolted door. A moment his captors fumbled with its bolt, then opened the door by sliding it down into an aperture in the floor, motioning Rowan inside and keeping the white globes full upon him.

Hopelessly he stepped in, and the door slid up and shut behind him, while in a moment the bolts clanged shut outside. Rowan turned slowly around, then stood rigid. Across the room from him a single figure was staring at him, and as his eyes took in that figure a cry broke from him:

"Morton!"

5

A SINGLE moment the other stared at him, unspeaking, a haggard, unshaven figure utterly different from the trim little scientist Rowan remembered, and then he came across the room, hands outstretched.

"Rowan!" he cried, hoarsely. "Good God, you here, Rowan!" Then his thoughts shifted, lightning-like. "They've gone out, Rowan?" he asked. "These things—these creatures—they've started their attack?"

"Yes," said the assistant. "Over Brinton, hours ago. I came—when you disappeared there in the swamp." Swiftly he spoke of the attack on Brinton, of his own crazed flight into the swamp, his own trip

down the shaft and capture, and when he had finished Morton was silent, his face a mask. When at last he spoke it was in a whisper.

"They've started," he whispered. "Over Brinton—and over all earth, now. And I who might have warned, captured——"

"You were captured by them there in the swamp?" asked Rowan, quickly, and the other inclined his head.

"Taken there by them, without a chance to escape. And taken down here. . . .

"You know, Rowan, why I came to Brinton, to the swamp, to investigate the rumors we had heard of great bones and skeletons existing in the slime of that swamp. And in the week I spent investigating the morass I found that the rumors had spoken truly, for here and there inside the edges of the morass I found great bone-fragments which could only come from dinosaur skeletons. Then, a week after I had begun my search, the thing happened.

"I was working with my probing-rod, perhaps a mile inside the swamp, when there was a sudden distant crashing of trees and I saw a gigantic, slate-colored bulk rolling across the forest toward me. Before I could recover from my amazement the thing was on me, a great brontosaur ridden by one of the lizard-men—a gigantic dinosaur out of the Mesozoic age, crashing through an Illinois swamp! Before I could gather my stunned wits another had crashed toward me from beyond it, and in an instant I was the prisoner of the lizard-creatures, who fettered my hands and feet, crashed back on the great brontosaurs with me toward that mound at the swamp's center, where there yawned the opening of the great shaft. Up and down that shaft moves the great disk-platform, endlessly, and on it they brought me down to this cavern world, down to this gray city of theirs and into this building. And here, first, I was examined by three of their number who seemed to hold positions of authority among them.

"For hours the three examined me, striving to converse with me in their rasping tones, endeavoring to make plain to me the elementary word-sounds of their strange language. That language, I found, is a phonetic one, but aided by gestures and written diagrams we were able to attain to a rough exchange of ideas. And partly through their own questions, partly through what I had seen in the great cavern outside, I came to understand who and what these enigmatic creatures were, and where they had originated.

"They were beings of an age dead for hundreds of millions of years, I learnt, creatures of the Mesozoic age, that period of the earth's history which we call the age of reptiles. For in that age the races of mammals had hardly begun to arise, and the great and smaller reptiles and lizard-races were the rulers of all earth. And just as man, the creature of dominant intelligence, was to develop later from the races of mammals, so had these lizard-men, the dominant intelligence of their own age, developed from the races of reptiles. They had spread out in great numbers over what is now North America, the most habitable portion of earth during the Mesozoic age. They had built strange cities, had developed their knowledge and science in myriad ways, and had learned how to conquer and subjugate the great reptilian creatures who swarmed then on earth, to make servants of them. The great brontosaurs, more tractable than the rest, they used as mounts and beasts of burden; the fiercer tyrannosaurs and allosaurs were their beasts of war; and on the mighty pterodactyls they soared into the upper air and flitted across earth's surface. Great indeed was

their power, and through that power and through their terrible, giant servants they ruled all the habitable parts of earth unquestioningly.

"At last, though, there came that great convulsion of earth which was to mark the end of the Mesozoic age, that vast world-cataclysm in which continents sank beneath the seas and new lands rose from the oceans' depths. In such convulsions and mighty quakes the cities of the lizard-men were shaken down and annihilated, and across all their world was wild confusion. They knew, then, that they must find some other place of refuge or perish, and so they hit upon the plan of descending to one of the great cavernous spaces which lie scores of miles down in earth's interior. They had discovered long before that such great caverns exist inside earth's crust, and so they pierced a shaft down to one of them and descended into it to investigate.

"They found it a place large enough to hold all their numbers, and one quite habitable. It was lit perpetually with crimson light, too, since the molten fires of earth's heart had pressed up close to the walls of the cavern, and through an opening in those walls there poured down eternally a raging Niagara of molten rock and flame, that titanic fall of living fire whose blazing radiance illuminates all this cavern-world. So beneath this fall of fire the lizard-men constructed a canal which conducted it into a great stone basin which lay directly beneath the opening of their shaft in the cavern's roof, and from this basin the molten fires were able to seep gradually into crevices beneath the cavern.

"Naturally, however, an intensely powerful gale of heated air roared up from this molten lake, and by setting a ring of current-projectors around the lake they were able to concentrate the cyclonic power of those winds into a single concentrated air-current roaring straight up and through the shaft, and capable of lifting titanic weights up that shaft, just as a cyclone, which is concentrated wind, will lift and whirl about great buildings. And this terrific, upward-thrusting current they used to lift their great disk-platform up the shaft, arranging the projectors beneath so that the force of the current automatically lessened when the disk reached the top, and allowed it to sink again to the cavern's floor, to the fiery lake, whence it traveled up again, and so on ceaselessly, an automatic, never-stopping lift or platform on which the throngs of the lizard-people and their dinosaur-beasts were able to move down into this cavern world.

"Only a portion of their dinosaur servants did they bring with them, leaving the rest to perish above, whose bones, indeed, I had found in the swamp. When this had been done they closed tightly the opening of the great shaft, above, and dismantled the great ascending and descending disk for which they no longer had need. Then their hordes set to work to build up their cities anew in their new cavern home. Far above them the surface of earth writhed and twisted gigantically, annihilating all the hordes of dinosaurs above, but the cavern world of the lizard-men remained unchanged, as they had foreseen, and in it they lived serenely on.

"WHEN at last the surface of earth quieted once more they could have quitted their underworld and gone back up, but they did not do so, since by then their city was established in the safe, warm world of the mighty cavern and they had no desire to leave it. So in that cavern they lived on, while on the world above the races of mammals rose to replace the great reptiles; until with the passing of ages man

rose to dominance over all those races and set his cities where those of the lizard-men had once stood. The mouth of the shaft was hidden and covered by the great swamp, and on all earth none suspected the races who dwelt beneath them.

"So ages passed, and might have continued so to pass until the end of time, had not necessity pressed once more upon the lizard-people in their cavern world. As I have said, the interior fires of earth's heart had pressed up close against the walls of their cavern, bursting forth in one place in that fall of flame which lighted their world; and now the molten fires began to press with more and more force against the walls, forced up by convulsions far beneath, and it was only a question of time until they would burst through those walls and sweep over all the cavern world in a great cataclysm of annihilating fire, instantly wiping out all life in the cavern. They must leave it, they knew, before that happened, so they decided to venture back once more to earth's surface. So they again placed the great disk-platform in position, and as it again swept ceaselessly up and down a party of them rose on it and opened the mouth of the shaft, in the swamp far above. It was that party, exploring the swamp on their great brontosaurs, who had captured me, and brought me down here to examine me. They had observed that intelligent creatures, men, now were established on earth's surface, that one of their cities stood near the swamp itself, and so they planned to send up first a striking force which would annihilate that city, annihilate Brinton, to prevent any possible interference from it. Then that first attacking force would return down the shaft, leaving guards at its mouth, and all the lizard-people and their dinosaur hordes would gather and assemble to pour up the shaft on the great disk and sweep out upon earth to conquer and annihilate the world we know. Besides their dinosaurs they had their own heat-beam projectors, those white globes in which they could condense and concentrate heat-vibrations, holding those vibrations static and releasing them at will in a concentrated ray.

"So they poured up the shaft to attack Brinton, and now that that attack has been made, their first striking force will return down here, gathering together all their hordes for the last attack on earth itself. Within hours, I think, that attack will take place, their hordes will swarm up the shaft and out over earth. Up at the shaft's mouth they have placed a great switch which will be turned on when all of them have left this cavern and are safely above, and which will release concentrated rays down here that will blast the cavern's walls and allow the floods of fire that press against them to burst into the cavern. For they fear that if they do not do so the imprisoned fires will burst forth in some mighty cataclysm that will wreck all earth. To loose the fires upon the cavern while they are in it would be to annihilate themselves, of course, but if it is done through the switch above after all of them have gained earth's surface there will be no harm to themselves.

"So all their plan has been carried out, so far, and within hours now their hordes will be sweeping up the shaft and out over earth. And what then? What will the forces of man avail him? What troops could stand against the thundering, gigantic dinosaurs? What guns against the deadly heat-beams? What airplanes could ever battle with the hordes of circling, swooping pterodactyls and the rays of their lizard-riders? For man, and for the world of man, there looms

swift annihilation only, when the hordes of the lizard-men and their giant beasts sweep terribly upon him."

Morton's voice ceased, and he sat motionless, staring across the dusky little room with strange eyes. From the great corridor outside came the rasping voices of passing lizard-men, and the thundering tramp now and then of one of the great dinosaurs, but in the room itself was silence, as the two men regarded each other. Finally, with an effort, Rowan spoke.

"And so they plan to sweep out over all earth," he repeated, "plan to annihilate the world we know. And no chance of escape, for us, no chance to get back up to earth's surface——"

Morton raised his head, a sudden eagerness on his face. "There is still a chance," he said. "If we could get out of here—could get to that disk and back up the shaft! And we must, soon; for soon, I know, their hordes will be sweeping up that shaft, and when all are gone they will loose from above the fires upon this cavern, annihilating us unless we are slain by them before. Soon, I think, they will come to take you for questioning, also; since had they not intended to do so they would have slain you outright. And when they come—here is my plan——"

Swiftly he unfolded his scheme to Rowan, and wild as it seemed the other agreed to try it, as their only chance. Then they sat silent, for a time, in the darkness. It was a silence and a darkness torturing to Rowan. On earth above, he knew, the news of the terrible attack on Brinton would be flashing out, would be spreading terror and panic over all the world. And soon, now, would come the outward, resistless sweep of the lizard-men and their dinosaur hordes from this cavern world. Unless they escaped——

Hours fled by as they sat there, while from outside came the unceasing hurrying of lizard-men and dinosaurs through the giant corridor. Then from the distance came a loud bellowing and chorus of rasping cries, and a thunder of many gigantic feet passing the building where they lay imprisoned.

"The first attackers!" whispered Morton. "They've come back, from Brinton—they'll be assembling now beyond the city there, making ready for all to go——"

Outside in the corridor the sounds had lessened, almost ceased. It would be sunset, by then, in the world above, Rowan thought, and he wondered, momentarily, whether the desperate scheme which he and Morton had agreed on was to be of no avail. Then, as though in answer to his thoughts, there came a sound of footsteps down the great hall outside, and a fumbling with the bolts.

Instantly the two were on their feet, and at once they put into action their plan. Leaping toward each other they locked instantly in battle, gripping and striking at each other furiously, swaying about the room, smiting and kicking. Rowan glimpsed the door slide down and open, saw two of the lizard-men entering with white globes held toward them, but he paid no attention to them, nor did Morton, the two men staggering about the room as though locked in a death-combat, twisting and swaying in assumed fury.

There was a rasping command from the lizard-men, but they heeded it not, still intent upon getting at each other's throat. Another command was given which they ignored also, and then that which they had hoped for happened, since the foremost of the lizard-men came toward them, gripping Rowan's arm with a taloned claw and pulling him back from Morton. And as he did so Rowan turned instantly and before

he could raise the deadly white globe had leapt upon him.

As he leapt he saw Morton springing upon the other of the two creatures; then all else vanished as he whirled blindly about the little room with the reptilian creature in his grasp. He held in his left hand the claw which gripped the white globe, preventing the creature from raising it, but as they spun dizzily about he felt his own strength beaten down by the lizard-man, since the power of the muscles under its scaled hide was tremendous. With a last effort he clung to the creature, to the claw that held the globe, and then heard a cry from Morton, saw the other of the two scaled shapes hurl his friend to the room's floor and leap toward the door. The next moment his own hold was torn loose as his opponent wrenched free and leapt in turn toward the door with his fellow.

A single moment Rowan glimpsed them as he staggered back, and then he became aware of something round in his hand, the white globe which his frantic grip had torn from his opponent's grasp. With a last instinctive action he raised it and threw it at the two at the door. It struck the wall beside them, the white globe seeming to smash under the impact; then there was a great flash of pallid light there, a gust of intensely heated air scorched over Rowan, and then the two lizard-things lay upon the floor as two charred, shapeless heaps. The smashing of the globe and the release of its condensed heat-vibrations had annihilated them.

Instantly Morton was on his feet and the two were staggering out of the room, into the immense, dusky corridor outside. Down it they ran, for a moment, then suddenly stopped. For from ahead had come the sound of immense steps, while some vast black bulk had suddenly blotted out the great square of crimson light at the corridor's open end, ahead. Then, as it came on, they saw the great thing clearly—a gigantic brontosaur that had halted momentarily a hundred feet down the corridor from them. A moment it surveyed them with small, glaring reptilian eyes, then raised its mighty neck and head with a vast, hoarse bellow and thundered straight down upon them.

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As the colossal beast charged down upon them Rowan stood motionless, stunned, seeing as though in some nightmare dream the great snaky neck and head, the gigantic, trampling feet, and hearing in his ears the deep bellow of the oncoming monster. Then suddenly Morton had leapt forward, beside him, uttering a high, harsh-voiced cry, a cry at which the thundering brontosaur suddenly slowed, stopped. A scant twenty feet from them it stood, regarding them suspiciously, and Morton turned swiftly to the other.

"Come on, Rowan!" he cried. "I heard the lizard-men direct these beasts with that cry—I think it'll hold this one till we get past!"

Together they ran forward, down the corridor toward the gigantic brontosaur, which was regarding them with its small eyes in seeming perplexity, its head swaying to and fro on its sinuous neck as they neared it. Now they were to the great beast, pressing past it and between its great body and the corridor wall, its mighty bulk looming above them awe-inspiringly in the great corridor. As they ran past it the huge beast half turned, half stepped toward them, but as Morton repeated his strange high cry it halted again. The next moment Rowan breathed for the first time in seconds, for they were past the brontosaur and racing on down the corridor toward its open end.

As they neared that end they slowed their pace, crept forward more cautiously, until they were peering out into the great, crimson-lit street. The broad avenue seemed quite deserted and empty, and they sprang out into it, toward the central plaza where lay the lake of fire and its ascending and descending disk. But suddenly Morton turned, pointed back. Far down the street behind them a great mass of huge figures was moving toward them—a mob of mighty dinosaurs and lizard-riders which was coming rapidly up the avenue.

"They're coming now!" cried Morton. "They've gathered—they're ready—they're going to go up the shaft, *now!*"

From the advancing horde they heard, now, deep, gigantic bellowings, answered far across the great gray city by others like it, by other masses of dinosaurs and lizard-men moving toward the central plaza and the great lake of flame. Then abruptly the two men had turned and were racing madly up the avenue toward that lake, up the broad and empty street toward the great disk that was their sole hope of escape.

On and on they staggered until at last they were stumbling between the last gray buildings of the street and into the broad, clear plaza, toward the rim of its central basin of fire. Rowan looked up, as they ran, saw high above them a dark, expanding circle which was dropping down from a round black opening in the rock roof far above, dropping swiftly down toward the lake of fire ahead. And then he cried out, for emerging into the empty plaza directly across from them were a half-dozen of the lizard-men, who saw the two running men, and, uttering rasping cries, sprang around the rim of the flaming lake toward them.

The mighty disk was sweeping smoothly downward, now, down until it hung level with the plaza, above the basin's fires, and now Morton had flung forward across the two-foot gap and upon the disk. But as Rowan too leapt forward the racing lizard-men reached him, and as he threw himself upon the disk, which was rising now, one of them had leapt forward with him and pulled him back. He clung frantically to the great disk's edge, and then the mighty platform was rising smoothly upward while he and his lizard-man opponent clung dizzily to its edge, swinging above the flaming lake and striking at each other with their free hands.

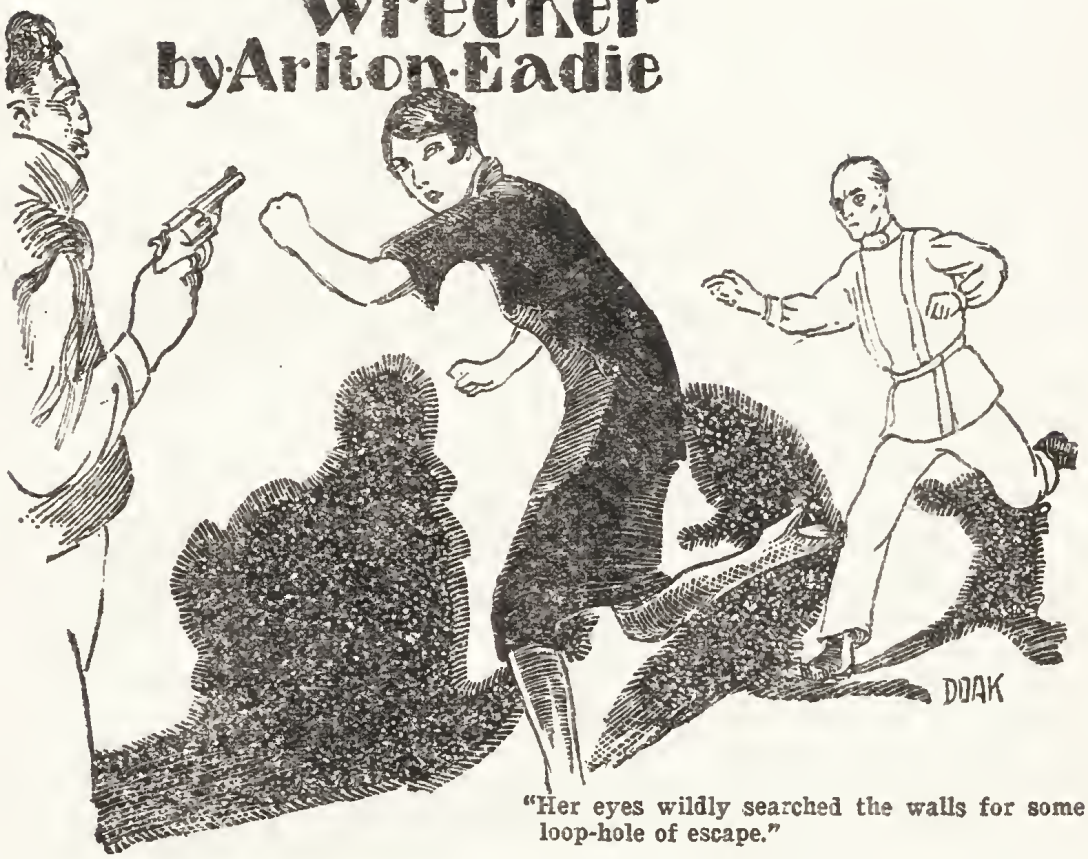
Rowan felt himself carried upward with ever-increasing speed, heard the roar of winds in his ears and glimpsed the raging lake of fire below, and then felt his strength slipping from him beneath the blows of the lizard-man, who clung to the disk with one taloned claw and struck out with the other. Then, as Rowan felt his grip on the disk's edge slipping, loosening, there was a flashing blow from above which sent the scaled green body of his opponent whirling down into the flames beneath, torn loose from his hold. And as Rowan's nerveless fingers released his own hold a hand above caught his wrist, there was a tense moment of straining effort, and then he had been pulled up onto the disk's surface by Morton, and lay there, panting.

A moment he lay thus, then crept with Morton to the disk's edge and stared down with him at the gray city which now lay far below. They saw, pouring into the plaza, a great mass of huge dinosaurs and a vast throng of the lizard-shapes, an eddying throng that was moving now toward the plaza and the fiery lake from all the city's wide and branching streets. The next moment all this was blotted from sight as the disk shot smoothly upward into the dark-

(Continued on page 855)

The World-Wrecker

by Arlton Eadie



"Her eyes wildly searched the walls for some loop-hole of escape."

The Story Thus Far

FROM an unknown who signs himself "Autocrat of the World," the *Daily Wire* receives a communication for publication which threatens that, unless the present rulers recognize him as the Supreme Lawgiver of the World, he will destroy every living thing on its surface. This he is able to accomplish by means of an anti-gravitation gas which, he states, he has recognized in the spectra of the tails of various comets. Terry Hinton, a young reporter, is deputed to make inquiries, in the course of which he meets Alma Wexford, a professor's attractive secretary and assistant, with whom he falls in love. Terry is convinced that the phantom Autocrat is none other than Professor Merrivale, but the police authorities deride his theory. They are convinced that so many generating bases would be required to provide sufficient gas (which they do not believe exists except in the crazed imagination of the unknown) that the operation could not be kept secret. There has, however, lately been put on the market a new fuel which, under the name of "Floxton's Fuel Blocks," is being extensively used by Atlantic liners. At the time appointed, huge crowds assemble to "see the end of the world." Apparently, however, no change takes place. But the members of the cabinet, assembled at the Royal Observatory, Greenwich, are astounded at the statement of the astronomer royal that the earth has commenced to diverge from its usual orbit and is heading into outer space; which means that humanity is doomed.

"THE people must not know." This almost unanimous decision was the outcome of the hurried, informal consultation which had taken place among the members of the cabinet immediately after the astronomer royal had announced his verdict. There had been very little discussion; no attempt at that flowery oratory usually so dear to the political heart. The prime minister had put his views before his colleagues in a low, earnest whisper, and the motion had been agreed to with a series of grave, silent nods. The one dissentient voice had been that of the astronomer.

"Why not let the public know the peril in which they stand?" he had urged. "They must know soon in

any case. Why not give them time in which to prepare?"

"For what?" asked someone.

"For death!" came the grim reply. "That is what it will mean for us all."

The premier shook his head decisively. "Not yet—not yet. We must have time to think—to make preparations. It is a position entirely without precedent. It is an international question, too."

"It's all that," heartily agreed Sir Edmund Brailsford. "At all costs we must keep the press quiet. I'll have an intimation sent to each of the principal newspapers——"

"No need for that," interrupted the astronomer. "They will be no wiser than the rest of the community if you keep your own counsel."

"Tranquillity—that is our watchword," put in Sir Wilfred Brendon, with a vaguely soothing gesture. "It may—ah—blow over. At all costs the taxpayers must not be unduly alarmed."

Nor were they. The morning of the first of October dawned much the same as other mornings; the populace went about their various occupations and amusements as usual; nothing appeared to be amiss with the world, and if a little extra chilliness was noted it was set down to the approach of an early winter.

The day was still young when a detachment of Scotland Yard's flying squad paid a visit to Tudor Towers, armed with a warrant for Professor Merrivale's arrest. Somewhat to their surprize, the great doors swung open at their knock.

"We want to see Professor Merrivale," said Sir Wilfred, who was personally conducting the raid.

"He is not at home, sir," said the footman.

"We'll see about that, my man," said the commissioner pleasantly, as he snapped a pair of handcuffs on the man's wrists. "Search the place," he ordered, and his men dispersed in all directions.

An hour later they reassembled in the hall, but only to report their failure. With the exception of one manservant and a caretaker at the lodge, the Towers contained not a living soul.

Then it was that Sir Wilfred bethought himself of the man whose previous warning he had so contemptuously dismissed. "Find Terry Hinton," was the message flashed to every police station in London. But here again the detectives drew a blank. Neither at his lodgings nor at the *Wire* offices had the young reporter been seen for the past two days. It seemed as though he had disappeared as completely as had the professor.

"What puzzles me," said the home secretary as he sat in conference that night, "is how and where the scoundrels are making this anti-gravitation gas. According to the report of the select committee of scientists, there must be thousands of such generating bases, operating over an area of thousands of miles. It seems almost inconceivable that they could have escaped the observation of the police."

"Scotland Yard must wake up!" declared a very eminent personage who was present. And Sir Wilfred Brendon found himself the recipient of a communication which, although it did not come through the usual official channels, could by no means be ignored.

Scotland Yard did, indeed, wake up. Fast motor-cars explored all likely and unlikely stretches of country where secret factories might have been installed. Stalwart, military-looking men, clad in sporting tweeds and carrying guns, patrolled the lonely Scottish moors; enthusiastic fly-fishers tramped miles around the deserted bog-tracks of Ireland looking for suitable streams, which, strangely enough, they never seemed to find; a party of well-equipped, hefty mountaineers made their unexpected appearance

among the Welsh mountains and scanned the country through powerful glasses after every ascent; fleets of airplanes zigzagged across the kingdom from east to west and from north to south.

And the result of all this feverish activity may be summed up in one word—nothing.

ON THE eastern outskirts of London, not far from the spot where the River Lea enters the parent Thames, there is a network of narrow waterways, constructed many years ago with the object of reclaiming the extensive, low-lying marshlands which then stretched from Leyton to Hackney Wick. At low water they are mere lanes of odorous black mud, but as the tide creeps up their slimy reaches from the river, strings of barges occasionally make their way past the ruinous locks and sluice-gates, bearing the raw materials, or taking away the finished products of the numerous factories which line the canal banks.

Occupying the whole of an extensive triangular tract of ground, which was bordered on all sides by the narrow streams, was a series of red brick buildings which had been built by the government during the war. Exactly what kind of munitions had been manufactured there had never transpired; but that it was some novel and secret agency of destruction was indicated by the isolated position of the factory and the careful manner in which the bridge, which formed its only connection with the mainland, was guarded. At the conclusion of peace the machinery had been dismantled and the buildings put up for sale. But there was no great rush of purchasers to secure the great, rambling structure; other, more convenient, factories were to be had in the neighborhood. For years no plumes of smoke had crowned the gaunt chimney-stacks; water-rats scampered undisturbed through the lofty halls which had echoed to the never-ceasing whir of machinery; birds built their nests beneath the silent eaves.

Then there had come upon the scene a certain Mr. Floxton. He was a tall, thin man with a certain foreign-looking blackness of hair and beard. But his references were indisputable, and when, after certain preliminary negotiations, he had approached the firm of property agents who had the matter in hand, the derelict factory passed into his hands at a figure which was satisfactory to all parties concerned. A month later the factory woke to life once more, and glaring letters announced from every point of vantage on its walls, that "Floxton's Fuel Blocks Are the Best."

Anyone who had happened to inquire into the inner working of this newly launched enterprise would have found himself confronted by quite a number of peculiarities. He would have noted that, although the custom of the great shipping companies whose vessels ply from Liverpool to New York or Montreal, or from Southampton to the same ports, was eagerly solicited, the owners of those ships which traversed other parts of the world found their inquiries strangely neglected. In other words, the curious inquirer (had there been one) would have come to the conclusion that the eccentric proprietor of the new process was desirous that his fuel should be burnt only across the Atlantic. Which, to say the least, was very strange. And it was to this curiously conducted business concern that the attention of Terry Hinton had been directed by the words scrawled on the back of the note handed to him by Professor Merrivale's chauffeur.

To Peg Dawson's nimble brain the words suggested something more.

"Floxton's Factory, Bow," he repeated. "Don't yer see, guv'nor? That was where the old boy was making for when he slipped us. By

jumping out of the car, and nipping down one of the side streets, he could get from Canning Town to there. And that's what he did, depend on it. And if Miss Wexford ain't being kept a prisoner there, then I don't know the meaning of 'S. O. S.'"

Terry nodded. Not for an instant did he doubt that the writing of the message which had fallen so providentially into his hands was that of the girl he loved, and the knowledge that she had appealed to him inflamed him with a desire to be up and doing. The mystery of her strange attitude during their last meeting could no doubt be explained later. The only fact which mattered now was that Alma was in danger of some sort, and had asked his help.

That same night Terry and Peg Dawson, assuming the characters and habiliments of two respectable workingmen, took lodgings in an upper back room of one of the mean houses which overlooked the canal. As soon as daylight appeared Terry began to examine the enemy's position through the powerful binoculars which he had brought for that purpose. Keeping carefully out of sight behind the dingy curtain of the window, he made a quick, but thorough, survey of the general plan of the factory.

Professor Merrivale could scarcely have found a site more suitable for his purpose. The island was roughly about three acres in area, and the walls of the various buildings had been so arranged that they presented a smooth, unbroken surface on their outer faces, which rose sheer from the water on every side. The only way by which an entrance could be gained was by the gate which opened on to the light iron bridge spanning the canal; and this, Terry was quick to note, was usually kept locked.

At five minutes to 8 a buzzer sounded, and, at first by ones and twos, and then in an increasing stream, the hands tramped across the iron bridge and entered the works.

"Is there a time-keeper at the gate?" Peg asked as a bright idea occurred to him.

Terry, with his eyes still glued to the binoculars, shook his head.

"They seem to be clocking in by some mechanical time-recorder," he said. "Why do you ask?"

"I was thinking that if we could manage to mix with the crowd when they go in after the dinner-hour we might be able to get inside undetected."

The smile which twitched the lips of the young reporter was a little grim.

"We'll have to change the style of our beauty if we're to do that, Peg. The gentleman who's guarding the gate is an old friend of ours."

He handed the glasses to his henchman as he spoke.

"Blimy!" muttered Peg, as he focused them. "It's that blue-jowled guy that gave you the letter. And what's more, I believe I know who he is—I remember his face seemed mighty familiar to me at the time, though I couldn't just place him then. But I know him now. He's one of the old Algate mob. Ash, his name is—'Basher' Ash. He used to be a prizefighter afore he got licked and took to the booze. I knocked up against him once or twice when I was running crook."

"All the more reason why we should change our appearance," said Terry, getting out the cigarette-tin in which he kept his make-up materials. "Come here, Peg, and I'll fix you so that your ma wouldn't know her blue-eyed boy."

Under Terry's deft fingers Peg's ruddy face was changed to an unhealthy-looking sallow tint, while a few artfully toned smears with a brown lining pencil, on the cheeks and under the eyes, gave a cadaverous appearance very unlike his usual chubby features. Turning his attention to his own countenance, Terry's healthy tan soon took on a blotched,

purplish look which seemed to indicate a long and affectionate devotion on the part of its owner to the beverage that cheers—and is not purchased by the pound.

Pulling their caps rakishly over their eyes, they took their stand in front of the mirror.

"We'll do, guv'nor," grinned Peg. "That is, if we're not arrested as suspicious characters by the first flatty that sees us!" Then he suddenly became serious as he asked, "What's the order of battle, guv'nor?"

Terry remained deep in thought for a few moments, then shook his head.

"It's no use making plans beforehand. Once we are past the gate, we must separate and be guided by circumstances. Our object will be to find out all we can, and above all to keep our eyes open for any place where Miss Wexford is likely to be imprisoned. If you're challenged, your yarn is that you've wandered in on the off chance of getting a job. Can you swim?"

"I could paddle across that ditch with one hand—if I wasn't poisoned," said Peg, looking with disfavor on the evil-smelling green water below.

"I'd risk that, if I were you, if you find yourself in a tight corner," advised Terry, as they prepared to leave. "Judging by past experience, I should guess that poisoning would be an easy death compared with the stuff that the professor will hand out to us if we're caught."

They dined leisurely at a humble eating-house in the neighborhood, and when the buzzer again sounded, mixed with the throng of workmen as they streamed across the iron bridge. Passing the gate without difficulty, Terry glanced into the first open door, and what he saw there caused his estimation of his own cleverness to sink several degrees. It was merely a copy of the factory act rules and regulations affixed to the wall, but the sight of it told of a grand opportunity missed.

"What an unmitigated ass I am!" he groaned inwardly. "Why didn't I think of getting up as a factory inspector and thus touring the place in comfort?"

But it was too late to rectify his plan now. So, keeping in the center of the crowd of hurrying workmen, Terry set his wits to the task of remaining undetected until the 6 o'clock buzzer should signal his release.

"I HAVE failed!"

It is only with difficulty that the realization of complete and utter failure comes to the naturally optimistic mind of youth; yet Alma Wexford, as she sat in the luxuriously furnished, windowless prison which formed part of the island factory, could not disguise from herself the fact that her efforts to circumvent the perverted genius of Professor Merrivale had been in vain. From the first she had identified the phantom Autocrat with her eccentric employer; but it was only by concealing her knowledge that she felt she could successfully pit her wits against the man whose mad ambition it was either to rule or to wreck the world.

And she had failed. An upper room in the block in which she was held prisoner had been fitted up as a small observatory, and night after night she had directed the telescope toward the sky, noting with a sinking heart the ever-diminishing brightness of the planets, which told that the earth was speeding farther and farther from the rays of the life-giving sun. It might be months or even years before the end came; but sooner or later the decreasing heat of the sun would cause the polar caps to spread their mantles of eternal ice through the now temperate zones, driving the teeming millions of Europe, Asia, America and Australia into the narrow equatorial belt where alone they

could find sufficient warmth to support life. And after that? Apart from the bloody wars which must result from such a redistribution of the world-population, how long would it be before the ever-receding sun ceased enabling life to be supported even there? The end of all life must come, and Alma Wexford shuddered as a vision arose before her eyes of a lifeless, frozen globe circling forever in the outer realms of space.

The sound of a door being unlocked caused her to look up. Professor Merrivale entered, carefully securing the door behind him.

"And how is my little caged bird this morning?"

Alma's heart turned sick with a sudden fear at the tone in which he uttered the greeting. Looking closely, she noted an unusual flush on the sunken cheeks, and that the dull eyes blazed with a new and horrible light as they played over her. In her own mind she had decided that the old man was mentally deranged, but now she seemed for the first time to sense a sinister purpose in his madness.

"My quarters are comfortable enough, Professor Merrivale," she answered with an air of carelessness which it cost her an effort to assume. "But I shall not be sorry to leave them, all the same."

"So, the little bird wants to stretch her wings, eh?" He curved his tight-shut lips into a smile. "Soon we shall quit this poor, doomed earth and fly away—away—like swallows before the ice-cold breath of winter."

She looked at him again. So her first intuition had been right, after all. The professor was mad. He must have read her thoughts in her face, for:

"You think that my mind has given way? Droll, is it not, that every original-thinking genius should be thought mad by his generation? But still, I hardly blame you, for as yet you do not realize the whole of my plan. You thought, when I condemned to death the concourse of fools and knaves which make up the population of this planet, that I should of necessity share their fate. In that case I should have been content to be dubbed a maniac. But such is far from my intention. I am but remaining here long enough to make sure that the ruin of the earth is complete, and maybe to enjoy the first death-throes of humanity; observing how the masses take the news when the truth can be no longer withheld from them. Moreover, I wished to make sure that there is no possibility of my gas being used to make the earth return to its usual orbit."

"Surely that would not be possible now?" she put an inflection into her voice which seemed to invite a fuller explanation. But the old man shook his head testily.

"It is quite possible," he muttered. Then he darted a keen glance at her. "But I'm not going to be fool enough to explain the method by which it might be accomplished. You might escape, you know—though I flatter myself that is hardly likely. Or that young quill-driving knight-errant, Hinton, might come to the rescue of his lady-love, in which case I'd be more than pleased to meet him." Half unconsciously his hand strayed in the direction of his bulging hip-pocket as he said the words. "But I have more important matters to attend to. I want to show you something which I am sure will interest you. It is something unique even in this age of so-called scientific wonders."

Outwardly calm and collected, but secretly a prey to a thousand hopes and fears, Alma Wexford allowed him to lead her from the room. Once out in the open, she was resolved to make a dash for liberty, cost what it might. Her heart beat high when Merrivale unlocked a door through which she had never passed before; but it only gave on to a long corridor, at the farther end of which, after passing another door, she found herself con-

fronted by a strange and unexpected sight.

The room—if such it could be called—was circular in shape, with walls of plain red brick, which, ending abruptly about thirty feet from the ground, showed a circle of blue sky overhead. There was no roof to this strange structure—indeed it reminded Alma more of a huge factory chimney that had been abandoned in the course of construction than anything else that she had seen before. At the bottom of this shaft—for it appeared to be nothing more—there rested a sphere of shining aluminum, about fifteen feet in diameter. There was a space of about a yard between its rivet-studded plates and the walls of the shaft, so that it appeared to be an immense projectile ready to be launched into space by a giant gun of brick. But Alma at once dismissed this theory from her mind; no wall could withstand the strain of the charge of explosive necessary to raise that great sphere. She was soon to be enlightened, however.

"My ark of safety," said the professor, laying his hand almost caressingly on its silvery surface. "The means by which I shall leave this doomed world. Would you like to see inside?"

Without waiting for an answer, he gave a sharp push and a segment of the plating fell inward, revealing a space through which it was possible to pass.

"Come inside, Alma," he said, grasping her hand and forcing her to follow him. "And now," he went on when she was inside, "tell me how you like our aerial life-boat."

In the first shock of surprize at what she saw, the significance of his remark passed unnoticed. The interior of the sphere was fitted up as though for human habitation. It was lighted by electric globes deeply sunk in the padded walls round the upper portion of its arched ceiling. The lower portion of the sphere had been leveled to form a kind of floor, and this seemed to Alma, by the way her feet sank into it, to be supported by hidden springs after the fashion of a mattress. Furniture there was none, unless one could so describe the very broad divan, fitted underneath with a series of lockers, which ran round the walls at a height that allowed its cushioned top to be used either as a seat or couch. To one side was a series of dials and levers, and numerous brass taps which seemed to be connected with pipes radiating in all directions beneath the leather padding on the walls.

There could be but one explanation of the preparations he had made.

"I see," observed Alma, after she had taken a good look round. "Having failed to subjugate this world, you are about to attempt to reach another, where you can reign in solitary state."

A lurid light began to gleam in his narrowed eyes.

"Not solitary, Alma," he corrected softly, and in a flash she realized his intention.

"You mean——?"

"I mean that you, and you alone of all the women in the world, shall escape the doom which is even now slowly creeping upon it. The same gravity-defying gas which has spelt the ruin of planet shall waft us upward to another world where time, as we know it, does not exist. There we will reign together as gods—you and I."

She recoiled before his advance, her eyes wide with terror.

"You're crazed!" she gasped.

He gave a tolerant shrug.

"Really, Alma, I am pained—pained and disappointed. I have always regarded you as one of the most intellectual of women, as well as one of the most beautiful. And yet, at the first mention of anything beyond your comprehension, you indulge in the same doubts of my sanity as did the cheap ink-slingers of Fleet Street when I first announced my in-

tention. Are you not aware that time is merely a relative, and entirely terrestrial, term? Our year is merely determined by the speed with which the earth makes its circuit of the sun; the month is but another name for the phases of the moon; the day, the revolution of the earth on its axis; the hour, a purely artificial division of the day. Once we escape from the gravitation of this planet we shake off the tyranny of time, and enter into space, which is eternal."

He made a step toward her, and she sought desperately for some words to turn aside his crazy project.

"What of your associates?" she cried. "What of the dupes that you have led to encompass their own ruin? Would you leave them to perish?"

"Yes," he answered meaningly. "All—except you."

She could have screamed aloud as he stretched out his hand toward her; but at his odious touch there came a wave of courage which nerved her for one last effort. She forced herself to burst into a disdainful laugh.

"It's no good, professor," she said shaking her head. "You can't get past me with your bluff."

"Bluff?" He had drawn back and was regarding her with genuine amazement.

"Of course it's bluff," she laughed again, this time in real amusement at the look of hurt dignity on his face. "I reckon this world-destroying business is a job a little bit beyond your weight. Why, you'd need thousands of gas generators to upset gravitation!"

Her stinging scorn made him throw caution to the winds.

"And I've got them!" he cried triumphantly. "Now—even as we speak—by day and night there is an unceasing stream of gas being loosed into the atmosphere by thousands of ships——"

"Ships? What do you mean? How could you get thousands of ships to assist you?"

"The fools don't know they're accomplishing their own destruction," he chuckled. "They're burning my patent fuel—the fuel whose combustion generates the gas which neutralizes gravitation. Every shovel of fuel cast into their furnaces adds to the volume of gas now accumulating over the Atlantic between the 40th and 60th northern parallels of latitude."

"But gases diffuse——" she began.

"Ordinary gases—yes. But not this gas. It is not subject to the ordinary law which governs the diffusion of gases. It would even be possible—did the fools but know of it—by releasing a similar volume of the gas over the Pacific Ocean, between the 40th and 60th southern parallels, from the 80th to the 160th degrees of longitude, west—which is exactly opposite the route from Liverpool to New York—they would be able to bring the earth back into its former position. But why do we waste time thinking about these fools and their fate. We must get away now."

"Now?" Her heart sank as she echoed the word.

The old look of cunning returned to his eyes.

"Do you think that I'm going to risk losing you now that you know the secret that would save the world? No, my pretty bird is about to make her flight, here and now. The sphere is already provisioned for our journey to another planet—all is prepared for our honeymoon in space. Wafted by invisible wings, we will soar aloft together, and the music of the circling orbs shall sound our nuptial hymn. We shall be as gods—Alma—my love——"

He lurched toward her over the padded floor, his breath coming quick between his lips, the light of passion blazing in his eyes. His hands, their fingers bent like the claws of some bird of prey, were already outstretched to clasp her, when, gather-

ing all her strength, she struck him with her clenched fist full in the face.

He reeled and fell beneath the unexpected blow, and in an instant she had darted out the door of the sphere into the passage beyond. Merrivale, cursing the oversight that had made him neglect to lock the doors behind him, followed hard at her heels. It was lucky, he told himself, that the outer doors would be locked. She could not go far; and she would not elude him a second time! He licked his thin lips as he gloated on the prospect of making her suffer for that blow.

Through the long brick passages dashed Alma, her eyes wildly searching the walls for some loophole of escape; but the seemingly endless labyrinth mocked her with its unbroken surface. And ever behind her echoed the footsteps of her relentless pursuer.

Ah, what was that? As she passed the spot where two passages crossed, she could have sworn that she felt a current of cold air upon her cheek. It might come from an open door—maybe a mere grated window—but the slenderest chance was better than none at all. She changed direction and dashed to the right.

Yes, she had chosen well! There was a faint light shining at the farther end of the passage. It was the blessed light of day, beckoning her to freedom!

She quickened her pace in one last effort. Another twenty yards—ten—five—and she would be free! She leapt forward like a drowning swimmer toward the light—then stopped dead with a strangled scream as she found her way barred by a huge, sinister-looking ruffian, whose mottled and bloated features seemed the hallmark of every villainy and vice.

For a second the ruffian hesitated; then a grin showed between his unshaven lips as he threw out his arm and clasped the girl's panting body close to his own.

"Got you!" he cried, and there was grim exultation in his tone.

The girl started. There sounded something familiar in the voice, and it did not seem as though the words had been addressed to her. His right hand was pointing past her, toward the professor, and it held a Browning pistol.

"Don't move, Merrivale. I've got you where I want you—and there are no magnets here to spoil my aim!" said the man quietly—and he spoke in the voice of Terry Hinton.

"Terry!" she gasped, as the truth dawned upon her. "Terry, you—you darling!"

All the dreadful strain of her late ordeal was forgotten in that joyful recognition. But the sudden reaction was too great. Clinging to her rescuer with a sense of blissful security, she felt herself slip into contented oblivion.

Her last conscious sensation was hearing the sound of a shot echo down the passage.

It is needless to enumerate here the wild rumors which flew from mouth to mouth when it was known that the British navy had been ordered to mobilize. When it leaked out that the whole of the Atlantic liners had been ordered at a moment's notice to sail for the South Pacific, the suspicion that another war had broken out became almost a certainty in the public mind. Many and bitter were the complaints about the activities of the supposed strict censorship as the weeks went by without any reference to hostilities appearing in the press. The number of people who knew the real reason for that lightning concentration of every available steamship could have been counted on the fingers of one hand.

To this day, highly placed naval officers are accustomed to refer with contemptuous amusement to the sudden whim of the admiralty which made the sweating crews load their

bunkers to capacity with some new-fangled fuel blocks or other, and then to steam aimlessly (as they thought) backward and forward between Kerguelen Island and the Antipodes Group. Little did they dream that this seemingly recklessly extravagant "fuel test" was in reality a carefully thought-out plan for the preservation of the world.

And as little did the general public connect the strangely deserted appearance of our naval ports with the gradual passing of the early wintry weather, and the appearance of that rarely seen phenomenon, a second spring.

Then, as suddenly as the order had gone forth it was rescinded. There was much shrugging of epauletted shoulders, and raising of eyebrows under gold-laced caps, as the order was flashed from ship to ship to jettison every scrap of "Floxton's Fuel Blocks" and proceed to home stations burning ordinary coal.

For the watchers at the great telescope in the observatory at Greenwich had made numerous, varied and oft-repeated checks on the position of the earth, and they knew that the earth had finally returned to its appointed orbit.

And yet its position was not quite the same as before. A world is a clumsy thing for human efforts to guide, and it was thought advisable to be content with an approximate replacement. There still remains a slight difference in that angle which determines the seasonal changes.

Maybe this fact (here made public for the first time) will bring some consolation to the people who have waxed so eloquent of late about the vagaries of our weather. It may help them to realize that the trifling inconvenience we occasionally suffer is but a small fraction of the mischief intended us by that mad scientist whom Terry shot dead in the factory at Bow—the man who, but for the courage and devotion of the girl who is now Mrs. Hinton, would undoubtedly have succeeded in his attempt to wreck the world.

[THE END]

THE DOOMED

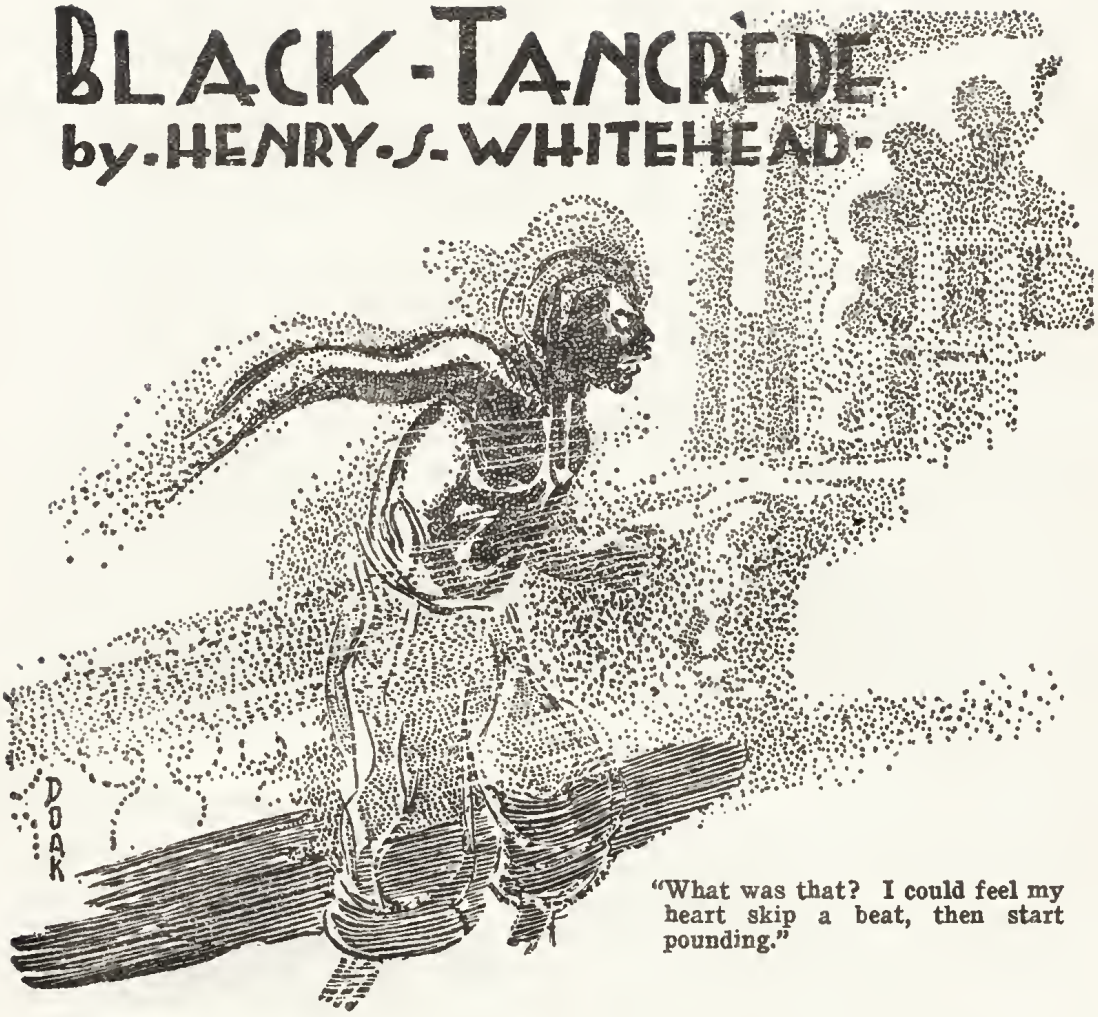
By **DOROTHY MARIE PETERKIN**

How dream the mad? My dreams have been to me
All that the friends I longed for could not be;
Clearer were dreams than hard realities;
Sweeter were dreams than piper's melodies.

How dream the mad? For if I can not dream,
I were much better dead. Will shadows seem
Real to me then, and winds that blow,
Bodied companions? Only madmen know.

BLACK-TANCRÈDE

by HENRY S. WHITEHEAD



"What was that? I could feel my heart skip a beat, then start pounding."

IT IS true that Black Tancrède did not curse Hans De Groot as his mangled body collapsed on the rack, and that he did curse Gardelin. But, it must be remembered, Governor Gardelin went home, to Denmark, and so escaped—whatever it was that happened to Achilles Mendoza and Julius Mohrs: and Black Tancrède, who always kept his word, they said, had cursed three!

The Grand Hotel of St. Thomas in the Virgin Islands glistens in the almost intolerable brilliance of the Caribbean sunlight, because that great edifice is whitewashed in every corner, every winter. Built somewhat more than a century ago, it is a noble example of that tropical architecture which depends, for its style, upon the structural necessity for resistance to summer hurricanes. Its massive walls of stone, brick, and heavy cement are thick and ponderous. The ceilings of its huge, square rooms are eighteen feet high. Despite its solidity, the 1916 hurricane took the top story off the main building and this has never been replaced. The fact that the hotel is now uniformly a two-story structure somewhat mars its original symmetry, but it is still as impressive as in the days when the Danish Colonial High Court sat in one of its sections; when its "slave-pens" were especially noted for their safety.

Built alongside the great courtyard which its bulk surrounds, and toward the harbor, once the crater of a volcano in that era when Atlantis and

its companion continent, Antillea, reared their proud civilizations in the central Atlantic, stand two houses, added, it is believed, some time after the construction of the original building. On this point the St. Thomas wiseacres continue to dispute. Nevertheless, under the house nearest to the hotel, and built with connecting steps leading to its great gallery, are those very slave-pens, converted nowadays into one enormous workroom where the hotel washing and ironing goes on, remorselessly, all the year round. During its early history, the hotel was called "Hotel du Commerce."

In that nearer, and slightly smaller of the two houses, I was installed for the winter. I took this house because I was accompanied that winter by Stephen de Lesseps, my young cousin, a boy of fourteen. Stephen's parents (his mother is my cousin Marie de Lesseps) had persuaded me to take him with me for the change of climate. Stephen is an agreeable young fellow. I gave him daily "lessons" and he read much himself, so that his education out of books was not neglected, and that major portion derived otherwise was enhanced. Stephen turned out on close association to be so manly, sensible, and generally companionable, that I congratulated myself upon yielding to my cousin Marie's suggestion.

In the middle of that winter, Marie and her sister Suzanne paid us a visit of a month. Mr. Joseph Reynolds, the American proprietor of the Grand Hotel, assigned them Room 4, a huge, double room, opening off the enormous hotel ballroom in which the major social functions of the Virgin Island capital are usually held. I am obliged to mention this background for the extraordinary story I have to tell. If I had not had Stephen along, I should not have remained in St. Thomas. I did so on his account. The capital, rather than my beloved island of Santa Cruz, was a better place for his education. Don Pablo Salazar, a famous teacher of Spanish, is resident there; the director of education lived in the neighboring house—there were many reasons.

And, if I had not had Stephen with me, Marie and Suzanne would not have made that visit, and so could not have spent a month in Number 4, and so this tale would never, perhaps, have been told.

The ladies arrived early in January, after a sweeping tour of "the lower islands"—those historic sea-jewels where England and France fought out the supremacy of the seas a century ago. They were delighted with Number 4. They slept on vast mahogany four-posters; they were entertained by everybody; they patronized St. Thomas' alluring shops; they reveled in the midsummer warmth of midwinter in this climate of balm and spice; they exclaimed over Stephen's growth and rejoiced over the fine edge with which one of the world's politest communities had ornamented the boy's naturally excellent manners. In brief, my lady cousins enjoyed their month tremendously and went home enthusiastic over the quaint charm and magnificent hospitality of the capital of the Virgin Islands, our Uncle Sam's most recent colonial acquisition, once the historic Danish West Indies.

Only one fly, it appeared, had agitated the ointment of their enjoyment. Neither, they eventually reported, could get proper sleep in Number 4 in spite of its airiness, its splendid beds, and its conveniences. At night, one or the other, and, as I learned later, sometimes both simultaneously, would be awakened out of refreshing sleep at that most unpropitious of all night hours, 4 o'clock in the morning.

They said very little of this to me. I found out later that they were extremely chary of admitting that anything whatever had been interfering with their enjoyment of my hospitality. But later, after they were gone,

I did recall that Suzanne had mentioned, though lightly, how she had heard knocks at the double-doors of their big room, just at that hour. It had made little impression upon me at the time.

Long afterward, questioning them, I discovered that they had been awakened nearly every morning by the same thing! They had mentioned it to their room-maid, a black girl, who had appeared "stupid" about it; had only rolled her eyes, Marie said. They tried several explanations — brooms carelessly handled in the early morning; a permanent early "call" for some guest, perhaps an officer of marines who had to get to his duties very early. They rejected both those theories, and finally settled down to the explanation that some pious fellow-guest was accustomed to attend the earliest religious service of the day, which, in both the Anglican and Roman Catholic churches in St. Thomas, is at 5 in the morning. They knew, because they had several times answered the knocks, that there was never anybody at the door when they opened it. They reconciled their ultimate explanation with the discrepancy that the knocks were on *their* door, by the supposition that there was involved some strange, auditory illusion.

As I have said, these ladies were fascinated with St. Thomas, and they did not allow one minor disturbing element to interfere with their enjoyment of its many strange sights; the weird speech of the blacks; the magnificent hospitality; the Old World furniture; the street lamps; the delightful little vistas; the Caribbean's incredible indigo; especially, I think, with the many strange tales which they heard more or less incidentally.

For St. Thomas, the very home and heart of old romance, is full of strange tales. Here, in September, 1824, the pirate Fawcett with his two mates was publicly hanged. To this very day, great steel doors guard most St. Thomas stores, and particularly the funds of the Dansk Vestindiske Nationalbank, from marauders, as anciently those same doors guarded them from the frequent raids of the buccaneers. St. Thomas' streets have more than once run red with human blood; for, like Panama, it is a town which has been sacked, though never burned like Frederiksted on the neighboring island of Santa Cruz.

Among these many tales was that of Black Tancrède. This negro, a Dahomeyan, so said tradition, had lived for a while in one of those very slave-pens under my house. He had been, strangely enough, a Haitian refugee, although a full-blooded black African. Many Caucasian refugees from Haiti had come to St. Thomas in the days of Dessalines, Toussaint l'Ouverture, and Henry Cristophe, the black king of Northwestern Haiti, the bloody days of that wise despot whose marvelous citadel still towers incredibly on the hills behind Cap Haitien and who is chiefly remembered for his tyrannies, but who is probably the only person who ever made millions out of the "free" labor of his fellow blacks!

Tancrède had, so said tradition, incurred the enmity of Cristophe, and that in the days of his power was a fearsome thing for any man. But, unlike other known unfortunates who had risked that terrible anger, Tancrède had escaped Cristophe's executioner. That personage boasted that he had had so much practise with the broadsword that he could remove a head without soiling the victim's collar!

By some hook or crook, hidden probably in the stinking, rat-infested hold of some early Nineteenth Century sailing-vessel, perhaps buried under goat-hides or bales of *bacalhao*, Tancrède had shivered and sweated his way to the Danish refuge of St. Thomas. There he fell swiftly into inescapable debt, for he was a fighting-man from a warlike tribe, and no

bargainer. Therefore he had become the property of one Julius Mohrs, and because of that his connection with the old hotel had begun. Black Tancrède had been lodged, for safekeeping, in one of those same slave-pens under my house.

He had soon escaped from that servitude, for his strong, bitter soul could not brook it, and made his way to the neighboring Danish island of St. Jan. There he is next heard of as a "free laborer" on the sugar estates of Erasmus Espersen. In the "Rising" of 1833 he was prominent as a leader of those who revolted against the harsh laws of Governor Gardelin. Later, whether by the French troops from Martinique who came in to help the Danes put down their Slave War, or by the Spanish troops from Porto Rico, Black Tancrède had been captured alive, which was a grave error of judgment on his part, and brought back to St. Thomas in chains, there to be tortured to death.

That sentence was delivered in the Danish colonial high court, sitting in its own quarters in the hotel, by Governor Gardelin's judge.

First Black Tancrède's hands had been cut off, one a day. Then he suffered the crushing of his feet (after "three pinches with a hot iron instrument"), a punishment consummated with a heavy bar of iron in the hands of Achilles Mendoza, the executioner, himself a black slave. The iron sheared through his leg-bones, and he was "pinched," and his hands chopped off, because he had been so unfortunate as to be caught in insurrection, bearing weapons, and he was therefore to be made an example by a governor whose name is even now execrated among the black people.

With his last expiring breath Black Tancrède cursed his tormentors. He cursed Achilles Mendoza. He cursed Julius Mohrs. He cursed Governor Gardelin. They buried his shattered body in quicklime in the courtyard of the fort, and with it went his left hand, which was clutched so firmly about the wooden crossbar of the rack that it could not be pried loose. Mendoza therefore broke off the crossbar with the hand attached, and threw it into the limepit. The other hand, chopped off the day before, had disappeared, and no effort was made to recover it. Such items in those "good old days" were not infrequently picked up and kept by onlookers as interesting souvenirs.

FOUR months after the execution, Julius Mohrs was found strangled in bed one morning. Even the lash failed to elicit any testimony from his household. No one has ever known who committed that murder. Mohrs, like Governor Gardelin, had the reputation of being harsh with slaves.

Achilles Mendoza died "of a fit" in the year 1835, in the open air. He was, in fact, crossing the courtyard of the hotel at the time and was not more than a few steps from the doors leading into the slave-pens. Many bystanders saw him fall, although it was at night, for the full moon of the Caribbee Islands—by whose light I have myself read print—was shining overhead. Indeed, so much light comes from the Caribbean moon that illuminates these latitudes—degree seventeen runs through Santa Cruz, eighteen through St. Thomas—that on full moonlight nights in the "good old days," the capital itself saved the cost of street-lights; and that is the custom even today in the Santa Crucian towns.

Some of the black people at first believed that Mendoza had strangled himself! This foolish idea was doubtless derived from the fact that both the executioner's hands had gone to his throat even before he fell, gasping and foaming at the mouth, and they were found clasped unbreakably together, the great muscles of his mighty arms rigid in death with the effort, when his now worthless body was unceremoniously gathered up and carted away for early morning burial.

Naturally, everybody who remembered Black Tancrède and his curses, and his character—that is, everybody who believed in black magic as well as in Black Tancrède—was certain that that malefactor, murderer, leader of revolt, had consummated a posthumous revenge. Perhaps Julius Mohrs, too——

The Danes pooh-poohed this solution of the two unaccountable deaths in the capital of their West Indian colony, but that did not affect black belief in the slightest degree. Black Quashee was in those days only a generation removed from Black Africa, where such matters are commonplaces. Such beliefs, and the practises which accompany them, had come in through Cartagena and other routes, deviously and direct, into the West Indies from the Gold Coast, from Dahomey and Ashantee and the Bight of Benin—all the way, indeed, from Dakar to the Congo mouth regions—into the West Indies indeed, where Quashee's sheer fecundity, now that the "good old days" are no more, and Quashee is a Christian of one kind or another, and often a high school or even a college graduate, has caused him vastly to outnumber his erstwhile white masters. White people are now Quashee's masters no longer, though they still live beside him in the West Indies, in a constantly diminishing proportion, under that same bright moon, that same glowing sun, in the shade of the mighty tamarinds, beside the eye-scorching scarlet of the hibiscus, the glaring purple and magenta of the bougainvillea.

Governor Gardelin returned to Denmark very soon after the Slave War of 1833, where, so far as one may know from perusal of the old records, he died in his bed full of years and honors.

As I have mentioned, my cousins, Marie and Suzanne, returned to the continental United States. They left about the tenth of February, and Stephen and I, regretting their departure, settled down for the rest of that winter, planning to return the middle of May.

One morning, a few weeks after their departure, Reynolds, the proprietor, asked me a question.

"Did you hear the uproar last night, or, rather, early this morning?"

"No," said I. "What was 'the uproar'? If it was out in the streets I might have heard it, but if it happened inside the hotel, my house is so detached that I should probably have heard nothing of it and gone right on sleeping."

"It was inside," said Reynolds, "so you probably wouldn't have noticed it. The servants are all chattering about it this morning, though. They believe it is another manifestation of the Jumbee in Number 4. By the way, Mr. Canevin, your cousins were in that room. Did they ever mention any disturbance to you?"

"Why, yes, now that you speak of it. My cousin Suzanne spoke of somebody knocking on their door; about 4 in the morning I believe it happened. I think it happened more than once. They imagined it was somebody being 'called' very early, and the servant knocking on the wrong door or something of that kind. They didn't say much about it to me. What is 'the Jumbee in Number 4?' That intrigues me. I never happened to hear that one!"

Now a "Jumbee" is, of course, a West Indian ghost. In the French islands the word is "Zombi". Jumbees have various characteristics, which I will not pause to enumerate, but one of these is that a Jumbee is always black. White persons, apparently, do not "walk" after death, although I have personally known three white gentlemen planters who were believed to be werewolves! Among the West Indian black population occurs every belief, every imaginable practise of the occult, which is inter-

woven closely into their lives and thoughts; everything from mere "charms" to active necromancy; from the use of the deadly *Vaudoux* to the "toof from a dead," which last renders a gambler lucky! Jumbee is a generic word. It means virtually any kind of a ghost, apparition, or *revenant*. I was not in the least surprized to learn that Number 4, Grand Hotel, had its other-worldly attendant. My sole ground for wonder was that I had not heard of it before now! Now that I recalled the matter, something *had* disturbed Marie and Suzanne in that room.

"Tell me about it, please, Mr. Reynolds," I requested.

Mr. Reynolds smiled. He is a man of education and he, too, knows his West Indies.

"In this case it is only a general belief," he answered. "The only specific information about 'the Jumbee in Number 4' is that it wakes occupants up early in the morning. There has, it seems, 'always been a Jumbee' connected with that room. I daresay the very frying-pans in the kitchen have their particular Jumbees, if they happen to be old enough! That rumpus this morning was only that we had a tourist, a Mr. Ledwith, staying overnight—came over from Porto Rico in the *Catherine* and left this morning for 'down the islands' on the *Dominica*. He came in pretty late last night from a party with friends in the town. He explained later that he couldn't sleep because of somebody knocking on his door. He called out several times, got no answer; the knocking went on, and then he lost his temper. He reached out of bed and picked up the earthenware water-jug. His aim was excellent, even though he may have had a drop too much at his party. He hit the door-handle, smashed the jug into fragments, and then, really aroused, got up, flung open the door, found nobody there, and took it into his head that somebody was having a joke on him. Absurd! The man was a total stranger to everybody in the hotel.

"He raged around the ballroom and woke up the Gilbertsons and Mrs. Peck—you know they have rooms on that side—and at last he awakened me and I got up and persuaded him to go back to bed. He said there were no more knocks after that. I was afraid it might have disturbed you and Stephen. I'm glad it didn't. Of course such a rumpus is very unusual in the hotel at any time."

"Hm," said I, "well, well!" I had been thinking while Mr. Reynolds made this long speech about the nocturnal activities of the unknown Mr. Ledwith. I could not talk with him. He had already sailed that morning.

I was really intrigued by now—that occurrence coupled with the experience of my cousins! Of course I knew very little about that, for they had said almost nothing. But it was enough to arouse my interest in "the Jumbee in Number 4."

That was the only time Mr. Reynolds and I spoke of the matter, and for some time, although I kept my ears open, I heard nothing further about Number 4. When the "trouble" did start up again, I was in Number 4 myself. That came about in this manner.

An American family named Barnes, permanent residents of St. Thomas—I believe Barnes was a minor official of the public works or the agricultural department of the Virgin Island government—let their house-lease expire and decided to move into the hotel at family-rates-by-the-month for the convenience. Mrs. Barnes had two young children, and was tired of household cares. She had employed, I think, some rather inferior servants, which always means a heavy burden in the West Indies. One of the two hotel houses would suit them exactly. The other was occupied, by the year, by the director of education and his family, delightful Americans.

It was the first of May, and as Ste-

phen and I were booked to sail on the twelfth for New York, I proposed to Mr. Reynolds that we give up our house to Mr. and Mrs. Barnes, and he could put us into one of the huge double rooms for the remainder of our stay. Mr. Reynolds put us into Number 4, probably the best of all the rooms, and which was, fortunately, vacant at the moment.

It happened that on our first night in our new quarters, I was out very late. I had gone, with the colonel in command of the naval station marines and his wife, to meet an incoming ship on which a certain Major Upton was returning to St. Thomas from a month's leave. Two days before the arrival of the ship, a cable had informed the colonel of Mrs. Upton's sudden death in Virginia. We did not know whether or not Upton had learned of his unexpected bereavement by wireless aboard ship, and we rather thought he had not. The ship was reported due at 1 a. m. She came in a little after 2, and after meeting Upton — who had, fortunately, received a wireless—and making his arrival as pleasant as we could for him under the circumstances, I got back to the hotel about 3:30 in the morning.

I CAME in at the side door, which is always open, walked softly along the great length of the ballroom, and very quietly opened the door of Number 4. By the streaming moonlight which was pouring in through the open jalousies of the great room, I could see Stephen's outlines, dimly, through the cloud of mosquito-netting which covered his enormous four-poster. I undressed silently, so that I should not disturb my young cousin. I was just ready to turn in, my soiled drill clothes in the washbag, my white buckskin shoes neatly treed, my other things laid away where they belonged —for I am a rather fussy fellow about such matters—and it was within a minute or two to 4 o'clock in the morning; I know I was beastly tired; when, just beside me, on the door leading in from the ballroom, came an abrupt, unmistakable rap-rap-rap!

There could be no possible doubt about it. I was standing within three feet of the door at the moment the raps were delivered. I, Gerald Canevin, am a teller of the truth. I admit that I felt the cold chills which are characteristic of sudden, almost uncontrollable, paralyzing fear, run swiftly up and down my spine; that acute prickling at the hair roots which is called one's "hair standing on end."

But, if Gerald Canevin is a trifle old-maidish about the arrangement of his personal belongings, and, even damagingly, truthful, he may boast, and justly, that no man living can call him a poltroon.

I took one firm step to that door and flung it open, and—so help me God!—as I turned the small, old-fashioned brass knob, the last of the raps—for the summons was repeated, just as the convivial Ledwith had alleged—sounded within three inches of my hand, on the other side of the door.

The great, ghostly still ballroom stood silent and empty. Not a sound, not a movement disturbed its early-morning, dead, serene emptiness. I raked the room with my scrutiny. Everything was visible because the vivid moonlight—the moon had been full two nights before—came flooding in from the gallery with its nine Moorish arches, overlooking the harbor.

There was nothing—absolutely, literally, nothing—to be seen or heard. I glanced back over my shoulder along the wall through which the door of Number 4 opens. What was that? I could feel my heart skip a beat, then start pounding. A dim something, the merest shadowy outline, it seemed, in the form of a gigantic negro was moving along the wall toward the passageway, curtained from the ballroom, which leads to the main entrance of the hotel below.

Even as I looked, the strange form seemed to melt and vanish, and there came a hard, dull thud from the direction where I imagined I had seen it slipping furtively along the wall.

I looked narrowly, my heart still pounding, and there, on the floor moving rapidly from me in the same direction I had imagined that sinister figure following, and with a queer, awkward movement suggestive of a crab's sideloug gait, but moving in utter silence, there ran along the bare floor something about the size of a baseball.

I was barefooted and in thin, China-silk pajamas, but I started, weaponless, after the thing. It was, I surmised, the biggest tarantula I had ever seen in or out of the West Indies. Certainly it was no crab, although its size and even its gait would suggest one of our boxlike, compact land-crabs. But a crab, running away like that, would make a distinctive, identifying, hard rattle with its shell-covered feet on that hard, wooden floor, and this thing ran silently, like velvet.

What I should do with, or to, the tarantula if I caught it, I did not stop to consider. I suppose it was a kind of instinct that sent me in pursuit. I gained on it, but it slipped past the curtains ahead of me and was lost to sight in the broad passageway on the other side at the stairs' head. As soon as I had passed the curtain I saw that any attempt to catch the thing would be an impossibility. There would be innumerable hiding-places; the main entrance doors were closed tight down below there, and the stair-well was as dark as the inside of Jonah's whale.

I turned back, perforce, and re-entered Number 4, shut the door quietly behind me, and turned in upon my own gigantic four-poster and tucked the mosquito-netting under the edge of the mattress. I slept at once and did not awaken until five and one-half hours later, at 9:30 in the morning. The excellent Stephen, realizing the situation, had repaid my pussyfooting in his interest of the earlier morning by getting dressed in silence and ordering my breakfast sent in at this hour.

That was Saturday morning, and there were no lessons for Stephen. I took advantage of that fact to put in a very much occupied day at my typewriter, and I got such a start on what I was then engaged in writing that I determined, if possible, to finish it the next day in time for the New York mail which goes out through Porto Rico every week. A brief, unaccustomed siesta Saturday afternoon helped make up for some lack of sleep. I decided to get up and go to that horribly "early" service at 5 on Sunday morning. That would give me a reason for early rising—which I have always secretly abominated! —and a good day's start. Stephen and I retired that evening as soon as he returned from his moving-pictures at the naval station; that was, about 9:30.

I MUST have grown wearier than I had realized, sitting up for Major Upton's ship, and accompanying him to the colonel's quarters afterward; for I slept like the dead, and had my usual fight with myself to get up and shut off an insistent alarm-clock at 4:15. I got to church in time, and was back again a few minutes before 6. It was barely dawn when I came in at the side entrance and up the stairs.

As I walked along the still dim ballroom toward Number 4, the tarantula, or land-crab, or whatever the thing might prove to be, came sidling in that same awkward fashion which I had noted along the edge of the side-wall, toward me this time. It was as though the creature were returning from the hiding-place whither I had chased him Saturday morning.

I was carrying a tough, resilient walking-stick, of native black wattle, cut by myself on Estate Ham's Bay,

over on Santa Cruz, two years before. I stepped faster toward the oncoming thing, with this stick poised in my hand. I saw now in the rapidly brightening dawn what was wrong with the spider—it was obvious now that it was no land-crab. The thing was maimed. It had, apparently, lost several of its legs, and so proceeded in that odd, crablike fashion which I had noted before. A spider should have eight legs, as most people know. This one came hunching and sidling along on five or six.

The thing, moving rapidly despite its paucity of legs, was almost at the door to Number 4. I ran toward it, for the door stood slightly open, and I did not want that horrible creature to go into my room on account of Stephen. I struck at it, viciously, but it eluded my black wattle and slipped in under the conch-shell which served as a door-chock.

Conchs have many uses in the West Indies. In the Bahamas their contents serve as a food-staple. They occasionally yield "pearls," which have some value to jewelers. One sees the shells everywhere—bordering garden paths, outlining cemetery plots, built, with cement, into ornamental courses like shining pink bricks. In the Grand Hotel every door has a conch for a chock. The one at my door was a very old one, painted, in a dark brown color, to preserve it from disintegration due to the strong, salt air.

I approached the shell, now covering the huge tarantula, with some caution. The bite of our native tarantulas in St. Thomas is rarely or never fatal, but it can put the human victim into the hospital for several days, and this fellow, as I have said, was the largest I had ever seen, in or out of St. Thomas. I poked the end of my stick under the lip-edge of the shell, and turned it suddenly over. The spider had disappeared. Obviously it had crawled inside the shell. There is a lot of room inside a good-sized conch. I decided to take a chance. I did not want that thing about the place, certainly.

Keeping my eye on the upturned shell, I stepped over to the center of the ballroom and picked up a week-old Sunday supplement rotogravure section of one of the New York newspapers, crumpled it, folded it into a kind of wad, and with this, very gingerly—for the tarantula is a fighter and no timid beast—effectually stopped up the long triangular entrance to the shell's inside. Then, picking it up, I carried it outside onto the stone-flagged gallery.

Here things were appreciably lighter. The dawn was brightening into the tropic day every instant, and I could now see everything clearly.

I raised the conch-shell and brought it down crashing on the tessellated floor.

As I had expected, the old shell smashed into many fragments, and I stood by, my black wattle raised and ready to strike at the tarantula as it attempted to run away. I had figured, not unnaturally, that the experience of having its rocklike refuge suddenly picked up, carried away, and then crashing to pieces about itself, would, from the tarantula's viewpoint, prove at least momentarily disconcerting, and I should have a chance to slay the loathsome thing at my leisure. But, to my surprize, nothing ran out of the shattered shell.

I bent and looked closer. The fragments were relatively both large and small, from powdery dust all the way to a few chunks as big as my two fists. I poked at one of these, of an extraordinary and arresting shape, a strangely suggestive shape, though colored a dirty pink like the rest of the conch's lining. I turned it over with the end of my stick.

It was the hand of a negro, which, lying palm upward, had at first seemed pink. The palm of the hand

of the blackest of black Africans is pink. So is the sole of the foot. But there was no mistaking the back of that sooty, clawlike thing. It was a severed hand, and it had originally grown upon an owner who had no admixture of any blood other than that of Africa. The name "Tancrède" leapt to my mind. Had he not, even among his fellow slaves, been called "Black Tancrède?" He had, and my knowledge of that ancient tale and the sooty duskiness of this ancient relic conspired forthwith to cause me to leap to that outrageous, that incredible conclusion. The hand of Black Tancrède—this was a right hand, and so, said tradition, was the one which had first been severed and then disappeared—or, at least, the veritable hand of some intensely dark negro, lay there before me on the gallery floor, among the debris of an ancient conch-shell.

I drew a deep breath, for it was an unsettling experience, stooped, and picked the thing up. It was as dry and hard as so much conch-shell, and surprizingly heavy. I looked at it carefully, turning it about and examining it thoroughly; for I was alone on the gallery. Nobody was stirring in the hotel; even the kitchen was silent.

I slipped the hand into the pocket of my drill jacket, and returned to Number 4. I laid the hand down on the marble-topped table which stands in the room's center, and looked at it. Stephen, I had noted at once, was absent. He had got up, and was now, doubtless, in his shower-bath.

I had not been looking at it very long, before an explanation, too far-fetched to be dwelt upon or even to be seriously entertained, was invading my dazed mind. Something on five or six "legs" had run under that conch-shell. Nothing, save this, had been there when I smashed the shell. There were the surface facts, and I was my own witness. There was no hearsay about it. This was no black Quashee tale of marvels and wonderment.

I heard a pad-pad outside, like slippered feet, and I had the thing in my pocket again when Stephen came in, glowing from his shower. I did not want to explain that hand to the boy.

"Good morning, Cousin Gerald," said Stephen. "You got off early, didn't you? I heard your alarm-clock but I turned over and went to sleep again."

"Yes," I answered. "You see, I have a lot of work to get through with today."

"I'd have gone with you," continued Stephen, half-way into his fresh clothes by now, "if you'd waked me up! I'm going to 6 o'clock church if I can make it."

He dressed rapidly, and with another pleasant, hasty word or two, the boy was off, running. The "English Church" is quite near by.

I got up, left Number 4 empty, crossed the ballroom diagonally, and entered Mr. Reynolds' sanctum at its western extremity. I had thought of something. I *must* do what I could to clear up, or put away forever, if possible, that explanation, the details of which were invading my excited mind, pressing into it remorselessly.

I went to the lowest shelf of one of his bookcases, and took out the three heavy, calf-bound, ancient registers of the Hotel du Commerce. I must find out, on the off-chance that the room numbers had not been changed since then, who had occupied Room 4 at the time of Black Tancrède's execution and cursings. That, for the moment, seemed to me absolutely the salient fact, the key to the whole situation. . . .

I could hardly believe my eyes when the faded entry, the ink brown, the handwriting oddly curleycued, jumped out at me.

For all of the year 1832, 1833, and most of 1834 besides, Room 4, Hotel du Commerce, Raoul Patit, proprietor, had been occupied by one Hans de Groot. Hans de Groot had been Governor Gardelin's judge of the Danish Colonial high court. Hans de Groot had condemned Black Tancrède to death, by amputation of hands, pinching, and breaking on the rack.

I had my explanation. . . .

IF ONLY this were a romance, I should proceed to tell how thereafter I had applied, in the traditional method for the laying of this kind of ghost—a ghost with an unfulfilled desire, promise, or curse—how I had applied for permission to restore the hand to the resting-place of Black Tancrède. I should recite the examination of old records, the location of the lime-pit in the Fort yard; I might even have the horrible thing which lay in my jacket pocket "escape" to wreak devastation upon me after unavailing efforts on my part to avoid destruction; a final twist of luck, the destruction of the hand. . . .

But this is not romance, and I am not attempting to make "quite a tale" of these sober facts.

What I did was to proceed straight to the hotel kitchen, where fat Lucinda the cook was cutting breakfast bacon at a table, and two dusky assistants preparing grapefruit and orange-juice against the hour for breakfast.

"Good morning, Lucinda," I began; "is your fire going?"

"Marnin', Mars' Canevin, sar," returned Lucinda, "hot, good'n hot, sar. Is yo' desirous to cook someting?"

Both handmaidens giggled at this, and I smiled with them.

"I only have something I wish to burn," said I, explaining my early-morning visit.

I approached the glowing stove, anticipating Lucinda, and waving her back to her bacon-cutting, lifted a lid, and dropped the horrible, mummified thing into the very heart of a bed of cherry-colored coals.

It twisted in the heat, as though alive and protesting. It gave off a faint, strange odor of burning, like very old leather. But within a few moments the dry and brittle skin and the calcined bones were only scraps of shapeless, glowing embers.

I replaced the stovelid. I was satisfied. I would now satisfy Lucinda, if not her very natural curiosity. I handed her with an engaging smile one of the small, brown, five-franc currency bills which are still issued by the Dansk Vestindiske Nationalbank, and are legal tender in our Uncle Sam's Virgin Islands.

"Many t'anks, sar; Gahd bless yo', Mars' Canevin, sar," muttered the delighted Lucinda.

I nodded to them and walked out of the kitchen reasonably certain that the Jumbee of Number 4 would trouble guests no more at 4 o'clock in the morning, nor at any other hour; that eternity had now swallowed Black Tancrède, who, tradition alleged, was a very persevering man and always kept his word. . . .

It is true, as I remarked at the beginning of this narrative, that Black Tancrède did not curse Hans de Groot, but that Governor Gardelin went home to Denmark and so escaped—whatever it was that happened to Achilles Mendoza and Julius Mohrs. Perhaps the persevering shade of Black Tancrède was limited, in the scope of its revengeful "projection" through that severed hand, to the island on which he died. I do not know, although there are almost fixed rules for these things; rules in which Quashee believes religiously.

But, since that morning, I, truthful Gerald Canevin, confess, I have never seen any large spider without at least an internal shudder. I can

understand, I think, what that strange mental aberration called "spider fear" is like. . . .

For I *saw* that thing which ran along the floor of the Grand Hotel ballroom like a maimed spider—I saw it go under that conch-shell. And it did not come out as it went in. . . .

The Mouse Legend

AS YOU journey along the Rhine near Bingen, you are shown what is called the Mouse Tower on a rocky islet in the river, and are told its legend. Hatto II, a mediæval prelate who became Archbishop of Mainz in 968, was said once to have ordered the burning of a barn in which a number of poor people were confined for stealing grain during a famine. As the barn burned, he humorously likened their cries to the squeaking of mice. Thereafter he began to be tormented by a plague of mice, which finally overran his whole palace. To escape them, he built this tower on the island and fled there for refuge; but the mice appeared there and multiplied, growing bolder, until they fell upon him, killed him and picked his bones.

This is one of those legends found in slightly varying form in many places, all being told for the truth and believed. The story of Popiel, King of Poland, is similar. Some of his subjects complained of his acts; he summoned the leading murmurers to his palace, poisoned them and had them flung into a lake. He then gave a jubilatory banquet; but during the feast, myriads of mice issued from the bodies of the slain men, and rushing to the palace, attacked the king and his family. Popiel took refuge within a circle of fire, but the mice broke through it; he then fled to an island castle, but they followed, killed and ate him.

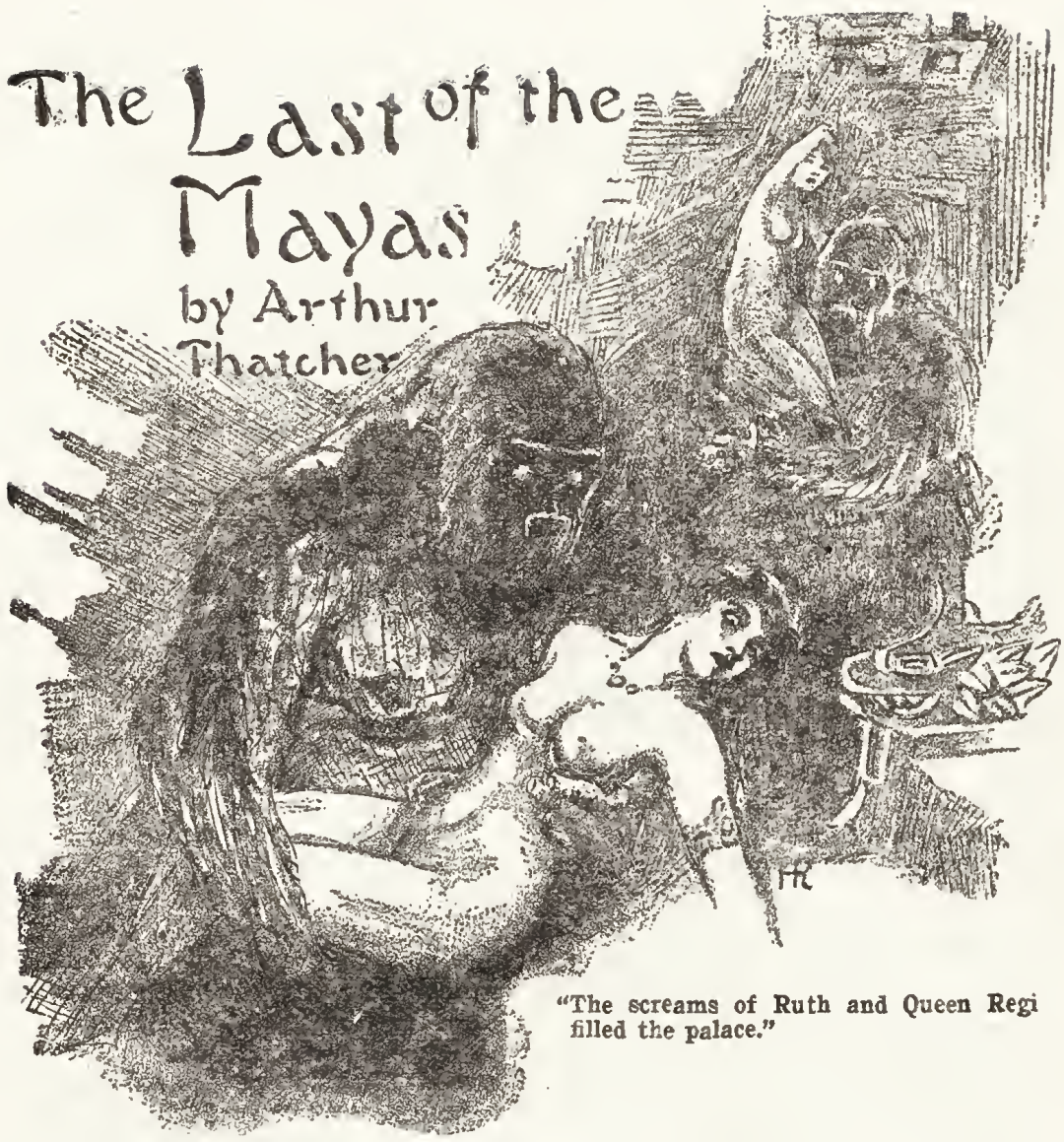
Another story is of the Freiherr von Guttingen, of Switzerland, who, during a famine, shut his poorer tenants up in a barn and burned them, comparing their shrieks to the cries of mice. When the avenging mice came down upon him, he fled to his castle in the Lake of Constance, but they swam after him and devoured him. The castle then sank into the lake, where it may still be seen if the water is sufficiently clear and unruffled.

The Worthsee, in Bavaria, is also called the Mouse Lake. A count of Seefeld, who was punished here, starved his famishing poor in a dungeon. When the mice followed him to his island castle, he had his bed suspended by chains from the ceiling, but they swarmed down the chains and devoured him alive.

There are several other such legends. Sometimes the avenging animals are toads in the story instead of rats and mice.

The Last of the Mayas

by Arthur Thatcher



"The screams of Ruth and Queen Regi filled the palace."

1. Lost in the Jungles

THROUGH the torrential tropic downpour, through darkness so dense it resisted their progress as if it were a black wall being moved slowly backward by a giant's hand, two men and a girl groped their way in single file along the narrow trail. Lost, hopelessly lost in a Yucatan forest—separated from the rest of the expedition when the sudden rain and blackness descended on them, descended with the vengeful fury of an ancient god's wrath, a god angered by the expedition's probing and prying into the secret citadels of a civilization that was his—the three stumbled forward. To stop was suicide. Salvation lay somewhere ahead. Dank verdure slapped their faces, clawed and clutched at their bodies with slimy, poisonous tentacles that rent their clothes or lightly caressed them with leafy kisses that seared like serpents' tongues.

Fred Carkhuff was in the lead. Sporadic flashes from his electric torch seemed to hinder rather than help their progress, but they saved Carkhuff from smashing into the blank face of a towering bluff.

The trail swung sharply to the right

along the rocky wall. The inquiring eyes of Carkhuff's flashlight picked up the cleft where the trail disappeared into what looked like a solid rock wall.

"Here's shelter," called Carkhuff to the girl and Harold Stillwell. "This is a real shelter," he added, as they joined him after a few minutes of blind groping.

"Let's go into this place a little farther," suggested Stillwell, laying his rifle down on the dry ground at his feet while he lighted up the serviceable corncob pipe. The flash of the match became thousands of points of scintillating light reflected from large stalactites. Their little cleft was a huge cavern.

"Let's look at it," suggested Ruth. "It is beautiful."

Led by Carkhuff with his flashlight, the three advanced slowly toward the interior. The place exceeded their expectations. Its width increased, and not more than two hundred feet from the entrance several interjoining passages intersected the main cavern.

"Let's continue along this a bit farther," suggested Stillwell.

Carkhuff led on for another hundred feet.

"What's back of us, Carkhuff?"

"God knows, Stillwell," Carkhuff replied, and, breathing more easily, he observed, "It is probably some of the rest of the expedition."

What Stillwell had seen was the light of a number of torches at a point where the intersecting corridors entered the main cavern.

"Where did they come from so suddenly?" Stillwell exclaimed, halting. "They are not our crowd. They are natives."

"We may as well make ourselves known," suggested Carkhuff. "I was under the impression that there were no natives in this locality."

THE three continued toward the figures with the torches, who observed their approach. To the surprize of Carkhuff and Stillwell, the natives assumed a hostile attitude, advancing toward the two men and the girl with their spears held menacingly before them.

Carkhuff hurriedly sized up the situation and raised his hand in token of peace. When the natives realized that the three intended no hostility, they lowered their spears and approached.

"Who are you, and where is your habitation?" queried Stillwell in Spanish.

The leader of the party shook his head. Stillwell repeated his question in English, then in French, but the natives showed no sign of understanding the question.

"These duffers are apparently unacquainted with any language but their own," said Carkhuff. "We'd better get past them and rejoin the others of our party."

Stillwell indicated by signs that it was their desire to proceed toward the mouth of the cavern. The leader of the party of natives shook his head and grasped his spear menacingly, indicating that he and his followers would not permit them to pass. The chief pointed in the direction from which the three had come as they retraced their steps toward the cave entrance, and issued a command of one syllable much like the word "go" in English.

"We'd better not get frisky with this bunch," advised Carkhuff. "Apparently they want us to accompany them. Since there are at least fifty of them to the three of us, it may be a good policy to go along with them."

"Right," agreed Stillwell. "We can get away from them at the first opportunity and beat it back to the other researchers. The rest of our crowd will not go far from here, for Henry has decided to begin his excavations in this section of the country, seeking the ruins of the former great nation of the Mayas."

"Let's not antagonize these people,

for they are apparently quite savage," Carkhuff advised. "They must be of Indian deseent, for their skin is bronze-colored, and they have the high cheek-bones and Roman nose typical of the native American raees."

"I am quite willing to accede to their demands," said Ruth Benton. "We can choose our own time for making an escape, which is a mueh better policy than attempting to get away now. We might shoot several of them with our rifles, but they are so numerous that we would be quickly overwhelmed."

Again the chieftain of the party pointed in the direction that he desired the three to accompany him. Stillwell nodded his head and smiled to indicate that they were willing. The action pleased the leader of the party, for he again lowered his spear. Several of the warriors, carrying torches, assumed the lead, and the others of the company followed with the two white men and Ruth Benton.

The march through the great cavern continued for another three hundred yards, when the light of another bunch of torches was detected several hundred yards in the distance. The chieftain of the war party gave a loud cry, when the glare of the distant torches was detected, the tones of his voice reverberating uncannily through the cavern. As the echoes ceased, an answering yell sounded from the direction of the other lights.

The company soon reaehed the place where a second party of natives was awaiting the arrival of the first. The members of the second company had been seated on the floor of the cavern. At the sight of the strange men and woman, they rose hurriedly and jabbered excitedly with the warriors of the first company, easting occasional glances at the two men and Ruth.

The members of the second company had been breaking off quantities of the stalactites, which they had placed in wicker baskets.

After some minutes of deliberation, the chief of the first company gave the order to march. The warriors pieked up the baskets of stalactite fragments, and the entire crowd moved forward along the main corridor of the cavern.

After a march of another five hundred yards, the assemblage issued from the cavern. The three gazed in wonderment at the country into which they had just emerged. The rain had ceased, and the forest that stretched over the major portion of the valley presented a red hue. Closer approaeh to the trees revealed to the three white people that the appearance was created by the leaves, that, instead of bearing a green coloration, were in pigmentation similar to a red sandstone.

The nature of the soil was in harmony with the color of the leaves. It was a red-colored loam, rich apparently in the elements having iron for their basis. The trees of the forest were enormous in circumference at the base, and gradually tapered to enormous heights.

The party had proceeded about a quarter of a mile through the forest of red trees, when the foremost warriors suddenly halted at the sound of a wild, roaring howl, that echoed through the forest at a point some distance ahead.

Evidence of fear seized the natives of the company.

"What in thunder do you eall that?" exclaimed Carkhuff, turning to the chief of the party as the hideous howl again made the forest eeho.

The big native was shivering from fright. "Gorabuto!" he exclaimed.

"Must be something terrible," said Ruth Benton, examining the rifle she carried, while Stillwell also looked at his weapon.

"I wish we could talk to these people," lamented Stillwell. "This sounds interesting."

2. *Gorabuto*

THE roar of the gorabuto again sounded; this time it was much closer. The chieftain commanded his followers to take a different route from the one they had been following, and they proceeded rapidly in an effort to avoid the beast that was approaching them.

The effort proved unsuccessful, for the succeeding cries of the beast revealed that it was trailing the party of natives and their three captives.

The beast circled the advancing company, and again roared forth its defiance not more than fifty yards ahead. At its last cry, the company of natives scattered, leaving the two men and Ruth Benton standing alone, awaiting the approach of the anticipated danger.

The underbrush immediately before the three parted, and the two men and woman gazed for a few seconds in astonishment at the sight before them. An enormous ape, resembling the African gorilla in its head structure, stood grasping a large branch in one of its enormous hands. The ape was not less than nine feet in height, and stood nearly upright on its powerful legs as it viewed the three people awaiting its approach. The color of its hair was like that of the leaves of the surrounding forest, sandy red in pigmentation.

"The great American gorilla!" exclaimed Stillwell, raising his rifle, and sighting at the beast.

"Yes," agreed Carkhuff, excitedly, imitating the example of Stillwell with his rifle. "Its remains have been found on the American continent, but it has ever been placed in the category of extinct things."

The great ape, as the men aimed at its head, opened its enormous mouth, exhibiting the huge teeth. It dropped the branch, and clenching its fists, began beating its chest. A wild roar came from its mighty throat. The cry terminated abruptly, and the great beast began advancing toward its contemplated prey.

The report of the two rifles mingled with the termination of the ape's challenging cry. The aim of Stillwell and Carkhuff was true, but the bullets glanced from the skull of the beast before them without effect.

"Pour it into his chest!" commanded Stillwell, lowering his aim. "The creature must have a heart!"

The succeeding two shots had a telling effect on the gigantic ape. Both bullets entered the creature's chest and penetrated its great heart. Paralyzed by the bullet strokes, the ape fell in its tracks. With a great effort, it rose again and attempted to advance toward the three. Stillwell and Carkhuff fired again as it began to rise. With a groan, it again lunged forward and fell to the earth. For a moment the great muscles contracted in the agony of death, and then relaxed. The gorabuto was dead.

When the great ape ceased its struggles, the three advanced and examined the body of the gigantic anthropoid.

"No man on the American continent ever dreamed that such an animal exists in flesh and blood," remarked Stillwell, as he examined the head of the creature. "Remains of such as this have been found from time to time that were suggestive of its one time existence, but it has been associated with the forgotten ages."

"How I wish the other members of the expedition might be here and view this great beast!" said Carkhuff. "We must attempt to form a peaceable association with these natives and return to the region that lies beyond the barrier of small mountains where our friends are. Talk about research for antiquities! Why dig up a lot of antiquated ruins for the purposes of determining whether the Mayas ate bananas or oranges for their breakfast, when here is a region whose animals now living are the descendants of creatures that breathed when the

first great empires of the American continent were at the height of their power."

The attention of the three was directed, for the time being, from the dead ape to the chieftain of the party of natives. The latter had cautiously returned to the scene. He approached the three, a look of astonishment on his features; then he pointed to the dead ape, and questioned them in his native tongue.

Stillwell laughed at the jargon and shook his head. "We don't understand your lingo," he said.

The chieftain turned and gave a repetition of the cry that had been uttered by him in the cavern. In a short time the entire company of warriors returned to the place and joined with their leader in surveying the dead gorabuto. They mingled their glances at the dead ape with curious ones toward the two men and Ruth Benton.

At a command from the chieftain, two of the natives approached the body of the gorabuto. They drew crude knives from their belts and began to attack the chest of the ape. Five minutes later they had removed the heart of the monster. This they placed in one of the wicker baskets, and two of the warriors were instructed to carry it.

The march through the forest was then resumed. After an hour's traveling, the company emerged upon the banks of a stream, and followed along the bank of the river, until the members emerged into a great clearing.

A quarter of a mile in the distance rose the buildings of a small city. Stillwell gave an exclamation of astonishment.

"What do you think of the place yonder?" he questioned. "It has the appearance of a city built by educated and not savage hands."

"I agree with you," said Carkhuff. "From a distance the towers and roofs resemble the architecture of the British Indian civilization. This band of savages never built such a place."

"It may have been theirs by right of inheritance," suggested Ruth Benton. "A former civilization may have built the city. The founders of the place were swept away in some mysterious fashion, possibly some epidemic; or, again, some invading host of savages such as these who are retaining us."

The outskirts of the city were approached, and, as the company entered and followed one of the streets, numerous other natives, similar to the ones with whom the three were walking, came from the various buildings and called inquiries to the chieftain and his command.

3. Prisoners

THE buildings of the city were fashioned from white stone that had been polished until it possessed a luster similar to that of fine marble. Before one of the largest buildings they had yet seen, the three were halted. The chieftain indicated that they were to be retained within the structure. A dozen of the company with the chieftain accompanied the three into the building.

They passed along a wide corridor from which numerous entrances were effected into adjoining rooms. The natives halted before one of the entrances, and by words, accompanied with numerous signs, the chieftain indicated that the three were to pass into the apartment.

The two men entered the room, and Ruth Benton followed. The natives, who had accompanied them, remained without the doorway to guard against any effort on the part of the three to leave the place.

"We're prisoners in possession of our weapons," remarked Carkhuff, as he approached one of the stone benches that stood alongside of a wall. "We're fortunate to a great degree, too. We have discovered one of the lost cities of the Mayas."

"I am inclined to agree with you," remarked Stillwell. "The empire of

the Mayas possibly extended over this part of the continent, as you have suggested. Our captors are the successors of the builders, who erected this city for the ages to come."

The three remained engaged in conversation for half an hour, when their talk was interrupted by the entrance of the chief of the party that had captured them. He was accompanied by another native. The latter was dressed in a long, gownlike trapping that extended nearly to the floor. His hair was worn much longer than that of the warriors, and under his arm he carried a roll that resembled coarse wrapping paper.

The chieftain pointed to the native of the long gown and spoke the word, "Bloto."

The latter repeated the word and pointed to himself.

"That's the newcomer's name," remarked Carkhuff; then, pointing to himself, he repeated his own name. Turning to Stillwell, he spoke the latter's name, and then Ruth Benton's. Ruth watched the entire proceeding with a smile.

The chieftain withdrew from the chamber, and the man in the gown remained. He began unrolling the parchment, and finally completed the task by placing the article on the floor. The three glanced at the surface of the parchment, and each showed surprize at the artistry revealed. On the parchment was depicted the likeness of a gorabuto, and under the picture of the animal were several written characters, indicating in the language of the natives the name of the animal pictured. A great beast, resembling an elephant, with long tusks that curled upward in a semicircle, was depicted by the side of the gorabuto. The trunk of the creature divided half-way from the point of connection with the skull into two smaller trunks. The eyes of the beast, instead of being situated like those of an elephant, were in the forefront of the skull just above the point where the trunk joined the head.

"Elbomo," stated the man in the gown, noting the interest the three took in the second picture on the parchment. The three repeated the name in unison.

"This man must be our teacher," suggested Ruth, turning to Stillwell and smiling. "They want us to learn their language and have sent him to instruct us."

"I think that such is their intention," returned Stillwell, his eyes meeting the glance that Ruth turned to his. "These people have something superior to that of any savage tribe I have ever encountered: a written language as well as a spoken one. They are intelligent, too, in having a studied method of teaching their language and writing."

"This intelligence may be something their ancestors gleaned from the Mayan civilization," argued Carkhuff.

For an hour, the lesson under the tutorship of Bloto continued. Aside from the objects depicted on his instruction chart, he pointed out many other articles about the room, and through the narrow stone window through which light and fresh air entered the chamber.

When he had imparted to his students what he considered sufficient information for one time, the instructor withdrew from the room. An hour later, the first native women who had been encountered entered the room bearing several trays of fruit and other foods. The three who entered were young and wore one-piece trappings fashioned from a fiber woven skilfully by hand or else in a loom of the natives. Their hair and eyes were black, and the color of their skin was less of a bronze than that of the warriors.

They wore light sandals fashioned from the hide of some animal unknown to the three. The sandals were much lighter and more daintily fash-

ioned than the stout ones worn by the chieftain and the other native warriors.

The fruits were pleasing, and Carkhuff restrained himself with difficulty from overindulging in the bananas that formed a portion of the assortment. One tray contained a quantity of venison that had been cooked with no mean skill in some of the ovens of the heads of the city.

The three girls named each of the articles as they placed them before the three strangers.

"We ought to acquire a speaking knowledge of their language in a few weeks," said Carkhuff.

"I am very anxious to learn their tongue," remarked Stillwell. "I want to get more information regarding the strange beasts old Bloto exhibited on his chart."

When the meal had been completed, the three girls took up the trays with the remnants of the meal and departed from the room. When darkness had fallen, they returned and spread two mats fashioned from vegetable fiber on the floor. They indicated to Stillwell and Carkhuff that they should rest during the night on the mattresses thus furnished. They pointed to Ruth, and indicated that she was to follow them. The girl left her two companions somewhat reluctantly.

"I have only one regret over this adventure," she said anxiously, "and that is that some one of the other girls of our expedition did not get caught in the rainstorm with us instead of being with the rest of the party. I would have had a companion."

Without further hesitation, Ruth turned and followed the three native girls through the exit into the main corridor. They preceded her across the wide hallway, where she followed them into the room directly opposite that occupied by Stillwell and Carkhuff.

On the floor were spread four mats similar to the ones furnished for her two companions. The three girls indicated by words and signs that they would sleep in the chamber with Ruth and that one of the mats was for her accommodation.

Her feeling of apprehension left when she understood the actions of her new companions, and without further reluctance she removed her unnecessary clothing and lay down on her mat. Physical exhaustion asserted itself, and she slept.

4. Queen Regi

When morning dawned, Stillwell and Carkhuff were led into the hallway, where they were joined shortly by Ruth and the three maidens who had spent the night with the white girl.

Accompanied by the warriors, who had remained on guard duty during the night, the party proceeded, until it passed through one of the entrances into a large room at the end of the long corridor.

In this room, a number of the natives were breaking their fast, and the white people and their companions joined in the breakfast. Among the ones who were eating at the long table of stone was Bloto, the teacher of the previous day.

When the repast had been completed, Bloto approached the three white people and indicated that they should follow him. They complied with the instructor's order and trailed after him. Bloto led the way to another room, which he ordered them to enter. Upon entering the place they found it was a schoolroom. Many charts, similar to the one Bloto had brought to their room the preceding day, were hanging on the walls of the chamber.

For the next three hours, Bloto instructed the three while their escape was prohibited by a number of warriors stationed as guards at the doorway.

The next month continued much after the fashion of the first twenty-four hours. At the end of that time, the three had acquired a good speaking knowledge of the language.

"This will be the last day of your instruction," Bloto announced one morning, when the four had assembled in the special instruction room. "This afternoon you are to be led before the queen of our city. She is the ruler of the City of the Rainbow, although she is not of the same race as Bloto and his kind. She is the last of a race that lived and ruled here millions of suns ago. It was her fathers who built the City of the Rainbow. Our queen is a woman of great wisdom. She it was who ordered you to be instructed in the language of this people so that she might talk with you when you were brought before her."

The three entered into their final course of instruction with greater zest than heretofore. When they had been returned to their room where they were guarded during the day, they began speculating on what the future might hold for the party.

"I have been wondering," said Carkhuff, "if Professor Henry and the others have given us up for dead. They no doubt have made an exhaustive search for us. Failing in this, they may have decided that we became lost and wandered away into the jungle, or that we met with some of the fierce native tribes of Indians reported to inhabit this portion of the continent and were slain by them or carried away into captivity."

"I would like to rejoin the others as soon as possible," remarked Ruth, "but the lure of our present position is thrilling, and that same lure overshadows the desire to return until we have learned more of this unusual country, hidden here for so many years behind the barrier of small mountains. When I have satisfied myself regarding the habits of this people, learned their history, and viewed more of the strange animals and plants that abound in this valley, then I am ready to attempt an escape and return to the research expedition."

"It should not be so difficult to get away from here," commented Stillwell. "We could shoot our way out, since we have been permitted to retain our rifles. The natives look upon the guns with reverence, since we killed the big gorabuto, and do not seem to realize that what happened to the gorilla could easily happen to some of them, if we attempted to escape and they tried to prevent us from doing so."

"A quiet escape would be more desirable," said Carkhuff. "It is my opinion that these natives would put up a great fight, if we started anything in the presence of superior numbers."

Shortly after the noonday meal, Bloto entered their room and announced that the three were to accompany him and the warriors to the palace of the queen.

"The queen of the Ronalans desires your presence in her throne-room," announced Bloto. "Lelock, the chieftain of the party that was with you when you killed the great gorabuto, has shown the queen, Regi, the monster heart taken from the beast that you killed with your thunder poles. The queen wants to look upon you and see the thunder poles and hear them speak. Sebol, the chieftain in chief of the Ronalans, who is the suitor for the love of Queen Regi, will furnish a target for you to strike with the lightning concealed within the poles."

The two men and Ruth followed Bloto into the hallway, where they joined some thirty warriors under the command of Lelock. The company proceeded toward the front entrance and emerged into the street. They followed the street until the river was reached, and turned along the stone walk by the side of the stream. Sev-

eral nundred yards before them rose an enormous structure of polished stone. It was surmounted by numerous towers whose roofs resembled the half of a large globe of stone, polished and sparkling in the tropical sunlight.

At the point where the grounds about the structure were closed from the surrounding lots and buildings by a high stone wall, the river fell, Niagaralike, to a lower level of two hundred feet. Above the gigantic waterfall the form of a miniature rainbow was constantly visible.

"There is the palace of the rainbow," said Lelock, pointing toward the white stone structure. "It is there that Queen Regi lives."

"The city gets its name from the waterfall," eommented Stillwell, turning to Ruth.

"This is a beautiful spot," she replied. "The garden here is the work of artists. Queen Regi has an adorable plaee to live in."

The company arrived at a walk built of polished, flat stones. They followed the walk until they were halted at the main entrance of the palace. The entranec was equipped with a door, resembling a series of rounded wooden bars. The door was guarded beyond by a dozen powerful warriors dressed in green trappings.

At the approach of Lelock and his company, one of the guards began unfastening the door.

"The queen keeps the entrance to her palace constantly barred," explained Lelock. "She fears that the gorabutos may eome and carry her away. The gorabutos have many times come into the City of the Rainbow and carried away its residents. The great gorabutos like the women best. When they carry away a man, they immediately kill him. The gorabutos do not eat flesh, but live on the fruits of the forest. When they carry away a woman, they keep her until they become tired, then they tear her to pieees in apish frenzy."

"Are there many gorabutos in the forest?" queried Stillwell.

"Far toward the setting sun," replied Lelock, "they are more numerous in places than the people of the Ronalans."

The door of wooden bars swung inward, and the company proceeded into the corridor. They passed the line of green-clad guards and advanced down the long hallway toward an exit into another chamber visible at the far end of the corridor.

The entrance was reached, and the party was admitted by another group of green-clad men.

As they entered the place, they were impressed with the beauty of its equipment. Carved furniture of wood and stone occupied logical places, and at the opposite side of the great chamber stood an elevated section of the floor on which was situated an exquisitely earved ehair of massive proportions. The chair was fashioned from a wood of the finest whiteness and was polished until it glistened. The arms of the chair were of solid ivory fashioned from the tusks of one of the great elbomos, the curved section of the tusks touching the floor.

The company advanced toward the elevated section of the floor and waited in silence. In one of the chambers adjoining the throneroom the long, soft note of a trumpet sounded. This was followed by a succession of weird though beautiful notes on the same instrument. Through an adjoining entrance a procession of native girls, clad in one-piece trappings corresponding in color to the green clouts of the palace warriors, advanced. Bands of gold in which were set stones of sparkling brilliancy girded their arms. About the waist of each was a girdle of red fiber, and suspended from the girdle was a short sword about two feet in length.

"They are the personal attendants and guards of the queen," explained Lelock. "The young women are very brave, and are even better fighters than some of our best warriors."

Following the company of maidens came seven warriors of powerful physique. In the lead of them strode one larger than the others whose face and head resembled that of a gorabuto.

"That is Sebol," whispered Lelock. "He is the chief of the chieftains of the Ronalans. He is also the most powerful of the warriors. By virtue of his position, he has a station in the palace of the queen, and her personal safety is looked after by him."

"He is the ugliest man of the Ronalans," commented Stillwell, replying to Lelock's statement. "He has a face like a gorabuto."

Lelock smiled at the statement of Stillwell. "You'd better not let Sebol hear you make such a statement," he cautioned. "Sebol is very sensitive regarding his features. He once slew a rival who had made ridicule of his face." Lowering his voice, Lelock whispered: "I once was told by an old chieftain, who was chief of the chiefs before Sebol, that the father of the latter was a gorabuto."

Following the seven great warriors came Queen Regi. Stillwell, Carkhuff and Ruth looked upon her with amazement. Instead of the Indian woman they had anticipated, they beheld a being whose skin was as white as their own. Instead of the stringy black hair of the Indian, she had the blond locks of the Caucasian. Her face was perfectly formed; the cheek bones were not like those of the natives but were Anglo-Saxon in formation.

She wore a one-piece trapping of purple cloth about her loins. The trapping was supported in its position by a girdle running over her right shoulder. A girdle of white, studded with hundreds of sparkling jewels, covered her breasts, and bands of gold, studded with precious stones, adorned her arms.

As she entered, her eyes rested upon the three strangers. She looked at Stillwell, standing near the side of Ruth; then her gaze turned to Carkhuff's powerful physique, as he stood watching the guard maidens. As her eyes rested on Carkhuff, he turned from his inspection of the native girls and his eyes met those of Queen Regi.

For a few seconds they stood, the steel-gray eyes of the scientist meeting the brown eyes of the savage queen. Then Regi, recalling the occasion of her entrance into the throneroom, continued her advance toward the elevated portion of the chamber where the throne stood.

Regi ascended to her throne and seated herself. Sebol took his position at her right hand and remained as motionless as a statue. The maidens of the guard gathered about the foot of the throne and sat on the elevated section of the chamber floor, while the other six warriors who had entered the chamber with Sebol stood at the rear of the throne.

Bloto, the instructor, now advanced and bowed before Regi. "Queen of the Ronalans, last of a royal race, before whom we do obeisance, your command regarding the teaching of the tongue of the Ronalans to these strangers has been fulfilled. From them you may hear their story, of whence they came, and their object in coming. They have brought their thunder poles with which they slew the gorabuto."

Bloto withdrew from before Regi, and the queen spoke. "Strangers within the land of the Red Forest and the City of the Rainbow Mists," she said, "I have heard from one of my chieftains, Lelock, the story of your great deed in slaying a gorabuto. Regi bids you tell her the

story of your coming here and the nature of the power you possess in your thunder poles."

Carkhuff replied for the three. Advancing, he met the gaze that Regi turned to him and began speaking. He related how he and his two companions had gone into the cavern, and later had encountered the natives under Leloek's command. He made no mention of the other members of the Henry expedition, fearing that some effort might be made by the natives to leave the valley and capture the others.

"The thunder poles contain magic," concluded Carkhuff, in commenting on the power of the rifle. "The white men and their companion can strike the gorabutos or any other creature dead by directing their thunder poles toward them. If Queen Regi desires to look at one of the thunder poles, she may do so."

Regi rose from her throne and advanced to Carkhuff. She viewed the various parts of the weapon, as he exhibited them to her. Sebol desisted from his statuelike attitude and gave close attention to the explanation of Carkhuff.

Stillwell noted the attitude of the native commander-in-chief, and viewed the angry scowl that mantled his forehead. When Regi had returned to her seat, he advanced before her and bowed.

"We have heard the white warrior speak of the magic of his weapon," said Sebol, a malicious grin on his apelike countenance. "Let him kill a target before Regi, so that she may know that he speaks the truth."

"Regi is willing," announced the queen, "and as a special favor to her chieftain of chiefs, she will allow him to select a target of any thing that breathes in the valley of the Red Forest. Let Sebol take his men and bring a target into the throneroom."

Sebol's grin deepened. "Since the queen has given her authority to Sebol, and when once that permission is given it can never be changed, Sebol will deviate from the custom that prevails at our annual spearing matches of slaying animals, and name a human target. Lelo, of the queen's guard of maidens, shall be the target."

An exclamation of astonishment came from the assembled company of natives, and Queen Regi was visibly shocked by the announcement of her head chieftain.

One of the maidens of the guard sprang to her feet, and appealed to Regi to spare her from the order of Sebol.

Regi looked at the guard maiden for a moment, then spoke. "What the queen of the Ronalans once gives away, under the laws of the country, she can not take back. She has given the right to Sebol to select the target for the thunder pole. He has made his selection, though Regi never dreamed that her chieftain would name a maiden of the guard. The power rests now with Sebol regarding your fate. Make your appeal to him."

Lelo rose from her position of humility before Regi, and turned, not an appealing look, but one of hatred, toward the big native. "If Sebol can save Lelo," she said, "yet Lelo will not beg him for her life. Lelo, about to become a target for a strange weapon in the hands of strange warriors, is not afraid to die. She hurls defiance at Sebol. He is a big gorabuto which carries away women and tears them to pieces."

A snarl grew on the face of Sebol as Lelo spoke. He advanced to the girl and seized her by the arm. She reached for her short sword, but the big chieftain disarmed her as easily as if she had been a child. He led her to the wall of the chamber opposite the point where Carkhuff and the others were standing.

"Let the thunder pole of the white warrior smite the guard maiden,"

commanded Sebol, addressing Carkhuff. "Let her die the death that befell the great gorabuto."

Carkhuff addressed Regi. "The magic that speaks from the thunder pole," he said, "is controlled by a spirit. The spirit does not like wrongdoing or wrongdoers. If I point the thunder pole at Lelo, the spirit may strike, not Lelo, but one who has done her wrong."

Carkhuff paused in his announcement, then turned toward Sebol, who was still holding the guard maiden. "If you want to take the chance of the magic striking you instead of your intended victim," he said, addressing the chieftain, "then you may remain where you are."

Sebol continued in his position, and appeared angered at the unwillingness exhibited by Carkhuff to shoot the guard maiden. Again he commanded: "Sebol does not fear any spirit or magic. Let the white warrior slay the guard maiden."

"Shoot a piece of his shirt away," advised Stillwell, speaking in English. "If he feels the whiz of the bullet, he will change his mind."

Carkhuff raised the rifle and aimed in the direction of Lelo and the chieftain, who retained his hold of the girl's arm. An expectant silence reigned over the company. Carkhuff's rifle broke the stillness with deafening effect, while Queen Regi gave a jump and rose to her feet to view the effect of the shot. The guard maiden did not fall dead, as the gorabuto had done in the forest. Instead, the girdle of Sebol fell from his waist, and his long sword clattered upon the stone floor of the chamber. The bullet from Carkhuff's rifle had cut the girdle with expert neatness.

"The spirit of the thunder pole is displeased with Sebol," announced Carkhuff, turning toward Queen Regi. "It is not pleased that the guard maiden should die. Rather would it smite Sebol as it smote the gorabuto."

Sebol could ill conceal his anger at the statement of Carkhuff. The rifle bullet, cutting his girdle mysteriously from his body, had frightened him, though he concealed his fear from his followers as best he could. With an angry scowl directed toward Carkhuff, he spoke: "The chief of chiefs, Sebol, will spare the guard maiden to satisfy the spirit of the thunder pole. Lelo may go."

Queen Regi at this announcement raised her hand as a signal that the meeting was adjourned. With Lelock and his command the three white people left the chamber. Queen Regi, who had seated herself after dismissing the assemblage, rose and looked after the three members of the Henry expedition, as they followed the lead of Lelock.

Sebol watched her as she gazed after Carkhuff. The snarl again disfigured his face, as it had done when Lelo hurled her defiance at him. He advanced to the side of the queen as the other members of her retinue of male and female guards passed from the chamber.

"Regi looks with admiration upon the stranger," he charged, as they stood alone in the throneroom. "Never has Regi bestowed such a glance upon Sebol, though he has fought for her and protected her, yet she looks with admiration on another."

"Regi is queen of the Ronalans," she replied, meeting the fierce gaze of Sebol. "She it was who made you chieftain of her chiefs. She may look at the stranger if she desires, and Sebol can not direct her not to do so."

A savage growl issued from the throat of Sebol. "Regi is ungrateful," he said. "Regi is powerful by right of her inheritance. She is the last of her race. Sebol, though, is powerful, too. Many there are who

live in the City of the Rainbow who would like to see Sebol or some of the other chieftains and their wives reigning in the grand palace of the Ronalans."

The great savage drew close to Regi. She withdrew from his advance. "Does Sebol threaten revolution against the existing government?" she asked sharply, a light of anger revealing itself in her eyes.

"Sebol does not answer," replied the chieftain. "He will merely wait and watch. He hates the stranger with the white face like that of Regi's. May the gorabutos soon get him and his companions!"

Regi gave an exclamation of anger, and turning, she followed her retinue out of the chamber, leaving the angry chieftain brooding alone in the throneroom.

5. *An Invasion Threatened*

When Stillwell, Carkhuff and Ruth Benton were again in their room in the building that had been their headquarters since their arrival in the City of the Rainbow, they began a discussion of the events that had taken place in the queen's palace.

"She is a real beauty," remarked Carkhuff. "What race would you say she belongs to, Stillwell?"

"A transplanted Caucasian type running through many centuries of existence in this hemisphere," replied Stillwell.

"That creature Sebol is a terrible brute," remarked Ruth. "I shudder when I think about him. How can so refined a creature as Queen Regi stand having such a beast watching over her?"

"The power of the physical is what dominates in the City of the Rainbow," replied Stillwell. "Sebol is without any doubt the most powerful man from the standpoint of strength in the kingdom of the Ronalans. It was his physical power that placed him in the palace of the queen as one of her personal bodyguards. Through his constant association, he has become infatuated with the beautiful Regi, and seeks, as Lelock informed us, to win her love and ascend the throne as king through his marriage with Regi."

The conversation was interrupted at this point by the entrance into the temple of one of the guard maidens of the queen's palace. The girl bowed low before the three, and then made known her mission.

"I have been sent as a special emissary from Queen Regi," she said, "to inform you that the queen has allowed the use of her private garden for the white woman of the strangers. The white woman may visit it whenever she desires. When she walks in the queen's garden or rests therein, she may have the company of her two men if she wishes. It is the order of the queen, also, that the white woman and her two men may walk about the city whenever they desire, but they must be accompanied by a guard of the Ronalans, as the queen does not wish them to leave her city until she is willing."

"Tell Regi, queen of the Ronalans," answered, Ruth, "that the white woman of the strangers appreciates her kindness, and that she will visit her garden and walk about her city. Tell her that the white woman and her two companions have no desire to leave the beautiful City of the Rainbow."

"Regi will be pleased," stated the guard maiden, and, with another bow, she turned and left the chamber.

"Looks as if things were moving our way," commented Carkhuff. "They've apparently turned over the keys of the city to us."

Lelock approached the guards who were in the entranceway leading into the chamber where the three were sitting. He spoke quickly to the

guards, and the occupants of the chamber caught his statement.

"The gorabutos are coming toward the City of the Rainbow," the chieftain announced. "A party of hunters from the palace of the queen returned a short time ago and report having found traces of a number of the great apes. The word is being sent throughout the city, and the entrances to the buildings are being walled up to prevent the beasts from entering and seizing our women."

Carkhuff advanced toward the entrance of the chamber and spoke to Lelock.

"Is it the custom of the Ronalans to wall up their doorways when they fear an invasion of the gorabutos?" he questioned.

"That is the only manner we have of resisting the great creatures," explained Lelock. "When we wall up the entrances, they can not get into our stone homes. The gorabutos will not stay longer than seven suns. They get hungry then, and go back to the depths of the Red Forest. When they leave the city, then we remove the wall across the doorways and live as we have lived before."

"I should think that half a dozen long spears would be effective in keeping the beasts out of any doorway in the city," said Carkhuff.

"One might as well use so many branches from the Red Forest," returned Lelock. "The gorabutos would laugh at such resistance. They would sweep a hundred men with spears aside. Unlucky is the home or public building that does not have its entrances closed when a crowd of the gorabutos come into the city."

Carkhuff returned to the side of Ruth Benton. "I suggest that we take a little stroll this evening over toward the palace garden. Lelock intimates that it may be several days before the gorabutos may be expected to pass through this section of the country and the City of the Rainbow."

"I would like to go there," agreed Ruth. "Let's make the trip after we have had our supper."

"That's a go," said Stillwell. "We'll take the trip and get better acquainted with our location. We don't want to spend the remainder of our years here, and we can begin studying a method of getting away from here when we so desire."

FOLLOWING her quarrel with Sebol after the termination of her first interview with the three white strangers, Regi followed her retinue of guard maidens and went to her private chamber in the palace.

She removed her breast-band of jewels and the one-piece purple trapping, then lay down on a couch carved from the snow-white wood of the Red Forest trees. For the next half-hour she remained thus, her perfectly molded figure resembling the work of one of the greatest sculptors, resting on the black leopard skins from which the covering of the couch was fashioned, her only garments being the jeweled band about her shapely white arms and the jeweled sandals encasing her feet.

Finally she terminated the study in which she had been plunged. She sat up and spoke softly to herself, her eyes turned toward the floor at her feet. "Sebol must go," she said determinedly. "Too often of late has he shown disrespect for my authority. He constantly tells me of his feeling of devotion and love, but I do not care for it. True, he is a wonderful animal physically, but Regi when she gives herself must have someone who has other than physical qualifications. He must be a great warrior and hunter, a leader of men."

Regi rose to her feet and advanced into an adjoining small room. When she returned she was clad in a trapping the color of the leaves of the Red Forest. Instead of the white jewel-studded band she had worn early in the afternoon, she wore an-

other corresponding in color to the one-piece trapping that adorned her body.

She picked a small instrument from one of the tables and placed it to her lips. A soft, flutelike note sounded. Regi placed the instrument upon the table and waited. A few moments later Lelo, one of the guard maidens, entered the apartment.

"Regi will eat earlier this evening than usual," the queen announced. "She is going to walk in her garden, after the sun has gone down."

"Is not Regi afraid to leave her palace tonight?" queried Lelo, by way of warning. "The hunters report having found traces of the great gorabutos not two days' journey from here. The order has been sent throughout the city to put in the major portion of the walls in the entrances of the houses, until the hunters bring in further reports of the whereabouts of the gorabutos. When they are reported as very near the city, then the remainder of the openings may be closed."

"Have they started closing the entrances to the palace?" asked Regi.

"They are at work now," replied Lelo.

"The danger is not imminent," commented Regi. "It may be several days before the great apes pass through here. Regi will walk in her garden this night. She has sent word to the three strangers that they may use her garden when they desire. Did you see the great white stranger who pointed the thunder pole whose magic cut the sword-girdle of Sebol?"

Lelo nodded her head. "Lelo saw him. He is as strong-appearing a man as Sebol, only his great muscles are covered with his cloth trappings."

"Yes, he is powerful," agreed Regi, "and his face is not like a gorabuto's, as are the features of Sebol."

Lelo withdrew from the room to bring the queen's food. The latter walked to a chair and seated herself.

"I will call a new contest," she soliloquized, "to find a new strong man for position at the head of the warriors of the Ronalans to replace Sebol. The present chieftain of the chiefs must go."

An hour later, when the sun had disappeared below the horizon of the forest beyond the great clearing surrounding the City of the Rainbow, Regi emerged from one of the side entrances nearest to her apartments in the palace. She had changed to a snow-white costume that sparkled with jewels of finest luster. Six of the guard maidens followed her, and after the guard maidens came Sebol, the chieftain of the chiefs.

6. A Conspiracy

WHEN Regi left the throneroom, Sebol walked to one of the benches stationed at the side of the room to ponder his recent quarrel with the queen.

"Sebol should be king of the Ronalans," he told himself. "My friends have told me so, and why should I not hasten my time and overthrow Regi?"

The approach of another warrior into the throneroom roused him from his soliloquy. At the sight of the newcomer, Sebol rose to his feet with a salutation of greeting.

"Walmar of the queen's hunters is welcome home," he said.

"Glad is Walmar to be again in the City of the Rainbow," replied the other warrior, returning the salutation of raising his spear.

"What has brought the chieftain of the hunters to the city from the Red Forest?" asked Sebol.

"The great apes are again migrating toward the east. It is the first time in three years. They will arrive here possibly in three or four suns. Walmar and his men returned to the city this afternoon to give warning so that the inhabitants may prepare for their passing through."

"Sebol is doubly glad that Walmar has come. Sebol is in trouble."

"Has he quarreled again with Regi?" queried Walmar.

"He has."

"Sebol should do as Walmar has suggested before," continued the hunter chieftain. "He should overthrow the queen and be king himself. With the power in his hands, he could compel her to be his wife, if he still desired her, or he could wed the daughter of Walmar, the most beautiful of the Ronalan maidens."

Sebol listened to the last statement of Walmar with grim satisfaction.

"Neda, the daughter of Walmar, is fair in the eyes of Sebol," admitted the chieftain of the chiefs. "Almost as fair to look upon is she as Queen Regi herself. Sebol is ready now to overthrow the present queen if his friend Walmar will aid. Walmar's daughter, Neda, shall be his queen, and Regi shall be taken into the Red Forest and left for the gorabutos."

"Walmar is willing to act, when his friend Sebol is ready."

"For his aid, Walmar shall be made the chieftain of the chiefs for King Sebol," promised the giant warrior. "Sebol will complete his plans and commence his revolution when the threatened passing of the gorabutos through this section of the country has passed."

A maiden of the guard entered the throneroom and spoke to the two men. "Regi will walk in her garden this evening," she announced, "and it is her wish that the warriors guard her as well as the maidens, for the reported coming of the gorabuto bands has made her fearful."

When the maiden of the guard left the room, the two men continued their plot to overthrow Regi and seize the government of the Ronalans.

"There is one chieftain who is very loyal to Regi," said Sebol, "and he is Lelock. His power in the City of the Rainbow is not to be treated lightly. When the hour of seizing the government comes, we must assassinate him and throw Regi into the city prison. The loss of the queen and her most loyal chieftain will make the changing of the reins of government into our hands an easy matter. None of the others who may be loyal to Regi would fight for her restoration without a leader."

"What about the three white strangers of whom I have been told? Would they be considered as factors liable to interrupt our plans?"

"I think not, for I will order the assassination of all three when we order the death of the chieftain Lelock. I will go now and prepare to serve as guard this evening for Regi. Until we meet again, let your tongue speak not of our planning."

The two left the throneroom. Walmar returned to the home which he had not visited for six months since he entered the Red Forest as commander of the warriors whose duty it was to hunt and capture game for the royal household of Queen Regi and her retinue. Sebol went to his chamber in the palace and prepared for his evening's guarding of Regi.

An hour later he joined the guard maidens and awaited the arrival of Regi from her room.

SEBOL did not have to wait long until Regi came from her room along the corridor leading to one of the side entrances of the palace. He watched her as she approached, and noted the pearl-white costume she wore, and the additional band that bound her hair. Regi flashed a glance at the chieftain, but passed him without speaking.

She smiled at the six maidens of the guard, and walked past them into the outer garden. For the next fifteen minutes she wandered about the garden, which covered some five acres of ground. Thousands of the most gorgeous flowers and unique plants had been brought from the depths of the Red Forest and its adjacent terri-

tory to flourish in the garden of the Rainbow City.

She continued her walk until she approached the river where the great falls roared into the rocky depths below. The rainbow above the falls was still visible in the fading light of the evening. Regi paused and gazed into the mist above the cataract. As she stood thus, a challenging, growling roar sounded within the confines of the garden. The six guard maidens stood speechless with fright.

"The gorabutos are here," exclaimed Regi. "We must hasten to the safety of the palace."

"It is too late!" exclaimed Lelo, of the guard maidens, pointing in the direction from which the party of strollers had come.

Regi's eyes followed the direction indicated by the girl, and noted an object that filled her with fear. An enormous gorabuto, walking upright like a man, was coming toward the party at a rapid pace.

"Defend us who are weaker than you, Sebol!" appealed Regi, turning toward the chieftain of the chiefs.

Her appeal was unheeded, for Sebol seemed not to hear. He viewed the approaching monster for a moment; then, remembering the tradition of his ancestors that a gorabuto would carry a woman away before he would touch a man, the chieftain of the chiefs sought safety in ignominious flight. The guard maidens emulated his example, and Regi, the queen of the Ronalans, was left alone to face the advance of the roaring monster.

7. The Last of the Mayas

When Stillwell, Carkhuff and Ruth had completed their evening meal, they informed the guards of their desire to visit Queen Regi's garden. Escorted by six of the warriors, they proceeded through the city toward the river, then turned to follow the stone walk until the outer wall of the palace garden was reached. The three, as had been their custom since their capture, carried their rifles, fearing that to allow the weapons to pass from their possession might result in their never recovering them.

At the entrance gate into the palace ground, the party was halted by the gate guards, who informed them that Queen Regi was then walking in the garden.

The warriors with the three white people told the gateway guards of the invitation that had been extended by Queen Regi for the white people to visit the garden whenever they might desire. At this explanation, the guards opened the gate, and allowed the members of the party to pass through.

"We could have climbed their little old wall, if we had been denied entrance at this point," remarked Carkhuff. "So low a structure is easily scaled."

The company, at the instigation of Ruth, proceeded toward the spot where they had viewed the great waterfall earlier in the day. When they were a hundred yards from the place, which was still concealed from their view by the intervening shrubbery, the terrific roar of a gorabuto fell upon their ears.

"Gorabuto!" exclaimed the warriors, accompanying the three, terrified at the sudden challenge of the great ape so near to them. The scream of the guard maidens with Queen Regi reached the ears of the members of the party.

Carkhuff was quick to sense the danger. "The monster is after Regi and her retinue of maidens!" he exclaimed, rushing forward to where he had heard the cries of the terrorized girls.

When he approached the point where the cataract was visible, the sight that met his eyes thrilled him. Regi was crouched on the edge of the rocky abyss into which the river fell, and a few paces from her strode a

gorabuto much larger than the one he and Stillwell had slain the first day in the Red Forest. The great ape beat its massive chest with its fists and roared loudly.

Carkhuff stopped and sighted quickly at the beast. The bullet from his rifle entered the body of the great ape at a point in the back just over the heart.

He hurriedly ejected the shell from the rifle and fired a second bullet, then a third into the great hulk. A tremendous rage seized the gorabuto, and, with hideous roarings, it turned from its advance toward Regi to attack the enemy which had wounded it so severely. The eyes of the ape fell upon Carkhuff, and with a succession of quick roars it bounded toward him. Carkhuff met the charge toward him with a well-directed bullet into the heart of the advancing animal. The great ape fell in its effort to reach him, and, attempting to rise again, it was smitten by a bullet fired at close range. With guttural growlings, it toppled over again upon the stone walk and struggled in the agony of death.

Seeing that the gorabuto was dead, Carkhuff advanced to where Regi was staring in fearful wonderment at the scene. At his approach she ran toward him. He hesitated as she drew near and waited for her to speak. In her frenzy of gratitude, she placed her hands on his shoulders and gazed steadily into Carkhuff's eyes as she spoke.

"The white stranger is great," she said. "Regi owes her life to him. He is brave. Regi would make him the chieftain of her chiefs; for Sebol, who would have Regi for his wife, is a coward and saved himself. Regi will award to the white stranger anything in the land of the Ronalans that he may choose."

Carkhuff noted the beauty of the eyes lifted to his, and studied for an instant the gracefulness of her figure. Then he spoke. "The white stranger deserves but little credit. He has saved Queen Regi because it was his duty to protect her when it was in his power to do so."

Stillwell, Ruth and the others approached the two. The warriors viewed the dead gorabuto, while Ruth and Stillwell advanced toward Carkhuff and Regi.

"I owe my life to this warrior," said Regi, turning to Ruth and Stillwell, as they stopped near them. "It is the wish and the command of Regi that the three white strangers shall be transferred at once to the Palace of the Rainbow to live with her."

"That appeals to all of us," Ruth commented, returning the smile that Queen Regi had bestowed upon her.

"We must return to the palace at once," urged Regi, "for to remain here may mean further attacks from such beasts as the one which has just been slain. The animal there is probably one of the first of the approaching apes, which make migratory journeys from the forests of the west toward the eastern territory every so many years."

The suggestion of Regi was well taken; for, as the party approached the palace, the distant roaring of another gorabuto was heard. As the members of the party passed through the entrance into the palace, the native masons had already walled the greater portion of the palace entrance shut. When the queen and the others passed through, they began hurriedly to place into position the balance of the stones, which were kept from year to year in a strategic position near the entrance. Stillwell and Carkhuff noted with interest the mortar they were using.

When the throneroom was reached, Regi informed Stillwell and Carkhuff that one of the guard maidens would show them to a room in the palace,

where they would be quartered from then on.

"You," she said, turning to Ruth, "will become the companion of Regi. This night you shall slumber on one of Regi's couches."

The guard maiden advanced and led the way for Stillwell and Carkhuff to their apartment. Ruth turned and followed Regi into her suite of rooms.

When they had entered the room where Regi always lounged during the day, they sat down on one of the beautifully carved couches covered with leopard skins. Regi asked many questions regarding Ruth and her companions, making many inquiries concerning the land of Ruth's birth and the habits of the people.

"You are not of this people here," ventured Ruth. "You are as white as I am, and your features betoken that you have come from some race of Europeans who must have settled here ages ago."

"Yes," admitted Regi, corroborating Ruth's statement. "I am not of the same race as the people whom I rule. I am the last of the Mayas, who once, according to the traditions handed down to me, ruled over a vast empire of land, forest and mountains. My mother was the last queen of these people, and my father, Regulo, was the last king. My mother died when I was but a child, and my father, the last of the kings of his race, went into the last sleep five passings ago of the constellations of the summer about the earth. By right of inheritance I have ascended to the rulership. The natives have lived in hopes that I would take one of their kind for a husband and king. Sebol has been advancing himself in my graces with that intention."

"Do you care for Sebol?" queried Ruth.

Regi's eyes flashed. "I hate him," she replied.

For a time they remained in silence; then Regi continued: "Do you care for the one you call Stillwell? I notice that he stays very close to your side, while the big man you call Carkhuff, the one with the piercing gray eyes, does not do so."

Ruth's face flushed for a moment at Regi's question. "I like Mr. Stillwell," she admitted. "Carkhuff is not generally thoughtful of women. He is not the type who loves easily."

"Did he ever love any woman in the land whence you came?" continued Regi.

"I think not," replied Ruth.

Silence again ensued; then Regi spoke: "We may as well slumber now," she said. "We shall be unable to walk again in the garden until after the danger of the gorabutos has passed. When they are gone, the masonry blocking the entrances of the palace will again be broken away and removed."

Ruth followed the queen into the adjoining room. Regi motioned her toward an exquisitely carved couch of stained white wood. She removed her clothing, and emulating the example of Queen Regi she lay down upon her bed while Regi occupied a similar couch across the room from her.

WHEN Sebol fled from the advance of the gorabuto in the garden of the palace, he rushed to the building and urged the native masons who had been working slowly at blocking the entrances to hurry their task. He called out all of the warriors of the palace to stand by with their long spears and resist any attempt of gorabutos, which might then be in the vicinity of the palace, to enter the place.

"Sebol is now king," he muttered to himself. "The gorabuto by now has slain Queen Regi in her garden. Sebol will not have to resort to a revolution to gain the kingship. The picture of a gorabuto shall be painted on the shield of King Sebol."

The crack of a rifle broke the soliloquy of Sebol, and, mingled with the report of the gun, came the enraged cries of the wounded gorabuto.

A malicious expression came over the features of Sebol, as he listened to the repeated reports of the rifle. "The white stranger is fighting to save Regi," he muttered. "May the gorabuto defeat him in the battle!"

Fifteen minutes later, when Sebol heard the queen and her companions enter the palace, he withdrew and went to his quarters.

An hour later he returned to view the completed work of the masons who had finished blocking the entrance. He stood with his torch in his hand and studied the solid wall before him. The roar of a gorabuto sounded near the palace. As he listened, a smile spread over the apelike features of Sebol.

"The desires of the gorabuto to steal a woman shall not be frustrated," he soliloquized. "Sebol will remove the masonry, ere it hardens, and make an entrance for the beasts. They can reach the queen as she lies sleeping in her apartment. They are prowling about the palace now, seeking to steal a woman to carry with them into the forest on their journey toward the rising sun country."

Sebol seized a bar of metal that had been abandoned by one of the masons near the opening. With it he hurriedly began punching the masonry from its position. The mortar had not hardened sufficiently to hold the stonework in place, and his task of removing the wall was an easy one.

Fifteen minutes later he returned to his quarters in one of the chambers far from the entrance he had fashioned for the gorabutos, and remained listening for something to happen. Two hours later his wait was rewarded. The screams of Ruth and Queen Regi filled the palace as they were borne struggling from the building beneath the arms of two of the great brutes.

8. Captured by Gorabutos

RUTH had been asleep for about two hours after Regi extinguished the torch in their room, when she was awakened by the sound of a guttural growl near her. She sat up, and in the dim light of the place she could distinguish several great forms in the room, where she and Regi had been sleeping.

One of the creatures advanced toward her couch. As the shadowy hulk approached, she reached for her rifle, which she had left leaning against the wall near her couch. As she grasped the weapon, she was seized by great hairy hands and held powerless to fire the weapon.

A scream from Regi filled the chamber, followed by guttural chattering from the great apes. "The gorabutos!" screamed Regi, as she struggled in the powerful embrace of one of the animals. "We are lost!"

Ruth, still grasping her rifle, was carried from the chamber by the ape that had seized her. The gorabuto that had seized Regi followed, and a third animal that had entered the chamber left the place after the other two.

Ruth turned the rifle barrel against the chest of the beast which had seized her, intending to discharge the weapon. She realized that such an action at the present moment might result in her being torn to pieces by the ape that carried her, even though the bullet might pierce the creature's heart.

She recalled the stories she had heard about the treatment accorded women by the gorabutos, and decided to wait for a more advantageous moment, when, possibly, the ape might for a time release her from his grasp.

The gorabutos emerged from the palace, carrying their captives. The moon had risen above the scene and flooded the garden with light almost equal to midday.

The three gorabutos set off across

the garden and continued together until they arrived at the stone wall enclosing the locality. The animal without any captive remained in the garden, and the two apes carrying the women clambered over the wall.

The two apes with their captives followed one of the streets until they emerged from the city into the clearing surrounding the town. They crossed the clearing and entered the edge of the forest. At that point they separated, each pursuing his own pathway through the forest.

When the two animals separated, the one carrying Ruth continued for a mile through the forest. The creature finally halted and sat upon the ground, holding his captive in his arms.

As he was seated thus, the roar of another gorabuto sounded in the distance. The one holding Ruth turned its great head in an attitude of listening. Then a blood-curdling howl issued from the recesses of the iron-like throat.

Ruth felt the nerves along her spine tingle at the sound of the deafening reply to the other challenging cry. For hours she remained in the arms of the great brute, which seemed to sense the possibility of her attempting to escape should he release her. In the sitting attitude, the ape fell asleep at times, holding Ruth closely to his great hairy body; the bristles of the creature's shaggy coat reddened her skin through the rough contact. To Ruth it seemed that the night would never pass, as she still retained her hold upon the rifle, and several times she was greatly tempted to risk the chance of killing the beast, as it held her clutched in its arms.

The first streak of the new day finally appeared in the east, and at the coming of the light the ape again rose and resumed its wanderings. A patch of wild berries of the size of plums was approached, and the opportunity for which Ruth had been praying came. The beast placed his captive on the earth and began picking the fruit from the bushes. It ate large quantities, and as it appeased its appetite the ape moved farther from the girl. When some twenty feet separated the two, Ruth raised her rifle and pointed it at the chest of the gorabuto, which she knew from past experience was a vital spot. At the crack of the rifle, the gorabuto gave an agonized roar and turned staggering toward the girl, to be met with another bullet at close range. As she fired the second shot, Ruth turned and ran as rapidly as possible to elude the expected charge of the beast. The gorabuto followed, but the aim of the girl had been accurate, and the creature collapsed before it had gone twenty feet in pursuit. Ruth continued on her way and looked backward only when she was certain that the beast had ceased its pursuit.

"The way back to the City of the Rainbow may be difficult to find," she thought, "but if I can only find my way to the border of the clearing, I can see the city in the distance and easily make my way there."

She continued in the direction from which she believed that the ape had carried her, walking carefully through the forest to avoid injuring her bare feet.

"I am a modern Eve," she said to herself, glancing at her naked figure and several small scratches which she had sustained in her mad rush to escape the anticipated charge of the gorabuto after she had shot the creature. "Poor Regi! I wonder what has been her fate."

THE experience of Regi during the night, following the separation of the gorabutos near the forest edge earlier in the evening, was quite similar to that of Ruth.

Regi was without a thought of successful escape, such as had sustained

Ruth in the knowledge of the possibilities that existed in her rifle.

The last queen of the Mayas lay helpless in the hairy arms of the great gorabuto which had carried her from the chamber in the palace. She was keenly sensitive to the scratching of the bristly hair of the ape against her soft flesh. She thought much, as she lay thus waiting for the breaking of the day that seemed never to come.

With the first light of the morning, the gorabuto rose and continued its way through the forest. It wandered aimlessly about, until it came to a tree that bore quantities of fruit somewhat like a banana in shape, though not so large.

The great ape released its hold of Regi and sprang into the small tree, where it began eating. Regi watched the monster until she was certain that it was entirely occupied with eating; then she rushed from the spot.

Quick as was the queen of the Ronalans, even quicker in its movements was the gorabuto. The girl had not gone fifty yards before the monster with a hideous howl pounced upon her and crushed her in its arms against the great hairy chest. Still roaring its displeasure at the attempt of the captive to escape, the gorabuto returned to the tree, where it again resumed feeding but kept a continuous savage watch upon the girl at the base of the trunk.

The roar of another gorabuto sounded close to the tree, and at the challenging cry the ape feeding among the lower branches leaped lightly to the earth and seized Regi. It made off through the forest with her, and a quarter of a mile from the feeding-spot it paused. The roar of the other beast again sounded, and the gorabuto carrying the girl listened intently. Then with its great tongue it began licking the skin of its captive. Regi cringed before the roughness of the beast's tongue, and welcomed another roar from the other animal which seemed to be pursuing her captor through the forest.

At the last challenge, the gorabuto ceased licking the flesh of the girl, and turning its head sent forth a deafening reply.

The cry was answered, and a few minutes later a second great ape came crashing through the undergrowth.

The second gorabuto growled fiercely. The one holding the girl released her and advanced a few steps toward the other. Regi drew slowly away from where the two beasts were standing in challenging attitudes.

For a few seconds the great gorabutos stood; then with hideous howls they rushed at each other and began fighting with terrific fury. Regi watched the battle, shrinking from the combatants in terror, fearing to attempt an escape lest the two might pursue her and tear her to pieces in their contention for her possession.

The second ape began to gain the mastery over the one that had carried Regi from her palace. It forced the other beast to the earth and sank its great teeth into the neck of the latter. The under beast in the fight attempted to break the hold of the other, but its efforts were unavailing. The teeth of the gorabuto reached the jugular vein of the other and held on in a death-bringing grip.

For another five minutes the two creatures struggled. Then the victor rose and sent a hideous cry ringing through the forest. Regi drew back from the approach of the victorious gorabuto, which paused a half-dozen paces from her and pounded its massive chest until the detonations reverberated like a bass drum.

The report of a rifle interrupted the antics of the ape, and the beast turned its head with a wild roar, seeking the object of attack.

9. The Rescue

THE screams of Queen Regi and Ruth, as they were being carried from the palace of the queen, awakened Carkhuff and Stillwell from their slumbers. They seized their rifles and rushed down the corridor, until they approached the suite of rooms occupied by the queen and Ruth. They were met in the corridor, before the entrance to the queen's suite, by Lelo and several of the other guard maidens, who had been slumbering in an adjacent suite of rooms.

"The gorabutos have gained entrance to the palace and carried Regi and the white woman of the strangers with them," informed Lelo. "They have taken them into the garden, and will carry them away into the depths of the Red Forest."

"We must pursue the animals and recover the queen and Ruth," announced Carkhuff. "Is there anyone of the natives who can follow a gorabuto trail into the forest?" he continued, addressing Lelo.

"Yes," she returned, "there are many who can follow the trail of the beasts and the tracks of any other animal. The greatest of the trailers is Lelock. He is asleep in his room at the far end of the palace; for he, like Sebol, has been specially favored by Regi, because of his particular ability in that one accomplishment, and permitted to live here."

"Rouse Lelock from his sleep," commanded Carkhuff, "and we will meet him here in a few minutes, just as soon as we can return to our room and dress for a trip through the forest."

"Lelo and several of the guard maidens will go also," said the girl. "They will go to carry the clothing of the queen and the white stranger female, for they were carried away in their nakedness by the gorabutos."

"Hurry then," urged Carkhuff, and the party separated to fulfill their various hurried missions.

A few minutes later, Lelock with five other warriors, and Lelo with three of the guard maidens, stood in the corridor near the queen's suite, awaiting the arrival of the two white men. The latter joined them quickly, and the entire party proceeded to the entrance where Sebol had broken the masonry the evening before to permit the entrance of the prowling gorabutos.

Across the garden they took their way, and climbed over the stone wall. Across the moonlit clearing they thought they could detect the figures of the receding gorabutos.

"We can not follow the gorabutos very easily tonight," said Lelock. "We must wait until the day; then we can trail them. We had better wait here and find the place where they left the garden; then we can follow, until we find them in the forest. They will not kill the women at once. They usually keep them for a week before they become tired of carrying them through the jungles. When they become weary, they tear them to bits."

"How do you explain this periodical migration of the gorabutos?" asked Carkhuff.

"Lelock was told by an old chieftain that every three years the gorabutos mate, as the birds do every passing of the constellation in the sky. I never have seen a female gorabuto. Nothing but males pass through this section of the country toward the east on the migratory journey. The old chieftain told me that the females live in the far woods toward the rising sun. These males are going on their three-year journey to join the females. They return to the western forest later in the year after the mating-season by a different route. In three more years they will come through here again. In the fall, they will take the young

apes that have reached maturity in the eastern woods back with them to dwell in the western forests."

"They're as periodical as locusts," commented Carkhuff. "Our hands are tied at present, so far as rescuing the girls is concerned. We must wait for daylight; we can not afford to take the chance of picking up a false trail in the forest, instead of the ones we are seeking."

The rest of the night was spent by the members of the company sleeping at times upon the grass of the garden. With the first coming of the dawn, Lelock began his search along the wall for the place where the gorabutos had left to cross the clearing toward the distant forest border.

"This is the place," he finally announced. "They have gone from the garden together. There were three of them that invaded the palace. One did not leave the garden and is probably somewhere within the confines of the place. Two have gone and started across the clearing."

"May it not be possible that the gorabuto remaining within the garden has in his possession one of the women?" asked Carkhuff.

Lelock shook his head. "No," he answered. "The gorabutos that started from here toward the border of the forest yonder are the ones carrying the two women. The one remaining in the garden had no woman in his possession or he would have gone with the others. When the beasts steal a woman, they hurry to the cover of the forest. The women are with the apes that have crossed the clearing before us."

"Let's go, then," urged Carkhuff. "What do you think of our chances of overtaking the gorabutos?"

"They will go a long journey," returned Lelock, "and then they will pause for a time and feed."

The party crossed the clearing and arrived within the borders of the forest. They approached the spot where the two apes had separated, and Lelock, who was leading the party, paused.

"The gorabutos have separated and gone along different paths," he announced. "We will have to follow in different parties."

"You follow Lelock," urged Carkhuff, addressing Stillwell, "and I will take some of the other warriors and follow after the other beasts."

Lelock and Stillwell, with two of the guard maidens and two warriors, started on the trail of the ape that was carrying Ruth, while Carkhuff with the others followed after the beast which had stolen Regi from the palace.

Lelock followed the trail with ease, and the entire party following the chieftain made rapid progress, until the place was reached where the gorabuto had remained sitting the greater portion of the night.

"The animal rested here," announced Lelock. "We may expect to encounter it not very far away."

The march was resumed. When the party had proceeded about two hundred yards, the report of a rifle reached their ears, followed closely by a second report. Mingled with the noise of the weapon could be distinguished the angry roar of a great ape.

"Carkhuff must have encountered the ape carrying one of the girls," suggested Stillwell, as the company hastened forward after Lelock. Several minutes later they came upon the dead body of the gorabuto that had fallen before Ruth's aim.

"The white woman of the strangers must have had her thunder pole with her," said Lelock, "for her trail leads from this place through the forest. It was she who slew this gorabuto."

"She must have seized her rifle before the ape grabbed her in the palace," said Stillwell, "and never ventured to use it until a short time ago; fearing that the beast in its wounded frenzy would tear her to pieces. Let

us follow her trail, for she can not be far away."

The company again hurried forward, and Stillwell discharged his rifle to attract the attention of the girl should she be close by.

The firing of the signal was timely, for Ruth heard the report of the gun and halted in her effort to find the forest border. She began retracing her steps, for she calculated that the weapon had been discharged some distance from where she had killed the gorabuto.

Five minutes later she heard the voices of the trailers, and crouching in the undergrowth to conceal her nakedness, she called to the approaching company. Her call was answered by Stillwell. Another minute and he had caught sight of the girl in the bushes.

"One of the guard maidens has a trapping for you," he announced, and turning to the native girl who was carrying one of the trappings which she and Lelo had brought from Regi's wardrobe, he ordered the maiden to take the trappings to Ruth.

Stillwell and the others halted, while the girl carried the trappings of Regi to Ruth and assisted the latter to don the garment. The two returned from the bushes and joined the others of the party. Ruth hurriedly related her experiences with the gorabuto to Stillwell, and the company then proceeded to return toward the border of the forest, where they had agreed to meet Carkhuff when the object of the expedition was accomplished.

"I hope that Regi still lives," remarked Ruth, as she walked through the forest by the side of Stillwell. "It is my prayer that Carkhuff may overtake the beast that has carried her away."

CARKHUFF, with the two warriors and the two guard maidens, hastened along the trail of the second gorabuto, after Stillwell and the other members of the expedition disappeared in another direction following the ape which had carried Ruth.

Shalah, one of the warriors, assumed the lead in following the trail of the gorabuto, and astonished Carkhuff by his uncanny ability in following the trail through the forest.

They came upon the place where the beast had remained during the hours of darkness, and, as they paused, surveying the spot, they heard the challenging cry of a gorabuto. Scarcely had the cry sounded before they heard the answering cry of the animal which was holding Regi captive.

"There are two of the beasts near us," announced Shalah. "One has challenged the other and has been answered."

"Maybe one is the creature we are seeking," suggested Carkhuff. "The answer to the other's cry sounded apparently but a few hundred yards ahead. Let us hasten to the spot."

The advance continued, until Shalah halted at the sound of a fight somewhere ahead in the jungle. "Two of the beasts are engaged in mortal combat," he announced. "The gorabutos never fight except for stolen women or females of their kind. The queen must be somewhere near this place, or else it is the white woman of the strangers."

Carkhuff assumed the lead at the announcement of Shalah, as he noted the disposition of the latter not to advance farther. Lelo of the guard maidens followed him, but also lagged behind as the scene of the fight between the gorabutos was approached. Alone, Carkhuff advanced to the place where the two apes fought for possession of the queen of the Ronalans.

He arrived at the time that the victorious ape released his death grip on the severed throat of his opponent, and rising upright sent forth a victorious cry.

Carkhuff thrust his rifle forward and sighted at the gorabuto, which

began beating its chest and advancing toward Regi, who drew back from its approach.

Carkhuff fired, and the ape was hard hit. The creature turned from its advance toward Regi, and sighting Carkhuff in the adjacent underbrush, rushed toward the man, with its life-blood flowing from the wound in its chest. A second bullet, followed quickly by a third, sent the gorabuto crashing to the earth. It rose a few seconds later, and growling, attempted to continue its advance toward its death-dealing opponent. Another bullet from Carkhuff's rifle pierced the giant heart. The beast trembled for a moment, then collapsed.

Carkhuff advanced to where the creature was struggling its last, and Regi advanced toward her rescuer. Carkhuff turned to meet her, his eyes taking in the beauty of her perfectly molded figure.

"My chieftain of chiefs," she said, approaching Carkhuff, "Regi is again in your debt. How can she ever repay the one who is so brave and who so willingly risks all to save her?"

"Regi, queen of the Ronalans, owes the white man nothing," replied Carkhuff, meeting the frank gaze she turned to him. "The white man admires the queen of the Ronalans. She knows not prudery, as the woman of my land know it; her simplicity attracts the white man. Regi, I am worse than Sebol. I love you, too."

She placed her hands on his shoulders and lifted her eyes again to meet his.

"You are not worse than Sebol," she replied softly. "For Regi hates Sebol and returns the love of the white stranger."

Carkhuff drew her figure to him. He pressed a kiss upon her hot lips. For a moment they stood thus in silence. Then he released her.

"Lelo is back there a short distance," he informed her, "with some of your clothing, which she thoughtfully brought. I will call her, and you can don the trappings and sandals; then we can return to the edge of the clearing and await a report of the success of the others who are following the ape that carried away Ruth."

Carkhuff called to Lelo, and the guard maiden advanced to where the two had been standing. He withdrew a short distance and remained until Regi and Lelo rejoined him. Regi clasped his arm with her right hand, and together they walked to where the others of the party were waiting.

"Sebol must have broken the stonework from the entrance of the palace," suggested Regi. "Sebol wants to be ruler of the people of the Rainbow City. He knew that if he opened the entrance the prowling gorabutos could gain admittance. Since the bed chamber of Regi was first to be encountered, he probably figured that the apes would seize her and carry her away first. Sebol must be shorn of his power as chieftain of the chiefs. You will soon be king of the Ronalans yourself, and then Sebol will have to depart from the palace of Regi."

"Your man Sebol does not like me," asserted Carkhuff, looking down at her. "I believe that he would like to throw me into the cataract whose spray forms the rainbow from which your city is named."

"Yes, my warrior," she replied, "Sebol does hate you, and has told me so. I fear for you because of him."

Carkhuff laughed. "Don't worry," he said. "I have no fear of that gorabuto-faced bluffer."

An hour's walk brought the members of the party, after they had rejoined Shalah and the others, to the border of the clearing. They emerged from the place a few hundred yards from the spot where Stillwell and his companions had reached the border of the clearing. The two forces united with many expressions of gladness over the rescue of Regi and Ruth.

"Let's have a lunch here," suggested Stillwell. "Lelock has gone

with one of the others to get some food."

"May as well have a picnic," agreed Carkhuff, seating himself on the ground by the side of Regi. "I have a secret to relate to you, Stillwell," he continued. "You are now looking at the future king of the Ronalans."

"Quit your joshing," exclaimed Stillwell, looking in astonishment at Carkhuff.

"Do you mean it?" queried Ruth, rising to her feet and approaching Carkhuff and Regi.

"Ask the queen," replied Carkhuff, and Regi smiled as she nodded in corroboration of Carkhuff's statement.

"I'm delighted," exclaimed Ruth, extending her hand to Carkhuff and then to Regi.

"Bully!" agreed Stillwell. "Long may you reign! But when's the wedding to take place, Carkhuff?"

"Before another month has passed," he replied. "Regi will decide that."

As the group talked, another warrior approached across the clearing. He finally noted the members of the rescuing party in the shade of the trees bordering the clearing and advanced toward them.

"That is Shoto, a member of the company of palace hunters," said Regi, noting the approaching man. "He is in a great hurry."

Shoto approached and addressed Regi. "I have come, Queen Regi," he announced, "to inform you that the government has been seized by Sebol. He has taken advantage of your being stolen by a gorabuto to proclaim himself king of the Ronalans. The gorabutos have passed through, and the entrances to the houses have been opened. Their passing took but a sun this time. Sebol believes that you have been killed and that the white strangers must have failed in attempting to rescue you."

"Will not he surrender the throne again when he learns that you are living?" queried Ruth anxiously, turning to Regi.

The queen of the Ronalans shook her head. "Not Sebol," she replied. "If Regi regains her palace, she must fight for it."

"If that is the case, then," ejaculated Carkhuff, "we'll fight for it."

The desperate lengths to which Sebol went in his efforts to retain his rule over the Ronalans will be narrated in the concluding chapters of this story in next month's WEIRD TALES.

RATTLE of

BY ROBERT E. HOWARD

"LANDLORD, ho!" The shout broke the lowering silence and reverberated through the black forest with sinister echoing.

"This place hath a forbidding aspect, meseemeth."

Two men stood in front of the forest tavern. The building was low, long and rambling, built of heavy logs. Its small windows were heavily barred and the door was closed. Above the door its sinister sign showed faintly—a cleft skull.

This door swung slowly open and a bearded face peered out. The owner of the face stepped back and motioned his guests to enter—with a grudging gesture it seemed. A candle gleamed on a table; a flame smoldered in the fireplace.

"Your names?"

"Solomon Kane," said the taller man briefly.

"Gaston l'Armon," the other spoke curtly. "But what is that to you?"

"Strangers are few in the Black Forest," grunted the host, "bandits many. Sit at yonder table and I will bring food."

The two men sat down, with the bearing of men who have traveled far. One was a tall gaunt man, clad in a featherless hat and somber black garments, which set off the dark pallor of his forbidding face. The other was of a different type entirely, bedecked with lace and plumes, although his finery was somewhat stained from travel. He was handsome in a bold way, and his restless eyes shifted from side to side, never still an instant.

The host brought wine and food to the rough-hewn table and then stood back in the shadows, like a somber image. His features, now receding into vagueness, now luridly etched in the firelight as it leaped and flickered, were masked in a beard which seemed almost animal-like in thickness. A great nose curved above this beard and two small red eyes stared unblinkingly at his guests.

"Who are you?" suddenly asked the younger man.

"I am the host of the Cleft Skull Tavern," sullenly replied the other. His tone seemed to challenge his questioner to ask further.

"Do you have many guests?" l'Armon pursued.

"Few come twice," the host grunted.

Kane started and glanced up straight into those small red eyes, as if he sought for some hidden meaning in the host's words. The flaming eyes seemed to dilate, then dropped sullenly before the Englishman's cold stare.

"I'm for bed," said Kane abruptly, bringing his meal to a close. "I must take up my journey by daylight."

BONES

"This thing is beyond reason, yet with my own eyes I see it."

"And I," added the Frenchman. "Host, show us to our chambers."

BLACK shadows wavered on the walls as the two followed their silent host down a long, dark hall. The stocky, broad body of their guide seemed to grow and expand in the light of the small candle which he carried, throwing a long, grim shadow behind him.

At a certain door he halted, indicating that they were to sleep there. They entered; the host lit a candle with the one he carried, then lurched back the way he had come.

In the chamber the two men glanced at each other. The only furnishings of the room were a couple of bunks, a chair or two and a heavy table.

"Let us see if there be any way to make fast the door," said Kane. "I like not the looks of mine host."

"There are racks on door and jamb for a bar," said Gaston, "but no bar."

"We might break up the table and use its pieces for a bar," mused Kane.

"*Mon Dieu,*" said l'Armon, "you are timorous, *m'sieu.*"

Kane scowled. "I like not being murdered in my sleep," he answered gruffly.

"My faith!" the Frenchman laughed. "We are chance met—until I overtook you on the forest road an hour before sunset, we had never seen each other."

"I have seen you somewhere before," answered Kane, "though I can not now recall where. As for the other, I assume every man is an honest fellow until he shows me he is a rogue; moreover, I am a light sleeper and slumber with a pistol at hand."

The Frenchman laughed again.

"I was wondering how *m'sieu* could bring himself to sleep in the room with a stranger! Ha! Ha! All right, *m'sieu* Englishman, let us go

forth and take a bar from one of the other rooms."

Taking the candle with them, they went into the corridor. Utter silence reigned and the small candle twinkled redly and evilly in the thick darkness.

"Mine host hath neither guests nor servants," muttered Solomon Kane. "A strange tavern! What is the name, now? These German words come not easily to me—the Cleft Skull? A bloody name, i'faith."

They tried the rooms next to theirs, but no bar rewarded their search. At last they came to the last room at the end of the corridor. They entered. It was furnished like the rest, except that the door was provided with a small barred opening, and fastened from the outside with a heavy bolt, which was secured at one end to the door-jamb. They raised the bolt and looked in.

"There should be an outer window, but there is not," muttered Kane. "Look!"

The floor was stained darkly. The walls and the one bunk were hacked in places, great splinters having been torn away.

"Men have died in here," said Kane, somberly. "Is yonder not a bar fixed in the wall?"

"Aye, but 'tis made fast," said the Frenchman, tugging at it. "The——"

A section of the wall swung back and Gaston gave a quick exclamation. A small, secret room was revealed, and the two men bent over the grisly thing that lay upon its floor.

"The skeleton of a man!" said Gaston. "And behold, how his bony leg is shackled to the floor! He was imprisoned here and died."

"Nay," said Kane, "the skull is cleft—methinks mine host had a grim reason for the name of his hellish tavern. This man, like us, was no doubt a wanderer who fell into the fiend's hands."

"Likely," said Gaston without interest; he was engaged in idly working the great iron ring from the skeleton's leg bones. Failing in this, he drew his sword and with an exhibition of remarkable strength cut the chain which joined the ring on the leg to a ring set deep in the log floor.

"Why should he shackle a skeleton to the floor?" mused the Frenchman. "*Monbleu!* 'Tis a waste of good chain. Now, *m'sieu,*" he ironically addressed the white heap of bones, "I have freed you and you may go where you like!"

"Have done!" Kane's voice was deep. "No good will come of mocking the dead."

"The dead should defend themselves," laughed l'Armon. "Somehow, I will slay the man who kills me, though my corpse climb up forty fathoms of ocean to do it."

KANE turned toward the outer door, closing the door of the secret room behind him. He liked not this talk which smacked of demonry and witchcraft; and he was in haste to face the host with the charge of his guilt.

As he turned, with his back to the Frenchman, he felt the touch of cold steel against his neck and knew that a pistol muzzle was pressed close beneath the base of his brain.

"Move not, *m'sieu!*" The voice was low and silky. "Move not, or I will scatter your few brains over the room."

The Puritan, raging inwardly, stood with his hands in air while l'Armon slipped his pistols and sword from their sheaths.

"Now you can turn," said Gaston, stepping back.

Kane bent a grim eye on the dapper fellow, who stood bareheaded now, hat in one hand, the other hand leveling his long pistol.

"Gaston the Butcher!" said the Englishman somberly. "Fool that I

was to trust a Frenchman! You range far, murderer! I remember you now, with that cursed great hat off—I saw you in Calais some years agone."

"Aye—and now you will see me never again. What was that?"

"Rats exploring yon skeleton," said Kane, watching the bandit like a hawk, waiting for a single slight wavering of that black gun muzzle. "The sound was of the rattle of bones."

"Like enough," returned the other. "Now, M'sieu Kane, I know you carry considerable money on your person. I had thought to wait until you slept and then slay you, but the opportunity presented itself and I took it. You trick easily."

"I had little thought that I should fear a man with whom I had broken bread," said Kane, a deep timbre of slow fury sounding in his voice.

The bandit laughed cynically. His eyes narrowed as he began to back slowly toward the outer door. Kane's sinews tensed involuntarily; he gathered himself like a giant wolf about to launch himself in a death leap, but Gaston's hand was like a rock and the pistol never trembled.

"We will have no death plunges after the shot," said Gaston. "Stand still, *m'sieu;* I have seen men killed by dying men, and I wish to have distance enough between us to preclude that possibility. My faith—I will shoot, you will roar and charge, but you will die before you reach me with your bare hands. And mine host will have another skeleton in his secret niche. That is, if I do not kill him myself. The fool knows me not nor I him, moreover——"

The Frenchman was in the doorway now, sighting along the barrel. The candle, which had been stuck in a niche on the wall, shed a weird and flickering light which did not extend past the doorway. And with the suddenness of death, from the darkness behind Gaston's back, a broad, vague form rose up and a gleaming blade swept down. The Frenchman went to his knees like a butchered ox, his brains spilling from his cleft skull. Above him towered the figure of the host, a wild and terrible spectacle, still holding the hanger with which he had slain the bandit.

"Ho! ho!" he roared. "Back!"

Kane had leaped forward as Gaston fell, but the host thrust into his very face a long pistol which he held in his left hand.

"Back!" he repeated in a tigerish roar, and Kane retreated from the menacing weapon and the insanity in the red eyes.

The Englishman stood silent, his flesh crawling as he sensed a deeper and more hideous threat than the Frenchman had offered. There was something inhuman about this man, who now swayed to and fro like some great forest beast while his mirthless laughter boomed out again.

"Gaston the Butcher!" he shouted, kicking the corpse at his feet. "Ho! ho! My fine brigand will hunt no more! I had heard of this fool who roamed the Black Forest—he wished gold and he found death! Now your gold shall be mine; and more than gold—vengeance!"

"I am no foe of yours," Kane spoke calmly.

"All men are my foes! Look—the marks on my wrists! See—the marks on my ankles! And deep in my back—the kiss of the knout! And deep in my brain, the wounds of the years of the cold, silent cells where I lay as punishment for a crime I never committed!" The voice broke in a hideous, grotesque sob.

Kane made no answer. This man was not the first he had seen whose brain had shattered amid the horrors of the terrible Continental prisons.

"But I escaped!" the scream rose triumphantly, "and here I make war on all men. . . . What was that?"

Did Kane see a flash of fear in those hideous eyes?

"My sorcerer is rattling his bones!" whispered the host, then laughed wildly. "Dying, he swore his very bones would weave a net of death for me. I shackled his corpse to the floor, and now, deep in the night, I hear his bare skeleton clash and rattle as he seeks to be free, and I laugh, I laugh! Ho! ho! How he yearns to rise and stalk like old King Death along these dark corridors when I sleep, to slay me in my bed!"

Suddenly the insane eyes flared hideously: "You were in that secret room, you and this dead fool! Did he talk to you?"

Kane shuddered in spite of himself. Was it insanity or did he actually hear the faint rattle of bones, as if the skeleton had moved slightly? Kane shrugged his shoulders; rats will even tug at dusty bones.

The host was laughing again. He sidled around Kane, keeping the Englishman always covered, and with his free hand opened the door. All was darkness within, so that Kane could not even see the glimmer of the bones on the floor.

"All men are my foes!" mumbled the host, in the incoherent manner of the insane. "Why should I spare any man? Who lifted a hand to my aid when I lay for years in the vile dungeons of Karlsruhe—and for a deed never proven? Something happened to my brain, then. I became as a wolf—a brother to these of the Black Forest to which I fled when I escaped.

"They have feasted, my brothers, on all who lay in my tavern—all except this one who now clashes his bones, this magician from Russia. Lest he come stalking back through the black shadows when night is over the world, and slay me—for who may slay the dead?—I stripped his bones and shackled him. His sorcery was not powerful enough to save him from me, but all men know that a dead magician is more evil than a living one. Move not, Englishman! Your bones I shall leave in this secret room beside this one, to——"

The maniac was standing partly in the doorway of the secret room, now, his weapon still menacing Kane. Suddenly he seemed to topple backward, and vanished in the darkness; and at the same instant a vagrant gust of wind swept down the outer corridor and slammed the door shut behind him. The candle on the wall flickered and went out. Kane's groping hands, sweeping over the floor, found a pistol, and he straightened, facing the door where the maniac had vanished. He stood in the utter darkness, his blood freezing, while a hideous muffled screaming came from the secret room, intermingled with the dry, grisly rattle of fleshless bones. Then silence fell.

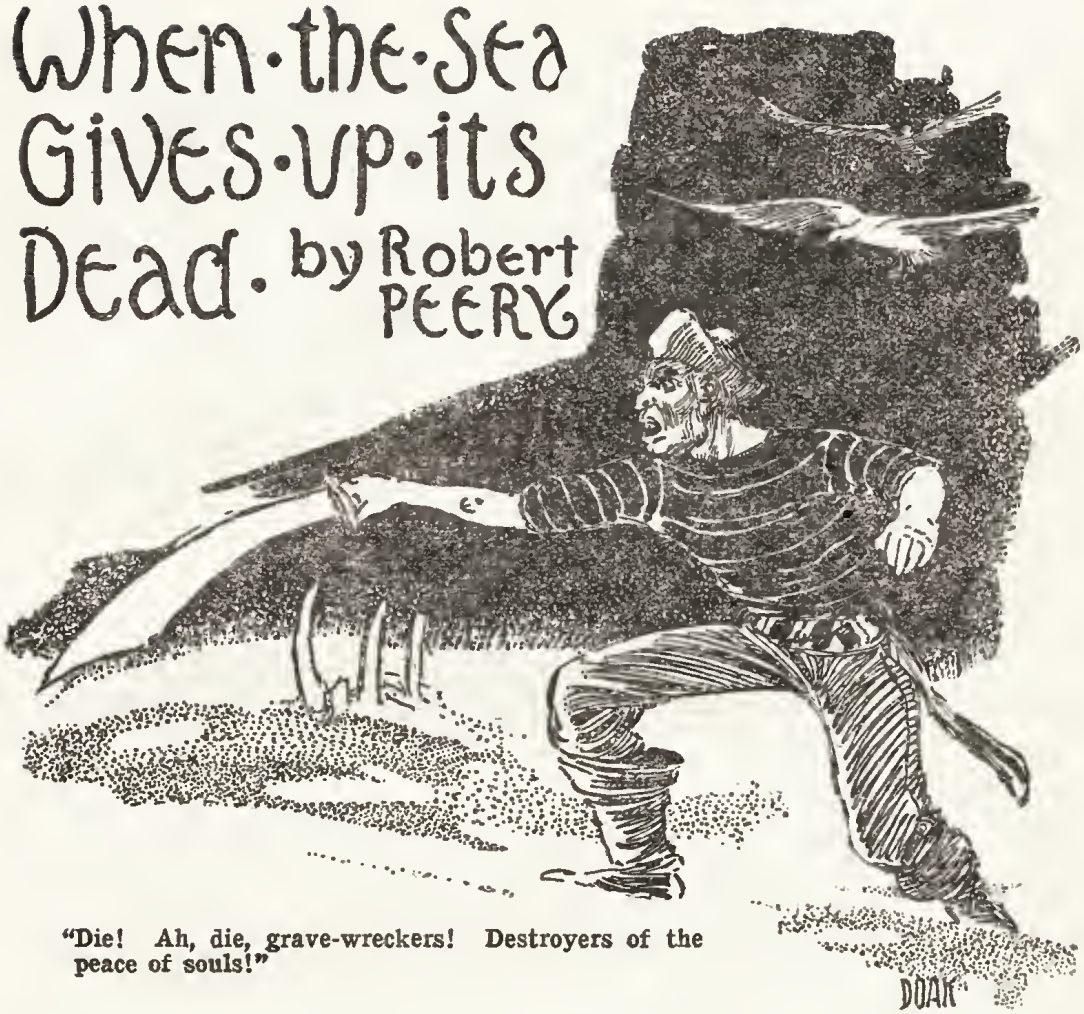
Kane found flint and steel and lighted the candle. Then, holding it in one hand and the pistol in the other, he opened the secret door.

"Great God!" he muttered as cold sweat formed on his body. "This thing is beyond all reason, yet with mine own eyes I see it! Two vows have here been kept, for Gaston the Butcher swore that even in death he would avenge his slaying, and his was the hand which set yon fleshless monster free. And he——"

The host of the Cleft Skull lay lifeless on the floor of the secret room, his bestial face set in lines of terrible fear; and deep in his broken neck were sunk the bare fingerbones of the sorcerer's skeleton.

When the Sea Gives up its Dead.

by Robert PEERY



"Die! Ah, die, grave-wreckers! Destroyers of the peace of souls!"

WITH slow strokes I pushed my tiny craft among the dead brown grasses of the creek that wound its way over the flatlands of southern Carolina toward the distant sea. About me, as far as my eye could see, there stretched a level waste of melancholy sands topped with sparse dead grasses. Now and then a low-flying beach bird trailed its legs in dejection and uttered its long wailing cry, wending a dispirited way toward the quagmires of the swamp lands in search of food. In the east, black clouds were banking toward the zenith; jagged lightning darted eerily, blue and white and yellow, before the ominous ascension of the cloud masses. The wind was rising; the grasses bowed down to the water, as if accomplishing some ritual to a gray, forbidding god. And now and then, breaking the depressing silence, the slow mutter of a thousand drums in the distance—the guttural complaint of the god of thunder—rolled up to me like waves of the sea, and receded again into a fearful silence.

Loneliness! It is more than a word to one in a small boat upon the meandering stream that will carry one to the beaches of Carolina. Melancholy! The word, upon that depressing shoreland, drips with the ooze of despair, when one's lips roundly utter its syllables.

For many days I had found myself becoming more and more depressed at being away from my family. Perhaps this depression, this saddened condi-

tion of my spirits, accounted for my being on that creek in my boat that late afternoon in September. I had not returned to the government camp with my fellow workers, but had turned my boat seaward and had by the time the storm broke gone miles farther than any of us had been before. It was not a pleasant work in which we were engaged—this discouraging search for the breeding-place of an insect that was destroying millions of dollars' worth of crops annually—but someone had to do it, and the bureau had selected me to head the investigation.

My first intimation of the nearness of the storm came with a crash of thunder that followed hard upon the most tremendous lightning stroke I ever saw. The very heavens seemed to split asunder and the echo of the thunder rolled almost endlessly against the gray, forbidding horizon. Then came the rain, a typical South Carolina coast rain — the beating sheets of gray water of those dreary savannahs.

I turned my boat about and began poling furiously upstream. Somewhere, I remembered, along the creek was a shack that had been pointed out to me as the habitation of an old beachcomber and odd-job man of the neighboring town. I searched the landscape as I moved sluggishly up the stream. It was difficult to see any great distance through the gray avalanche of rain. But at last I espied the shack set back about fifty yards from the marshy bank of the creek. I shunted the boat into the bank, tied it to a clump of small willows, and raced up the path toward the shelter of the shack.

When I entered—the door was not locked, and I pushed it open without ceremony—the old man was kneeling before the open hearth lighting a fire of grasses and driftwood. He turned his face when I entered and said—with a note of petulance, I thought—"The hospitality of necessity."

"I shall not trouble you long—only until the storm is over;" I told him. "It is not pleasant punting along in the pouring rain. And then, the lightning, you know."

"Oh, you're welcome, as far as that goes," he said, in that whining, creaking voice that is so often an affectation of the aged. "Nobody can ever say that Sailor Jack ever turned a needy man from his door."

He motioned me to take one of the two chairs with which the room was furnished, but I stood for a moment or so in the doorway under a small sheltering awning of planks so that I might not wet the floor more than I could help.

"Don't mind the water," he said. "Come on in and dry yourself by the fire."

I complied, and when I was seated I looked about the room. I had heard many tales of Sailor Jack—tales the town folk didn't believe—old sailor myths he'd strewn through the district. People wondered how he managed to live on the little work he got to do.

In the room were two bunks, one above the other, sailor fashion, and in a corner an old chest of black, carved wood. In a room at the back I could see a skillet hanging from a nail and a small iron stove in which a fire was already lighted. A coffee-pot was bubbling and the faint aroma of good strong coffee came to my nostrils. A cup of coffee, I decided, would be just the thing to take the sudden chill from my body.

Evidently Sailor Jack thought so, too, because I saw him go into the kitchen and pour a cup from the pot. He was very old, was Sailor Jack. His face was wrinkled like old parchment, and his beard and hair were streaked with a yellowish tinge. The beard was splashed with brown stains from the lips to the tip of the white straggly growth. His eyes were "hollows of madness." Upon his head was a curiously shaped blue cap, some-

thing similar to the cocky little hats that French sailors wear in port. He was terribly thin, and stooped, and old.

He returned with a cup of coffee, which I drank without sugar or cream. It warmed me deliciously, and I forgot the raging wind and the rain for a moment or so. Sailor Jack seated himself in the other chair and lighted his knotty black pipe.

"Bloody night," he said between puffs. English, was Sailor Jack.

"Bad storm," I said.

"They don't last, though," he said, staring into the fire. "Be all over betimes the dance goes on."

I stared at him rigidly. "The dance?" I queried.

There was within the cabin only the puffy sound of his thin old lips over the stem of the black pipe and the licking whir of the flames on the logs of the hearth. Sailor Jack gazed abstractedly into the brightness of the fire and spoke as if he were not talking to me but only reiterating some thought that haunted him and must have utterance. It had grown quite dark outside; the lightning threw the windows into shimmering, dazzling flame at each forked bolt.

"The dance," said Sailor Jack. "The dance of the dead of the bark *Greta*. You must be a stranger to Pineville, else you would have heard ere now about how the men who perished when the *Greta* foundered offshore near here more than fifty years ago come back each dark of the moon to dance and drink above the grave. Always at the hour of 9 at night they come whimpering out of their sea graves to dance upon the grave of Naika. Always at 9 because that was the hour at which we buried her; 9 o' the night when the moon was dark."

A heavy blast of the wind tore the door from its fastenings and the rain swept into the room. Sailor Jack got to his unsteady feet and together we shut the door and tied the leather thong more securely.

"Tonight is the night for them. Be a wild night, but what do the dead care? Aye, what do they care? It is the living who suffer."

"Is there a story?" I asked.

"Aye, lad, well you ask if there is a story! A story of goblins and the sea-dead. A body never rests beneath the waves. All will tell you that. The earth is a man's proper burial ground, and the poor spirits of the dead doomed to a watery grave are never at rest. I hear 'em coming up across the savannahs, to dance their monthly rituals. Always at Naika's grave, too. I know where she was buried; I helped cover her wasted body."

"When — where ——" I began, drawing my chair closer to the fire.

"Of course," he said. "You're wantin' to hear, an' it's me as would be tellin' yo' about the night we buried the poor brown body of the dead Naika. She's never at rest, and the ship's crew, it never rests.

"THIS all happened, lad, more than fifty years ago when I was a strapping lad myself, and mate o' the bark *Greta*, keeled at Bedford by Derwood who was one o' the best o' the builders in those old days. A sweet ship, she was, as easy to handle with dry sticks up above as when she was all plain sail with heavy jib and spanker. Sweet to the helm as a brood mare. A bird of a ship, lad. She'd never ha' foundered off the savannahs if three-fourths o' the crew had not been down with the fever—the tropic fever as Naika give 'em.

"But you don't know about Naika, do ye? Naika was mine in the beginning. I found her at the wharf at Pameti an' she begged me to bring her home with me. I did, or I started with her. I smuggled her aboard at night and she kept herself stowed away for three days after we pulled anchor from the harbor. She was a beauty, lad—brown, seductive, limbs

and a face as any man might ha' fancied. The cap'n—Beideman, his name was—the dirty lying dog—he took her away from me an' we fought for her, an' he won! I was near wild, I tells ye, lad. For I loved her, an' he—he only wanted her for his evil purposes!

"Well, we was coming home under a good wind with all sail aloft, whipping it in easy after touching Montevideo on the coast of South America. Bedford was our next point of call. An' at Bedford—I had figgered it out—was where I'd leave the ship. With Naika, yo' understand. But I reckoned without consulting that fate that follows the sailor. Naika took down with a fever. She died, an' never once did that beast of a Beideman let me see her. We anchored off shore here."

Sailor Jack pointed to the east and resumed his tale.

"The cap'n detailed the five o' us to bury Naika on the beach. She'd made him promise her he'd give her a decent burial on land an' he meant to keep the promise. She knew the dead at sea never rested. For Naika was wise with the wisdom of women. They shrouded her body in a sheet and lowered it away into the bumboat and we pulled to shore. It was at 9 o'clock that we digged the grave. Before we buried her I swept back her shroud to see her face for the last time. I touched her eyelids and said a little prayer for the peace of her soul. I touched her little brown hands. I saw the ring on her finger. I drew back in surprize! The last link of her spirit with me, who really loved her, was gone! The ring I had given her was gone and in its stead was a ruby set about with green stones, the whole set in a gold band. I knew it was Beideman's ring. I wanted to snatch that ring from the finger but something held me back. The men of the crew, who watched me at my prayer, warned me of the dreadful penalty that follows the robbing of the dead. So it was that we buried Naika, the beautiful, the beloved, on the sands of the beach behind a rotting hull of a ship's boat."

The storm was decreasing now. I had leaned forward under the strange spell of the old man's words. His eyes were beginning to fill with tears. His breath became more labored.

"But she was never allowed a moment's rest from that night to this. Her soul, that she wanted buried in decent Christian ground, is desecrated by the terrible carousals of the crew of the brig *Greta*. For the *Greta* foundered that night, trying to draw off the shore. The crew was short on account of the fever Naika had spread among them and she went down before a single boat could be lowered. I was strong and I swam ashore, and was saved."

He grew silent then, and I feared to question him. It was so evident that his mind was filled with the memory of the burial of his beloved Naika. It was an almost unbelievable tale; I cast about in my own mind for reasons to doubt his story, but the crowding memories were so plain in his dim old eyes that I could do naught but believe.

"They will not let her spirit rest," cried Sailor Jack. He sprang to his feet and cast his arms upward and raised his head to stare at the ceiling. "They dance their fiendish dances over her grave at every dark of the moon. They drink their rum and sing their braggart songs above her grave and her spirit is never still! Beideman leads their drunken revels!"

I stepped to his side and helped him back to his chair.

"Forgive me," he said softly, his head bowed into his hands. "I forget myself when I think of Naika's soul that never rests."

I looked at my watch. It was after 8 o'clock.

"I think I'll try it back," I said to him. "The rain has stopped."

He rose and confronted me. "No," he answered, "you must go with me tonight to watch the dance of the

dead at Naika's grave. It is not too far across the marsh. Come and I will show you that I am telling the truth. Come and you will hear the creaking of the sails of the *Greta;* you will hear the lowering boats, and the landing; you will hear all I have said you would hear, but you will see nothing! No man is privileged to see save me! I alone must bear the horror of the sight."

I made feeble protest but he only stared into my eyes and placed his hands on my shoulders in entreaty.

"I will go," I said at last.

He went then into the kitchen and prepared a supper of bacon and milk with a hard bread he had made of cornmeal. We washed this coarse fare down with great cups of hot coffee. When we had finished he went into a cupboard and fetched an old ship's lantern, lighted it and set it down near the door. He delved into the trunk, or chest of black wood, and brought forth a silk scarf of blue and an old curved simitar.

"We will go now," he said.

He led the way along a path that curved around the house toward the sea. For an hour I walked behind him. We passed no word between us. The lightning had passed around us, and now made futile yellow glares in the southwest. The wind still swept in gusts over the wet brown grass of the savannah. I began to suspect something of the foolishness of the night's affair. Why should I be here with this crazed old man? What would my friends at the camp four miles up the stream think of my absence? They perhaps might set out to search for me. I was just on the point of stopping the old sailor when he turned off the path and sat down in the sand behind a clump of willows. I could hear the rushing of the waves along the beach that could not be very far away. His hand touched my shoulder. He extinguished the lantern.

"There is the place. You can see the ribs of the old boat half-buried in the sand of the beach. It is beneath the bow of that rotting old boat that Naika is buried. The stream enters the bay just there—the stream you came down this afternoon. Our way was shorter, that is all."

I settled myself into the sand beside him and waited.

"What is the time?" he asked.

"Almost 9 o'clock," I replied.

"I will know when 9 comes," he said. "I will hear the flapping of the sails of the *Greta* as they pull her inshore."

I will make no effort here to say what I heard that night; I can only say what I, under the recurring monotone of his voice, thought he made me hear. The space before us was possibly fifty yards wide, running to the right into a dark clump of willows and large grasses; to our left the same. Between were the lapping wavelets of the sea and the sand of the beach, in the center of which I could just distinguish the black ribs of a ship's boat buried quite more than half its depth in the sand. The willows nodded and shifted in the wind. Complete silence pervaded this deserted strip of beach, except for the heavy wheezy breathing of Sailor Jack; that was the only sound.

I did not hear the first sound, but I knew that Sailor Jack did. His skinny, clawlike hand almost cut into my flesh with the tenacity and the fear with which he gripped my arm. He sat half erect.

"The sails! The *Greta* is pulling inshore!"

I listened intently. The sound was of bellying sails, booming low, but quite audible, down the wind. There was then a clanking, a creaking, a sound so tiny that I feared for an instant that I was only imagining I heard. Sailor Jack had not released his grip upon my arm.

"The boat is going over. There will be two of them lowered. You will hear; I have heard every month for fifty years. They are coming to dance their terrible rituals of sacrilege over the grave of Naika so that her soul can have no rest!"

The flesh of my body tightened perceptibly. The sounds were real! I could no longer doubt their reality, try as hard as I might! I heard the splash of lifted oars, the scraping of a boat upon the sand! And nowhere the sight of any moving thing or human figure. Had I seen any tangible substance, a wraith, a moving ghostly figure, it would not have been so terrifying to my spirits, my nerves. But there was nothing except the rattle of phantom chains and the splash of shadowy oars in the surf. It seemed to me that the waves grew larger at the point where I had heard the scraping of a boat's keel along the sand.

"They will roll their casks of rum along the sand," said Sailor Jack.

His voice startled me. I looked at his face. Every muscle was drawn in horror.

"They will stamp their feet upon Naika's grave in a ghost dance. They hate Naika! Naika, whom I loved with all my soul and my heart! Naika comes to my cabin at night and lays her woes at my feet. Her lips touch mine in a kiss that is of her hungry, searching soul!"

His voice grew louder in his wild, demoniacal denunciation of the despoilers of his sweetheart's grave. My mind grew weary with the dreadful thoughts that thronged its avenues. The dance began—smothered voices, the clinking of mugs, the low, shrill laughter of drunken men! Sounds without bodies capable of producing them! It is indescribable!

"Come," said Sailor Jack. "It is time to avenge her desecration! I shall slay the spirit of Beideman, who leads these ghastly revels!"

He sprang with a loud cry from his hiding-place behind the willows and ran, crouching, toward the hull of the boat. The sounds died away! There was none except the soft murmur of the wind in the willows. I sprang behind him, quite confident now that he had gone mad. He was brandishing the simitar at an unseen adversary close to the rotting hull of the boat.

"Die! Ah, die, grave-wreckers! Destroyers of the peace of souls!"

Suddenly he stumbled back into my arms. It was almost as if some tremendous blow had been delivered upon his head. His simitar—rusted, useless thing that it was—fell from his grasp. Sailor Jack was dead.

I bent over him, not daring to move, cold with a sudden fear! The sounds had begun again. I dared not look. The rattling of boat-hooks, the creaking of windlasses, the bellying and the popping of sails—I heard them all and I dared not raise my head. I knelt there in the sand above the grave of Naika and held the poor old body of Sailor Jack in my arms.

I tried later to bring him back to his cabin, but the burden was too great. I set off alone in the darkness then, found my boat, and went to the camp for help. We brought Sailor Jack to Pineville and left his body with the local undertaker. I told no one of the night's affair, except that I was on the beach with the old man when he died. The local doctor pronounced it heart-failure.

The next afternoon I went alone to the beach where the rotting hull still stood half buried in the sand. I found Sailor Jack's simitar and the blue silk sash. I had brought a spade along with me and I began excavating the sand upon the spot where the old man had engaged his ghostly enemy in combat.

I had not to dig long. I came at length upon a sort of white earth, the crumbled remains of human bones, and a little to one side I found a ring—a ruby set about with green stones in a gold band.

THE-ROSICRUCIAN-LAMP- - -

BY-STEPHEN-BAGBY

"The truncheon descended, shearing flesh and crushing bone."

"THIS fellow John Kenner Owen sure must be badly wanted and in one terrible hurry!" remarked the operator after having cabled to Dar-es-Salaam, Hongkong and Surabaya in succession. And then he tapped out the call for John Kenner Owen to the rest of the list of cable stations from which Franz von Reinitz thought a message might reach the son of his old friend.

One of the messages did connect; and John Owen within a few hours of its receipt was working his way southward through the steaming jungles of Burma, wondering, as he slowly made haste toward the coast, why his father's old friend had cabled him to come to New York at once.

Surely von Reinitz was in dire need. Or had the old man's niece finally relented, and asked her uncle to recall Owen from the voluntary exile into which he had plunged three years ago when the last one of her oft-repeated and uncompromising rejections had finally cracked Owen's will to carry on his suit?

There was no explanation; no mention of Freya, who might have relented; nothing to indicate why his presence was so urgently de-

manded. But Owen knew that von Reinitz must have cabled at least half a dozen out-of-the-way places, stations along the proposed route of wandering which Owen had in a letter outlined, presumably for the old man's entertainment, but actually for Freya should she ever choose to recall him; and one does not cable Singapore, Rangoon, and Adis Abeba out of idle fancy, nor do practical jokers go to such expense.

Up the China Sea and across the Pacific went Owen and his reflections. It couldn't be death or serious illness, for with the time it took a cable to find him, and the time required for making the trip, his presence in such an emergency wouldn't be demanded.

Then Freya had relented. . . .

Freya had always cared for him. And her persistent rejections had always caused her as much grief as they had Owen. Never a reason; only regret, and uncompromising refusal.

Owen, it is true, had heard strange tales current in Ardsley-on-Hudson, subdued breaths of rumor about old Franz von Reinitz and his great Gothic mansion which from the wooded heights of its encircling estate commanded the town; but they were of such a vague, legendary, even outrageous nature that he had always classed them with the rest of the pre-revolutionary tales of Tarrytown and its environs.

The hushed surmises about the odd circumstances surrounding the death of the father of Franz von Reinitz —and of the curious end to which came the grandfather—were always glossed over with banal remarks about what strange things fire would do. . . .

The village loafers always dragged the von Reinitz family into their recurrent discussions on spontaneous combustion. If, for instance (they speculated), one remained in a state of extreme alcoholic saturation for weeks at a time, might one not finally disintegrate from internal combustion, spontaneously generated? Particularly if one partook copiously and incessantly of the potent rum of a hundred years ago?

But in these whispered fantasies Owen took no stock; for rumor and legend invariably abound in a small town and center about the imposing mansions of wealthy recluses who have kept aloof for successive generations.

"What we are today, we owe to Franz von Reinitz," John Owen's father had often told him. "So if the old man ever asks a favor, don't deny him, no matter if it costs you your hide!"

But none of these reflections shed any light on Freya's everlasting rejection of John Owen's proposals, in spite of her undisguised affection for him.

FREYA met Owen at the Grand Central terminal.

"So you finally did change your mind!" exulted Owen.

"No, John. I'm sorry if you carried that hope all the way from wherever you were. It's Uncle Franz that called you." She disengaged herself from his embrace, and continued, "You might as well know why I've refused you these past half-dozen years. It's that rumor——"

"What rumor?" demanded Owen.

"You know as well as I do. That gossip about the curse of fire. You must have heard, from time to time."

"Surely you don't mean that that's the reason——"

"Yes. Exactly why I didn't marry you the first time you proposed."

"Good lord, is that all?"

"Wait until you see Uncle Franz, and you'll understand."

Nor could Owen's persistence get more than that ominously final sentence: for each attempt during the ride to Ardsley-on-Hudson was deflected by Freya's interest in Indo-China and the ruins of Angkor Wat.

All of which resulted in Owen's

finally declining Freya's invitation to stay at Schönbrunn until his own house could be set in order; for the growing premonition of something menacing and deadly in the background oppressed him with the thought that by avoiding even the temporary shelter of the von Reinitz house he would retain a detached viewpoint which would serve him well in answering what he now knew would be the outcome of his first words with Freya's uncle: an appeal for help against some sinister force that lurked in the background.

As Owen turned over his checks to the baggage transfer man at the station he noted, somewhat apart from the inevitable scattering of loafers, a tall, lean spectator whose presence and bearing had nothing of the loiterer about it. There was something vaguely foreign about the man: something remotely familiar in his expression rather than his features or stature, reminiscent of a curious scene in far-off Azerbaijan which Owen had never been able entirely to forget. It was not an encounter with a familiar face but rather a meeting with one whose background linked him with something outlandish, unforgettable. . . .

All of which passed dimly through Owen's mind as he assured the transfer man that there was no mistake about the address, and that he, Owen, was reopening that house. Nor was Owen aware that his right hand edged toward his hip until his fingers failed to meet the butt of the once ever-present Colt .45.

The stranger's veiled, smoldering stare was directed not at Owen but at Freya. As he caught her eye, she nodded distantly as to one entitled to recognition but not casual conversation; and the stranger bowed with courtly, foreign formality.

"Trencher Scarrett," remarked Freya as they passed beyond the stranger's hearing.

"Odd name," commented Owen, keeping to himself the fact that Scarrett wore a familiar mantle.

In Azerbaijan curious things are done with fire and in honor of fire. . . .

Owen found himself vainly wondering just what name could be Anglicized to Trencher Scarrett. . . .

And then, as they approached the von Reinitz car, parked at the first corner past the station: "No, thanks, really. I've a bit of shopping to do, and it's only a short walk to the house. Tell Uncle Franz that I'll see him early in the afternoon."

But as Freya headed for Schönbrunn, Owen turned to retrace his steps. And then he decided not to accost Scarrett with that curious, fleeting gesture to which Owen felt Scarrett would most certainly respond as had one in Azerbaijan: whereupon he proceeded on foot to his house on the outskirts of the town.

THE towering, Gothic mass of Schönbrunn rose high above the tall grove that crouched about the center of old Franz von Reinitz's estate. Ponderous turrets and castellated battlements reared skyward their mediæval bulk. Yet that prodigious heap of carved gray stone might have been the tenuous fancies of an Arabian dream for all it served its master—if those outlandish tales that were told were true.

An aura of despair had been imposed on the somber atmosphere of the Schönbrunn that Owen had known in the years before his exile. He shuddered at the thought of Freya living under its solemn shadow, and recalled at least a hundred places that he would rather visit than the von Reinitz mansion.

Owen seized the ponderous knocker, and sought to remain unmoved by its sinister clank as it fell back into place.

An aged retainer ushered Owen into the presence of the master of Schönbrunn, bowed, and departed

silently, leaving Owen to announce himself however he saw fit. Freya evidently had elected to remain unseen until the end of the interview; and with the day's thoughts on his mind, and the uneasiness that came from his glimpse of Scarrett, Owen was relieved rather than disappointed at her absence.

The old man awoke with a start, but recovered his composure as he recognized Owen.

"I knew you'd not fail me! Such a long trip to satisfy an old man's whim. Freya said we dragged you out of upper Burma——"

"I was glad to get away, Uncle Franz."

Owen could not quite contrive any falsehoods about how well von Reinitz was looking. So he contented himself with attempting not to reveal any amazement at the old man's haggard features.

"Well, yes, I did have a good trip," continued Owen, as he seated himself. "But the delays did grate on my nerves, as I knew there must be something urgent. First a fire at the docks at Rangoon——"

"Fires!" groaned von Reinitz, fixing Owen with his dark, haunted eyes. "That's why I called you. Fires . . . ancient fires . . . the accursed light that burns in a hidden lamp is threatening my life."

"And so you seek protection by sheathing the walls of Schönbrunn with sheets of copper?" hazarded Owen as he sought to have his father's friend confirm what had for years been rumored in Ardsley.

"So you've heard? Well, that was only a portion. The enemy is closing in and will overwhelm me. Not only me, but Freya——"

"Good lord! Freya threatened?"

"Threatened? The doom is already upon her! Just as on all of her ancestors. As for me, it matters little. For me there is no escape; but for her there is still hope, as I just recently learned. So I called you from wherever my cable reached you. You may help, if you have courage——"

"I'm with you, Uncle Franz! But tell me what it's all about. I've heard so many rumors and wild tales, ever since I was a boy——"

From the folds of his dressing-gown von Reinitz slowly drew an oiled silk envelope and took therefrom a folded manuscript.

"The sins of the fathers shall be visited upon the children," muttered the old man as he extended the packet to Owen. "Read it, please."

"Deckendorf, 12th of December, 1434," began Owen, frowning at the archaic script. "To the glory of God and the illustrious Emperor Sigismund——"

Then, returning the manuscript: "I'd miss the thought as well as the letter. Maybe you'd better translate it for me."

"Doubtless you're right," agreed von Reinitz. "I'll give you a synopsis which will do. Though when you leave, you might as well take the manuscript with you, so that you and Dr. Blanchard can study it together."

The old man shivered, thumbed the yellowed pages for a moment as he collected his thought, and repeated the prelude as one steeling himself for a plunge into black, freezing waters.

"The philosopher Rosenkreutz, they said in those old days," began von Reinitz, "revived the lost arts of the ancients, discovered the philosopher's stone, delved so deep into thaumaturgy that in the end he devised a lamp that would burn past the final moment of eternity."

"A lamp that would burn forever?" exclaimed Owen. "Did they really believe——"

"They believed, *and they were right,*" solemnly affirmed von Reinitz. "In subterranean caverns and tombs, even to this day, are lights that have burned undimmed for ages. The

perpetual lamp is but one of the triumphs of ancient science. The priests who read the *Book of Thoth* and pronounced the hidden name of Osiris guarded their lore jealously; but the learned men of the Middle Ages rediscovered the secret. Yet in those troublous times the mere suspicion of thaumaturgical researches meant death at the stake; so that thy hid the secret, not out of jealousy, but self-preservation."

Owen swallowed his incredulity and chewed his cigar.

"There was Meister Eckhardt, and Athanasius Kircher, and Rosenkreutz, the founder of the Rosicrucian sect, who made perpetual lamps."

"I know you're serious," interrupted Owen, "even if it does outstep reason. But that curse——"

Again the old man thumbed and glanced at the manuscript which he held, then resumed his discourse.

"Through his army of spies, the Emperor Sigismund learned that Rosenkreutz and other master alchemists delivered their formulæ and documents to their friend and patron, Graf Eberhard von Findelstein. Because of this, and the fact that Graf Eberhard had publicly styled the Empress Barbara the Messalina of Germany, he was proscribed for assassination, perhaps even the rack or the wheel. But he was forewarned, so that instead of accepting the Emperor's invitation, he fled Frankfort with his only child, the beautiful lady Thuringia, and a handful of loyal retainers.

"In his stronghold at Findelstein he defied the Emperor, serenely awaiting the approaching siege. . . ."

The old man paused, bowed his head, sighed.

"My ancestor, Gottfried von Reinitz, who wrote these pages, was in command of the forces assigned to the task of capturing Findelstein and taking prisoner the rebellious Count.

"Early in the siege, so the story goes, the Lady Thuringia ventured from the walls of the castle, believing that the besiegers had withdrawn before a sortie of her father's men at arms. She rode into an outpost, squarely into an ambush. Gottfried sought to capture her as a hostage to force the capitulation of the Count. His men closed in on her from three sides; and on the fourth she was hemmed in by the precipitous thousand-foot drop of a cliff. Gottfried spurred his horse forward, and attempted to drag her from her mount. But before he or his men could seize her, she wheeled and rode straight into the abyss.

"The following day another sortie, headed by the grief-crazed Graf Eberhard, routed Gottfried's forces and pursued him to Frankfort. And then the Count declared war on the Emperor. Gottfried, once more in the field with a larger force, again besieged the castle; and this time it capitulated without resistance. Graf Eberhard was dead of grief for his daughter's death—suicide forced by Gottfried's attempt to hold her as a hostage.

"The Emperor ordered Findelstein sacked from foundations to topmost battlements and turrets; yet not a trace of alchemical manuscripts or apparatus could be found; nor a sign of the tomb of either Graf Eberhard or the Lady Thuringia. Torture could not wring the secret from Kuhrt, the Count's lieutenant; though before he died, he mocked Gottfried, and taunted him about the everlasting curse the dying Count had pronounced—the curse of endless fire, the eternal curse which would last until the perpetual flame of the hidden Rosicrucian lamp should dim to extinction. . . .

"Gottfried's misgivings, which are expressed in these very pages, and in his own handwriting, were well founded. The curse swiftly overtook

him. He persisted in seeking the hidden loot of the castle; sought out one day the nethermost passages and deepest crypts—and was never again seen alive. What remained of him was later found in the Danube, far in Bohemia. . . ."

The old man's voice trailed into an awed whisper.

"It was scorched and seared by fire. Gottfried was the first of our line to fall before the curse. And none since then has evaded it. Not one! The doom has cornered me; and Freya is next. . . .

"It is written," continued von Reinitz after a solemn pause, "how the spell was woven. Graf Eberhard, armed from head to foot, bade his retainers farewell, and ordered them to seal him alive in his daughter's tomb; him, and one of the everlasting lamps of Rosenkreutz, into whose eternal flames he chanted a remorseless curse which should endure as long as that fire burned. And then —so the story goes, aided by the inference of occultists, for no man knows precisely where the tomb is, nor what took place therein—the Count entered a mystic silence, composed himself to a sleep that was animate death; so that, living yet lifeless, he sits pondering on the endless vengeance which has endlessly fallen on my house and all those allied to it.

"None remains save only myself and Freya. Our ancestors fled from Bavaria more than a century ago, taking refuge here, and for a while seemingly evading the curse: for while my father and grandfather died strangely, the supernatural element was not plainly in evidence. Though the less said about their deaths, the better. . . . "

The old man shuddered, then continued, "But despite their appalling deaths, natural causes could easily be found. And I took fresh hope, fancying that the curse had spent itself. Yet I was wrong; for shortly after your last letter, I felt the influence of the curse, and quaked in the shadow of its terror. The signs are now unmistakable; the everlasting fires besiege me, and in spite of the counter offensive directed against it by the learned Dr. Blanchard, of whom you surely know——"

"Then where do I fit into the scene——"

"You can work with Blanchard. He needs help which you can give. For me there is no hope—though during the time that it takes to complete my doom, you or the doctor could break the curse. And even if too late to save me, there is a chance of saving Freya."

"Then the curse can be broken?"

"Certainly," affirmed von Reinitz. "If the lamp were found and extinguished, we are saved; though that is a dim hope, seeing that my ancestors sought it for centuries, and in vain. Old as I am, and infirm, I can't go to Bavaria and hunt that hidden tomb. So I can but pin my faith to some stout friend who has the courage——"

"Courage I have, but my knowledge——"

"Blanchard knows; but the curse knew him for an enemy. So today Blanchard is a cripple, helpless, his strong mind and great knowledge imprisoned and half useless in a withered shell."

"Then Blanchard shall teach me!" declared Owen. "I'm with you to a finish; so count on as much as Blanchard asks me to do."

Whereupon Owen took leave of von Reinitz, determined then and there to seek the learned occultist, Blanchard.

HE FOUND Dr. Blanchard on the rear sun-porch of his brick bungalow, seated in a wheel chair. The professor was a slender man, with luminous dark eyes and keen, aquiline features which could smile pleasantly enough.

Owen took the seat indicated by

the invalid, and drove to the point at once, summarizing the story of von Reinitz.

"It's all so incredible," concluded Owen. "Particularly the story of the eternal lamp. What do you think, Dr. Blanchard?"

"There is more truth in it than you could possibly believe. The eternal lamp is not the fabulous thing you think it is. Of those mysterious vessels made by Rosenkreutz, one was discovered some years after his death, in the underground vault where he lay buried. When those who profaned the tomb approached the weird light too closely, it flickered high and expired, so that its mystery and wonder might not be uncovered.

"And in the Museum of Rarities in Leyden are two lamps whose flames expired when human hands touched them. In the Museo Capitolino of Rome is another that on good authority is said to have been found in the tomb of Tullia, Cicero's daughter, where it had been burning brightly for fifteen hundred years."

"Your reputation in occult and psychic research compels my belief, even if the story surpasses all belief. But as to the accursed light which old von Reinitz——"

"That also is true," declared Blanchard solemnly. "I know, and to my great cost! I studied the case, and tried to fight the malignant influence that made the von Reinitz house a den of madness. And look what happened to me for interfering: I'm warped and twisted, and useless. They——"

"*They?*" queried Owen.

"Yes, *they*. For there is more now than in the beginning. More than just a hereditary curse which in most cases lies entirely in the minds of members of the family afflicted, and is kept alive by their fears. There is in this instance a powerful concentration of forces, strong personalities—human personalities, I mean, as distinguished from spiritual entities—who are bent on destroying von Reinitz. Someone, hiding behind the mask of a curse, has decided on finishing old Franz, and his niece as well."

"His niece as well? Good God, Doctor——"

"I'm sorry, lad, but I'll not spare you anything. Yes, they're after her also. And if you interfere, as I know you will, they'll include you. *Me* they could not touch; but they caught me unaware and seared and scorched my body into what you now see. Medical men are puzzled; laymen call it paralysis; but I know better."

"What is my first move, Doctor?"

"Be on your guard as to your own safety; for if they get you, you can't save her. So watch yourself jealously and selfishly. Guard yourself——"

"Against whom?"

Before Blanchard could answer, Owen made a fleeting, swift gesture with his left hand. The doctor's brows lifted in Gothic arches.

"You know more than I thought," he said. "Tell me, did you offer Treucher Scarrett that sign and greeting?"

"No. I didn't know if I was right. And if right, all the more reason for not tipping off my hand. If he is what something told me he is—but I once used that sign, in Azerbaijan. . . ."

Owen shivered.

"Don't bother to continue. I know what you saw. And I wonder that you are here today."

"Then I'm right about Scarrett?"

"I don't *know;* but like you, I suspect it strongly. Old von Reinitz didn't call on me for assistance until shortly after Scarrett appeared in town a year ago. And Scarrett's past is too thoroughly covered. One can't trace him back beyond the day of his appearance. He might have emerged from the earth. All of

which convinces me that he's here on the trail of von Reinitz, though I can't prove it. Suffice it to say that something must be done, and done quickly. You arrived none too soon."

"Then what am I to do first of all? What move must I make?"

"Patience. I'll let you know. I had to see you before I could begin to plan for you. Now leave me to study it out, to fit you into the picture. But if you learn anything of interest, see me at once. I'm crippled, so you'll have to be both eyes and ears for me. And watch yourself closely!" concluded the invalid as he offered his hand.

OWEN spent the remainder of the afternoon in wandering about the town and its environs, hoping for a casual encounter with Scarrett. And yet all the while he felt more like the hunted than the hunter; so that, failing to make any contact with Scarrett, Owen returned to his house with the sense of one finding shelter from a pursuer.

"Driven home!" he exclaimed in disgust as the door clicked closed behind him.

In his restlessness and sense of insecurity even in his own house, Owen wandered about, forcing himself to take an interest in the home he had not seen for three years; but he could not drive off the feeling that he was the butt of an intangible yet powerful assault, the center of a vortex of power that was closing in on him. He found himself reading the last line of a page and then realizing that he retained not a word of what he had read in its beginning. Azerbaijan crept into his thoughts, and would not leave them. . . .

And then something snapped, liberating him from the bondage of the Land of Fire and the oppression of its memories. He was here to save old Franz . . and he'd have Freya, curse or no curse!

Unmindful of the hour, Owen set out on foot for Schönbrunn, once more himself, on the warpath, and resolved to see Freya then and there, look her in the eye, and laugh the curse out of existence. He wondered how anything could have distracted his thoughts from her ever since his interview with von Reinitz. It seemed grotesque that the fears of an old man and the warnings of an invalid and the memories of a devil-haunted adventure in a far-off province of Persia could have unnerved him. Thus he strode aggressively along the road to Schönbrunn, and finally passed the somber gate that opened into darkness unplumbed by the night's full moonlight.

A guttural murmuring as of a distant chant came to his ears; and beneath it he sensed rather than heard the rhythm of oddly accented drumming, the thump-thump of a curious drum played in but one part of the world. Owen would rather have retraced his steps; but he went on, though picking his way more cautiously. Then out of the darkness ahead of him he caught the nebulous, bluish glow of a faint light just around a curve in the road that wound on and on to the heart of the von Reinitz estate.

As he advanced, now stealthily and soundlessly on the trail of what lay before him, the oddly cadenced, muttering roll of the drum grew louder, and the chant less muffled; then both ceased abruptly.

Had the drummer heard his approach, and decided to do some stalking of his own?

Owen paused, grimaced at the thought of having for an instant considered retreat, and advanced more cautiously; and finally, hugging the outside of the curve in the road, making himself as much a part of the shadows as he could, Owen found himself regarding a spectacle that in no way added to his peace of mind.

A man squatted cross-legged in

the middle of the drive, with his back not quite squarely turned to Owen. Surrounding him was a circle of tapers that burned with an unwavering blue flame; and in the light of this incredible blue there glittered a concentric circle of orange-colored powder. At the man's left was the tiny kettledrum which he had just ceased playing.

The squatting figure swayed from the hips, as to the cadence of a measure that he alone could hear; and then, body still swaying, his hands flashed first to the left, then to the right, in precisely formal gestures—gestures statuesquely stiff as Egyptian sculpture, yet swift and sinister.

Scarrett was engaged in some devilish mummery. One fleeting glance at those predatory features sufficed to identify him.

Scarrett's voice again picked up the muttering chant to whose silent cadence he had been swaying; and this time Owen recognized occasional words, Persian laid on a background of a tongue more obscure.

"Lord of Everlasting Fire . . . Fire Everlasting . . . Fire . . ."

His suspicions and Blanchard's had been well grounded indeed! Here before him was the poisonous ritual that was reviving the curse that for nearly five hundred years had been damning the house of von Reinitz; and this hawk-beaked reminder of Azerbaijan was chanting out of existence all of Owen's hopes and aspirations, and heaping a doom on Freya. . . .

The night's misgivings and flashes of cowardice slipped from Owen's shoulders. He set himself for action. . . .

"Lord and Master of Everlasting Fire!" droned that half-intelligible chant. "Fire . . . Master . . . Fire . . . Everlasting. . . ."

And now it was a war drum that sent hot flashes and cold chills up Owen's spine and coursing through his blood. His hands stealthily combed the darkness of the surrounding ground, weaving in time to the rise and fall of the chant and the swaying of the singer. His fingers brushed against a piece of wood the thickness of his wrist. With infinite care he felt along its length, and found it not too long, nor yet too thick. . . .

Owen emerged from his shadow . . . one . . . two . . . and on the third pace struck. . . .

As he dusted the dead, dry bark from his hands, he regretted that his club had failed him, breaking under the force of his blow. But when he saw how quietly his quarry lay in the circle of unbelievably blue flame, Owen felt that the evening's work had been very good, and sufficient; so that instead of going on to the von Reinitz house, he retraced his steps to his own. It was too late to see Dr. Blanchard; and Owen felt that though Scarrett had probably survived the impact of that unfortunately defective club, he would at least engage in no further chanting that night.

"JUST as I suspected," commented Dr. Blanchard the next morning, as Owen completed the recital of the previous night's events. "Scarrett is in back of it all. Now we know, definitely. Freya phoned me shortly before your arrival and told me how, for over an hour, her uncle had been writhing and twisting and complaining of fires that were consuming him, until shortly after 11, he suddenly became quite himself again and fell into a sound, restful sleep. That was just about the time you took a hand."

"But what are we to do?" fumed Owen. "Now Scarrett knows someone is on his trail and will be more wary. Our only hope is to patrol the estate and pot him as a trespasser. Thus far he's a fairly law-abiding citizen. One can't have him hanged

for sitting in a circle of blue tapers and chanting in a foreign language. From the looks of things I'll have to waylay him and shoot it out, and trust to luck to get clear of it——"

"That won't suffice," declared the doctor. "For the curse itself is a thing beyond Scarrett's control. He's meddling with something that he himself couldn't stop. You must leave for Bavaria as soon as possible——"

"How about a passport?"

"You'll have time for that. Though if you had to leave very suddenly—say on account of last night's performance being more thorough than you think—try this address."

Blanchard handed Owen a card on which he had scribbled a name and address.

"He'll furnish a passport with skilfully forged seals and all, within the hour. And whatever cash you need. Never mind why; suffice it to say he's indebted to me, and that for good and sufficient reasons I don't care to expose him. Remember just this: that once you enter his door, you'll make a clean getaway if you follow his instructions.

"Keep those papers which von Reinitz gave you yesterday, for they contain a good deal of information he omitted in telling you his story. It will be difficult reading; but once you're on the ground, you'll be able to read between the lines. The hunt may not be as difficult as it was to those of the house of von Reinitz, who sought the hidden tomb while oppressed by the fear of the curse. . . . Good God! Look!"

Owen followed the invalid's compelling gesture.

Small stars of incandescent whiteness blazed, expired, and blazed again as they skipped dazzlingly across the surface of the pond at the edge of Blanchard's estate. A hissing, as of cold water trickling over hot metal, came to Owen's ears as he leaped to his feet.

"Fire elementals! Mad, and moving toward Schönbrunn! Sweeping everything before them to get at Franz! Quick! Get me outside! Wear this scarab. And on your life, don't drop it!"

Owen flung the chain about his neck, seized the invalid, and carried him out of doors.

"Don't stop!" commanded the invalid from Owen's shoulders. "March right into them!"

Owen obeyed, advancing full into the path of the burning, scintillant flecks of doom that converged on the house. A hissing, roaring, surging as of flames beyond all reason and measure thundered in his ears, and an intolerable fierceness of heat seared his cheeks; but Owen advanced.

And then, above the elemental tumult, Owen heard the voice of Blanchard chanting words that crackled and whipped through the blistering air.

The fumes, the ever-increasing fury of the advancing elementals dizzied Owen. He stumbled; but before he could recover his footing, he saw the doctor with a supreme effort rise to his knees and with a sudden, stabbing motion thrust his own amulet, held at arm's length, to the cardinal points of the compass, in the ritual of psychic pointing; and all the while Blanchard persisted in his sonorous chanting of a language that was ancient when Khafra laid the base of his great pyramid.

And then roared the voice of Blanchard, in English: "By the Sword and by the Rod and by the Power——"

To Owen's amazement, the advancing lines paused, swung in a right turn, retreated.

"They're headed for Schönbrunn! Run, man, for *their* lives! I'll stay here, but I'll think for you. Walk into them with your amulet before you; *think* power, even if you can't pronounce the words."

And Owen, lashed by the words of the invalid, ran toward Schönbrunn as though pursued by, rather than pursuing, the overflow of the nethermost hells.

The path of the elementals, strangely enough, was in a vast curve; though despite their deviation they bore inevitably on Schönbrunn. Yet Owen's direct course gave him the advantage; so that, even though on the verge of collapse from his frenzied dash, he had a lead of a hundred yards on the swiftly flickering menace that sought old von Reinitz in his last retreat.

Owen pounded the ancient brazen knocker. "Open!" he demanded. "Quick!"

As Freya unlatched the massive door, Owen crashed into the somber vestibule.

"Your uncle——"

A hoarse, agonized scream quenched his speech. Then came a heavy thud, and silence.

"Uncle Franz! He's hurt——"

Owen flung himself up the winding stairs, taking them three at a leap.

A BLINDING flare of fire shot from the grate to the threshold as Owen burst into the old man's room. He saw on the crest of that bed of glowing coals two flame-colored lizards with white-hot, adamantine eyes. The air thickened stiflingly, and darkened; and as he groped for the snap-switch to turn on the lights, the fumes of singed clothing and scorched flesh assaulted his nostrils. But before he could find the switch, the terrific darkness of the room thinned, leaving visible the horror he had anticipated.

On the floor, with terror unnamable burned on its twisted features and branded into its staring eyes, lay the body of old Franz. The curse had struck; and Freya alone remained of the house of von Reinitz.

On the chest of the old man was a brand, the livid figure of a salamander deeply etched into the skin. Further examination disclosed a deep gash over the old man's left temple. A cane lay on the floor, a few inches from the stiffening right hand. Old Franz in falling had struck his head against the massive andiron.

Owen stooped to pick up the cane. . . .

A piercing scream sounded behind him. He turned and saw Freya reel into the room, totter, and collapse. But before he could reach for his flask and apply it to her white lips, an all too familiar roaring and crackling poured up the staircase. Sheets of livid flame surged and billowed into the vestibule, along the hall, and up the stairs. Tiny flecks of dazzling whiteness danced and leaped glitteringly with the advancing fire.

In another instant, the curse would claim the sole survivor of the house of von Reinitz. Lord God, but if Blanchard were there to speak his strange words! Then out of his despair came an overwhelming confidence; remembering the doctor's admonition, feeling his very presence, Owen tore the amulet from his neck, looped its chain about his wrist, seized the unconscious girl and advanced to meet the unquenchable fury that raged up the stairs. And though his lips could not speak the syllables, there flashed through his mind the cadence, the fierce and solemn thunder of Blanchard's ancient incantation; and to that cadence, Owen pointed in psychic ritual, ever advancing.

The flames lapped his cheeks——

"By the Rod and by the Sword and by the Power!" he pronounced in a voice that rang above the snarl of the flames and their crackling.

They retreated before him, dimmed, vanished; and Owen found himself a few seconds later in the vestibule,

still blinded by the awful radiance he had confronted.

As his sight returned to him, Owen busied himself with the unconscious girl he still clutched in his left arm. Her dress, torn open at the neck, exposed a fearful band deeply scored on her breast: the salamander, the mark of the curse!

She was not dead; the elementals had but succeeded in marking her for the death that hovered close at hand. There still was hope: and to make the most of her chance for life, Owen took possession of the von Reinitz car and raced from Schönbrunn as fast as steel and gas could carry him, feeling that he could place Freya in no refuge safer than the home of Dr. Blanchard.

Helene Spalding, Dr. Blanchard's widowed daughter and constant attendant, met Owen at the door.

"Bring her right up to my room. She'll be in good hands," assured Helene in a voice that betrayed not a trace of surprize at Owen's still unconscious burden. "Leave her to me; Father wants a word with you at once."

"There's not an hour to lose," began Blanchard, as Owen stepped into the doctor's study. "Last night's encounter with Scarrett was evidently not as conclusive as I wish it had been; and you see how he followed up by releasing this unholy manifestation."

"Well, I've at least been proof against his fires!" raged Owen, fuming at the mere mention of Scarrett. "And I'll shoot him at sight——"

"Steady, lad," cautioned Blanchard. "That would do little good. For though he accelerated the curse, brought it to a crisis by his rituals, he himself can't halt it or deflect it. And with the shock that Freya has received, she has not enough resistance to fight it off. It will surely get her in the end—and that end is not far off. So your killing Scarrett would only lead you into complications that would rob me of the one ally that can help me destroy the curse at its source. Don't you see the logic of it? That while a curse emanates from a focal point, an outside source, it gains most of its force from its destined victim's acceptance: and with what has happened, Freya's will can't fight it any more. So that more than ever, and without any delay, you must find that hidden lamp and destroy it.

"But should you discover this vessel, be on your guard, for it is undoubtedly the focal point of dangerous fire-elementals. On the other hand, have confidence. After what you did this afternoon——"

Owen shivered, and grimaced at the memory of his terror.

"You mean, after what *you* did!"

"I didn't think it could be done," answered Dr. Blanchard. "I knew I couldn't drive them away, but I hoped to deflect them from their course."

"So that's why they went on a curve while I ran in a straight line?"

"Yes. But the farther they went, the less susceptible they were to my thought concentration; so that in the end they closed in on you."

"But how do you account for my having the distinct impression of having pronounced in my mind those words of yours. They were meaningless; yet I could have sworn that at that instant I felt a sense of power, felt something within me pronouncing them. I was so sure that I advanced instead of retreating."

"Exactly. Your courage did it. And it really mattered little what syllables you *thought*, so that you *felt* power. The words themselves serve only in that those who know them can assume the power the words express and symbolize: thus you assumed for an instant some of the psychic strength I myself would have had had I been present.

"But as I said," continued the doctor, "be on your guard. Wear

your amulet, day and night. Elementals of fire, as typified by those salamanders, are not physical flame, as we know it, but vortices of force; not souls, as human beings are, but intelligences that live indefinitely. Yet being inferior to man, since they are only intelligences, they are under proper circumstances under the control of man; so that they may be used by adepts at sorcery to gain evil ends, and apparently overstep the very laws of nature. But remember that this afternoon your will and your courage saved you and Freya. So have courage; for they are but *psychic*, burning only that against which they are directed by a will superior to that of the victim."

The questions that crowded to Owen's lips were unuttered; for at that moment came a loud rapping at the outer door. But before he could leave the doctor's study, Helene waved him back, and went to the door herself. The next instant he heard the sound of voices mingled with Helene's sharp protest, and the slamming of a door. A moment later, Hinckley, the town constable, entered the study, with Scarrett in his wake.

"There he is!" growled Scarrett, leveling a finger at Owen. "He killed the old man!"

Hinckley hesitated, then, avoiding Owen's hard stare, drew forth a warrant.

"Owen," muttered the officer, "I'm sorry—but I got no choice. You got to come with me."

Owen knew that the charge couldn't be substantiated; but he also knew that the delay would play into Scarrett's hands, give him just the few days he needed to devote to uninterrupted deviltry.

Hinckley was armed, and would not let old acquaintance block the course of the law; but Hinckley was at the same time a stickler for the letter of the law.

Owen advanced a pace, leaned on the edge of the light table that was between him and the intruders, and got a secure grasp on it, one hand at each end, all with a careless negligence that disguised his intent.

"Why not read me your warrant, Hinckley?" he requested suavely. "The whole thing sounds unreasonable. Someone must have sworn out that warrant before the old man died."

The constable unfolded the document. Scarrett edged closer, his hand seeking his hip.

"Well, I guess you're entitled to hear it," agreed Hinckley.

Owen, lifting the table and thrusting it before him as a shield, leaped forward. The constable, caught off his guard, tripped; and clutching Scarrett for support, threw Scarrett's drawn pistol out of line. The shot went wild.

Owen dropped the table and closed in. Scarrett, roeked by Owen's swift thrust to the jaw, sank in his tracks. And Hinckley clambered to his feet just in time to find himself staring into the muzzle of the pistol Owen had salvaged in the course of the encounter.

"Reach for the ceiling, Hinckley!" commanded Owen. "And don't trust old acquaintance too far——"

Hinckley wilted under Owen's fierce gaze.

And then, as he backed out of the study, pistol still leveled, Owen addressed Blanchard: "Take good care of her, Doctor. I'm getting that lamp!"

Whereat he slammed the door of the study, cleared the front door, and in a moment more gained the wheel of the von Reinitz car. And then the dash from Ardsley to New York, where he abandoned the car and sought out the man who would provide him with forged passports.

From Hamburg Owen went to Munich, and thence to his destination, Deggendorf, a mediæval city lying in the Bavarian forest, the

wildest and least known part of Germany, and far off the tourist's track.

Not far from the city was the Castle of Findelstein, ominously glowering at the Danube from its impregnable height. And there for a week he labored, never once finding a trace of that hidden tomb which he sought; for among the papers of old Franz von Reinitz there was nothing which gave any clue more definite than that the focal point of the curse lay hidden somewhere in or near the castle itself.

Yet one thing he did discover: that the curse on the von Reinitz family and the ruined castle were indeed connected; and that, though eluding him, the Rosicrucian lamp must be within his reach.

The moldering walls of the castle were hot, hot with a torrid, tropical warmth that would have been welcome had it not been so unnatural to the season. The ruin was permeated with the radiation of subterranean fires, the emanation of monstrous forces that simmered and sweltered in their hidden prison, awaiting the day of release, the hour of the destruction they were to wreak against Freya. And the day of wrath was close at hand; for there was a tension in the air, an oppressive, stifling heaviness in those dusky passages and dim halls through which Owen prowled, seeking the panel, the trapdoor, or the passageway which would lead to the spot where Graf Eberhard and his daughter lay fearsomely entombed and guarded by elemental fires.

One evening as Owen sat on the parapet, studying the papers which thus far had failed to yield a clue, he was startled by the crunch of a footfall behind him. He drew his Luger as he leaped to his feet and whirled to face the intruder.

Searrett confronted him.

"Easy, there!" smiled the enemy as he raised his hands above his head. And then, grinning sourly: "This looking into pistols you point at me is becoming monotonous. How about an armistice?"

"What brings you here?" demanded Owen.

"It's rather awkward to talk with one's hands clutching skyward," suggested Searrett.

Owen suddenly felt quite the master of the situation. A Fire Master who didn't relish looking into the muzzle of a Luger couldn't be as terrific as the psychic flames Owen had faced that hideous afternoon at Schönbrunn. So he lowered his pistol.

"And now I'll answer your very reasonable question," announced Searrett. "I propose working with you, if you'll meet me half-way."

"Fascinating!" agreed Owen. "What assassination do you contemplate now?"

He laughed to conceal the fear that crept over him at the thought that Searrett's work in Ardsley might have ended with the destruction of Freya.

"I'll ignore the implication. But to come to facts, I want to be in on the opening of that tomb you're seeking."

"Indeed!"

"Yes. You've taken a notion to get those thaumaturgical secrets buried with Graf Eberhard. And after what you did in the face of certain curious manifestations before Schönbrunn—yes, I heard the whole story—facing those fires and living to tell the tale, I feel that you're a man after my own heart.

"Be reasonable, Owen," continued Searrett. "Need we be at sword's points? I admit that I tried to get you arrested on a trumped-up murder charge to give me a few days in which to explore Schönbrunn without interruptions. That charge wouldn't have stuck any longer than was necessary for me to make some important investigations of the phenomena attending the curious

death of von Reinitz. Your precipitate flight served me just as well; though I may as well admit that it did me no good after all, for the papers were not to be found at Schönbrunn. And, judging from your still being here, you likewise failed to find what you sought."

It was odd to hear the Fire Master, the arch sorcerer from Azerbaijan, making those matter-of-fact explanations; nor did it seem quite credible that this man had concentrated those fire elementals on Schönbrunn. Finally, Owen sensed the possibility of using the Fire Master instead of openly opposing him.

"Well, your proposition does interest me," *admitted Owen.* "*It seems* that I was mistaken about several things. My efforts thus far have been in vain. But working together, we might both succeed."

"Splendid!" exclaimed Scarrett, as he offered his hand.

"Just a moment!" countered Owen. "Supposing I refuse?"

"I had thought of that," mused Scarrett. "Supposing then that it leaked out in Deggendorf that someone was prowling about this unsavory ruin? The inhabitants would probably pull you into very small pieces, just out of idle curiosity to see what they could learn about the inside workings of a man who haunted an ill-favored place like this. Now, as I said——"

"The point is well taken," conceded Owen. "And we'll equip ourselves with easels and the like, pose as artists, which will explain almost any antics which anyone might witness or hear about."

"Good. Then we'll make our plans and come back in the morning."

Whereat the newly formed *entente* returned to Deggendorf.

IN THE morning, Scarrett and Owen, equipped with easels and sketching-materials, picked their way up the steep path to Findelstein. Owen wondered whether they would continue in the same way he had started: systematically hunting for trapdoors and secret panels. Scarrett's first remark as they entered the courtyard, however, was certainly not what Owen had expected.

"It happens," announced Scarrett, as he dropped his artist's paraphernalia on the paving, "that I know precisely where this tomb is located."

"There," replied Owen as soon as he could catch his breath, "is where you have it on me."

Which, he fancied, was somewhat better than asking Scarrett what, then, *the real problem might be*, and wherein he, Scarrett, needed any help.

"And," continued Scarrett, "I have every reason to believe that you yourself know where it is, all protests to the contrary notwithstanding."

"And if I do?"

"Then you probably were confronted by the same problem that confronts me."

But without defining that problem, Scarrett advanced to the center of the courtyard, toward the basin of a dry fountain. He seized its odd centerpiece, a grotesque and not entirely savory statuette of lead, twisted it on its base, reversed the twist a part of a turn, and then, after a pause, jerked it toward him, all with the display of familiarity to be expected of one returning after a long absence to open the wall safe of his own house.

"Now give me a hand!" demanded the Fire Master.

Owen obeyed, and the two leaned against the edge of the basin, heaving and grunting; in vain, Owen thought, until, suddenly, the entire fountain yielded, turning on a pivot apparently in its circumference. A circular opening was revealed, and into its depths led narrow staircase

which vanished in dismal blackness far beneath.

"Follow me!" commanded Scarrett.

The two invaders, guided by the glow of Scarrett's flash lamp, picked their way down the spiral staircase. A fierce tropical warmth embraced them: the warmth of Samar and Cebu, and the fiery breath of Saharan expanses. . . .

"Just as I said!" exulted Scarrett.

Owen fingered the small crowbar he carried, and wondered whether it might not be wise to bend it across the Fire Master's head; for somehow it seemed to him that the Fire Master sought his aid for some reason not entirely to Owen's benefit. Still, Scarrett knew so well where the tomb was, and yet spoke of difficulty . . . and moreover, to assault a man from the rear was not the most heroic thing in the world, so that Owen desisted.

At the foot of the interminable sequence of stairs Scarrett halted, his advance barred by the wall of a circular vault. To save his flash lamp, he struck light to a half-burned torch which someone, hundreds of years ago, had left sticking in a crevice of the wall; and by its smoky, resinous flame they examined the curved surface of the masonry.

To the left of the staircase was a niche in the wall, some five feet deep, three feet wide, and five or six in height. Closer scrutiny revealed that the back of the niche was not curved, but flat; and that instead of being of stone, it was of metal.

"Steel!" exclaimed Scarrett. "A door . . . look at the hinge straps . . . and to get at the lock we'll have to demolish the five feet of masonry that was built in front of it. . . . Look! Now you can't doubt!"

Scarrett indicated a half-legible inscription graven into the door:

A double curse on him who violates the tomb of Graf Eberhard von . . .

The rest was too obscure for ready reading; but that sufficed.

Just beyond that door was the Rosicrucian lamp! The Fire Eternal!

"Well, what's a curse more or less?" laughed Scarrett; though his laugh was not quite convincing. "We've got to eat our way through five feet of granite——"

"Yes, and it's cemented together . . . and—good Lord!—each block was bound to its neighbor with molten lead poured into holes drilled from one stone to the next!"

"Dynamite in sufficient quantity to shake it would probably make the staircase collapse and fill up the vault, for it's not as securely built. And to knock the masonry from in front of that door would take the two of us weeks—or months, perhaps. I can't wait that long!"

Owen wondered at the anxiety in the Fire Master's voice. What was *his* game? Why *his* haste?

"There is an old tradition," reflected Scarrett, half aloud. "I've never had the courage to put it to test. . . ."

He took from his vest pocket a piece of chalk and drew on the floor of the vault a circle, in which he inscribed a pentacle; and then at each of the cardinal points of the compass he marked a curious symbol just tangent to the circle.

"Stay outside," protested Scarrett as Owen sought to take position beside him within the circle. "You'll spoil it all. I must work alone!"

Scarrett was too anxious. And Owen remembered a scene in Azerbaijan which he wished he could forget. . . .

"Like hell you must!"

Owen's Luger seconded the contradiction.

"So!" Scarrett smiled with an effort. "So! . . . Well, the advantage is yours. And since you must spoil

my one chance, have it your own way."

"Don't bother, Scarrett. Just call it off. I begin to see why you wanted me to work with you. If I enter that circle, and thus cheat Them out of Their sacrifice, They won't obey you, even if They do come. You see, I once saw that ritual, and I saw what remained of the man who stayed outside the circle."

Scarrett nearly succeeded in masking his wrath and disgust.

"I didn't contemplate *that* ritual. But since you don't trust me, we'll have to pick the masonry to pieces, stone from stone."

"The devil we will! Fire Master, you don't seem to know your fire! I'll turn that trick if I can assemble the stuff."

"How?"

"Wait and see."

And with that he turned and began the ascent to the courtyard, Scarrett following him.

Late that evening, Owen and Scarrett returned to Findelstein, this time leading a pack mule along the circuitous route they had picked to conceal their movements, and misled any of the idly curious who might have observed their departure. And their preparations having been made so stealthily, there was little chance of any shadowing by any inhabitant of Deggendorf.

In the courtyard of Findelstein they unslung the heavily laden pack saddle.

"Help me carry this stuff downstairs," commanded Owen. "Grab the large cylinder; I'll bring the rest."

Scarrett, tottering under the weight of a cylinder of compressed oxygen, led the way. Owen followed, carrying a smaller cylinder, several pieces of apparatus equipped with gages and handwheels, and a coil of rubber tubing.

"I had one hard time getting this stuff together without arousing comment. But thanks to an American-born superintendent of a saw mill out in this forest, I promoted a cutting torch and some gas."

ONCE in the vault, Owen assembled the apparatus, turned on the gas, adjusted the flame so that its heating jets burned in small, blue points of dazzling fire. Then, eyes protected with dark goggles, Owen applied the flame to the door.

"If it only works as well as it did this afternoon!" he muttered as, seeing an incandescent spot develop under the nose of the torch, he released the cutting jet of oxygen under high pressure. A shower of molten metal spattered back; fine, misty, white-hot droplets that seared and seamed his face and dusted through his hair. The torch backfired, sputtered, and went out. Owen relit it, and again applied it, this time with more success. A jagged, smoking-hot fragment of the door, about the size of the palm of his hand, dropped out.

Scarrett rushed to the opening, blinked, dropped his eyes; not because of the glare of the incandescent sides of the hole, but before the immeasurable radiance that sifted out from the other side: brilliant as a host of suns. Despite his goggles, Owen with difficulty faced the ferocity of that awful light.

It came from a bronze vessel, suspended by long chains from the ceiling, with its branched jets gushing silvery flame.

The eternal lamp of Rosenkreutz!

With a shock that left him cold came the realization that this light had been burning for ages, might burn for centuries more, evil and menacing, radiating a curse that even within the next few hours might destroy Freya, unless he quenched it.

The thought of confronting that fearful glare of living radiance froze

him. He shivered in spite of the fierce heat that poured through the opening in the door. He wondered whether he might not shatter the accursed lamp by means of a hod thrust through the hole he had cut, and whether even this device might not cost his life as the price of dissolving the curse.

As if on guard, in the farther end of the tomb, loomed the statuesque figure of a man in full armor of bronze. He sat beside a long table, leaning on his left arm, and holding in his gauntleted right hand a ponderous truncheon whose butt rested against the flagging. The plumed and visored helmet drooped forward in an attitude of sleep; as if relaxed from the vigilance of the guard he stood over the body of an unbelievably lovely girl, the daughter of Graf Eberhard, inanimate, yet with all the semblance of life, reclining on a lofty dais just beneath the everlasting lamp. Surrounding the dais were great chests, half opened, from which blazed the iridescent fire of bloodily glaring rubies, cool, unblinking sapphires, diamonds, and fabulous emeralds. And flanking this treasure he saw other chests, richly carved, and sealed with seals of lead.

The archives of the philosophers! The secrets sought by Scarrett!

As he gazed, there came to mind Scarrett's haste to enter the tomb. . . .

He started violently as one suddenly roused from deep sleep—but not soon enough. The impact of something swiftly traveling and solid shook his brain. Fingers fluttered feverishly at his throat even before he sank to the floor; which mattered not at all to Owen, who was dropping through successions of unplumbed darkness. As he floated to a halt, he sensed that cords were being drawn about his ankles and wrists; that he was trussed securely.

Then—he couldn't estimate the length of that timeless interval during which he had been stunned by the blow from behind—he saw Scarrett regarding him with a smile almost friendly.

"Unless I'm fearfully mistaken about who slugged me one dark night not long ago, you and I are about even. But since you've helped me get in to the treasure, I'll give you a fair deal: you may have whatever I leave of it; if you manage to escape."

Owen's reply was inarticulate.

"Come, come now," chided the Fire Master; "I'll have to leave jewels a-plenty, since one little pack mule couldn't carry them. But, my bright young friend, you may as well forget whatever plans you had, for I am taking the secrets of forgotten thaumaturgy back to a land where *I* shall be power made absolute. There can't be two of us."

And then Scarrett relit the torch and set to work.

Piece after piece of the massive door dropped to the floor. Owen wondered how Scarrett could endure the unearthly radiance that poured out of the tomb.

With infinite effort, Owen contrived to turn his aching head just enough to enable him to follow Scarrett's advance into the tomb. Scarrett was carrying Owen's amulet. And as he advanced, he thrust in front, and to the right, and to the left, in gestures of psychic pointing, chanting as he went.

Long jets of flame hissed from the lamp, enveloped him, but harmed him not at all. And then it dawned on Owen why he had been tapped on the head as soon as Scarrett had picked up the technique of the cutting torch: not only to be uninterrupted in his looting, but to get the amulet without which his occultism might fail before the lamp of Rosenkreutz.

The invader was stooping over the chest of archives.

Then the bronze knight stirred, stretched; paused an instant, and

with incredibly silent swiftness, stood bolt upright!

The plumed warrior lifted his truncheon——

Scarrett, moved by a premonition of doom, half turned. But too late. The truncheon descended, shearing flesh and crushing bone. The fierce flames of the lamp surged forth again; and once more the knight lifted his truncheon to strike. Then a deafening roar, a flash of flame even more devastating—and blackness impenetrable. The last glimpse of light showed Owen that the knight's blow had shattered the Rosicrucian lamp!

A metallic whirring . . . a roar that shook the earth . . . the sound of rushing winds . . . and then the silvery sweet laugh of a woman. . . .

"Free, Father, free from the curse by which you bound us to earth for a vengeance not worth taking . . ."

A tempestuous voice shouted triumphantly in reply.

"Hear, O ye winds of Heaven!" it boomed. "Hear, O mighty Osiris, Anubis, Hawk-headed Thoth! To the blackness of Egypt they return, thy servants who are released from bondage. They return to the Realms of Fire. . . ."

Then on the blackness was imposed a silence even darker.

OWEN had no recollection of his extricating himself from his bonds, nor of his exit from the tomb. The local police said they found him on the road to Deggendorf; and as his wits assembled themselves, Owen checked dates and found that by all reckoning the police had not found him until four days after the opening of the tomb.

His replies to their questions put an end to any further questioning; they tapped their foreheads, nodded wisely when Owen insisted that he was sane, and detailed one of their number to escort the mad American to the nearest American consulate.

The American consul dispensed with questions, much to Owen's satisfaction. And before he could arrange to leave, a radiogram kept him from dismissing the entire episode as the mad fantasy of an Arabian dream. It was from Dr. Blanchard, and read:

The brand has disappeared. Freya awaits your return.

A week later Owen, back in the States, called on the doctor in the latter's study at Ardsley.

"From all I can gather," explained the occultist, "Scarrett's motive in sending von Reinitz to his death was to gain, by experiment, sufficient knowledge of the laws of fire elementals to enable him to cope with the forces emanating from the tomb. Your appearance in Ardsley led him to believe that you, too, were in the same way maneuvering to loot the hoard of Graf Eberhard: so that instead of carrying on his murderous studies and by way of further experiment destroying Freya, he hurried after you, his researches not yet completed. He reasoned that in view of your surviving the fires at Schönbrunn, you had the one missing link in the chain of knowledge; so he proposed working with you.

"Just what he had in mind when he drew that circle before the door of the tomb, I'm not sure: but from your account of it, he must, as you suspected, have contemplated some necromancy by which he hoped to open the tomb: something akin to the Oriental ritual of the seal of Suleiman, whereby all seals are dissolved. And it was fortunate for your sanity that you insisted on stepping into the circle with him.

"Yet in the end, he probably did save your life: for while the amulet protected against the psychic fires, it was no help against the blow of a mace. None of us contemplated that phase of the problem; and had he not been so anxious to take first choice of

the treasure, you might have been the victim of the knight in armor.

"The voices, those of the man and the woman? Why, as I once explained, the spirits of Graf Eberhard and his daughter were earthbound by the very force of the curse they kept alive; so that finally they wearied of vengeance everlasting, and with the shattering of the lamp, rejoiced at their liberation.

"But don't weary me with any more questions! Yes, though she's still weak from her trying experiences, you may have a few words with Freya; say for half an hour. . . . Idiot! You know as well as I do what she'll say!"

A Brief Ghost-Story Is

THE HOUSE ON THE HIGHWAY

By AUGUST W. DERLETH

"WELL, I guess we're here to stay."

"Where are we?"

"Somewhere in Wisconsin — between Madison and Sauk City, wherever that is."

"How far?"

"About half-way, I take it. Here's a hill marked on the map—'Springfield Hill.' That must be the place."

"Yes. Highway twelve; Springfield Hill."

"I wonder if we could 'phone in somewhere?"

"There doesn't seem to be a house in sight."

"Yes! there's one."

"Deserted?"

"Guess so. No, there's a light."

"A lamp! They haven't got a 'phone."

"No, I guess not."

"Well, what'll we do? It's pretty near midnight."

"I suppose we'll have to try to get bunks for the night."

"Just as you say, Doc."

The man called Doc climbed out of the car. He stood there in the drizzling rain while his companion followed him out.

"We'd better push the car off to the side."

"All right."

The two men picked their way carefully through the muddy ruts of the road to the rear of the machine. In a few moments the car was safely placed to the side of the road. Then the men made for the house. It was very dark, and the light of the lamp threw a dim glow about the solitary window through which it shone.

Presently they were knocking at the door. At first there was no answer; they had to repeat the knock a second time. Then an old man opened the door and shambled out to them, peering at them closely from under bushy white eyebrows.

"Hello," said Doc. "We're sorry to have to disturb you at this time of

the night, but our car's broken down. We'd like to know if we could bunk here tonight."

The old man shaded his eyes and looked out toward the road.

"Yes," he said, "I suppose you can."

"We'll gladly pay you for the accommodation."

"Oh! don't mind that," the old man was saying as he led them into a large room upon which the front door opened. "I'm used to company at all hours. No trouble at all; glad to have you."

In the light the travelers had a better view of their host. He appeared very old. The white hair on his head was straggly, but his beard was full. His cheeks were sunken, and in his eyes there was a feverish gleam. He coughed violently once or twice.

"Consumption—last stages," Doc whispered to his companion.

"Do you live alone?" he asked the old man in a louder voice.

"Yes," he answered. "For seven years now. That was when my daughter left me."

"Ran away?"

"No!" He shook his head. "Just left. Got married, I expect."

"Oh!" said Doc, somewhat disconcerted.

His companion cleared his throat and looked around vacantly. "Ever come to see you?"

"No. Hasn't got time. She's too busy nowadays."

"Don't you miss her?"

"Sometimes. Not much. I'm pretty used to living alone now."

The man called Doc glanced around the room. It was almost devoid of furniture; a dilapidated table and two or three very old chairs stood about. That was all. Through a half-open door he looked into the next room. There he could see a low couch, evidently the old man's bed.

"I expect you will want to sleep." The old man rose and threw open the door to the next room, pointing to the couch. "There you are, if you can use it. I'd like to sleep myself, but I always get lots of company during the night."

"Company?"

"Yes. Along about this time. My wife and my sister—they've both been dead going on fourteen years now."

Doc looked at his companion. "Hallucinations," he muttered in an undertone.

The old man coughed into a handkerchief that he had suddenly produced from somewhere.

"Then there's my parents—they always come to see me about 2 o'clock. And my son, who died ten years ago; he comes pretty regular."

"Well," said Doc. "I guess we'll turn in now."

"Go right ahead. I know how it is to be sleepy all night. And if we disturb you just rap on the door."

ALONE in their room the two men looked at each other a moment in strained silence.

"Is he crazy, or what?"

"Mildly, I suppose," answered Doc. "Delusions and hallucinations are pretty common in people in the last stages of consumption. Paranoia hallucinatoria, one might call it."

"Too bad about his daughter leaving him."

"That was funny. Did you notice the way he talked about her? Didn't seem to hold anything against her."

"He's a specimen. Doesn't even seem to know what became of her, and doesn't care. 'Got married, I expect,' he said."

"And getting company at night. At first it made me wonder, but when he began to talk about his dead wife and sister, I knew he was somewhat unbalanced."

"Maybe he does get company. Neighbors dropping in on him, just to humor him along."

"Possible, at any rate."

"Well, I'm going to sleep. It's none of my business."

He went over to the couch and sat down on it. "Good Lord! this couch is damp."

His companion went over to him.

"No wonder he's got consumption."

"The whole place smells musty as the deuce. It'll just take him a couple of months sooner, that's all."

IT WAS almost dawn when Doc woke up. He stretched himself and nudged his companion.

"I'm awake, Doc. Have been since 2 o'clock."

"What's the matter? Place too damp?"

"No. I was trying to hear what the old man and his visitors were talking about."

"Visitors?"

"Yes. He had all of a dozen or more. Neighbors or not, I don't know. They were all old codgers like himself. I looked out on them once. They're gone now, and the old man with them. All night they were talking and mumbling in some God-forsaken language. I couldn't get a word!"

Doc began to laugh. "That's the best ever! I can just see you losing sleep just to hear what that old fellow was talking about."

"Well, it's true; believe it or not."

The old man was not in the room when they emerged from their damp chamber. Somehow everything seemed older than it had looked in the light of the lamp. At sight of the patch of sunlight on the floor, Doc began to whistle.

Though they looked, they could not find the old man. They left at last, to find some place from which to telephone to the nearest town. From the road they looked back at the house. It was very ramshackle, much more so than they had thought, and had all the marks of a deserted house. Somewhat off to the side Doc noticed a "For Sale" sign.

A half-hour later they came upon a farmhouse on the northern slope of the hill. "Hallo!" they called to a man in the yard. The farmer looked up. "Got a telephone we can use?"

"Come in," called the farmer in return.

"You go right up to the house," he continued, as the travelers came closer, "and my wife'll show you where it is."

"Our car broke down last night," said Doc affably, while his companion went on up to the house.

"That so? You look as if you'd slept in a car."

"Oh! we stayed at your neighbor's."

"Which neighbor?"

"The old man who lives down the road a piece. Old white-haired fellow; he's pretty sick, it looks to me."

The farmer looked at him intently. "You stayed at that place?" he said at last in an incredulous voice.

"Yes. It was pretty damp, believe me; and musty, ugh!"

"Well, by God!" The farmer was staring at him in frank disbelief. "By God! I never would have believed it!"

From out of the house came the farmer's wife and Doc's companion.

"By God!" said the farmer for the third time, and turned and saw his wife. "That's his daughter, stranger. But that old man died of consumption seven years ago, come next week!"

An Ancient Tale Is

THE LEGEND OF DENARIUS

By LOUIS SARNO

THE graybeard stirred in his sleep, finally awoke, and peered about him with troubled eyes. Beside his cot sat another graybeard—an abbot, whose head was bent intently over a manuscript of vellum texture which his robed knees supported. Next to this churchman stood a table whereon rested a silver candelabrum, the sputtering lights of which now shaded, now lit up, his smooth, bald pate. Meanwhile the cell vibrated with the momentum of some elemental force.

Queried the bedridden individual: "Brother, what is that noise?"

"Be not disturbed," smiled the abbot, looking up from the manuscript. "It is only a storm."

"A storm?" repeated the other to himself. He shook his body, then sat in his bed and glanced at the Gothic window opposite—the sole opening which the bare cell possessed. Slowly the fingers of his right hand touched the abbot's elbow, caught it in a grip. "Brother," he whispered breathlessly, "help me to rise. I wish to go to yon window and behold how matters fare in the world of men."

The abbot placed the manuscript on the table and gently disengaged his arm from the clutch. "No, no!" he protested softly, womanlike. "I can not permit that. You are too weak. Your poor body can not stand it. Many days must pass ere you rise and walk about. O my brother! You are sicker than you think."

"Ay," agreed the patient gruffly, tossing the bed-sheets aside, "but, methinks, I'm not yet dead."

With a spring, he left the bed and the ecclesiastic's encircling arms and stood on his feet. Old in years though he was, his physique was nevertheless massive, and his muscles were supple. He shook himself, kicked his legs, and laughed to hear the crack of their awakening joints; then he clenched his fists. His features bore a blood-resemblance to the man in the robes, but it could easily be seen that he was no member of any order of the church. Rather, his stalwart figure bespoke a life spent in the saddle, out in God's free fields. Turning to the abbot, who eyed him with horror, he exclaimed: "What means this, brother? Making a sick man out of me when, really, I'm stronger now than ever!"

Speechless remained the other.

Striding to the window, the man threw open the casement. Like a blast from hell the night, the wind, the lightning and the rain entered at the same time and raked the room through and through. He laughed to see his beard spread before him as if it were a fan or a live thing, and to feel the raindrops stampeding his person. Meanwhile the abbot shouted shrilly, almost foolishly, "Shut it! Shut it!" Seeing he was unheeded, he jumped up and closed the casement himself; then, catching his brother, he tried to lead him back to bed. "Lie down! Lie down!" he whimpered. "All night

must I boil herbs for you. And whether or not they will save your life, which this foolish exposure has endangered, rests with God!"

"Tut, tut, man!" laughed the secular person, freeing himself. "Have no fear. I'm not sick, and never was. God never meant me to be. I was only exhausted the other night from the long ride, but you mistook the signs and kept me abed ever since instead of chasing me out of the monastery the very next day."

Worn out, the abbot sank to his seat.

His brother rubbed his palms energetically and searched the room rapidly. At last he questioned: "Where is my armor?"

"Wherefore——?"

"Up, brother, and get me my suit of armor. I must away tonight!"

"Away tonight?"

"To be sure. What is there wrong about that?"

"But the storm——?"

"Is a godsend! Just what I need. The watch will be lax tonight, and I can better enter the city unnoticed."

"You're not returning to that ungrateful city?"

"Ay, I am."

"I'll not fetch your suit!"

"Then I'll go as I am."

"O my brother! Do not leave! Too long have we been separated. Stay here in peace with me and watch the untroubled years go by. Remember the days of our youth? Remember how I always loved your company? Remember our dear mother (God have her in His keeping!)? Remember what she always said to you whenever we two went to some distant town or fair: 'Never leave your brother's side'? Why do you wish to leave me now?"

The warrior was touched. "I can not help it, brother mine," he explained in a thick voice. "I can not remain with you. You are very kind, indeed, and gladly, gladly would I stay, did it depend on me. But it doesn't. My duty calls. I must return. I must free my people!"

Quickly the churchman retorted, almost harshly, "But your own people drove you out!"

The warrior bit his lips. Outside the storm spent its rage unhindered. The casement rattled like the bones of the dead. At length he broke the silence:

"True. Just the same, I must return to them."

"Wherefore?"

"They need me."

With this explanation, he resumed his search for his suit of armor. Hither and thither he sped; scoured every corner; upset everything; finally he spied it in a corner, beneath two sacks of dried herbs and a monk's frock. He dragged it forth triumphantly, then proceeded with the business of donning it.

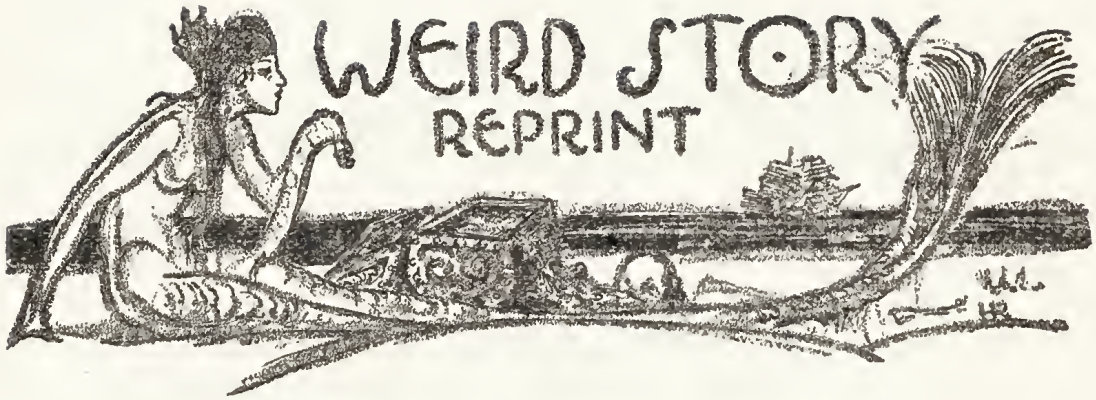
The ecclesiastic watched his brother's operations with unbelieving eyes. "Listen," he said slowly, weighing each word, "if you return they will end by betraying you to the enemy." Quickly his admonition changed to a plea: "Stay with me, O my brother! You have done enough for them, jeopardized enough for them. Your efforts were not appreciated. You can't deny that. They are unworthy, your people. Remain and serve God with me!"

Moodily the warrior meditated. Sensing that he had struck the right cord, the abbot eagerly followed up his advantage.

"Brother, listen! We have a manuscript in our possession here. It is very old. I don't know how long it's been with us. It isn't worth my while to go through the library in order to get it for you because it's written in old Latin and the handwriting is, I must confess, more artistic than legible."

The soldier's eyelids flickered, showing that he was following his brother, although still abstractedly.

(Continued on page 863)



*The Wind That Tramps the World**

By FRANK OWEN

THE little City of the Big Winds lies on the very roof of the world, among the bleak, storm-blown peaks of the Himalayas, as if flung there by some monstrous, frenzied hand, or snapped from the tip of a whip in the hand of a giant. A grayer or more desolate spot would be hard to imagine, or a spot where the tumult of discord is more frightful.

At first John Steppling had been unable to sleep upon his arrival in the city. It was like being in another world, living in a cloudland of drifting shadows where every breath was an effort, and prolonged exertion almost a physical impossibility. He felt like an empty box, strained to the breaking-point by external things, in danger of collapsing at any moment. At night as he gazed toward the stars, he felt as if he could extend his hand and pick them out of the sky, much as one might pick flowers in a fragrant garden. The sky was so intensely clear that it made him gasp, though possibly the rarefied air would have made him gasp in any case.

He had arrived at the city quite by chance during an exploring expedition in northern India. He had intended to remain in the weird little town only for a single day, and yet somehow he could not bring himself to leave it. It held a wild attraction which he could not define.

For the most part the inhabitants of the city were as poor as church mice—poorer, in truth, for they had only the roughest type of mud-thatched huts wherein to live. By occupation they were shepherds. They watched over thin and sickly flocks of sheep and goats that scraped out a meager existence from the barren, half-frozen soil. They were filthy-looking, illiterate and stolid. In lieu of bathing they smeared their bodies with grease. Water was scarce, and they did not waste it; besides, the grease had a tendency to keep them warm. It kept them odoriferous, as well; but to people unused to the sweet perfumes of which the inhabitants of the lands lying south of them were so fond, the odor did not matter.

Among all the shepherds, Steppling could not find a single one who understood his language, nor did any of them seem to care. So long as they did not bother him, he did not bother them. Their visions were so limited that they were unable to grasp any-

* From WEIRD TALES, April, 1925. This story, reprinted here in response to many requests, is now available in book form in a collection of some of the most colorful of Frank Owen's Chinese stories: *The Wind That Tramps the World, and Other Stories*, published by the Lantern Press.

thing beyond their usual scope. When a girl married, she married all the brothers of the family. Naturally, in their connubial arrangements, most of the brothers were diplomatic enough to be away much of the time.

Steppling was charmed by the spirit of mystery that hovered over everything. He longed to get beneath the mask which each person seemed to wear. These people seemed to lack personality; yet personality of some sort they must have had. When they went into their huts, did they just pass into blackness like candles blown out? Did they have any home life at all? He doubted it. Were their affections, hopes, desires, loves, all blunted? Did they ever read? It was like being in a dead city. No one approached him. No one talked to him. He seldom heard a human voice, for the voices of the people were usually drowned by the frightful screeching of the wind through the mountain passes.

Fortunately he had sufficient food with him to last him another month. When that was gone he intended to try to buy food from the natives. In what currency could he pay for it? English currency would be of little use among these savage hillsmen. He was outside British domains. The people did not value money. What they gloated over was food. Although illiterate and dull, they were able to appreciate how fundamentally useless gold is, after all.

Each day Steppling roamed for hours about the wind-swept mountain passes. He climbed to lofty pinnacles almost as sharp as needles. Sometimes he rambled over a tableland of rock so vast that the greatest giants of legend might have sat down comfortably around it without bumping elbows. Not infrequently he even ventured to walk about the native haunts of the city, where sod-thatched huts attested the poverty of the people. But the inhabitants looked at him with hostile glances as he passed. They were not pleased with his manner. They did not like his scrutiny. He, on his part, did not mind their attitude. He had traveled much. He was used to eccentricities. And yet he felt ill at ease.

ONE day he walked farther than usual. The city was small and the houses became less frequent, until finally he arrived at the country beyond. Even then he did not stop until he had reached a long, low house, Chinese in style. In the center was a tall pagoda, whose colorful façade was at strange variance with the drab little city through which he had just passed.

Before the doorway of the house sat an old Chinaman. He was so old, shriveled and shrunken, and his face was so crisscrossed with lines, that he appeared like a mummy. Age seemed to have turned him to stone. He sat without blinking. His parchment-like face was as brown as tanned leather. On his chin was a wisp of beard which eddied fantastically about in the sun. His lips were compressed into a thin line. His eyes looked dully out from beneath half-closed lids. His slant brows would have made his face distinctive even if it had not been distinctive otherwise. He was completely wrapped in a great cloak of alluring color. It was blue, like the midnight sky; yet sometimes, as the light struck it, it seemed to flame green. On his head was a square hat, small and black, like a great black ebony domino.

The old man sat and gazed before him. He seemed to be peering into the future, an old prognosticator crouching before his house. John Steppling stood and stared at the ancient figure. The Chinaman was so small that he resembled a child, a very old child with a wisp of beard.

Steppling was curious. Who was this ancient stranger, this man so different from all the other inhabitants of the desolate city? Nothing he had

beheld since crossing the mountain barriers had so completely captivated his interest. Perhaps, he thought, this man understands English. Despite the Chinaman's extreme age there was an undeniable air of culture about him.

"I wonder," said Steppling, "why they call this town the City of the Big Winds."

The old man did not stir. He seemed carved of stone.

Steppling repeated the sentence. No response. Then he repeated it again in a louder voice.

Finally the old man turned. He shook his shoulders in a peculiar manner, as if trying to escape from his reveries, from the visions which his imagination had conjured up for him.

"What do you wish?" he asked at last, in quaintly accented English.

Steppling did not know what to answer. He was surprized that the old Chinaman understood English. So long had it been since he had conversed with anyone, the question was rather a shock to him.

"If I am not presuming," he said, "I should like to know what you are looking at so intently."

The old man's eyes were like slits. They gleamed in his rough brown face as if they were lighted lamps.

"Looking?" he repeated slowly. "Looking? I was not looking. I was listening to the ceaseless voices of the wind. Most men of earth who believe their sense of hearing is very acute are in reality stone-deaf. To listen truly is a fine art. Anyone can hear a mountain fall, but only a genius can hear the music of a flower unfolding in the sun."

He paused, and gazed off toward the jagged, knife-edged cliffs. Presently he spoke again.

"I am Hi Ling," he said. "To my house you are welcome. No human soul dwells with me. And yet there are other voices besides my own, constantly echoing through my house; for every night I open my windows so that all the great winds can blow through. They are whispering, forever they are whispering. Can you not stay with me a while?"

"Nothing would give me greater pleasure," replied Steppling quickly, and he felt as if he could howl with glee. But he was careful to hide the intensity of his jubilant spirits.

With keen elation he followed the old Chinaman, who now arose and entered the house, if house it could be called, for it was a huge, ambling affair of mystery and shadows. Together they groped their way through multitudinous rooms, silent, weird, vast, through which scarcely even the faintest suggestion of daylight penetrated.

"I keep my house forever dark and shadowy," explained Hi Ling, "so that it may always be in harmony with life."

"You think, then," said Steppling, "that life is clothed in shadows?"

"I do indeed," was the quick response. "The shadows of earth quite outweigh the pleasures. Over almost everyone there is a shadow constantly hanging."

As he spoke they emerged into a great room. The air was fragrant with the pungent perfumes of the East, the incense of aloeswood and musk. In the center of a black platform stood a jade-green vase. In the vase was a single branch, withered and old, a branch whose shriveled appearance suggested the gaunt face of Hi Ling. The flower, if flower there had been, had long ago fallen from it. Above the vase hung a soft-toned yellow lantern, as round and coolly brilliant as an autumn moon rising above a range of mist-crested hills.

Hi Ling prostrated himself. Lying flat on his face before the altar, he chanted in a sad monotone. For perhaps ten minutes he remained thus. Then he rose to his feet. Without a

word he walked across the room and threw open a great, heavily draped window; then he opened a similar window on the other side of the room.

Instantly pandemonium broke loose. It was as if all the winds of earth had congregated outside that window and now came crashing through. They shrieked and laughed in a thousand fantastic tongues. The discord was frightful because it was so intense, so unrestrained. Once Steppling detected a low moan in the wind, almost a sob, but at once it was drowned by the awful laughter.

The wind crashed madly through, as if it would wreck the very building. It caught up the fragrant perfume from the musk-scented air and bore it off into measureless distances. The yellow moon-lantern swayed back and forth as ceaselessly as a pendulum. Only the jade vase remained stationary. The entire building shuddered, but still the vase did not move.

Steppling gripped Hi Ling's arm.

"What does it mean?" he cried.

He pitched his voice to the highest key possible, and even then it seemed as weak as a whisper.

"Is it a tornado, a cyclone?"

Hi Ling shook his head. His ghastly brown face looked more like that of a mummy than ever.

"It is only the wind," he said. "Listen intently. Can you hear voices calling?"

How long the havoc continued Steppling did not know. Time had lost its importance. Something supernatural seemed to have clutched them up in its grip. He felt numb and weak, almost without the power to move.

At last Hi Ling walked across the room and closed the windows. He had to fight until he was practically exhausted to get the mad wind out again. But at last the windows were tightly barred, and peace seemed to touch the room like a caress. The yellow lantern ceased its sway. The pungent perfume bloomed forth again.

THAT night John Steppling sat down to the simplest meal he had ever partaken of in his life. It was composed of rice cakes and tea. The rice cakes were as crisp as mountain air, and the tea was as pungent as it was delicious. They supped in a room lit only by a single lamp, which spluttered feebly as if protesting against the darkness that enveloped the house like a shroud.

After the meal was finished, the old man produced several pipes. They were very black and ominously small. Into the bowl of each he rolled a black, gummy pellet which he had shaped in the palms of his hand.

He held out one to John Steppling.

"Smoke?" he asked, curtly.

But Steppling refused the proffered pipe.

"I would prefer to hear you talk," he said.

"Why do you not listen to the myriads of voices in the wind?" asked Hi Ling drowsily.

"Because my ear is not attuned to catch the sound."

"You do not try. If you really listened, you could hear."

"I would rather hear your voice."

"That is foolish," declared Hi Ling. "No human voice is as softly alluring as the voices one sometimes discovers in the wind."

"Nevertheless," repeated Steppling stubbornly, "I would rather hear you talk."

Hi Ling shrugged his shoulders. He could not understand how anyone should prefer the natural voice to magic.

"What do you wish me to say?" he asked finally.

"Tell me the story of your life," replied John Steppling bluntly, "the story of the jade vase, and of the moon lantern."

Hi Ling hesitated.

"I have never told that to a living soul," he said slowly.

"Nevertheless, you must tell it to me."

"You would only smile," said Hi Ling. "You would hold my story up to ridicule, and if you did I would kill you. I should hate to do that. Never in my life has the blood of any animal been upon my hands."

"Scarcely a compliment," drawled Steppling, "to call me an animal."

He was not angry. He merely made the comment to draw on conversation.

"I meant no offense," Hi Ling assured him. "I spoke the truth, for surely, if you are neither a fish nor a fowl, you must be an animal."

"You are right," agreed Steppling. "I agree with you on every point. Therefore I think it but fitting that you tell me your story."

Again Hi Ling hesitated. But finally he acquieseed.

"YEARS ago," Hi Ling began, "I lived in southern China. I was very wealthy. My ancestors had all contributed their share to the measure of my holdings. By profession I was a horticulturist. Even though forty years have passed, the glory of my gardens is still recounted throughout southern China in innumerable quaint tales of fantasy. I raised all sorts of flowers, but I specialized in jasmine, eglantine and wisteria blossoms, particularly wisteria. I had a passion for the flowers, as great as that of any sultan for the veiled ladies of his harem. So intent was I on the contemplation of my flowers, that I seldom left the garden. Sometimes I did not even return to my house to sleep. Instead, I reclined in a charming grove at the back of my buildings, where I could hear the tinkle of a tiny rivulet, and where hundreds of gorgeous flowers breathed into the air a perfume that made me drowsy and caressed me to sleep.

"To me that garden was filled with soft-sweet voices. Flowers talk, or perhaps it would be more descriptive to say they sing; but it is given to few people of earth to hear their wondrous melodies. Of these few, I was one.

"Day by day I studied the language of flowers. I became a hermit. As time went on I never left my garden. All else was forgotten in the contemplation of gorgeous orchids, sweet-scented jasmine and seductive eglantine. I forsook human life for floral, and in my renouncing I gained much.

"In my garden there grew a single fragile flower, orchid-like in glory, but of a species quite different from any I had ever chanced upon before. It had the soft, warm color of a tea rose, with a tint of carmine faintly suggested in the petals, which were as velvet-soft as the cheek of a maiden.

"By the hour I used to sit and listen to the sweet singing of that perfect flower. The tinkle of a fairy bell would almost seem harsh by comparison. Is it any wonder, then, that I fell in love with that flower? The wonder is that the flower seemed equally enamored of me. It glowed more beauteously as I approached it. It swayed toward me. As I put down my head to breathe of the exotic fragrance, it gently caressed my lips, and the caress was softer than the kiss of the loveliest woman.

"In time I grew to call the flower 'Dawn-Girl.' No lover of romance was more enraptured by his dear one than I. That garden became for me a sacred place. Great peace stole into my heart. The miracle of love had been performed anew. Like night and day it goes on endlessly. When love dies out on earth, then will the sun grow cold.

"I was supremely happy, but my happiness was not to last. Into my life, as into the life of every man, there came a shadow. 'The Wind

that Tramps the World' chanced to blow through the garden. He beheld the exquisite beauty of 'Dawn-Girl,' and he paused. For the first time in years he was subdued and silent. He had tramped through every country and clime of the world, over every mountain and every sea. He had beheld the grandeur of Greece and Rome and all the other fabulous cities, but never had he chanced upon any lovely sight comparable to that of 'Dawn-Girl.'

"From that day forth he wooed her ardently. Each night he came to the garden, singing fervid love lyries. He brought her all the rarest jewels and tapestries of dazzling sunlight, which he tossed upon the ground before her. He even impregnated the cool night dew with all the famed perfumes of earth, so that as it fell upon her it would be more entieing than even the sun-glare. But it availed him not. She cared not at all for his gifts, continuing to bend toward me, as of yore. This greatly incensed 'The Wind that Tramps the World.' He who had wrecked cities, had leveled trees and stately palaces, now was impotent before this lovely girl-flower.

"His anger was frightful. He roared about the city so ferociously that people fled to their homes in fear, dreading the force of the tropical storm which they imagined was about to engulf them. The great Wind planned vengeance. One night while I slept, he whisked 'Dawn-Girl' from her branch and sped off on his old, old tramp which never ends.

"In the morning I awoke with an unaccountable fear clutching my heart. As usual, I had slept in the grove. I jumped to my feet and rushed toward the bush where 'Dawn-Girl' dwelt, but it was empty. And my heart, my life, was empty also. The shadow of doom had descended upon me. For three days I wept in the garden, and all my flower friends closed their glorious blooms in sympathy. The entire garden wept. It was a place of mourning. Some of the flowers even died of grief.

"On the morning of the fourth day I went with heavy step to the house of an old Hindoo philosopher who had lived for a hundred and forty years. He was said to be the oldest living man in the world, and also the wisest. He listened to my story. When I had finished, he told me to come to this city in the Himalayas, where all the great winds congregate. Here comes every wind of importance at some time or other. To this place, he declared, must some day come 'The Wind that Tramps the World.' When it does, he suggested that I steal 'Dawn-Girl' from the Wind, even as the Wind had stolen 'Dawn-Girl' from me.

"So I sold my garden, although it tore my soul to do so, and came up here to 'The City of the Big Winds.' I had this huge house built. It cost a vast sum of money. All the wood and material it contains had to be carried laboriously over the winding mountain passes that divide this country from India. I had two great windows built in the room of the jade vase. When these windows are flung open all the winds come crashing through.

"I have been here for forty years. Forty years have I failed, but I have not lost courage. There is always tomorrow, and tomorrow, on endlessly. Some day 'The Wind that Tramps the World' will come, and when he does, I shall be ready for him."

THUS the old Chinaman ended his story, and Steppling did not comment upon it. There seemed nothing to say. He was surprized at the story, but then he had traveled much in the world, and much had he heard that surprized him. It set many unan-

swerable queries floating in his mind. Was Hi Ling sane? For that matter, was he sane himself?

All through the night he sat at the door of the house of Hi Ling. He could not sleep. His brain was a cauldron of seething, fantastic thoughts. He was on the roof of the world. Much could he see that was invisible to the millions of people down in the valleys of Earth. The sky was as brilliant as a diamond-studded crown. It bore down upon him, crushing him beneath the weight of its splendor. He was breathing hard. The air was so rarefied that even in the night he could see for miles about him. From the jagged mountain peaks came the constant din and babble of the winds. On up they came from the valleys on a constant trail that is very old—nobody knows how old.

During the days that followed John Steppling felt as if he were living in a dream. The house, the moon-lantern, Hi Ling, all seemed but wraiths in a rather pleasant sleep. Hi Ling took his continued presence as a matter of course. Every night before they supped, Hi Ling opened the massive windows of the room of the jade vase, and the winds came tumbling through. Night after night the selfsame happenings were repeated and yet they never seemed to grow monotonous. Hi Ling endeavored to teach him the art of listening, but his efforts were in vain.

ONE night, as Hi Ling opened the windows, the blast that drove in was so intense that it shook the house as if it had been on rockers. It bellowed and roared like a lion with a thorn in its foot. By comparison, the other winds which had drifted through seemed to possess much culture. The moon-lantern swayed perilously.

Hi Ling seized Steppling's arm. His face was more cadaverous and drawn than ever. His fingers bit into the flesh like talons.

"It is the Wind," he muttered hoarsely.

How can one describe the events that followed? Hi Ling seemed to have gone stark mad. He pranced about the room with as much agility as an ape in a jungle swamp. His mouth was drawn back until his decayed yellow teeth showed like fangs. All the while he chanted a wild, weird refrain which occasionally rose above the howling of "The Wind that Tramps the World."

Involuntarily John Steppling shrank back into the shadows of the farthest corner of the room. He shivered. He was gripped by a crushing fear, which he could not shake from him. He knew that events of great portent in the life of Hi Ling were about to happen. For forty years Hi Ling had waited for this moment.

Fascinated, Steppling watched the actions of the old Chinaman. At times Hi Ling gyrated like a whirling dervish. Sometimes he sprang into the air as if clutching the moon-lantern. Froth foamed horribly in the corners of his lips.

As the actions of Hi Ling grew more fanatical, the intensity of the Wind increased. It struck against the ears like something solid. And all the time Steppling listened intently, more intently than he had ever listened before. He thought he heard the sound of singing, in a voice sweet-low and sadder than the autum breeze through the tree-tops. He strained every effort. His heart even slowed down to catch the melody, so superb was its beauty. At first he imagined that his ears were at fault, that the beautiful notes existed only in his subconscious mind, but even as the thought occurred to him, he banished it. A sound so beautiful could not be buried in his subconsciousness, for never in his life had he heard music

of such haunting beauty. At that moment he became almost as mad as Hi Ling. He knew that he had heard the voice of "Dawn-Girl," and he did not wonder that Hi Ling had renounced all else in the world for love of her.

For a while longer the singing continued; then it ceased. It ended on a final beautiful note that was almost a moan.

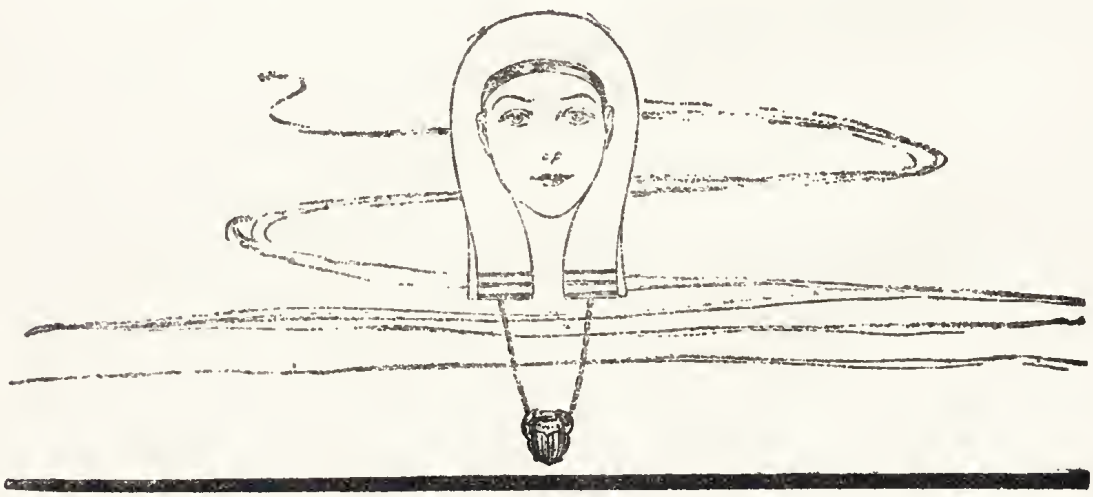
With a start, Steppling came back to reality. The room was now in total darkness. The moon-lantern had been ruthlessly torn from its hanging. Now the fury of the Wind increased, if increase it could. Occasionally Hi Ling uttered a cry of excitement, of anger or delight. And the Wind roared back in a tremendous voice which Steppling construed as a threat. How long the fight continued Steppling could not tell. He crouched in his corner, as nervous as a newborn kitten that is snatched from its mother.

DAWN came at last. As it did so the Wind passed out of the window, to return no more. As the first shafts of the sun cut over the jagged mountain peaks and crept into the room, John Steppling gazed cautiously about him. Hi Ling lay prone on the floor before the altar. Steppling rushed to his side. He turned the limp body over, but it was useless. The chest had been completely crushed. Hi Ling had collapsed, even as an old frail house might collapse in a cyclone.

For a moment Steppling gazed down upon the face, but it was no longer old and lined with age. It was the face of a youth. There was a bit of warm red color in the cheeks, and the mouth was smiling. Steppling gazed slowly toward the jade vase. The withered branch was withered no longer. Life had come to it again, for on the branch was a flower of the soft warm color of a tea rose, but unlike any flower he had ever known before. The fragrant, cool petals were as velvet-soft as the cheek of any maiden.

Again John Steppling turned to Hi Ling, and he was not surprized that even in death he looked young. For youth had come to him in the return of "Dawn-Girl." Old age at best is mainly a matter of attitude.

An hour later John Steppling left the long, ambling old house. But before he went, he again lighted the moon-lantern and placed the lovely flower on the breast of Hi Ling. Even as he left he heard the sound of singing, and the notes were joyous and wonderfully sweet.



A FRIEND of WEIRD TALES recently remarked that not only does this magazine publish a multitude of fascinating stories, but that it also prints more *great* stories than any other magazine in the world, in his opinion. He said that he was certain of finding in every third or fourth issue a story so superb as to deserve rank with the world's classics. One of these masterworks of fiction, to judge by the acclaim of the many readers who have written in to express their opinion, is *The Dunwich Horror,* by H. P. Lovecraft, in our April issue.

A. V. Pershing of St. Paul, Indiana, writes to the Eyrie: "I have just finished *The Dunwich Horror* by the great H. P. Lovecraft. I am a graduate of Indiana University and have taught physics in the high schools for six years. During this time I have read stories by some 'real' authors; for instance, I have read all of Shakespeare's plays, and many of Poe's works. I say that Lovecraft has an uncanny, nearly superhuman power of transporting one bodily to scenes of his unparalleled 'horrors' and forcing upon us the exquisite pleasure of 'living' the story, so that he (the reader) experiences actual meetings with the shadowy demons of Older Earth. The bare remembrance of such matter-of-fact acquaintances with the gibberish 'terrors' of his pen freezes my brain, the while my thoughts scatter and flee panic-stricken to the crumbling recesses of ancient hyper-space where laughing, screeching demons of all the crystallized filth and anguish of a universe obscenely chant the death orgies of the insane existence we term 'reality.' Some day I hope to purchase a classic, containing all of Lovecraft's works so far published in WEIRD TALES. I like best a *weird* WEIRD TALES. Again I say that surely Lovecraft is as great a writer as ever lived. Where does this genius live and how old is he?"

Writes Jack T. Whitfield, of Penn Yan, New York: "I have just finished reading about the best story I have ever read in the three and a half years I have been reading your extraordinary magazine. To me H. P. Lovecraft has outdone himself in *The Dunwich Horror.* It held me more deeply than any story I have read in some time. Since I can not find words to express my appreciation of this story, let it suffice that I find it utterly enthralling. I am

heartily in favor of having the older stories (say of four and five years ago) returned to your pages in the form of weird story reprints. I have heard so much about *The Wind that Tramps the World,* Lovecraft's *The White Ship,* Donald Wandrei's *The Red Brain,* and many others, that I am awfully anxious to read them. I am very fond also of August W. Derleth's stories."

Jack Conroy, of Toledo, Ohio, writes to the Eyrie: "When I first read the announcements of WEIRD TALES, several years ago, I was interested; but I was sure that such a magazine—differing so widely from the 'confessions' and 'they-lived-happily-ever-after' type so popular with the Great American Reading Public—would never be successful. I am happy to see that there *is* a group of readers who appreciate literary excellence enough to support WEIRD TALES. Such stories as S. Fowler Wright's *The Rat,* which was far and away the best story in the March issue, will build an enviable reputation and set a literary standard as yet unapproached by other magazines publishing weird stories. I hope you will soon publish a book-length serial by Mr. Wright. Another story —a short one—*The Chemical Brain* in the January issue, by an author named Flagg (I have forgotten his first name), possessed a distinctive style which is not usually encountered in anything less than the fifty cent magazines, and not frequently in them. I hope you will publish other stories by Flagg. The best story in the current issue (April) is, of course, *The Dunwich Horror.* Lovecraft can not be surpassed. *The World-Wrecker* is good, and the rest of the material up to standard."

"I note with interest and some amusement," writes Bernard Austin Dwyer, of Kingston, New York, "the frequently expressed opinions as to who is WEIRD TALES' best writer—as if there could be any question! Lovecraft is of course so far above the others that there can be no comparison. I will make exception in favor of Wandrei: he possesses real artistic feeling, and a sense of color and audacity of imagination seldom equaled. Clark Ashton Smith is a genius, as impossible to duplicate as are the faery fantastical forests traced by the frosts on winter mornings. I wish I could see much more of Smith's work. But excepting these two there is nobody who deserves mention in the same breath with Lovecraft. Lovecraft never descends to anti-climax—never starts 'in a wild weird clime' and ends in one's own back yard —no; with every word the reader feels the horror more engulfing—the terror of abysmal outer spaces, and unguessed chasms of infinity. I regard him as the greatest weird writer living today. *The Outsider—The Picture in the House—The Rats in the Walls—The White Ship*—and last, but by no means least, *The Dunwich Horror!* I can not find words sufficiently to declare my admiration of his virginity of conception—the weird, outré, unhackneyed, fully satisfying depth of colorful imagery and fantasy—as strange, as terrible, and as alien to the land of our everyday experiences as a fever-dream. Lovecraft, I am sure, will in after days be noticed as one of the very greatest writers of the weird and the grotesque that ever lived. Indeed I consider him as equal to Bierce and Blackwood, and at times equal to Poe—*The Outsider,* for

(Continued on page 854)

FUTURE ISSUES

A WEALTH of fascinating stories is scheduled for early publication in WEIRD TALES, the unique magazine. The brilliant success of WEIRD TALES has been founded on its unrivaled, superb stories of the strange, the grotesque and the terrible—gripping stories that stimulate the imagination and send shivers of apprehension up the spine—tales that take the reader from the humdrum world about us into a deathless realm of fancy—marvelous tales so vividly told that they seem very real. WEIRD TALES prints the best weird fiction in the world today. If Poe were alive he would undoubtedly be a contributor. In addition to creepy mystery stories, ghost-tales, stories of devil-worship, witchcraft, vampires and strange monsters, this magazine also prints the cream of the weird-scientific fiction that is written today—tales of the spaces between the worlds, surgical stories, and stories that scan the future with the eye of prophecy. Among the amazing tales in the next few issues will be:

OUTSIDE THE UNIVERSE, *by Edmond Hamilton*

The most imaginative and daring interplanetary story ever written—a colossal novel about outer space—three universes at death grips—a story that fairly takes the reader's breath away.

THE SHADOW KINGDOM, *by Robert E. Howard*

A fascinating weird tale of the ancient kingdom of Valusia, of Kull the King, and Brule the Spear-slayer, and grisly serpent shapes.

THE PURPLE SEDAN, *by Lois Lane*

An unusual ghost-story, involving a strange-colored automobile and the solution of a shocking murder.

THE INN OF TERROR, *by Gaston Leroux*

A powerful new story of stark realism and uncanny, gripping horror, by the author of "The Phantom of the Opera."

THE WISHING-WELL, *by E. F. Benson*

A vivid story of a weird Cornish superstition, black magic, and the gruesome power of an elemental, by a well-known British weird story writer.

THE DEATH TOUCH, *by Chester L. Saxby*

Frozen in the ice they found Yardley, there in the southern wastes, and his cold, clutching fingers sapped the vital magnetism from the bodies of the crew, leaving them white as leprosy.

DEMON DOOM OF N'YENG SEN, *by Bassett Morgan*

The author of "The Devils of Po Sung" returns again to the South Seas for another gripping tale of brain-transplantation and horrors unspeakable.

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(Continued from page 852)

instance. Of Seabury Quinn's *The Phantom Farmhouse* in your last issue, I can not speak too highly. That is a thing of poignant, pathetic beauty, full of a moon-filled and tender sylvan atmosphere through which flit shapes of hor-hor—the Undead."

Writes T. Windsor, of Greenville, Mississippi: "I have resisted the temptation to write my friendly criticism of WEIRD TALES since I first saw your magazine, but have finally surrendered; hence this letter. I am a professional artist and magician, and have read your magazine for about two years; in many little ways I have secured valuable hints and ideas from WEIRD TALES which I have used to good advantage in my magic show. Aside from that, I have enjoyed nearly every story in WEIRD TALES—they are entertaining to the nth degree. We of this business seldom have an opportunity to attend other places of amusement, but I feel as if I have the best entertainment available when I secure the latest copy of WEIRD TALES in my hands. I also wish to record myself in favor of having the Jules de Grandin stories in book form. Seabury Quinn certainly has created a wonderful character in Dr. de Grandin. He knows how to tell his story well, too; in other words, he is 'familiar with his spooks'."

Readers, what is your favorite story in this issue? It will help us to keep the magazine in accord with your desires if you will let us know your likes and dislikes. Your favorite story in the April issue was *The Dunwich Horror* by H. P. Lovecraft, as shown by your votes. Seabury Quinn's tale, *The Devil's Rosary*, took second place.

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The Abysmal Invaders

(Continued from page 753)

ness of the great shaft, flashing up that shaft amid a thundering of confined winds. Over the raging of those winds Rowan shouted in the other's ear.

"They've gathered down there!" he cried. "When the disk goes down again they'll come up with it, after us! We have only minutes——"

Morton shouted back. "The switch! If we could open that wheel-switch up there, let loose those fires below——"

Rowan gasped. The switch! That switch which the lizard-men had themselves prepared, to use after they had all come up from their cavern-world. If they could open it, could release upon that cavern-world the raging fires which pressed against its walls, it would mean annihilation for the lizard-people and all their giant reptile hordes. If they could——

Abruptly he grasped the other's arm, pointed mutely upward. Far above them a spark of pale white light was glimmering, a spark that changed to a spot and then to a little circle of pallid light as their disk-platform flashed up toward it with tremendous speed. And now, as that circle of white light widened, the disk was beginning to slow its speed a little, the downward-flashing metal walls beside them were moving past them more slowly. Up, up the great disk lifted, while the two men crouched tensely at its edge, and then it had floated up until it hung level with the mouth of the great shaft, beneath the radiance of the suspended bulb.

It was night once more on earth, Rowan knew, but the brilliance of the white bulb overhead was daz-

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Watch for these stories in WEIRD TALES

zlingly revealing as the disk swept up to hang at the shaft's mouth. In the moment that it hung there both he and Morton threw themselves from it onto the surface of the mound, and then as the great disk sank downward once more into the shaft they saw that their movement had not been observed, since the only figures on the mound were a half-dozen of the lizard-men armed with the white heat-beam globes, who lounged near the great three-pillar switchboard, at the opposite edge of the mound from the two men. They had not turned as the great disk reached the shaft's mouth and sank again, and after a moment of crouching Morton whispered to Rowan, who crept slowly off the mound in obedience to that whisper and into the shelter of the dark bordering forest around it. There he began to slip through the trees, stealthily, while on the mound itself he saw Morton crawling snakelike around the great shaft's edge toward the switchboard. Minutes passed while the two crept on, from different sides, minutes that seemed eternities to Rowan, and then he had reached the edge of the mound near the switchboard and was gathering himself for a dash toward it. And in that moment he was discovered. There was a harsh cry from one of the lizard-men guards at the mechanism and instantly two of them had leapt toward him, across the mound.

ROWAN sprang to his feet, but before he could gain the surface of the mound he was borne down by the charging of the two scaled shapes, thrust back into the swamp from the mound's edge and struggling in their grip. He heard another cry, glimpsed the other guards on the mound springing toward Morton, who had half risen; then all other sounds in his ears, the rasping cries of his opponents, the deafening winds from the great pit, the panting of his own breathing as he whirled about—all these sounds were suddenly dwarfed by a sound that came to his ears like the thunder of doom, a deep, throaty bellowing coming faintly as though from far beneath but growing swiftly louder, nearer, coming up the shaft from the ascending disk there!

"Morton!" he cried. "*Morton!*"

Then he saw Morton whirl sidewise from the guards who ran toward him, saw him leap toward the great switchboard and toward the wheel-switch at its center, felt himself thrust backward as his two opponents rushed back onto the mound with frantic cries. At the same moment the giant disk swept up again to the shaft's mouth, hanging there, crowded with massed lizard-men and a half-dozen of the huge tyrannosaurs. Out toward Morton leapt these gleaming-fanged monsters, and from a score of the lizard-men on the disk and on the mound there stabbed toward him rays of pallid light. But in the second before those deadly rays could be released Morton had grasped the great wheel, had spun it around in one frantic motion. The next moment the machine and Morton beside it had vanished in a flare of blinding flame, but even as they did so there came from far beneath a gigantic rumbling and crashing, a rending crash as of riven worlds, while the ground beneath Rowan swayed and rocked violently. The next moment there had burst up the shaft a vast gush of crimson fire, a molten flood bursting up from the suddenly released seas of molten fires below, annihilating the great disk that hovered in the shaft, raining in fiery death upon all on the mound, falling hissingly into the water and slime about Rowan. Then was another rumbling crash and the mound itself seemed to buckle, collapse, as the walls of the great shaft

below it collapsed, and then before Rowan there lay only a vast, smoking gouge in the earth, with no sign of life in it.

For minutes Rowan stared, unable to credit the miracle which had taken place before his eyes, which had thrust back the lizard-men and all their dinosaur hordes at the last moment, annihilating them in their cavern world far below by the switch they had themselves prepared, by the molten fiery seas of earth's heart which Morton's hand had loosed upon them. But for all the incredulous emotion within him he could find no words, could but stretch out his hands speechlessly toward the steaming pit before him.

And then suddenly he became aware that he was weeping. . . .

7

It was hours later that Rowan stumbled at last out of the great swamp and westward across the rolling fields toward Brinton. Behind him the first pale light of dawn was welling up from beneath the horizon, and as he went on the fields about him lay misty and ghostlike beneath that increasing light. Then, as he came wearily to the crest of a little rise of ground, he paused, gazing ahead.

Before him there lay in the distance the ruins of Brinton, a great mass of blackened wreckage in which was no sign of movement, and from which arose no sound of life. So silent was it, so wrapped round with the unutterable stillness and soundlessness of death, that it seemed to Rowan, standing there, that he must needs be the last living creature in the world, the last living man.

Yet it was not so, he knew. Out beyond the shattered city, out in those other cities beyond the horizon, out over all earth's surface,

there would be running men, and the fleeing of panic-driven crowds, and all the fear and horror which the invaders from the abyss had loosed upon the world. But soon would come an end to that. Soon those fear-driven throngs would be drifting back, returning, would be learning how those dark invaders had been thrust back, annihilated, the destiny of their race shattered by a single man. Soon . . .

Rowan looked on at the silent, ruined town, his lips moving. "You alone, Morton!" he was whispering. "You—alone!"

Then, as he stood there, the pallid light about him changed, deepened, while from behind him there shot forth long rays of yellow light. Beneath the magic of their alchemy the whole world seemed transfigured suddenly from gray to glowing gold. But Rowan never turned, never moved, standing still motionless there on the crest, gazing westward, a black, lone little figure against the splendor of the rising sun.

VAMPIRE

By **BERTRANDE HARRY SNELL**

Up from the moor came Guldah, with laughter in her eyes,
And oh! her skin was like the snow that on the Jungfrau lies,
And oh! her form was perfect as mortal form can be;
Up from the moor came Guldah, like Venus from the sea.

The mist hung dank and heavy above the reeking sod,
A dark and evil vapor, breath of a fallen god;
Each rotting hulk and carcass, that in the foul tarn lay,
Gave forth a slobbering, slithering sigh, as Guldah came that day.

Up from the moor came Guldah, the souls of men to kill,
And oh! she bent the strongest to answer to her will:
Her laughing eyes made promise—they promised, but they lied—
She took men to her bosom, she kissed them and they died!

For on the lips that Guldah kissed, the beast-mark could be seen,
Mark of the awful vampire that hid 'neath beauty's screen;
Up from the moor came Guldah, her lips a scarlet pout,
But oh! her teeth were were-teeth, to let men's life-blood out!

Back to the moor went Guldah when she had drunk her fill
Of the red, red milk she needed to keep her devil still;
And the yawning hell-pit opened and the ghastly vapors curled,
While fast and ever faster the bat-winged goblins whirled.

Up from the moor comes Guldah, whene'er her devil stirs;
And I who saw her beauty, am waiting to be hers,
And I, who know her laughter is but a vampire's lie,
Still wait for Guldah's vampire kiss—one kiss, and then **I die!**

The House of Golden Masks

(Continued from page 740)

slow and accompanied by much waving of hands and fluttering of fans.

The master of ceremonies began crooning a low, singsong tune in time with the plink-plink of the banjo. "*Chonkina—chonkina,*" he chanted; then with a slapping clap of his hands:

"*Hoi!*"

Dance and music came to a frozen stop. The four girls held the posture they had when the call came, assuming the strained, unreal appearance of a motion picture when the film catches in the projecting reel.

For a moment there was a breathless silence, then a delighted roar from the audience; for the fourth girl, caught with one foot and hand upraised, could not maintain the pose. Vainly she strove to remain stone-still, but despite her efforts her lifted foot descended ever so slightly.

A guttural command from the show-master, and she paid the forfeit, unfastening her girdle and dropping it to the floor.

A wave of red mantled her throat and face to the very rim of her golden mask as she submitted, but the forced, unnatural smile never left her painted lips as the music and dance began afresh at the master's signal.

"*Hoi!*" Again the strident call, again the frozen dance, again a girl lost and discarded a garment.

On and on the bestial performance went, interminably, it seemed to me, but actually only a few minutes were required for the poor, bewildered girls, half fainting with shame and fear of torture, to lose call after call until at last they danced only in their cotton *tabi,* and even these were discarded before the audience would cry enough and the master release them from their ordeal.

Gathering up their fallen clothes,

sobbing through lips which still fought valiantly to retain their constrained smiles, the poor creatures advanced once more to the platform's edge, once more knelt and touched their brows to the floor, then ran from the stage, only the fear of punishment holding their little baked feet to the short, sliding steps of their artificial run rather than a mad dash for sanctuary from the burning gaze and obscene calls of the onlookers.

"*Dieu de Dieu,*" de Grandin fumed, "will not the troopers ever come? Must more of this shameless business go on?"

A MOMENT later the showman was speaking again: "Let us now give undivided attention to the next number of our program," he was announcing suavely.

Something white hurtled through the archway behind him, and a girl clothed only in strings of glittering rhinestones about throat, wrists, waist and ankles was fairly flung out upon the stage, where she cowered in a perfect palsy of terror. Her hands were fettered behind her by a six-inch chain attached to heavy golden bracelets, and an odd contrivance, something like a bit, was fastened between her lips by a harness fitted over her head, making articulate outcry impossible. Behind her, strutting with all the majesty of a turkey-cock, came a man in the costume of a South American *vaquero*—loose, baggy trousers, wide, nail-studded belt, patent leather boots and broad-brimmed, low-crowned hat of black felt. In his hand was a coiled whip of woven leather thongs—the bull-whip of the Argentine pampas.

"God and the devil!" swore de Grandin, his teeth fairly chattering in rage. "I know it; it is the whipping dance—he will beat her to insensibility—I have seen such shows in Buenos Aires, Friend Trowbridge, but may Satan toast me in his fires if I witness it again. Come, my friend, it is time we taught these swine a lesson. Do you stand firm and beat back any who attempt to pass. Me, I go into action!"

Like some ponderous engine of olden times he strode forward, the joints of his armor creaking with unwonted use.

For a moment guests and servants were demoralized by the apparition descending the stairs, for it was as if a chair or sofa had suddenly come to life and taken the field against them.

"Here, wash all thish, wash all thish?" demanded a maudlin young man with drunken truculence as he swaggered forward to bar the Frenchman's way, reaching for his hip pocket as he spoke.

De Grandin drew back his left arm, doubled his iron-clad fingers into a ball and dashed his mailed fist into the fellow's face.

The drunken rake went down with a scream, spewing blood and teeth from his crushed mouth.

"*Awai, a bhut*!*" cried one of the servants in terror, and another took up the cry: "A *bhut!* a *bhut!*"

Two of the men seized long-shafted halberds from an ornamental stand of arms and advanced on the little Frenchman, one on each side.

Clang! The iron points of their weapons rang against his visor-bars, but the fine-tempered, hand-wrought steel that had withstood thrust of lance and glaive and flying cloth-yard arrow when Henry of England led his hosts to victory at Agincourt held firm, and de Grandin hardly wavered in his stride.

Then, with halberd and knife and wicked, razor-edged simitar, they were on him like a pack of hounds seeking to drag down a stag.

De Grandin strode forward, striking left and right with mailed fists, crushing a nose here, battering a mouth

*Demon.

there, or smashing jaw-bones with the iron-shod knuckles of his flailing hands.

My breath came fast and faster as I watched the struggle, but suddenly I gave a shout of warning. Two of the Hindoos had snatched a silken curtain from a doorway and rushed de Grandin from behind. In an instant the fluttering drapery fell over his head, shutting out sight and cumbering his arms in its clinging folds. In another moment he lay on his back, half a dozen screaming Indians pinioning his arms and legs.

I rushed forward to his rescue, but my movement was a moment too late. From the front door and the back there came a sudden, mighty clamor. The thud of gun-butts and riot sticks on the panels and hoarse commands to open in the law's name announced the troopers had arrived at last.

Crash! The front door splintered inward and four determined men in the livery of the State Constabulary rushed into the hall.

A moment the Hindoos stood at bay; then, with waving swords and brandishing pikes they charged the officers.

They were ten to four, but odds were not with numbers, for even as they sprang to the attack there sounded the murderous *r-r-r-rat-tat-tat* of an automatic rifle, and the rank of yelling savages wavered like growing wheat before a gust of summer wind, then went down screaming, while the acrid, bitter fumes of smokeless powder stung our nostrils.

"NOM *d'un porc, mon lieutenant,* you came not a moment too soon to complete a perfect night's work," de Grandin complimented as we prepared to set out for home. "Ten tiny seconds more and you should have found nothing but the deceased corpse of Jules de Grandin to rescue, I fear."

From the secret closets of the house the girls' clothing had been rescued,

wire-clippers in willing hands had cut away the degrading golden masks from the captives' faces, and Ewell Eaton, the three sorority sisters and the poor little shop-girl whose disappearances had caused such consternation to their families were ready to ride back to Harrisonville, two in the troopers' side-cars, the rest in hastily improvised saddles behind the constables on their motorcycles.

"We did make monkeys out of 'em, at that," the young officer grinned. "It was worth the price of admission to see those guys in their dress suits trying to bluff us off, then whining like spanked kids when I told 'em it would be six months in the workhouse for theirs. Gosh, won't the papers make hash of *their* reputations before this business is over?"

"Undoubtlessly," de Grandin assented. "It is to be deplored that we may not lawfully make hash of their so foul bodies, as well. Me, I should enormously enjoy dissecting them without previous anesthesia. However, in the meantime——"

He drew the young officer aside with a confidential hand upon his elbow, and a brief, whispered colloquy followed. Two minutes later he rejoined me, a satisfied twinkle in his eye, the scent of raw, new whisky on his breath.

"*Barbe d'un chameau*, he is a most discerning young man, that one," he confided, as he wiped his lips with lavender-bordered silk handkerchief.

Watch for further eery adventures of Jules de Grandin in this magazine. Shortly to appear will be three of his most spectacular exploits: "The Corpse-Master," "Trespassing Souls," and "The Silver Countess."

STATEMENT OF THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, CIRCULATION, ETC., REQUIRED BY THE ACT OF CONGRESS OF AUGUST 24, 1912,

Of Weird Tales, published monthly at Indianapolis, Indiana, for April 1, 1929.

State of Illinois } ss.
County of Cook }

Before me, a notary public in and for the State and county aforesaid, personally appeared Wm. R. Sprenger, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the Business Manager of the Weird Tales and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management (and if a daily paper, the circulation), etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption required by the Act of August 24, 1912, embodied in section 411, Postal Laws and Regulations, printed on the reverse of this form, to wit:

1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business manager are:

Publisher—Popular Fiction Publishing Company, 2457 E. Washington St., Indianapolis, Ind.

Editor—Farnsworth Wright, 840 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill.

Managing Editor—None.

Business Manager—William R. Sprenger, 840 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill.

2. That the owner is: (If owned by a corporation, its name and address must be stated and also immediately thereunder the names and addresses of stockholders owning or holding one per cent or more of total amount of stock. If not owned by a corporation, the names and addresses of the individual owners must be given. If owned by a firm, company, or other unincorporated concern, its name and address, as well as those of each individual member must be given.)

Popular Fiction Publishing Company, 2457 E. Washington St., Indianapolis, Ind.

Wm. R. Sprenger, 840 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Illinois.

Farnsworth Wright, 840 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Illinois.

George M. Cornelius, 2457 E. Washington St., Indianapolis, Indiana.

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3. That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 per cent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: (If there are none, so state). None.

4. That the two paragraphs next above, giving the names of the owners, stockholders, and security holders, if any, contain not only the list of stockholders and security holders as they appear upon the books of the company, but also, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting, is given; also that the said two paragraphs contain statements embracing affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner; and this affiant has no reason to believe that any other person, association, or corporation has any interest, direct or indirect, in the said stock, bonds, or other securities than as so stated by him.

5. That the average number of copies of each issue of this publication sold or distributed, through the mails or otherwise, to paid subscribers during the six months preceding the date shown above is_____. (This information is required from daily publications only.)

WM. R. SPRENGER,
Business Manager.

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 2nd day of April, 1929. O. F. DAHLSTROM,
[SEAL] Notary Public.
My commission expires July 26, 1932.

The Legend of Denarius

(Continued from page 842)

Continued the abbot: "This manuscript has to do with a certain Denarius. He was the leader of some long-forgotten people. Who were they? No matter. The facts, however, stand."

His brother evineed additional interest.

"Denarius," narrated the churchman, "was brave and patriotic. He loved his people. One day an invading horde attacked the land and captured him. He was immediately slaughtered and his body thrown into a ditch. Every night the spirit of Denarius sat beside the body and mourned—not for himself but for his defenseless countrymen who were now slaves to the conquerors. At last the Creator (Who is all-powerful) returned the soul to the body and allowed Denarius to walk the earth again. He went to his people and freed them. What happened? They grew insolent, independent. Before he knew it, spies had so poisoned their minds that they attacked him in his castle. They set fire to it. As the spirit of Denarius beheld his murder-intent followers and his own human corpse burning to ashes, he wept: 'O deluded ones! You have destroyed my human skin. I can never return to you now and you will fall again a prey to the foe. Oh that I had a thousand lives so that I could protect you always!' This was sublime, of course, but did the rabble deserve such sublimity?"

"A leader's life is not his own," persisted the warrior.

The other refused to be sidetracked. "Answer me now, O my brother! Did the rabble deserve such sublimity!"

"No." This was said mournfully.

The abbot's face beamed with satisfaction.

"Nevertheless," retorted the soldier, "it does not disprove my theory; otherwise, Calvary and the crucifixion were unnecessary, for we, the rabble, are very unworthy of Christ Our Lord's sublimity!"

The abbot stepped back, his mouth agape.

"So——?" he managed to say.

"So, venerable brother," supplemented the other, as he fitted on his helmet, "my life is not my own, as I have made plain to you. It belongs to my people. And if God wills that I must lose it in my duty to them, why then—what is the expression?—*Deus vult!*"

Not long after, he had mounted his steed and was riding away into the storm.

The abbot gazed after him from his cell's window. After a time he ceased and slowly made for the table to proceed with his reading. He stopped—his breath stopped—Jesu Maria! What was that that he was seeing? . . . It couldn't be! . . . He was awake. He was sure of that!

"Brother!" he gasped; then a moment later: "Denarius!"

Stretched at full length on the bed was a human body. A corpse. The warrior's corpse. His brother . . .

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