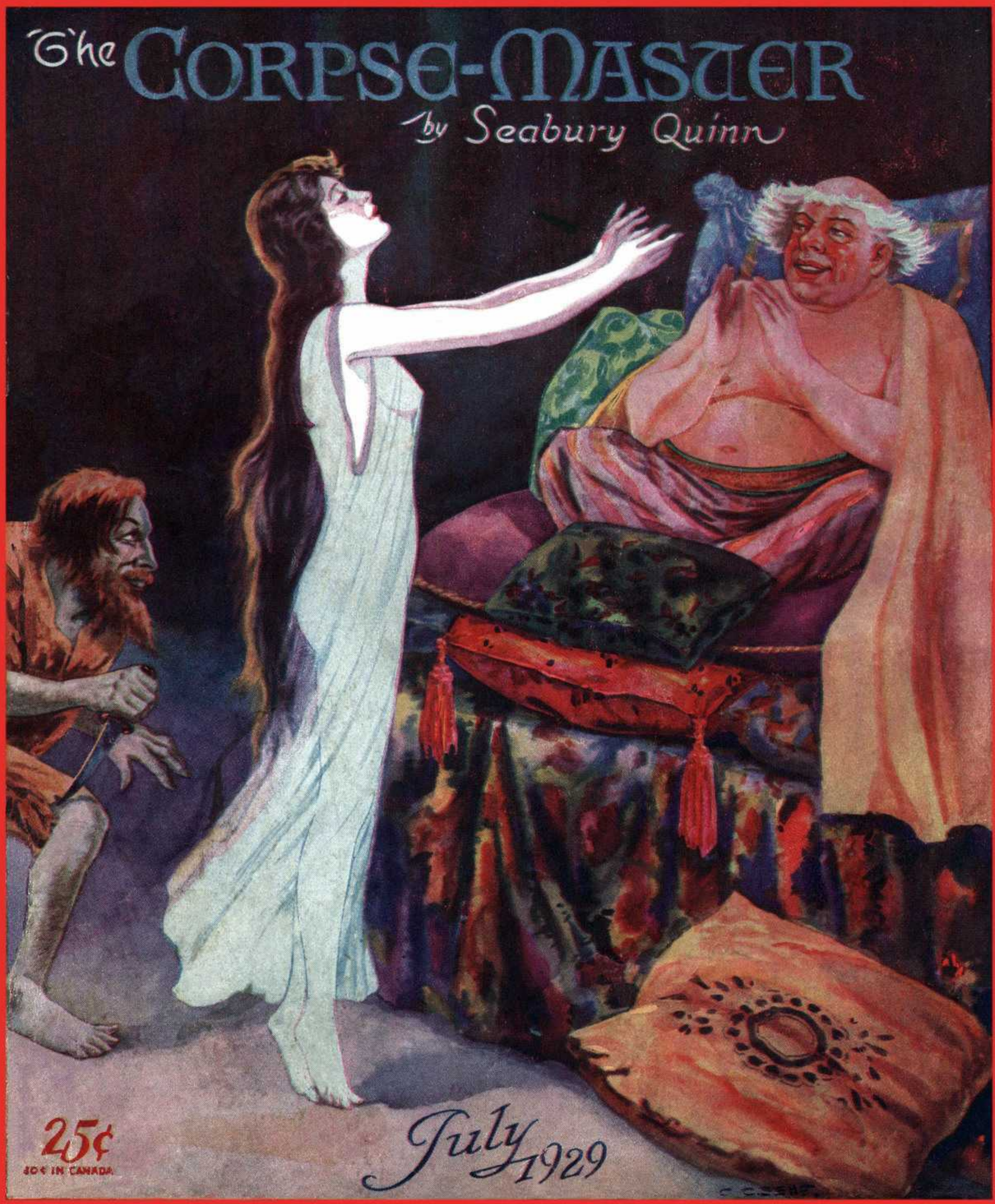
Weird Tales

The Unique Magazine

JULY, 1929



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Vol. XIV, No. 1—25c

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A MAGAZINE of the BIZARRE and UNUSUAL

VOLUME XIV NUMBER 1

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FARNSWORTH WRIGHT, Editor.

Contents for July, 1929

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A STORM of indignant letters from admirers of Seabury Quinn's stories, ever quick to resent any attack on their favorite writer, has followed the publication in the May issue Eyrie of a complaint by one of our authors (whose name was not used) against stories which "allow the forces of evil almost unlimited modes of self-expression, while restricting the opposite force to the use by the hero of such symbols as a holy relic or sprig of some plant, waved under the nose of the particular devil in the case." The writer went on to remark, "I know I usually get nearly to the end of each de Grandin tale, vowing to myself that here is the best story in the magazine, and then have the fellow flaunt the toenail of a saint or some such thing."

Many readers of this attack on the mercurial Frenchman have rallied to the defense of the de Grandin stories, setting forth in explicit detail their reasons for believing that the Frenchman is traduced by the attack. But it is Seabury Quinn himself, the daddy of this excitable, temperamental and lovable fictional character, who has provided the most complete refutation of the criticism, and we publish his reply herewith.

"Now, I think that squabbles among authors in the pages of W. T. are unseemly," Quinn writes, "but I have been viciously and untruthfully attacked, and I think I'm entitled to a defense. Don't you? Honestly? Fairly?

"Let us consider just how the evidence squares with the other author's blanket accusation. Let us take the last six stories by me to be published in WEIRD TALES, and consider the means of defense or attack used by J. de G.

"1.—*Body and Soul.* Here the spirit of an executed murderer reanimated an Egyptian mummy. De Grandin overcame the thing by setting fire to its tinder-dry carcass with a magnesium flare. Where was the holy relic, either part of a saint's anatomy, or not, there?

"2.—*Restless Souls.* In this tale an ikon from the Greek church was used, it's true, but only incidentally. The vampire was put out of the way most effectively by being cremated in a thoroughly modern crematory. The vampire's innocent victim was given the rest of true death by the classic method of the wooden stake. I fear the criticism of the undue use of sacred relics fails

(Continued on page 6)

The Dictator of Destiny!

WHO WAS THE MYSTERIOUS "KWO"?

The Answer Is Thrillingly Told in One of the Most Startling Stories Ever Written

WE have received thousands of letters requesting us to reprint this story which is too long to be republished in the magazine. THE MOON TERROR, by A. G. Birch, which appeared as a serial in WEIRD TALES in 1923, is too long to republish in our magazine consistent with our policy. As a matter of service to the multitude of readers who have requested us to reprint this story, we have had it printed in cloth-bound book form to sell at the publishers' price of $1.50 per copy. This fascinating book will be sent to you direct; we pay the postage.

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(Continued from page 4)

to hold good here. I've read many vampire stories, but never before I wrote of it myself did I hear of a vampire being burned in a modern, commercial crematory.

"3.—*The Chapel of Mystic Horror.* Here de Grandin uses a sprig cut from a tree grown from the Holy Thorn of Glastonbury. It works well on one of the lesser ghostly villains, but proves entirely inefficacious on the master of the black lodge. Indeed, it produces only a derisive laugh from him. Therefore de Grandin used radium to reduce the evil entities to nothingness. Surely, radium is not to be classed as 'the toenail of a saint or some such thing.' Indeed, the use of radium for such a purpose is, as far as I know, my own conception. Still, I am accused of *always* dragging in holy relics to the rescue.

"4.—*The Black Master.* The revenant of the old pirate is shot and 'killed to death' by de Grandin with a silver bullet. A couplet from Whittier is cited as authority for the use of such missiles, and de Grandin specifically states that he had the bullet cast for him that very afternoon by a jeweler. Nothing savoring of the use of bell, book and candle there, I trow.

"5.—*The Devil-People.* To overcome the invaders from the South Seas in this tale, de Grandin puts lime juice upon his weapons. Lime juice is very good. It is especially good in summer, if it be judiciously mixed with ice, charged water and a sufficient amount of Gordon gin, but its strongest advocate would not claim any saintly qualities for it. I fear the charge of lugging in long-deceased saints by their toes will not hold here.

"6.—*The Devil's Rosary.* Chinese magic, the ashes of camphor wood and chickens' blood are used here to combat the Tibetan priests. In addition to these, de Grandin uses the blade of his sword-cane. I doubt if the cane of such a profane little man as de Grandin can truthfully be called saintly; certainly there is no claim that the chickens from which the blood was obtained were holy chickens, and nowhere in the story does it appear that the camphor wood which produced the ashes had been blessed by any sort of religious ceremony.

"The fact is, Wright, the charges against me faw down and go boom, for there isn't a scintilla of evidence to support them. Here I've cited six stories—half a year's supply, and nowhere does a saint, or even a saint's toenail, appear. I've cited chapter and verse in my defense. My traducer has done nothing but make a blanket accusation, without one shred of evidence to support it."

W. Kahlert, of San Francisco, writes to the Eyrie: "The best story in your May issue is unquestionably *The Scourge of B'Moth,* by Bertram Russell. In conception and execution it is not inferior to the great mystery novels of all time."

"My infant daughter has a craving for the covers of WEIRD TALES," writes Mrs. Joseph C. Murphy, of Brooklyn. "The last one she cried for. I am getting to be a violent enthusiast over Frank Belknap Long, Jr. I am not

(Continued on page 136)

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NEXT MONTH

An unusually great lineup of fine stories is scheduled for the August issue of WEIRD TALES, on sale July 1.

THE PURPLE SEDAN

By Lois Lane

An unusual ghost story, involving a strange-colored automobile and the solution of a shocking murder.

THE SHADOW KINGDOM

By Robert E. Howard

A tale of grisly serpent shapes, of the ancient kingdom of Valusia, of Kull the King, and Brule the Spear-slayer.

THE INN OF TERROR

By Gaston Leroux

A tale of stark realism and gripping horror by the author of "The Phantom of the Opera."

THE IDOL-CHASER

By Barry Scobee

A strange quest took the two white men into the jungles, among unknown tribes and unforeseen dangers—a wholly unusual tale of adventure.

HIS UNCONQUERABLE ENEMY

By W. C. Morrow

The rajah could inflict dread tortures and mutilations upon his enemy, but he could not subdue the implacable spirit of revenge.

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.

THE SPEARED LEOPARD

By John Horne

An eery story of the Leopard-men of Africa, of a weird metamorphosis, and bloody death—a tale of negro magic.

OUTSIDE THE UNIVERSE

By Edmond Hamilton

Blood-freezing horrors make vivid the pages of the second installment of this epic weird-scientific novel.

THE HANGING OF ALFRED WADHAM

By E. F. Benson

A terrible ordeal was that of the good priest who, because of the inviolate secrecy of the confessional, could not save an innocent man from execution, and was thereafter haunted by evil apparitions.

These are some of the super-excellent stories that will appear in the August issue of WEIRD TALES.

AUGUST ISSUE ON SALE JULY 1

"The drawn face of a corpse grinned sardonically up."

THE ambulance-gong insistence of my night bell brought me up standing from a stuporlike sleep. For something like the millionth time I cursed the poor judgment which had led me to study medicine, as I shoved my toes into a pair of slippers and draped a bathrobe about my rather matronly figure, then, still half blinded by lingering sleep, began feeling my way down the stairs, one groping foot tentatively preceding the other in the mechanics of descent.

"Are you the doctor?" a breathless voice demanded as I switched on the vestibule light and opened the door. A hatless youth, jacket and trousers drawn over his pajamas, half stumbled, half fell through the doorway and clawed desperately at my sleeve. "Quick, quick, Doctor," he hurried on, not waiting for my affirmative, "it's my uncle—Colonel Evans. He's—he's dying, sir. I think he attempted suicide, and——"

"All right," I agreed, turning to sprint upstairs. "What sort of wound has he?—or was it poison?"

"It's in his throat," the youth replied. "I found him in the bathroom, lying on the floor, and—oh, Doctor, please hurry!"

I took the last four steps at a bound, snatched some garments from the bedside chair and charged down again, pulling on my clothes like a fireman responding to a night alarm as I ran. "Now, which way——" I began, but:

"*Tiens,* why do we stand here like statues on the Arc de Triomphe?" a querulous voice demanded from the stairs. "Trowbridge, *mon vieux,* it is to hasten. Come, the young man can relate what he found as we rush to the relief of *Monsieur* his uncle."

Both our caller and I stared with open-mouthed amazement as Jules de

Grandin, meticulously garbed as though he had spent an hour on his toilet, ran lightly down the stairs, snatched my first-aid kit from its place in the hall closet and motioned us toward the door.

Swallowing my astonishment, I turned to the visitor. "This is Dr. de Grandin," I introduced. "He's stopping with me, and will be of great assistance——"

"Yes, *parbleu,* and the Trump of Judgment will serve excellently well as an alarm clock if we delay long enough!" the little Frenchman interrupted, literally forcing the caller and me through the front door. "*En avant, mes amis;* let us go."

As I shot the self-starter of my car I wondered anew at Jules de Grandin. That he slept like a cat I already knew, but how he could have been wakened by the conversation in the hall, arrayed himself like Solomon in all his glory and been ready to respond to the urgent call in so short a time was beyond me.

"Down two blocks and over one—376 Albion Road," the young man's direction broke through my wondering revery. "My uncle went to bed about 10 o'clock, according to the servants, and none of them heard him moving about since. I'd been downtown to a fraternity meeting, and didn't get home till half an hour ago. When I went to the bathroom to wash my teeth I found him there. He was lying on the floor beside the tub with a razor in his hand, and blood was all over the place. It was awful!"

"Undoubtlessly," de Grandin murmured from his place on the rear seat. "What did you next, young *Monsieur?*"

"I snatched a roll of gauze from the medicine cabinet and staunched the wound as well as I could, then called Soames, the butler, and had him hold the pack in place while I raced round here for you. I remembered seeing your sign sometime before."

We drew up before the Evans mansion as he concluded his recital, and rushed through the door and up the stairs together.

"In there," our companion directed, pointing to a doorway through which a column of bright light streamed out to the darkened hall. A portly man in bathrobe and slippers knelt above a recumbent form stretched at full length on the white tiles of the bathroom floor. One glance at the supine figure and both de Grandin and I turned away, I with a deprecating shake of my head, the Frenchman with a fatalistic shrug of his narrow shoulders.

"He has no need of our services, that poor one," de Grandin informed the nephew. "Ten minutes ago, perhaps yes; now"—another shrug—"the undertaker, the clergyman, perhaps the police, are the only attendants he requires."

"The police?" the young man echoed in a shocked voice. "Surely, Doctor, this is a case of suicide, and——"

"Do you say so?" the Frenchman interrupted sharply. "Trowbridge, my friend, consider this, if you please." Delicately, so that not so much as a hair of the dead man's thin, white beard was disturbed, he indicated the deeply incised slash across the cut throat. "Does that mean nothing?" he demanded.

"Why—er——"

"Perfectly. If you will wipe your pince-nez before you look a second time, you will observe the cut runs diagonally from right to left."

"Of course, but——"

"But *Monsieur* the deceased was right-handed—look how the razor lies beneath his right hand. Now, if you will raise your hand to your own throat and draw the index finger across it, as though it were a knife, you will note the course described is slightly out of the horizontal—somewhat diagonal—and slanting downward from left to right. Is it not so?"

I nodded as I completed the gesture.

"Very good. Now, when one is bent on suicide he screws his courage to the sticking-point; then, if he has chosen the cut throat as his means of exit, he usually stands before a mirror, cuts deeply and quickly with his knife, and makes a downward-slanting slash. But as the red blood lays a ribbon across his neck, as the severed nerves shriek out their message of pain, and he realizes the enormity of his deed, the gash becomes more and more shallow. At the end it trails away to little more than a superficial skin-scratch. It is not so here; at its end it is deeper than at the beginning.

"Again, this poor one would almost inevitably have stood before the mirror to do away with himself. Had he done so, he would have fallen crosswise of the room, perhaps; more likely not. One with a severed throat does not die quickly. He suffers, he strangles, he chokes. And as he does so, he thrashes about like the decapitated fowl, and the signs of his struggle are written plainly on his surroundings. What have we here? *Cordieu,* is it likely a man would slit his gullet, then lie down peacefully to bleed his life away, as this one appears to have done? It is not *en caractère,* my friend.

"Further"—he bent down again, pointing with dramatic suddenness to the dead man's hairless pate—"if we desire further proof, look at this!"

Plainly enough, there was the welt of bruised flesh, the mark of some blunt instrument which had stunned without breaking the skin.

"Maybe he struck his head as he fell," I hazarded, realizing how weak the supposition was, even as I voiced it.

"*Ah bah!* Friend Trowbridge, this unfortunate one was struck unconscious by some miscreant, dragged or carried to this room, then slaughtered like a poleaxed beef. Without the telltale mark of the butcher's bludgeon there is ground enough for suspicion in the quietude of his position, in the neat manner the razor lies beneath his hand instead of being firmly grasped in cadaveric spasm or flung away in the death contortions—but with this bruise-mark before us there is but one answer. He has been done to death; he has been butchered; he was murdered."

"Would ye be afther seein' Sergeant Costello, sor?" Nora McGinnis, my household factotum, appeared like a phantom at the dining-room door while de Grandin and I finished our after-dinner coffee.

"But of course, bring him in, *ma petite,*" the little Frenchman returned. "Always I am glad to talk with your so distinguished countryman."

"Good evenin', sors," the big Irish policeman greeted as he followed Nora through the doorway. "'Tis th' devil's own business I'm up against, an' if ye would be afther givin' me th' bit of a lift, 'tis meself that'll be grateful to yez."

"Say on, *mon vieux,*" de Grandin invited, lighting a cigar, "I listen."

"Well, sor, right on top o' this Evans killin' comes another one tonight, not half an hour ago, an' while we're certain sure it wuz no suicide, for all it's dressed up to look like one, I'm hanged if we've so much as a thread o' suspicion to lead us to th' murderer. We're sure Colonel Evans was murdered, too, though we're layin' low about accusin' anybody o' th' crime, right now; but wid two cases o' th' same kind starin' us in th' face——" He made a world-encircling gesture with his arms, then sat back in his chair, an expression of deepest depression on his broad face. "'Twas this way," he continued as de Grandin refrained from comment.

"It hadn't got decently dark tonight when Mulligan, who pounds a beat up in th' Eighth Ward, was hailed by a felly from th' Rangers'

Club hollerin' an' yellin' an' raisin' th' devil about Mr. Wolkof havin' shot hisself. Mulligan goes in an' finds th' pore felly layin' on his back wid a little hole in his forehead an' th' back blowed outa his skull; an' bein' th' wise lad, he does nawthin' a-tall but 'phone headquarters.

"I'm detailed on th' case, d'ye see, an' hotfoots it up to th' club, expectin' to find th' common or garden variety o' suicide—them swells messes 'emselves up for reasons you an' I'd never give a second thought to, ye know, sor—but I'll be broke if it don't look more to me like murder than anny suicide I ever saw. Lissen, sor:

"Mister Wolkof wuz one o' them rich fellies wid more money an' time than brains, an' when he wuzn't foolin' round wid society stunts he wuz off to Africky or Asia or God knows where explorin' some heathen land. That's what all th' members o' th' Rangers' Club does, more or less, ye know; 'tis a organization entirely made up o' active or retired explorers, I understand, so——"

"Ah?" de Grandin's exclamation came with a sharp rising inflection as he struck his forehead with his knuckles.

"Sor?" Costello started at the interruption, but the Frenchman signaled him to proceed. "It is nothing, *mon ami,*" he assured the detective. "The so thick skull of Jules de Grandin has found a thought within it, and the pain is most excruciating. Say on, I am all attention."

"Well, sor, as I wuz after tellin' ye, I found this here now Wolkof felly layin' flat on his back across th' floor o' his room, a .45 Colt revolver kind o' half-way held in his hand—restin' on his half-closed fingers, like, sor. D'ye see?"

"Perfectly," de Grandin nodded.

"Now, I don't set up to be no expert, sor; but I served clean through th' Spanish War an seen plenty o' men die wid their boots on, an' I've been on th' force ever since I wuz mustered out, an' I've seen a few things there, too. To begin, th' whole layout o' th' case looked fishy to me. Here wuz an old-fashioned, black-powder revolver, what they call a low-velocity gun, sor, an' if it had been fired close again, th' dead man's forehead, it had ought to left a good-sized smudge o' powder-stáin; but th' devil a bit o' smoke-stain wuz there. Also, sor, 'tis most unusual, I've noticed, for a guy contemplatin' suicide to shoot hisself in th' forehead. Usually, if they're right-handed, they bring th' muzzle o' th' gun up to their right temples before they lets fly. Besides that, sor—ye've noticed it yerself, I dare say—when a man's shot through th' head he usually tightens up all o' a sudden. You doctors have some fancy sort o' hi-falutin' name for it——"

"Cadaveric spasm," de Grandin prompted.

"Yes, sor, that's it! Well, if a man has this cad—what you said, sor—he grasps whatever he's got in his hand like a Wop waiter holdin' onto a tip. 'Tis meself that's seen many a pore felly shot through th' head wid a Spanish Mauser hold so tight to his rifle that 'twas all we could do to git it away from him when th' buryin' party came round."

"*Précisément,*" de Grandin agreed, his eyes shining with appreciation of Costello's close reasoning as he reconstructed the scene. "You did find this Monsieur Wolkof lying full length upon his back with a hole drilled through his head, no powder-brand upon his brow where the projectile entered, and the presumably suicidal weapon lying loosely in his hand. One thing more, though it may not be conclusive: was there any powder-stain upon the dead man's pistol-hand?"

"There wuz *not,* sor," the Irishman declared emphatically, "but ye're yet to hear th' cream o' th' whole business. 'Twas in Mr. Wolkof's open

right hand th' pistol rested so easy-like; but all th' club attendants I questioned tells me he were a *left*-handed man—writin', feedin' hisself an' shavin' wid his left hand entirely. Now, sor, I axes ye, would a man all steamed up to blow his brains out be after goin' out o' his way to hold th' pistol in his right hand when he's so much more important matters to consider, an'——"

"*Nom de mille sales chameaux, non!*" the Frenchman shouted gleefully. "Sergeant, *mon brave,* you are a man after my own heart. Never do you overlook the smallest matter of importance. Never do they draw the woolen across your eyes. How easy it would be for you to report a plain case of suicide and thus save your official face, but the great conscience of you will not permit——"

"Sure, sor, that's why I'm here now," Costello interrupted. " 'Tis th' great conscience o' th' newspapers I'm thinkin' of. They'll be takin' th' hide off me back an' tackin' it to th' barn door if I don't make good on this here case, d'ye see, sor?"

"*Pardieu,* but I say they shall not!" de Grandin promised. "Jules de Grandin, he is in this case with you, *mon vieux,* in it up to both elbows. Never fear, we shall apprehend the miscreant who has done this; we shall——"

"Sergeant Costello's wanted on th' tellyphone from headquarters," Nora McGinnis interrupted. "Will ye be takin' th' message from th' study, Sergeant?"

The detective rose heavily and strode across the polished bare floor of the dining-room, treading silently as a cat despite his great bulk.

"Hullo! Costello speakin'," we heard him call through the 'phone. A series of grunted replies, one or two short, monosyllabic queries, then: "Glory be to God! Th' murtherin' blackguard! Oi will thot, immejiately!

"Gentlemen," his Irish brogue had completely supplanted his carefully mastered American accent as he reentered the dining-room, "there's all hell broke loose. 'Tis a gur-rul this time—a tiny, wee baby gur-rl that's been kilt entirely while we sat here talkin' like three damned fools. They've got her pore little body down to th' morgue now; an' if Jerry Costello can git his hands on th' bloody scoundrel 'at done it, there'll be no nade for th' public executioner to turrn on th' juice for th' electric chair, so there won't!" His great, freckle-flecked fists doubled into twin balls half as large as hams, capable, almost, of felling a wild bull in full charge.

"Wait, wait, my friend!" de Grandin cried as the Irishman turned to hasten away. "We come with you. *Mordieu,* are we men or are we apes, that we should sit about like decorations on a cocked hat while perverted degenerates assail little helpless children?"

WITH my horn tooting almost continuously and Sergeant Costello waving crossing policemen aside as though no such things as traffic regulations existed, we rushed to the city mortuary like a fire engine responding to an alarm. Parnell, the coroner's physician, was fussing over a tray of instruments; Martin, the coroner, bustled about in a perfect fever of anxiety to begin his official duties; and two plain-clothes men conferred in muted whispers beside the autopsy table as we shouldered our way past the uniformed patrolman at the morgue entrance and approached the pitiful little relic lying on the white-enameled slab under the hydrogen light's merciless glare.

Death in the raw is never pretty, as doctors, soldiers and undertakers know only too well. When it is accompanied by violence it wears a still less lovely aspect, and when the victim is a little child the sight is almost heart-breaking. Bruised and battered almost beyond human resemblance, her short, fair hair matted with blood

and cerebral matter, little Hazel Clark lay before us, the queer, unnatural angle at which her right hand thrust out denoting a Colles' fracture of the wrist; a subclavicular dislocation of the left shoulder was apparent by the projection of the bone beneath the clavicle; and the vault of her little skull had been literally beaten in by some blunt, heavy instrument wielded with tremendous force. The child had been as completely "broken" as ever mediæval malefactor was when bound to the wheel of torture for the ministrations of the executioner.

For a moment de Grandin bent over the battered little corpse, viewing it intently with the skilled, knowing eye of a surgeon; then, so lightly that they scarcely displaced a single blood-stained hair of the child's head, his quick, practised fingers passed quickly over her body, pausing now and again to prod gently, then sweeping onward in their investigative course. At length: "He was a gorilla for strength, this one," he announced, turning from the autopsy table and regarding the detectives shrewdly, "and a veritable gorilla for savagery, as well. What is there to tell me of the case, *mes amis?*"

Such meager data as they had they gave him quickly. She was three and a half years old, the idol of her lately widowed father's heart, and had neither brothers nor sisters. That afternoon her father had given her a quarter as reward for having gone an entire week without having merited a scolding, and shortly after dinner she had set out for the corner drug store to purchase an ice cream cone with part of her righteously acquired wealth. Attendants at the drug store testified she left the place immediately and set out toward home; a neighbor had seen her proceeding up the street, the cone grasped tightly in her baby fingers, her tongue protruding as she sampled the confection with ecstatic little licks. Two minutes later, from a spot where the heavy privet hedge of a residence vacated for the summer cast a shadow over the sidewalk, residents of the block were startled by a child's shrill, terrified scream. The cry was not repeated, and no one had been sufficiently alarmed to investigate till Mortimer Clark, rendered uneasy by his daughter's prolonged absence, set out in search of her.

From the drug store he traced her course homeward, and was passing the deserted house without thought when his attention was arrested by a patch of discoloration on the granolithic sidewalk. Stooping to investigate the unwonted moisture, he struck a match and was shocked to discover a little pool of fresh blood. With senses sharpened by a sort of panic premonition, he entered the shadowed grounds of the empty house and struck match after match to aid him in his search as he called his little daughter repeatedly. About to continue homeward, he was arrested by the gleam of white cloth beneath a spreading rhododendron bush. Hazel's broken little body lay where it had been callously tossed by her murderer half an hour before, her scant, little-girl clothing torn almost to ribbons, her head caved in, one wrist broken and a shoulder dislocated. The father's agonized cries roused the neighborhood, and the police were notified.

House-to-house inquiry by the detectives finally elicited the information that a "short, stoop-shouldered man" had been seen walking hurriedly away a moment after the child's single despairing cry was heard. Further description of the suspect was unavailable.

"*Pardieu,*" de Grandin stroked his small, blond mustache musingly as the plain-clothes men concluded, "it would seem we have to search the hayfield for an exceedingly small needle, *n'est-ce-pas,* my friends? The number of diminutive men with stooping shoulders is very great, and our task will be proportionately hard, I fear."

"Hard the devil," a detective returned disgustedly. "It's impossible. We ain't got no more chance o' findin' that bird than a pig has o' wearin' vest pockets!"

"Ha, do you say it?" de Grandin demanded, fixing his fierce, uncompromising stare on the speaker. "*Alors,* my friend, prepare to encounter a fully tailored porker before you are greatly older. You have forgotten, in the excitement, that I am in this case."

The policeman regarded him in mingled wonder and disgust. Finally: "Okeh, Frenchy, go as far as you like —you won't get far," he replied as he turned away.

"Death of a dyspeptic bullfrog——" de Grandin began furiously, but the sudden entrance of a uniformed policeman cut him short.

"Sergeant, sir," the newcomer saluted Costello as he advanced, "they found the weapon used on th' little girl. It's a winder-sash weight, an' they've got it up t' headquarters now, testin' it for fingerprints."

"Humph," Costello grunted. "Anything on it?"

"Yes, *sir;* th' killer must 'a' handled it after he dragged her body into th' bushes, for there's th' marks o' bloody fingers on it, plain as day."

"Ha, *parbleu,* have I not said so?" de Grandin exclaimed. "Is not every criminal a fool at heart? What have you to say now concerning the pig and his so odious vest-pocket, *Monsieur*——" he turned to taunt the skeptical detective, but the man had left, following close on the heels of the messenger from headquarters.

"Costello, *mon ami,* do you see to recording the fingerprints," de Grandin ordered, addressing the big Irishman over his shoulder. "Tomorrow, if you will be so good as to tell me what you find, I shall take keenest delight in helping you discover the perpetrator of this outrage. Meantime, I think there is much I can learn from the autopsy. With Dr. Parnell's permission, I shall remain until his work is done."

I knew Parnell of old. His qualifications as a surgeon were almost negligible, and his post-mortems were invariably performed in the sloppiest possible manner. With no stomach for the sight I knew awaited those who watched him work, I excused myself and hastened home, the memory of the murdered child's battered head and broken limbs haunting me like a nightmare as I drove slowly through the warm summer evening.

WHAT time de Grandin returned I do not know. I did not see him again until next morning, and he was in a villainous temper, wolfing his breakfast in surly silence, making only abrupt, monosyllabic replies to my tentative questions. Only once did he flare up from his taciturnity. That was when I mentioned Parnell's name. "*Ah bah,*" he cried, regarding me with blazing eyes, "do not speak of him, my friend. He is an old woman, that man; his talents would better be exercised in the abattoir. He is a fool, he is a butcher, he is a clumsy lout!"

That evening, as we concluded dinner, he announced abruptly: "I should greatly like to interview Monsieur Clark, Friend Trowbridge. Will you accompany and introduce me?"

I assented, wonderingly, and we drove to the darkened house where Mortimer Clark sat with his dead.

"He's in the drawing-room, sir," the elderly housekeeper told us. "He's been there ever since they brought Hazel's body home, just sitting beside her and——" She broke off as her throat filled with sobs. "If you could take his mind off his trouble for a minute or two, it would be a Godsend to him, and the rest of us, too. It's positively spooky, the way he sits and sits and stares and stares and——"

"*Mordieu,* yes, *Madame,*" de Grandin assented testily, "but we can aid neither him nor you if we stand and

talk and talk. If you will be so good as to direct us, we shall announce ourselves without your aid.'' The sting of his words was softened by one of his quick, disarming smiles as he waved her to precede us down the hall.

Coroner Martin had done his work as a mortician with consummate artistry. Under his deft hands all signs of the brutality which had struck little Hazel down had been completely effaced. Clothed in a short, light pink dress, the child lay peacefully in an open silver-gray casket, one soft, pink cheek resting against the tufted silken pillow sewn with artificial forget-me-nots, a little bisque doll, dressed in a frock the exact replica of the child's, resting in the crook of her left elbow. Beside the casket, a smile sadder than any grimace of wo on his thin, ascetic features, sat Mortimer Clark.

As we tiptoed into the darkened drawing-room we heard him murmur: ''Eight o'clock, little daughter, time for shut-eye town. Daddy'll tell you a story.'' For a moment he paused, looking expectantly into the still, childish face on the pillow before him, as though awaiting an answer. The little gilt mantel-clock ticked the quick seconds away; far down the block a neighbor's dog howled dismally; a light, vagrant breeze bustled softly through the opened French windows, fluttering the white-scrim curtains and setting the orange flames of the tall white tapers at the casket's head and foot to waving back and forth till elusive, elongated shadows wavered and danced against the gray walls of the room.

It *was* spooky, this stricken man's vigil beside his dead; it was ghastly to hear him talking to her as though her tiny ears could understand his words and her pink lips part in smiles and her blue eyes open and look childish laughter into his. But as the story of the old woman and her pig progressed, I felt a sort of terrified tension about my heart. ''. . . the cat began to kill the rat, the rat began to gnaw the rope, the rope began to hang the butcher——'' the recital went on to the silly, inconsequential end of the nursery tale, and as he spoke, the father bent lower and lower above the casket, as though he would project his softly spoken words across the silences of death by the very intensity of his utterance.

''*Grand Dieu,*'' de Grandin whispered as he plucked me by the elbow, drawing me toward the door. ''Let us not look at it, Friend Trowbridge. It is a profanation that other eyes should witness that, and other ears hear what the poor one says. Oh, it is abominable, it is monstrous, it is detestable, my friend. *Sang de Saint Pierre,* I, Jules de Grandin, shall find the one who has caused this thing to be, and, though he take refuge beneath the very throne of God, I shall drag him forth and cast him screaming into lowermost hell. God do so to me, and more also, if I do not!'' Tears were coursing down his cheeks, and he let them flow unabashed, but the eyes which streamed with compassion shone with a sort of demoniacal hatred. Actually, they seemed to gleam with an unreflected, inward light, like the furious eyes of a savage tom-cat at sight of a prowling cur.

''Do you want to speak with him?'' I asked falteringly, nodding backward toward the room where Clark held his eery converse with the dead.

''*Non,*'' he responded furiously. ''Neither do I wish to stop and tell indecent stories to the priest as he elevates the host. The one would be no greater sacrilege than the other, but—*ah?*'' He cut himself short, staring fascinated at a small, framed parchment which adorned the wall. ''Tell me, Friend Trowbridge,'' he commanded, ''what is it that you see there?''

''Why,'' I answered, ''it's a certificate of membership in the Rangers' Club. Can't you see? Clark was with the Army Air Service, and——''

''*Très bien,*'' he broke in. ''Thank

you, my friend. Ideas ofttimes lead us to see that which we wish, when in reality it is not there; that is why I sought the testimony of your disinterested eyes."

"But what in the world has Clark's membership in the Rangers to do with——"

"*Zut,*" he shut me off. "I think, I cogitate, I concentrate, my friend. Do you please withhold your idle talk. Monsieur Evans—Monsieur Wolkof, now Monsieur Clark—all are members. *C'est très étrange.* But yes, I shall interview the steward of that club, Friend Trowbridge. It is perhaps possible his words may throw more light on these so despicable affairs than all the clumsy, well-meaning investigations of our friend Costello. Come, let us go. Tomorrow will do as well as today, for the miscreant who fancies himself secure is in no hurry to run away despite all the nonsense talked of the guilty who flee when no man pursueth."

SERGEANT COSTELLO was waiting for us when we reached home. A very worried-looking Costello he was, something like fear shining in his usually fearless Irish eyes, and a set to his grim chin which was more like desperation than courage. "We've checked up th' fingerprints on th' sash-weight, Dr. de Grandin, sor," he announced almost truculently.

"*Bon,*" the Frenchman replied carelessly. "They are, perhapsly, of someone you can identify?"

"I'll say they are," the sergeant replied shortly. "They're Gyp Carson's—th' meanest killer th' force ever had to deal wid."

"Ah," de Grandin shook off his air of preoccupation with visible effort as he turned directly to the detective. "It is for us to locate this Monsieur Gyp, then, my friend. Have you credible information concerning his present whereabouts?"

The Irishman's answering laugh was almost an hysterical cackle. "That we have, sor," he replied with emphasis. "He wuz burned — electrocuted, you know—at th' penitentiary at Trenton last month for rubbin' out a milk-wagon driver durin' a hold-up. Be rights he oughter be out in Mount Olivet Cemetery this minute—an', be th' same token, he oughter been there when th' little Clark gur-rl wuz kilt last night!"

"*A-a-ah?*" de Grandin twisted the ends of his little, waxed mustache furiously. "*Parbleu,* it would seem this case contains the possibilities, my friend. Tomorrow morning, as early as you please, let us meet at the cemetery and investigate the grave of this Monsieur Gyp. Perhaps we shall find something there. If we find nothing at all, we shall have found the most valuable information we can have."

"If we find nothin'——" The Irishman looked at him in bewilderment, then raised his big hands in a gesture of futility. "All right, Dr. de Grandin, sor," he admitted finally. "I've seen some queer things since I begun runnin' round wid you, but if ye're after tellin' me th' dead can return from th' grave an' do such things——"

"*Eh bien,* my friend, I tell you nothing at all. I, too, seek information," de Grandin cut in. "Let us await the morning, and rely on the testimony of pick and shovel, if you please."

A superintendent and two overalled workmen were waiting beside the grave when de Grandin, Costello and I arrived at the cemetery the following morning. The Carson grave lay in the newer, less expensive portion of the burying-ground, where perpetual care was not so conscientiously applied as in the more fashionable sections. Scrub grass, almost blistered away by the midsummer sun, fought for a foothold in the clayey soil and the mound had already begun to fall in. Incongruously, a monument bearing the effigy of a weeping angel with a line of pious quotation from Scrip-

ture leaned over the grave-head, while a footstone with the inscription, *"Our Darling,"* guarded its lower end.

The superintendent glanced over Costello's papers, stowed them away in the inner pocket of his tattered work coat and nodded to the Polish laborers. "Git goin'," he ordered tersely, "an' make it snappy."

It was dismal work watching the sweating men fling shovelful after shovelful of earth from the desecrated sepulcher. The oppressive warmth of the day was unrelieved by any breath of breeze and the air seemed to hang dead-still. The veil of mist which completely overhung the sky was too thin to cut off the boiling heat of the morning sun, the scant foliage of the graveyard was dusty, and the entire landscape was a sick, yellowing green in the tepid sunlight.

The laborers' picks and spades bored deeper and deeper into the hard, heat-baked earth. At length the hollow, reverberating sound of steel in contact with wood warned us their work was drawing to a close. A pair of strong, web straps were lowered, made fast to the rough chestnut box enclosing the coffin, and at a word from the superintendent the men strained at the thongs, bringing their weird freight to the surface. A pair of pick-handles were laid across the open grave and the grave box rested on them. With a wrench the superintendent undid the screws holding the clay-stained lid and laid it aside. Within lay the casket, a cheap, square-ended affair covered with shoddy gray broadcloth, the tinny, imitation-silver name-plate and crucifix on its lid already showing a dull, brown-blue discoloration.

"Maintenant!" murmured de Grandin breathlessly as the superintendent began unlatching the fastenings which held the upper half of the casket lid in place. Then, as the last catch snapped back and the cover came away:

"Sang du diable!"

"Good heavens!" I exclaimed.

"For th' love o' God!" Costello's amazed antiphon sounded at my elbow.

The cheap sateen pillow of the casket showed a depression like the pillow of a bed recently vacated, and the poorly made upholstery of its bottom displayed a wide furrow, as though flattened out by some weight imposed on it for a considerable time, but sign or trace of human body there was none. The case was as empty as on the day it left the factory.

"Glory be to God!" Costello muttered hoarsely, staring and staring again into the empty coffin, as though loth to believe the evidence of his eyes. "An' this is broad daylight!" he added in a kind of wondering afterthought."

"Précisément," de Grandin's acid answer came back with whiplike sharpness. "That is diagnostic, my friends. Had we found something within, it might have meant one thing or another. Here we find nothing; nothing at all. What does it mean?"

"I know what it means!" the look of superstitious fear on Costello's broad, red face had given way to one of furious anger. "It means there's been some shinnanigans goin' on. Th' dir-rty killer wuzn't burned a-tall, an' — who had this buryin'?" he turned savagely to the superintendent.

"Donally," the other replied, falling back a pace before Costello's rising fury.

"Ah, he did, did he? Well, be gob, we'll see what Mr. Donally has to say about this, an' he'd better have plenty to say, too, if he don't want to collect himself from th' corners of a four-acre lot!"

Donally's Funeral Parlors were new, but by no means prosperous-looking. Situated in a small side street in the poorer section of town, the only pretension they made to ele-

gance was the brightly-gleaming gold of the letters in which the legend:

JOSEPH DONALLY
Funeral Director & Embalmer
Sexton St. Rose's R. C. Church

appeared on their plate-glass windows.

"See here, young felly, me lad," Costello began without preliminary as he stamped unceremoniously into the dark little room which constituted Mr. Donally's office, "come clean, and come clean in a hurry. Wuz Gyp Carson dead when you had his funeral?"

"I'll say he was—if he wasn't we sure played one awful low-down trick on him," the mortician replied. "Say, feller, if they set *you* in that piece o' furniture down to Trenton an' turned God knows how many volts o' juice into you, d'ye think you'd be dead? What d'ye mean, 'was he dead'?"

"I mean just what I say," Costello responded. "We've just come from th' cemetery, an' if there's hide or hair of a corpse in his coffin, I'll eat it, so I will."

"*What's that?*" the other demanded. "Y' say th' casket was empty?"

"Empty as your head."

"Well, I'll be——" Donally began, but Costello cut in:

"You sure will, an' you'll be all beat up, too, if you don't spill me th' low-down. Come clean, now, or must I sock ye in th' jaw an' lock ye up in th' bargain?"

"Whatcher tryin' to put over?" Mr. Donally wanted to know. "Think I faked up a stall funeral? Lookit here, if you don't believe me." From a pigeon-hole of his desk he produced a packet of papers, thumbed rapidly through them, finally handing Cos-

"A door swung open and in trooped a file of women."

tello a thin sheaf fastened together with an elastic band.

Everything was in order. The death certificate, signed by the prison physician, showed the cause of death as "cardiac arrest by fibrillary contraction induced by three shocks of an alternating current of electricity of 7½ amperes at a pressure of 2,000 volts."

"There wasn't much time," Donally volunteered. "I hadda work fast on that case, for th' prison doctors had made a full 'post' an' his old woman was one o' them old-fashioned folks that don't believe in embalmin', so there was nothin' to do but rush him out to the graveyard an' plant him. Not so bad for me, though, at that. I sold 'em a casket an' burial suit an' twenty-five limousines for th' funeral, an' later got my commission on th' monument."

De Grandin looked speculatively at the young undertaker. "Have you any reason to believe attempts at resuscitation were made, my friend?" he asked.

"Huh? Resuscitate *that?*" Donally returned disgustedly. "Say, feller, didn't I just tell you they'd made a full autopsy at the prison? You might as well try to resuscitate a hunk o' Hamburger steak as bring back a feller which had had that done to him."

"Quite so," the Frenchman agreed. "I did but ask. Now——"

"Now we don't know anny more where we're at than we did a hour ago," the sergeant supplied. "I might 'a' thought this guy wuz in cahoots wid th' felly's folks, but th' prison records show he wuz dead, an' them doctors down to Trenton don't certify nobody's dead if there's so much as th' flicker of an eyelash left in 'im. It looks like we'd have to hunt around for some gink wid a fad for grave-robbin', don't it, Dr. de Grandin?

"But say"—a sudden gleam of inspiration overspread his face—"this may sound wild as a mountain goat to you, sor, but I was just after thinkin': Suppose someone had dug his body up an' taken an impression o' his fingerprints, then had rubber gloves made wid th' prints on th' outside o' th' fingers? Wouldn't it 'a' been a horse on th' force for him to go round murderin' pore, innocent little gur-rls, then leave his weapons layin' round permiscuous-like, so's we'd be sure to find what we thought wuz his prints, only to discover they wuz made by a gunman 'at had been burned a month or more ago? Boy, howdy, that's th' answer, sure's a gun's made o' iron! Suppose you say it's all a lotta horse-feathers, an' no one but a crazy man would think up such a hare-brained scheme? Well, sors"—he regarded us triumphantly—"who but a crazy felly would go about murderin' pore little three-year-old gur-rls 'at never done him anny harm a-tall?"

"*Tiens,* my friend, your idea has at least the foundation of reason beneath it," de Grandin commented. "Do you search for one who might have stolen this body before perpetrating his so dastardly crime. Me? I shall make certain investigations of my own. Anon we shall confer, and together we shall surely lay this so vile miscreant by the heels. When we do——"

"Be gorry, there'll be no wor-rk for th' public executioner if *I* ketch him!" the Irishman promised grimly.

"*Mais non,* my friend," de Grandin protested. "Promise me as a descendant of the Irish kings that you will not entirely kill him."

"What th' hell for?"

"*Cordieu,* am *I* to have no pleasure? Shall I not have even one small little part in taking vengeance on this slayer of little children?"

Costello burst into a roar of laughter, but there was little merriment in it. Rather, it was such a bull-bellow of amusement as some ancient sea-roving *flatha* might have given as he led his savage seamen against the

Scotch or British. "Shake, Doc," he ordered as his huge hand went out to grasp the Frenchman's slim, white fingers. "Ye're th' bye I'm after doin' business wid in this case!"

DE GRANDIN was absent most of the day, attending to some mysterious affairs of his own, but a few minutes before dinner was announced he ran lightly up the front steps, made a hasty toilet and proceeded to attack the fried chicken, corn fritters and other delicacies Nora McGinnis had provided with an appetite which would have shamed a half-starved wolf.

"Ah, but it has been a lovely day," he assured me with twinkling eyes as he contemplated the glowing end of his after-dinner cigar. "Yes, *pardieu,* an exceedingly lovely day! This morning, when I went from that Monsieur Donally's shop, my head whirled like that of an unaccustomed voyager stricken by sea-sickness. I knew not which way to turn, and only miserable uncertainty confronted me on all sides. Now"—he blew a great cloud of fragrant smoke from his nostrils and watched it spiral slowly toward the veranda roof—"now I know much, and that which I do not actually know I damn surmise. I think I see the end of this tortuous trail, Friend Trowbridge."

"How's that?" I encouraged, watching him from the corners of my eyes.

"How? *Cordieu,* I shall tell you!" he replied explosively. "When the good Costello came to the house, telling us of the murder of that Monsieur Wolkof — that murder which was made to appear like a suicide—and mentioned that he was killed in the house of the Rangers' Club, I suddenly recalled that Colonel Evans, whose death we had but lately deplored, was also a member of that organization. It struck me at the time that there might be something more than mere coincidence in it; but when that so pitiful Monsieur Clark proved also to be a member, *nom d'un asperge,* coincidence ceased to be coincidence and became a moral certainty.

"'Now,' I ask me, 'what lies behind all this business of the monkey? Is it not more than ordinarily strange that two members of the Rangers' Club should have been slain so near together, and in such similar circumstances, and a third should have been visited with a calamity worse than ten thousand deaths?'

"'You have said it, *mon garçon,*' I tell me. 'It are indubitably as you say. Come, let us interview the steward of the Rangers' Club. Perhaps he will have something to tell us.'

"*Nom d'un pipe,* what did he not tell? From him I learn much, much more than he thought. I learn, by example, that Messieurs Evans, Wolkof and Clark have long been friends; that they have all been members of the club's grievance committee; that they were called on some five years ago to consider the case and finally to recommend the expulsion of a Monsieur Wallagin—*mon Dieu,* what a name!

"'So far, so fine,' I tell me. 'But what of this Monsieur-with-the-Funny-Name? Who and what are he, and what have he done that he merited expulsion from the Rangers' Club?'

"I make the careful inquiry and find out much. He has been an explorer of considerable note, and have written some monographs which showed he knew how to use his eyes. *Hélas,* he knew also how to use his wits, as many club members who lent him money later discovered to their sorrow. From Thomas, Richard and Henry he borrowed, but never did he repay. Furthermore, he had a most unpleasant lot of stories which he gloried to tell—stories of his doings in the far places which did not recommend him to the company of self-respecting gentlemen. And so he was —what do you say?—booted out of the club. When he went he swore

horrid vengeance on all who voted his expulsion.

"Five years have passed since then, and Monsieur Wallagin seems to have prospered exceedingly. He has a marvelous house in the suburbs where no one but himself and a single servant—always a Chinese—lives, but the neighbors tell queer stories of strange parties he holds, parties where pretty ladies in strange attire appear, and once or twice strange-looking gentlemen, as well.

"*Eh bien,* why should this make me suspicious? I do not know, unless it be that my nose scents the odor of the rodent farther than the average. In any event, out to that strange, lonesome house of Monsieur Wallagin I go and at its portals I wait like a hungry tramp in hope of charity.

"My vigil is not unrewarded. *Non,* by no means. Before I have stood an hour I behold a small Chinaman forcibly ejected from the house by a large, gross man who looks to me like a hog in human form. I meet the estimable *Chinois* as he trudges down the road, and sympathize with him on the misfortune he has suffered. He tells me much, though he thinks he tell but little.

"My friend, I learn he have been discharged because he salted the food which was prepared for the guests!"

The impressiveness of his manner as he imparted this bit of trivial information struck me queerly. I was about to express my surprize, when he hurried on with his story:

"Consider, my friend: This so execrable Wallagin have several house guests there, and what does he feed them? I demand to know."

"Haven't the faintest idea," I confessed, smiling at his vehemence.

"*Pardieu,* I shall tell you. Barley, my friend; barley and wheat, and damned, detestable turnips, with never the *soupçon* of meat or salt in them. What think you of that?"

"Queer sort of hospitality," I hazarded.

"Hospitality?" he echoed. "It is damnable, my friend—believe me, I use the term advisedly—damnable, no less. This poor one from far-off China has been hurled from his kitchen for no greater fault than that he did salt the wretched soup wherewith Wallagin regaled his visitors. He, this villainous Wallagin, always personally tastes all food before it is served to those who enjoy his so strange hospitality, and this day he discovered the savor of salt in it, whereupon he kicks out his cook without more ado."

"But see here, de Grandin," I returned. "Why make so much ado over an eccentricity? Perhaps Wallagin's guests are on some queer diet, and demand that sort of food. Here you are abusing the man like a pickpocket for no earthly reason I can see save the rations he serves his callers. I admit I don't think I'd relish such fare, but they must—they're not obliged to remain there if they don't like it, are they?"

Something so deadly serious shone in his eyes as he faced me that I felt a little shiver of apprehension. "I do not know," he replied simply. "Me, I think they are; but we shall soon ascertain. If I am right in what I suspect, we shall see devilment beside which the worst of ancient Rome was mild. If I am wrong—*alors,* I am wrong. Come, I think I hear the good Costello's feet outside; he is ready to accompany us."

COSTELLO ascended the front steps as the Frenchman ceased speaking. The two exchanged brief nods, and de Grandin motioned me to rise. In a moment we were in my car, speeding over the smooth turnpike leading to Morrisdale, the fashionable new suburb at the western end of town.

Evening had brought little surcease from the day's steaming heat, and though the moon shone in the eastern sky, a thin veil of haze lay across her face like gauze before an odalisk's

features, and the landscape was rather obscured than revealed by the strained light filtering through the damp, superheated night air. Perspiration ran in streams down Costello's face and mine, but de Grandin seemed rather in a chill of suppressed excitement, his little round blue eyes alight with dancing elf-fires, his small white teeth fairly chattering with nervous excitation as he leaned across the back of the seat, urging me to more and more speed as we whirled down the wide highway.

Wallagin's house was a massive stone affair, standing well back from the road in a jungle of overgrown greenery, and seemed to me principally remarkable for the fact that it had neither front nor rear porches, but rose sheer-walled as a prison from its foundations.

At a signal from de Grandin I parked the car beside the driveway's entrance and, led by the little Frenchman, we made our cautious way to the house, creeping to the only window showing a gleam of light and fastening our eyes to the narrow crack beneath its not-quite-drawn blind.

"Monsieur Wallagin acquired a new cook this afternoon," de Grandin whispered as we took our stations. "I made it my business to see him and bribe him heavily to smuggle a tiny bit of meat into the soup he prepared for tonight. If he has been faithful to his trust we may see something; if not—*pah*, my friends, what is it we see here?"

Inside the house was a room which must have been several degrees hotter than the stoke-hole of a steamer, for the window was tightly shut and a great log fire blazed on the wide hearth of the open fireplace almost directly opposite our point of vantage. The walls of the room were smooth-dressed stone, the floor was paved with cement. Lolling on a sort of ottoman composed of heaped-up cushions sat the master of the house, a great, overfed bulk of a man with enormous paunch, great, fat-upholstered shoulders between which his massive head was sunk like an owl's in its feathers, large, white hands with wrists wrinkled by pendulous layers of fat, and eyes as cold and gray as twin inlays of burnished agate. What hair the man possessed lay round the lower part of his cranium like a white wreath, for it was long and curling and white with a whiteness which was more due to total absence of color than to any silvery shading, and the broad, flabby face beneath the bulging, gleaming dome of his brow was pasty-pale with a sort of bleached, yellowish pallor like the belly of a toad, or one of those burrowing worms which live their lives away from any ray of sunlight. It was a massive face, an intellectual face, but a weak, vicious face as well, the countenances of Caligula and Nero in one, with something of the bestial brutality of a sensual Eastern seraglio-master in addition.

About his great shoulders was draped a robe of heavy Paisley weave, belted at the loins but open to the waist, displaying his obese torso and abdomen, so that as he squatted there he resembled a grimly grotesque travesty of Mi-lei-Fo, the laughing Buddha of China.

As we fixed our eyes to the gap beneath the curtain the man smiled in wide-mouthed anticipation and beat his fat hands together sharply.

A door at the farther end of the room swung open in response to his signal, and into the apartment trooped a file of women. Young they all were, and comely, with a diversity of beauty which would have done credit to the casting director of any metropolitan revue. The leader was tall, statuesque, with sweeping black hair, sharp-hewn, patrician features, and a majesty of carriage like a youthful queen's. Two others—one blond, petite and fairylike in her beauty, the other ruddy-haired and plumply rounded—followed in the wake of the

first, and last of all came slouching, with stoop-shouldered, hang-dog mien, an undersized man.

"Jasus!" Costello breathed in a terrified whisper. "Will ye be lookin' at that felly, Dr. de Grandin, sor. 'Tis Gip Carson hisself! An'—blessed be God!—th' woman ladin' th' parade is none other than pore dead Missis Clark, mother o' th' little gur-rl that wuz kilt th' other night!"

"*S-s-s-st!*" de Grandin's sharp, low hiss cut him off. "Observe, my friends; did I not say we should see something? *Regardez-vous!*"

At a signal from the seated man the women ranged themselves before him, arms uplifted, heads submissively bent; then, with a slow, gliding motion, first one, then the others, began to dance a sort of fantastic rigadoon. Each was clothed in a clinging shift of some netlike, silky material, falling in undulating lines from shoulder to instep like a boudoir negligée, and through the meshes of the filmy cloth their white bodies showed pale and wraithlike.

The dance was not a thing of art—at least, not such art as is exemplified upon the stage—for the dancers' movements were stilted and slow, each seeming to feel her way through the measures of her performance as though she danced blindfolded; yet there was a sort of eery, blood-freezing fascination about it, too, for though I set Costello's utterances down to Irish superstition and mistaken identity, there was something so unreal about the spectacle that, though I could not frame the words to describe it, I felt I looked on something so obscene, so utterly vile, that my eyes would be long polluted by what they saw that night.

"Oi tell ye, sor," Costello began again in a frightened whisper, his native brogue asserting itself, "there's Missis Clark, an'——"

"Be still, great fool, or I must silence you!" de Grandin hissed. "Behold what is to come."

The dance concluded, the fleshy master of the revels waved the slouching man to a seat on the floor and motioned to the dancers to approach. It seemed to me as I watched that each woman hesitated with a show of visible reluctance before obeying the silent order, but each stepped forward, nevertheless, and sank crouching at the bloated creature's feet.

All we saw was pantomime, for the heavy window shut in all sounds beyond its thick pane. Perhaps that added to the horror of the vision. At any rate, I felt myself go sick as the bloated man dropped a monstrous arm caressingly about the shoulders of the women seated to his right and left, then, with a throaty, cynical laugh, motioned some command to the stoop-shouldered fellow squatting cross-legged on the bare floor beside the red-haired woman. Slowly, mechanically, the undersized man leaned toward the girl, put the palms of his hands on her cheeks and drew her face to his, then kissed her long upon the mouth. It was as though two aûtomatons caressed. Though lip folded over lip in the counterfeit of love, the osculation was as devoid of sentiment as though the man and woman were two dolls carelessly tumbled face to face against each other, and I caught myself trying vainly to recall a half-forgotten verse from Oscar Wilde:

> **For within the grave there is no pleasure,**
> **. . . and desire shudders into ashes . . .**

My wandering attention was recalled as the gross creature motioned to the dark-haired woman to perform what was evidently a nightly rite. A shudder passed through her lissome frame as she complied, but despite her evident revulsion, she seated herself before him, leaned back until her head was pillowed on his crossed bare feet, and twined her lovely arms up and backward about his almost shapeless fat ankles.

Sudden recognition, sharp and

painful as the stab of a dentist's drill, pierced my consciousness as I looked. With the raising of her arms to embrace her master's legs, the woman had exposed her axillæ, and sunken deep in her left armpit was a short wound, patently quite fresh, but bloodless despite its evident depth, its lips drawn puckeringly together with the familiar "baseball stitch."

No surgeon leaves a wound like that. It was the mark the embalmer's scalpel made in cutting through the superficial tissue to raise the axillary artery for his injection. The woman before me, the woman who had danced like a houri from some sultan's zenana not five minutes before, was *dead;* dead as any tenant of the graveyard!

About to shriek out my discovery, I was arrested by the sudden clutch of de Grandin's hand upon my arm. "Observe, my friend," he whispered. "We shall see whether or not my plan has carried."

Shuffling into the room, apparently no more concerned with the scene before him than if he had been serving coffee at a formal dinner, a little Chinaman entered, a tray containing four small soup bowls held high before him. He set the food upon the floor and turned unconcernedly to leave, giving not so much as the tribute of a single backward glance at the gross, squatting man and his bondwoman, and the queer, lifeless-looking pair who kissed and clung in gruesome similitude of passion beside their master's cushioned throne.

An indolent motion of the master's hand and the slaves fell on their provender like hungry beasts at feeding-time, lifting the coarse china bowls to their mouths and drinking greedily.

Such a look of dawning recognition as spread over the four expressionless faces as they drained the broth I have seen sometimes when half-unconscious patients have received powerful restoratives. The man was first to show it, surging up from his crouching posture on the floor and gazing about him wildly through half-closed, desperate eyes, like a caged thing seeking escape from its prison. But before he could do more than wheel drunkenly in his tracks, realization seemed to burst upon the women, too, and scream after agonized scream burst from their lips. There was a flutter of transparent draperies, the soft thudding of soft bare feet on the cement flooring of the room, and they rushed pellmell to the door, brushing the hunch-shouldered man from their way as though he were a child.

Utterly transfixed with horror, I stood as if rooted to the earth till the sudden sharp clutch of the little Frenchman's hand brought me out of my stupor. "Quick, Friend Trowbridge," he ordered. "To the cemetery; to the cemetery, with all haste! *Nom d'un sale chameau,* we have yet to see the end of this!"

"Which cemetery?" I asked stupidly, my wits still benumbed by the horrid sight I had witnessed.

"*N'importe,*" he returned, fairly dragging me toward the waiting motor. "At Shadow Lawn or Mount Olivet we shall see that which will make us all three call ourselves liars."

Mount Olivet was the nearest of the three municipalities of the dead adjacent to Harrisonville, and toward it we made at top speed. Parking the car beside the main entranceway, we dashed through the narrow grilled gate for foot-passengers—the driveway was closed at sundown — and raced across the grave-hummocks toward the humble tomb of the executed murderer which had proved untenanted that morning.

"Say, Dr. de Grandin, sor," Costello demanded, panting as he strove to keep abreast of the agile little Frenchman, "just what's th' idea of all this business? I know ye've some good reason, but——"

"*S-s-st!*" de Grandin hissed between clenched teeth. "Crouch here, my friends, in the shadow of this

monument, and keep your gaze fixed upon that grave; keep it—*ah!*"

Shuffling queerly, stumbling now and again over the mounded tops of the sodded graves, a slouching figure came careening crazily toward us, veered off as it neared the Carson grave and sank to its knees beside the loosened earth so recently replaced by the cemetery laborers. An instant later it was scrabbling with frenzied hands at the clay and gravel of the mound, as though seeking to burrow its way into the sepulcher.

"Me God!" Costello breathed unbelievingly. "'Tis Gip Carson hisself!" He shuddered as he rose, and I could see the tiny globules of fear-sweat standing on his forehead in the pallid moonlight as he stepped forward, but the inbred sense of duty was stronger in his Irish heart than was the pull of generations of Irish superstition. "Gyp Carson, I arrest ye in th' name o' th' law for th' murder o' William Hamiline," he thundered as he laid a heavy hand on the burrowing creature's shoulder.

It was as if he had touched a soap bubble. With an odd little squeak, like that of a mouse caught in the jaws of a trap, the creature beneath his hand collapsed in a crumpled heap on the mound of fresh earth. When de Grandin and I reached them the pale, drawn face of a corpse grinned sardonically up at us in the beam of Costello's flashlight.

"Dr.—de—Grandin, sor—Dr.—Trowbridge, for th' love o' heaven, gimme a drink o' sumpin'," the big Irishman pleaded pitifully, catching at the diminutive Frenchman's shoulder as a terrified child might clutch its mother's skirts.

"Courage, *mon brave,*" de Grandin soothed, patting the detective's big hand, "there is yet work for us to do. Tomorrow they will bury this poor one. The law has had its will of him; now let his body rest in peace. Tonight—*sacré nom*, the dead must attend the dead; it is with the living we have business. *En avant;* to Wallagin's house, Friend Trowbridge!"

"IT IS as I suspected," he told us as I turned the car carefully in the narrow roadway and set out for the accursed dwelling we had just left. "Your solution of the case was sane, Friend Costello, but there are times when very sanity proves the falseness of a conclusion. That someone had resurrected the remains of this poor Gyp Carson to copy his fingerprints seemed most reasonable, but today I obtained certain information which led me up another road. Already I have explained the mystery of this Wallagin person; how he was thrown out from the Rangers' Club for various reasons and how he vowed horrid vengeance on those who voted his expulsion. That was of interest. I sought still further. I found that he was long in the Island of Haiti and that he there mingled with the *Culte des Morts.* Ah, my friends, we who sit here in this clean northern air can laugh at such things, but in Haiti, that dark step-daughter of mysterious Africa's dark mysteries, they are no jest. No. In Port-au-Prince and in the backlands of the jungle the native Haitians will tell you of the *zombie*—he is well known wherever black magic is practised. Now, a *zombie* is neither a ghost nor yet a living person resurrected, but only a spiritless corpse ravished from the quiet of the grave, endowed with a pseudo-life by black sorcery and made to serve the whim and pleasure of the magician who has animated it. Sometimes these wicked ones steal a corpse to make it commit a crime while they stay far from the scene, thus furnishing themselves unbreakable alibis. More often they rob the grave for the purpose of securing slaves who labor ceaselessly for them at no wage at all. Yes, it is so; with my own two eyes I have seen it before the American Marines occupied the island.

"But there are certain limits which

(Continued on page 138)

The Wishing-Well

by

E. F. Benson

"She kissed the frayed lips fretted with decay."

THE village of St. Gervase lies at the seaward base of a broad triangular valley which lies scooped-out among the uplands of the north Cornish moors, and not even among the fells of Cumberland could you find so remote a cluster of human habitations. Four miles of by-road, steep and stony, lie between it and the highway along which in tourist-time the motor-busses pound dustily to Bude and Newquay, and eight more separate it from rail-head. Scarcely once in the summer does an inquisitive traveler think it worth while to visit a village which his guide-book dismisses with the very briefest reference to the ancient wishing-well that lies near the lich-gate of the churchyard there; the world, in fact, takes very little heed of St. Gervase, and St. Gervase hardly more of the outer world. Seldom do you see man or woman waiting, at the corner where the road from the village joins the highway, for the advent of the motor-bus, and seldom does it pause there to set down one of its passengers. An occasional trolley laden with sacks of coal or cargo of beer-barrels jolts heavily down the lane; for the rest the farms of the

valley and the kitchen-gardens of the cottagers supply it with the needs of life and its few fishing-boats bring in their harvest from the sea. Nor does St. Gervase seek after any fruits of science or culture or religion save such as spring from its soil, which furnishes its wise women with herbs of healing for ailing bodies, and from its tradition of spells and superstitions of a darker sort to be used in the service of love or of vengeance. These latter are not publicly spoken of save in one house at St. Gervase, but are muttered and whispered in quiet consultations, and thus the knowledge has been handed down from mother to daughter since the days when, three centuries ago, a screeching, handcuffed band of women were driven from here to Bodmin, and, after a parody of a trial, burned at the stake.

It was strange that the vicarage, which might have been expected to be unblackened by the smoke of legendary learning, was the one house where magic and witchcraft were openly and sedulously studied, but such study was purely academical, the Reverend Lionel Eusters being the foremost authority in England as a writer on folk-lore. His parochial duties were light and his leisure plentiful; for a couple of services on Sunday were, to judge by the congregation, sufficient for the spiritual needs of his parish, and for the rest of the week he was busy in the library of the creeper-covered vicarage that stood hard by the lich-gate that led to the churchyard. Here, patient but unremitting, he worked at his great book on witchcraft which had engaged him so many years, occasionally printing some subsection of it as a pamphlet: the origin of the witch's broomstick, for instance, had furnished curious reading. He was a wealthy man with no expensive tastes save that for books on this subject, and the big library he had built on to the vicarage had now few empty shelves. Twenty years ago, when ill health had driven him from the chill clays of Cambridge, he had been appointed to this remote college living, and the warm soft climate and the strange primitive traditions that hung about the place suited both his health and his hobby.

Mr. Eusters had long been a widower, and his daughter Judith, now a woman of forty years old, kept house for him. The time of her more marriageable maidenhood had been spent here in complete isolation from her own class, and though sometimes when she saw the courtships and childbirths of the village the sense of what she had missed made a bitter brew for her, she had long known that St. Gervase had cast some spell upon her, and that had a wooer from without sought her, he must indeed be a magnet to her heart if he could draw her from this secluded valley into the world that lay beyond the moors. In a few visits she had paid to relations of her father and mother, she had always pined to be home again, and to wake to the glinting of the sun on the gorse-clad hills, or even to the bellowing of some westerly gale that threw the sheets of rain against her window: a stormy day at home was worth all the alien sunshine, and the sandy beach of the bay with the waves asleep, or toppling in foaming and thunderous, was better than the brilliance of southern seas. Here alone her mind knew that background of content which is brighter than all the pleasures the world offers; here every day the spell of St. Gervase was like some magic shuttle weaving its threads through her.

Since her mother's death Judith's days had been of uniform monotony. Household cares claimed a short hour of the morning, and then she went to the library where her father worked to transcribe his words if he had a section of his work ready for dictation, or to look up endless references in the volumes that lined the room, if he was preparing the notes which formed the material of his dictation.

Some branch of witchcraft was always the subject of it, some magical rite for the fertility of the cattle, some charm for child-bearing, some philtre for love, or (what had by degrees got to interest her most) some spell that made the pastures wither and the cattle die, or one that caused the man on whom a girl's heart was set, but who had nought for her, to wither in the grip of some nameless sickness and miserably to perish. Month by month as her father pushed his patient way forward through the ancient mists, these Satanic spells that blighted grew to be a fascination with Judith. Just now he was deep in an exploration into wishing-wells, and there she sat this morning, pencil in hand for his dictation, as he walked up and down the library, glancing now and then at his memoranda spread out on the table.

"These wishing-wells," he said, "are common to the whole of early European beliefs, but nowhere do we find that the power which supposedly presided over them was at the beck and call of any chance person who invoked their efficacy. Only witches and those who had occult powers could set the spell working, and in origin that spell was undoubtedly Satanic, and not till Christian times were these wells used for any purpose but that of invoking evil. The form of these wells is curiously similar, an arch or shelter of stone-work is invariably built over them, and in its sides are cut small niches where, in Christian days, candles were placed or thank-offerings deposited. What they were previously used for is uncertain, but they were beyond doubt connected with the evil spells, and I conjecture that the name of the person dedicated to destruction was scratched on a coin, or written on a slip of linen or paper and hidden there to await the action of the diabolical power. The most perfectly preserved of these wishing-wells known to me is that of St. Gervase in Cornwall; its arched shelter is in excellent condition, and the well, as is usual, very deep. The local belief in its efficacy has survived to this day, though its power is never invoked, as far as I can ascertain, for evil purposes. A woman in pregnancy, for instance, will drink of the well and pray beside it; a girl whose lover has gone to sea will scratch his name on a silver coin and drop it into the water, thus insuring his safe return. The village folk are curiously reticent about such practises, but I can personally vouch for cases of this kind. . . ."

He paused, fingering the short Vandyke beard that grew grayly from his chin.

"My dear, I wonder if that is quite discreet," he said to Judith. "But after all it is highly improbable that any copy of my work, published by the university at a guinea, will find its way here. I think I will chance it. . . . Dear me, the bell for luncheon already! We will resume our work this evening, if you are at leisure, as I have much ready for dictation."

JUDITH smiled to herself as she paged the sheets. She knew so much more about her father's parishioners than he; for he, scholar, recluse and parson, only lived on the fringe of their lives, whereas she, in chatty visits to the women who sat and knitted at their cottage doors, had got into real touch with an inner life of which he knew little. She knew, for instance, that old Sally Trenair, whose death less than a week ago had been a source of such relief to her neighbors, was universally held to be a witch, and Sally was always muttering and mumbling round the wishing-well. None who crossed her will prospered: their cows went dry or threw still-born calves; their sheep wilted; the atrocious henbane, fatal to cattle, appeared in their fields; so the prudent wished Sally a polite good-day, and sent her honey from their hives and a cut of prime bacon when the pig was killed.

But from some vein of secretiveness, Judith did not tell her father of such talk, whispered to her over the knitting-needles, which would have inclined him to modify his views about the surviving association of the wishing-well with evil invocations. It was idle gossip, perhaps, for if you had challenged her to say whether she believed such tales of old Sally, she would certainly have denied it. . . . And yet something deep down in her would have whispered: "I don't only believe, I know."

Today when luncheon was finished, her father returned to his desk and Judith started to walk a couple of miles up the valley to the farm of John Penarth, whose family from time immemorial had owned those acres. For the last eight years he and his wife had lived there alone, for their only son Steven had gone out to America at the age of sixteen to seek his fortune. But its coming had tarried, and now, when his father was growing old and his health declining, Steven was coming home with the intention of settling down here. Judith remembered him well, a big handsome boy with the blue of the sea in his eyes and the sunshine in his hair, and she wondered what sort of man he would have grown into. She had heard that he was already come, but though she was curious to see him, the motive for her visit was really the same as that which so often drew her to the Penarth farm, namely, to have a talk with Steven's mother. There was no one, thought Judith, who was so learned in what was truly worth knowing as Mrs. Penarth. She could not have pointed you India on the big globe that stood in her parlor, have answered the simplest board-school question about Queen Elizabeth, or have added five to four without counting on her fingers, but she had rarer knowledge in the stead of such trivialities. She had the healing touch for man and beast: she stroked an ailing cow and the next day it would be at pasture again; she whispered in the ear of a feverish child, plucking gently at its forehead, and pulled the headache out so that the child slept. And she, alone of all the village, had paid no court to Sally Trenair nor sought to propitiate her. One day as she passed Sally's cottage, Sally had screamed curses on her, yelling, halfway to the farm. Then suddenly Mrs. Penarth had turned and shot out her finger at her. "You silly, tipsy old crone!" she had cried. "Down on your knees and crave my pardon, and then get home and don't cross my path again." Sure enough, Sally knelt on the stones, and slunk off home, and thereafter, if Mrs. Penarth was down in the village, she would make haste to get into her cottage, and shut the door. Mrs. Penarth, it seemed, knew more than Sally.

Judith swung her easy way up the steep hill, hatless in spite of the hot sun, and unbreathed by the ascent. She was a tall woman, black-haired and comely, her skin clear and healthy with the blossom on it that only sun and air can give. Her full-lipped mouth hinted that passion smoldered there; her eyebrows, fine and level, nearly met across the base of her forehead; her eyes, big and black, looked ever so slightly inward. So small was the convergence that it was no disfigurement: when she looked directly at you it was not perceptible, but if she was immersed in her own thoughts, then it was there. Most noticeable was it when her father was dictating to her some grim story of malign magic or witchcraft. . . . But now she had come to the paved path through the garden of the farmhouse, set with flowers and herbs in front of the espaliered apple-trees, and there was Mrs. Penarth, knitting in the shade of the house during these hot hours before she went out again to chicken-run and milking-shed.

"Eh, but you're a welcome sight, Miss Judith," she said in the soft Cornish speech. "And you hatless in

the sun, as ever, but indeed you're one of the wise who have made sun and rain their friends, and 'tis far you'd have to search ere you found better. Come in, dear soul, and have a glass of currant-water after your walk, and tell me the doings down to St. Gervase.''

Judith always fell into their mode of speech when she was with the native folk.

''Sure, there's little to tell,'' she said. ''There was a grand catch of mackerel two days agone, and yesterday was the burying of old Sally Trenair.''

Mrs. Penarth poured out for her a glass of the clear ruby liquor for which she was famous.

''Strange how the folk were scared of that tipsy old poppet!'' she said. ''She had nobbut a few rimes to gabble and a foul tongue to flap at them. A tale of curses she blew off at me one day, and I doubt not she hid my name in the wishing-well, though I never troubled to look.''

''Hid your name in the wishing-well?'' asked Judith, thinking of this morning's dictation.

Mrs. Penarth shot a swift, oblique glance at her. There were certain things she had noticed about Judith, and they interested her.

''Aw, my dear, you've sure got too much sense and book-learning to heed such tales,'' she said. ''But when I was a girl my mother used to talk of them. Even now I scarce know what to make of some of them.''

''Oh, tell me of them,'' said Judith. ''My father's just set on the wishing-wells and the lore of them. He was dictating to me of them all the morning.''

''Eh, to think of that! Well, when I was a girl there were a many queer doings round the well. A maid would tell an old crone like Sally if she fancied a young man, and get some gabble to con over as she sipped the water. Or if a fellow had an ill-will toward another he'd consult a witch-woman and she'd write the name of his enemy for him, and bid him hide it in the well. And then, sure as the coming of morning, tribulations drove fast on him as long as his name bided there. His cows would go dry or his boat be wrecked or his children get deadly dwams or his wife break her marriage vows. Or he himself would pine and fail till he was scarce able to put foot to floor, and presently the bell would be tolling for him. Idle tales, no doubt.''

Judith had been drinking this in as eagerly as the thirsty earth drinks the rain after drought, or as a starving man sets his teeth in food. Her mouth smiled, her blood beat high and strong; it was as if she was learning some news of good fortune which was hers by birthright. Just then there came a step in the passage and the door opened.

''Why, 'tis Steven,'' said Mrs. Penarth. ''Come, lad, and pay your duty to Miss Judith; maybe she remembers you.''

Tall as she was, he towered over her: he had a boy's face still, and the sea was in his eyes and the sun in his hair. And on the instant Judith knew that no magnet of man would avail to draw her from St. Gervase.

THERE was dictation again for her up till supper-time, and when after that her father went back to his books, she strolled out, as she often did on hot nights like this, before going to bed. Never yet had she felt so strong an emotional excitement as that afternoon when Mrs. Penarth, talking of those old beliefs of her girlhood, had somehow revealed Judith to herself. All that narration about the wishing-well was already familiar to some secret cell in her brain: she needed only to be reminded of it to make it her own. On the top of that had come Steven's entry, and her heart had leaped to him. Some mixed brew of these two was at ferment within her now: sometimes a bubble

from one, sometimes from the other rose luminous to the surface. She felt restless and tingling with stored energy, and she paused for a moment at the gate of the garden uncertain how to spend it.

The night was thickly overcast, the road that led down to the village a riband of gray, scarcely visible, and as she stood there she heard a step brisk and active coming along it, and there swung into view, recognizable even in the deep dusk by his height and gait, the figure of Steven on his way to the village. Dearly would she have loved to call to him and walk with him, but that could not be; besides, another desire tugged at her, and when he was past she turned in at the lich-gate to the churchyard. The white tombstones glimmered faintly in the dusk, and she looked up beyond them toward the grave by which she had stood two days ago at the burying of old Sally. Then her breath caught in her throat, for she could see the mound of new-turned earth gleaming whitely. She made her way to it: the dark earth certainly was luminous with some wavering light, and on the moment she was conscious that Sally herself, not the mere bag of bones that had been put away in the earth, was close to her. So vivid was this impression that she whispered, "Sally! Are you here, Sally?" No audible response came, but the answer tingled in every nerve in her body, and she knew that Sally was here, no pale wandering spirit, but a power friendly and sisterly and altogether evil. It was trickling into her, growing warm in her veins, as by some transfusion of blood. She went to the wishing-well, and kneeling on the curbstone of it drank of its water from her cupped hands.

Something stirred beside her, and turning she saw at her side, illuminated by some pale gleam, a little bent figure shrouded in clean grave clothes, and the brown wizened face, which she had last beheld in the composure and dignity of death, was now all alive with glee and with welcome. Judith's flesh was weak, for in a spasm of terror she sprang to her feet with arms flung out against the specter, and lo! there was nothing there but the quiet churchyard with the headstones of those who slumbered there, and at her feet the black invisible water of which she drank.

Despising herself for her fright, and yet winged with it, she ran stumbling from the place, not halting till she was back at the vicarage, where the light shining from the library window showed that her father was still pursuing his academic researches into the world of things occult and terrible of which the doors were now swinging open to admit her in very truth.

For some days the horror of that moment by the well was effective, and she threw herself into the normal ways of life which lured her with a new brightness. She often saw Steven, for it was he who brought the milk of a morning from the farm, and she would be out in the garden by the time of his early arrival, cutting roses for her vases or more strenuously engaged in weeding the borders. At first she gave him just a nodded "good morning," but soon they would stand chatting there for five minutes. She knew she made a fine, handsome figure: she saw he appreciated her healthy splendor, he looked at her with the involuntary tribute a man pays to a good-looking woman. Fond wild notions took root in her mind, spreading their fibers beneath in the soil, and anchoring there. . . . Another morning she heard him singing as he clattered down the road in the milk-cart, a big, rough, resonant voice, and of high pitch for a man.

Judith played the organ in church, conducting a choir-practise every Saturday for the singers, and next week Steven was sitting among the men while she took them through the canticles and hymns. Women and girls took alto and treble parts; the chief

chorister was Nance Pascoe, a maid of twenty, and she was like a folded rosebud just bursting into full flower. By some blind instinct Judith began to dislike her: she would stop in the middle of a verse to tell the trebles they were flat, which meant that Nance was the culprit. Again she would ask the tenors singly to sing some line over which they had bungled, and had a word of praise for Steven. Or she would go to the farm for a chat with Mrs. Penarth, and by some casual question learn that Steven was hedge-clipping near by in the meadow. Then she would remember she wanted a chicken for next day, and go to tell him: it was but a step. In a hundred infinitesimal ways she betrayed herself.

Mixed with this growth of longing which had so firmly rooted itself was another of more poisonous breed. There was a power eager to help her, and like a frightened fool she had fled from its manifestation. But she knew she was making no way with Steven, and now she bethought herself again of it, and found that her terror had withered, and that her thirst for commerce with those dark enchantments was keen not only for the help they could give her, but for her own love of them. Once more in the evening, when her father was back at his books, she set out for the wishing-well.

HER step was noiseless on the grass of the churchyard, and she was close to the wishing-well, still screened by bushes that grew there, when she heard from behind them a man's ringing laughter, and a girl's voice joined in.

"Sure, she's terrible set on you, Steven. It makes me bubble within when she says at the choir-singing: 'Yes, very nice, Mr. Penarth,' and what the poor soul means is 'Aw, Steven, doo-ee come and give me a hug.'"

Steven laughed again. "I'm fair scared of her," he said, "though Mother laughs fit to burst when she's come up to the farm to see and order one egg or a sprig of mint. And every morning when I take the milk, the old girl'll be weeding and hoeing, showing off like, as if she was the strong man at the fair."

"Eh, I declare I'm sorry for her," said Nance, "for I know what it is to love you. Poor empty heart!"

"Nance, we must put our banns up," said he. "I'm scared, but give your lad a kiss to strengthen him and I'll pluck up and ask Parson to read us out next Sunday."

There was silence.

"Eh, Steven, don't hug so tight," whispered Nance. "You'll get your fill of me ere long. Just a drink from the well for us both, and then I must get home."

Judith stole back along the grass, and from behind the curtain in the parlor window saw the two, arm-entwined, pass down the road. No thought was there now in her mind of any love-philtre; no longer did she want the help of a friendly power to get Steven. He had mocked at her, he was scared of her, and soon he would have good reason for that. Of Nance she hardly thought: it was not for Nance that her heart was black as the water in the wishing-well. She felt no hysterical rage of longing or revenge: it was a hellish glee that fed her soul. Quaint and pleasant was it, she thought, as she wrote on a slip of paper the name "Steven Penarth," that it should have been his mother who had taught her that. And Mrs. Penarth had "laughed fit to burst" at her, so Mrs. Penarth must learn not to laugh so much.

She went forth again with the inscribed slip. The power she courted was flooding into her, wave on wave. Now she was back at the well again, and there she knelt a moment drinking in like a thirsty field the dew of power with which the air was thick. She felt in the darkness for one of those fern-fringed niches in the wall,

and deep among its fronds she hid the paper.

"Master of evil and of me," she muttered, "send sickness and death on him whom I here dedicate."

Something stirred beside her: she knew that the presence which had terrified her before was manifest again. She turned with hands of welcome, and there beside her was the shroud-wrapped figure and the wizened face, but now the shroud was white no longer but spotted with earth-mold, and the flesh was rotting from the face. Judith put her arms close round the specter, and kissed the frayed lips fretted with decay, and she felt it melting into her. She shut her eyes in the ecstacy of that union: when she opened them she was clasping the empty air.

She was down early next morning, full of youthful fire and fitness, and presently the milk-cart clattered up to the gate. But it was not Steven who drove it, but Mrs. Penarth.

"'Tis I who've come with your milk today, Miss Judith," she said; "for Steven's got a terrible bad headache, and I bade him lie abed. But he charged me to ask Parson to put up his banns come Sunday."

"Oh, is Mr. Steven to be married?" asked Judith. "Who's the maid?"

"Just Nance Pascoe whom he's played with since he was a lad."

"Then he's lucky," said Judith, "for she's pretty as a picture. I'll tell my father about the banns. And I'm so sorry Mr. Steven's not well. But he'll mend quick."

The days passed on, and soon it was known that Steven lay stricken with some sore fever to which neither his mother's healing hands nor the doctor's potions brought relief. Every morning Judith learned from Mrs. Penarth that he was no better, and every morning she felt herself the object of some keen, silent scrutiny. She was not one who prinked before her glass, but one day, after Mrs. Penarth had gone, she ran upstairs and questioned her face. It certainly had changed: it was sharper in outline, and that cast in her eye was surely more pronounced. But she liked that: it seemed an outward and visible sign of her power. Every night now she sat by the wishing-well concentrating on her desire. The news of Steven had been joyfully bad that day: his fever burned more fiercely, consuming the flesh on his bones and drinking up his strength. Twice now had his banns been called, and it was likely that the next visit to church would not be that of a bridegroom.

The moon was soon to rise as Judith got up to go home: she fancied she heard something stir in the bushes by the well, and called "Sally, Sally," but no response came. Her limbs were light with joy; she danced along the strip of turf, leaping high in the air from the very exuberance of her soul. . . . As soon as she had turned out of the lich-gate Mrs. Penarth stole out of the bushes. She had a dark lantern with her, and she searched the walls of the wishing-well. She spied the paper Judith had hidden there, and she drew it out and read it. She tore it in half, and on the blank piece she wrote another name, and put it back exactly where it had been. That night Steven slept well and long, and in the morning, even as Judith had surmised, he was "mending quick."

Judith was not in the garden at the milk-hour to hear the favorable report, and later in the day Dr. Addis was called in; he found her suffering from just such an attack of fever as he had been attending for the past fortnight. It puzzled him, but his treatment of his other patient was proving successful, and he assured her father there was no cause for alarm: fevers ran their course. And Judith's fever ran its course ever more fiercely.

She was lying in her bed facing the window some ten days after she had

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The DEATH TOUCH

By Chester L. Saxby

"Its yellow fangs were buried in Yardley's shoulder."

THE devil is in Cape Horn for men that sail, and if it can't get you one way, it will get you just the same. It isn't just the wind, either.

The wind had done enough. Six times we beat into it, trying to make into the Pacific before our cargo of wheat molded. But six times we lost headway on the starboard tack and were drawn in toward the same rounded cliff. Stormy petrels screamed at us from their desolate perches. The surf burst like cannon shells. At a yell from the lookout I sang out to let go. We wore around for the sixth time and legged it for the open sea. There we hove flat aback and argued.

Ned Priest, my mate, voted for the long road eastward. Give up, he said, and market the wheat in Port Elizabeth or Durban, with the following westerlies fetching us across to Africa in half a gale. But a stubborn fever was on me. I meant to win up onto the Chilean coast if I had to float ashore on a plank. And the crew were for it, too. The days backing and filling and banging about had only made them madder. Priest was right, but it's too late to say so now.

We waited for a lull and tried it the seventh time. Ten miles of searoom we put between us and the rocks before we came up into the wind's eye and dug into the crests. The sun went out in murk. The petrels deserted us. It began to snow. Ice had formed on the rigging and weighed us down by the head, so that there was no steadiness in the wheel.

That is the only explanation I know for getting off our course. Certainly we made more southing than westing. Some say that a strange current sets toward the frozen lands. Priest swore it had pulled Yardley's *Rambler* into the polar regions. But that

was sailor talk. The *Rambler* had disappeared most of a year ago, being last sighted a goodish way south of the Cape. Priest was merely playing a shrewd hunch, as it turned out; for, sure enough, we got trace of Yardley very soon.

Whatever happened to queer my navigation, the first reckoning I was able to get—which was on the third day when the snow stopped falling—showed us to be in latitude 64° south, with loose ice floating about. Something devilish in that! Almost as if the compass had quit. I watched it for an hour. It was jumpy, as if something besides the magnetic pole was pulling it.

Priest growled, "The wind's dropping. We'll never get out of this."

I hauled around on a long tack, but the wind died out completely, and through that day and night we lay becalmed in a cold sea, still drifting.

That brought back the talk of Ralph Yardley. But the double lookout I set was not for Yardley's *Rambler;* it was for ice. Good-sized bergs loomed up out of eddying murk, making plenty of distance while we made none — or else our drift was more rapid than I can believe. Those bergs were thirty-foot walls of green fire. Deathly cold or not, they blazed with green light, and blue and yellow flares played through them. The sheen blinded us when we got too close. They cracked like thunder. It was for them I kept the lookout and waited for the crash that would finish us.

However, those same lookouts saw the boat that settled things. A gig it was, bobbing in the lee of a big iceberg. And when we rowed to investigate, a man lay in the bottom. He was far gone from exposure and died the next day.

He was one of Ralph Yardley's crew; he told us that much. Yardley was fast in the ice of the Great Barrier a few hundred miles southward. He had found a big vein of pure iron cropping out of the ground where a split in the ice-barrier let him through. Then the ice pack had formed and sealed the *Rambler* tight. If he could stave off starvation, he was a rich man. This poor fellow who mumbled the story and pegged out seemed to have stolen the boat in a dash for civilization.

We thought it over. If Yardley was alive, we were murderers to run off and leave him. But we were taking the same chance of death that he took if we tried to reach him. Priest said only a fool would look for another fool such as Yardley was. I was agreeing with that because I knew the man, and I knew there was a streak of craziness in him. But maybe I was the fool that Priest meant. At least, the dream of profit tempted me hard. Under our hatches the wheat was moldy and foul. We had shipped too much water to save it. I faced a total loss, whatever port I made.

Out of sympathy for the *Rambler's* desperate plight, the crew were for making a try at the Barrier. Maybe I talked up the money side of it rather strong, too. We headed into the south on the first fair wind we had had. I thought that was a devilish circumstance—the sending of that wind to blow us into the deadly reaches of the frozen silence.

In a little while the compass ceased its jumping and lay steady. We steered squarely on the mark and came to a sheer face of ice that appeared to be hundreds of miles long. It was the great Antarctic Barrier on the rim of the polar continent. For a day and a half we sailed along it without finding a single break—like the Wall of China. And then suddenly it fell away, giving the picture of a Norwegian fiord, rock-bound. It was a bay half a mile wide, frozen over.

In the middle of it rose the masts and yards of a windjammer badly listed to port and partly thrust up onto the humpy ice. We ran across the ice and read the name on the

counter: *Rambler of Boston.* The boys cheered and swarmed aboard.

One look sufficed. Her sticks were sprung; her deck had buckled and burst open; bulkheads were ripped. She was a total wreck. Not a sign of life remained. If her company was not all drowned, they were dead of cold somewhere. We had come too late. The picturesque, harum-scarum Ralph Yardley was no more.

It gave us quite a shock to see this hulk without a vestige of man on her. It didn't seem right that nature had spirited away her victims and buried them. I think we all kept our eyes open pretty wide as we fanned out over the ice on the trail of food. We had to have food, fresh food, and the place was a storehouse of game. We went after it. Gulls everywhere. Guillemots chirping. Clumsy, shapeless seals staring at us with big round eyes and not moving, half asleep. Penguins approaching in a stately procession, bowing and scraping, all dressed up in their white shirt fronts. They grew wary later. We were walking right into their stone-nests. We climbed the cliff to look for birds' eggs. And because we were staring so hard for something else, we found it in a crevice.

It was the body of Ralph Yardley frozen into the ice.

The spring of the year this was. The ice on the bay was honeycombed, and the snow was melting off the rock ledges of the crevice. Otherwise we never would have seen the body; the snow would have concealed it. But now the body was encased in a solid block of ice as clear as crystal. There was no recognizing it as Yardley then. Still, it was a human figure, the only one we saw. We began hacking.

Priest came running and shook his head. "Leave him," he said. "It's a proud grave with a glass cover. Clear out while we can. Don't go poking about."

I disagreed. "There's bound to be some writing on him. Some facts."

"Facts that killed him," Priest barked. He was angry. "Greed's eating on you. Better not to know too much. Yardley was always a liar. Leave him be!"

That was a hard way to talk of the dead. I wanted to know about the iron mine, I admit. So did most of the others. I laughed at Priest.

"Scared of ghosts?" I asked him. "Whittle away, boys. Have him out!"

The chopping took a long time. The work raised a sweat. They say it's because the air is so dry. Devilish funny, though! It wasn't much above freezing. Coats and jackets went flying. At 60° we would have roasted.

Out came the block of ice with the body of a man in it. We warped a rope around it and hauled it out to the ship, hoisted it aboard and slid it into the cabin where a fire was burning. We left it there and continued after game.

That evening, officers and men messed together in the foc'sle in order not to eat in the presence of the dead. Priest said he would be damned if he went aft to sleep, and so did the second officer. Priest talked a good deal of Yardley's heavy drinking and his cold-bloodedness. He called him a dope-fiend, I remember.

I turned in early, tired and gloomy with what that day had brought. Witnessing disaster and death leaves a deep mark. Sleep is the only way to cure it.

WHEN I came into the cabin, the block of ice was all but melted. In a pool of water the figure was nearly free. The whole body was wrapped in sealskin. I stooped and plucked away a corner of it which covered the face, and brought the lamp down to it. A greasy face coated with seal fat running off from the unscraped hide. Ay, this was

Ralph Yardley! What a sleeping-bag he had made, I thought.

Slopping through water, I dropped into my bunk and was soon dreaming.

Toward morning I woke with a queer sound in my ears. Somebody was grunting and spitting and stumbling around the main cabin.

I sang out, "Priest—that you?" and knew while I sang out that it was not the mate. He would be the last man on earth to stumble about, striking things. Like a cat on his feet—that was Priest. And he despised any man that spat.

For that matter, no normal man needed to stumble about while the sun was shining all night. I felt uneasy as I listened to that thudding outside the door. Something was prowling there without sense or explanation, like ghosts rapping on tables; something that didn't answer. Besides, I recalled somebody I had known who was always spitting. That somebody was now a cold corpse lying stiff and stark and done for. *He* wouldn't ever spit again—unless his ghost had the power to do it.

I got up, shivering like an ignorant sailor. *Bang!* a set of knuckles struck the bulkhead. Shuffling boots too heavy to lift! A choking cough! I stood at the door, afraid to open it, just because I couldn't explain a common noise. My memory was frightening me. Too much talk the night before! Others had the same memory. Suddenly I laughed. They were playing a joke on me, knowing what I knew. I laughed, and then I grew hot with anger. It was no way to treat the dead.

I flung out into the cabin and stood with my fists drawn up.

"Whoever's doing that—I'll teach you to be decent! Bear around here!" I bawled at the tall, bulky figure shambling toward the companion steps.

It was hazy with smoke from the stove, hazy and warm and close. A smell hung in the air, a dank smell that instinctively made me bristle. Some smells belong in certain places, and this was a faint odor that wilted flowers give off—and moss that is ripped from tree-roots. Not much of a smell, but I think if a dog had been there, it would have laid back its ears and howled uncomfortably.

The figure had not turned around, but was still lurching toward the door. I started after it—and brought up, searching for the body. The skin of a seal I saw; it had nothing in it. Like the shed hide of a musk-ox it sprawled there. My teeth chattered when I saw that. And then the figure turned on me.

It was too big for Priest, and Priest was the biggest man aboard. The face glowed and gleamed; so did the hands that flapped as the creature walked.

"Rum—gi' me rum!" came from the leering mouth.

Closer—closer the figure staggered. It was but a yard from me. It was dark, dirty grease that streaked that face. It was seal-fat.

"Yardley! *Yardley!*" I knew him. I pushed him off. I snarled at him.

His knees gave way, and down he went, mumbling. When he did that, I got a bit of second wind, seeing him motionless as he should have been. In a daze I fetched a flask and stepped up and stuck it between his teeth. His fingers reached to clutch it, and they were as cold as icicles. He downed all he could and let the flask fall. For three minutes neither of us stirred. Then he began to jerk in every muscle, the way one does in a convulsion. That ended, he sighed.

"Feel better," he said. "Worst spell I ever had." He spoke as if his mouth were full of porridge. "Must have got frosted bad. Fingers and toes numb."

I sat down at the table, weak as water. "Yardley," I told him in a wobbly voice, "I swear to God you were dead! Frozen in a cake of ice!"

"Whisky heart," he answered. "Lays me out cold, days on end."

"Cold! Embalmed, I tell you! Must have been weeks in that ice——"

My head went round and round. He checked me. "What day is this?"

Vaguely I babbled something about October. He glared at me.

"Not October. August. Don't I know? It's August! Where am I?"

I jumped up and circled around him and spilled onto the deck. I let out a roar for Priest, for anybody. Half a dozen men came running. The scuttle opened on the rest of them. They crowded the door. I hauled them in with all my strength. They crowded back and stood jammed. They were worse scared than I was.

Ralph Yardley rose to meet them. He swept up the gingham table-cloth and wiped his face and hands and grinned and spat. His lips were blue; his eyes were deep-sunk. He saw Priest shouldering in. Priest at least was not afraid.

They faced each other. "Hello, Ned! Don't you know me?"

"Ay," replied Priest slowly, "I'd know you in hell. And that's where you've been. We should have left you there. You're a dead man, Ralph Yardley."

"Many's the time I've been dead," croaked the other. "But never so cold. Catalepsy is the name they give it. Walking with angels—beauties they were."

"How long?" asked Priest. "You never breathed through that ice."

"Two months," I said. "August he thinks it is."

"You can't do that," persisted Priest. "It's against nature. You're dead, I reckon. But you don't scare me, Yardley, miracle or not. Hold hard, boys!"

But they couldn't hold hard. Somebody got his breath and plunged for the deck. Like bleating sheep the rest plowed after him, tripping and sprawling. The door rocked shut. The three of us were left alone.

"Look here," said Yardley, "I'm right enough. You mustn't go saying I'm dead. Suspended animation—that's happened before. It's happened with me twice."

"Listen," Priest objected. "The ice sealed you in—four inches thick over your face. You couldn't possibly breathe. *That* never happened before."

Yardley laughed. "They put bodies in air-tight coffins in vaults, and later on they find the clothes torn off 'em. I'm alive, Ned. Feel me!"

"I don't want to. Have it your own way. What were you doing here?"

"Found a fortune underground. Iron mine. I'll tell you about it. Discovered it by accident when I was climbing over the tundra. The earth fell in with me, and I slid through an opening into a cave. Say, where's my crew gone to?"

"You ought to know," said Priest. "You know everything."

I was staring so hard at Yardley that I had no chance to miss the look he gave the mate. He seemed to be staring through a film and watching Priest from a long way off. His expression was a sort of hard, implacable curse. I almost looked for Priest to shrink and dry up where he stood. There was hate between them, but Yardley's hate curdled my blood. I figured that there was not enough fire in him to work him to rage, or else, having been over the edge of the Great Beyond, he knew how useless and silly was human anger. His old hate was nothing but a bad memory, and in a calculating graveyard fashion he would make Priest pay for it.

"Well," he said, "this cave was not deep to start with. I walked on and on. It got deeper and warmer. I saw a light reflected from above. That was when I reached the main chamber. The sun shone down off the ice through an open shaft. Another shaft

went below—an old volcano, maybe—heating the place. Must be holes like that all over the earth—breathing-holes. Down in the chamber you wouldn't know any ice was around. You'd say you were in the tropics. Once the Antarctic was a warm country, anyway—a few million years ago. Look at the seals. They used to be bears. The bones in their flippers prove that. And penguins—they were badgers, I'm told, that gradually took to the water when no more food was left on the land. Besides, I've seen fern-fossils in rocks, and petrified tree trunks. You don't have to go so far back. How about the mosquitoes here? Where do they grow so big and sting so bad? I figure it, the floor of that cave dropped in an earthquake and never got a touch of this cold. Just went on blooming."

"Are your men in the cave?" Priest snapped.

Again Yardley looked a hole in him. "They stayed aboard the *Rambler* and tried to break her out. When I came back from exploring, they were gone, and the boats were gone. It looked like they deserted. It was after I fell into the cavity that I came back to find the ship cracked open and nobody on her. I'm cold," he said suddenly. "Give me some whisky, will you?" He seized the bottle I passed him and drank it dry—all of a pint. I gasped. He hadn't turned a hair.

"What about this iron mine?" I found my voice. "What's your proposition?"

"Half and half for you fellows and me," he replied. "You'll be rich."

"There's a good many of us," I objected. "We'd be doing the work."

"Maybe, but I discovered it. We can pry it off in chunks. Dead easy."

Priest rumbled, "You don't get me down into that hole, Yardley. Likely now, the mouth of hell is in that hole, and you've sold your soul to the devil for the poor boys you'd push into the crater—or whatever it is. You never were human, Yardley. I knew you in Borneo where you played with voodooism. I don't get your game, but it's a deep one. I'll gamble there's no iron at all."

YARDLEY got out of his chair and made a motion to fasten his hand on Priest's shoulder. At once the mate had him by the neck, shaking him. I thought he would strangle him, forgetting how weak Yardley must be. It astonished me to see Yardley close his awkward hand on Priest's hair and force Priest's head back. His other hand gripped Priest's throat. They stood a moment pitching off balance. But Yardley did not fall. Instead, Priest squirmed and coughed and went into a nervous flurry and fought loose and cowered down.

"Don't lay your hand on me!" he howled. "I'll shoot you if you do!"

Yardley laughed at the man's insane fear and without a glance at me stalked out of the cabin, hauling along the sealskin and throwing it about him.

I stared at Priest. "His hands are cold as ice," I said. "He can't hurt you with 'em. They've got no strength. What are you afraid of?"

"No strength? He burned me, man! He *burned* me—like a hot iron!"

I confess there were blue marks on Priest's throat where those clumsy fingers had pressed. But burn? How could fingers numb with cold be able to burn? Intense cold burns, I suppose. That must be what Priest meant."

But he wouldn't have it so. He felt it to his toes, he said. And before my eyes those blue spots grew red as fire. While I looked, blisters formed.

Priest put a wet towel to his hurt and rocked back and forth. He admitted that he should not have gone

at Yardley. He knew better. Ralph Yardley was not like any other man, he declared. He had fought him before. He had seen him knifed in Shanghai and left for dead. The man had too much vitality to die. Priest swore there were four bullets in his body, one of them in his head.

"But how can his fingers burn?" I demanded. "Are you crazy, Priest?"

"Electricity burns," was the answer. "He's full of electricity."

"Oh, rot!" I snorted. "You're dreaming, and I'm dreaming! His skin is rough, and he tore you; that's all. There was a hole in that cake of ice!"

"Vance, there wasn't any hole in that cake of ice. Yardley was dead. What's more, his heart is dead now. He'll live on and on, but he's got no feeling."

I stamped out onto the deck, savage because I couldn't understand. And up forward Yardley was talking to the crew. He was selling his iron mine to them, arguing how rich he could make them, offering to show them how easy it was to pick up a thousand dollars apiece by a few days with a pickax.

They were afraid of him, but he was overcoming the fear by plain talk, and he had got out a pipe and was filling it, as if to give further evidence that he was no ghost. He struck a match as he talked. It burned down to his fingers before he put it to the pipe. It burned *between* his fingers, and yet he didn't seem to notice it. Priest had maintained that this fellow had no feelings. So it appeared.

I was so shaken up by these things that I remained rooted there while a sort of mutiny was preached on my own deck. Because that's what it was. Yardley, laughing recklessly, as much as said that the officers hadn't the guts to tackle the fortune underground, and if the men didn't take it themselves without regard to orders from aft, they were sheep with no minds of their own.

With that, he climbed over the rail and down onto the ice and made off, waving his hand for them to follow. And sure enough they followed, the lot of them, slowly, like sleep-walkers. They stumped across the ice and up the shore-hill and out of sight. It was uncanny to see them go. Superstitious fellows, every one; frightened by a dead man come to life—but dragging after him just the same.

I went below and got out my revolver and set to cleaning it. What I wanted of it I don't know. Self-protection must have been in my mind. Priest sat watching me and drawing in his breath as he touched those blisters of his. I had nothing to say to him. The gun had got rusted from long disuse. It took me a good while to rub down the rust spots. Then I loaded it, put it into my pocket, drew on my coat and mittens and cap, and pounded off across the ice.

NOBODY was in sight at first. All I followed was footsteps in the sugar-ice, footsteps leading up over the hill and through two gullies. At the end of the second one I made out three or four figures bunched in front of an overhanging rock. In that moment one of them passed out of sight. In a couple of minutes another disappeared. Yardley's cave entrance was narrow, I concluded, and he could take only one man at a time. When I arrived, the coast was clear. A warm breath blew in my face, wafting out of the space underneath the basaltic rock.

A rope had been moored around a big boulder at one side of the crevice and led into the darkness. No guts aft, eh? I set both hands on it and, crouching, started in. I went slowly, pausing half a dozen times to listen and wonder. It was dark. I was on a slippery skidway that might end in nothing. By degrees it dropped off through a succession of landings until it reached a considerable depth. Then

it straightened out into a gallery with many turnings and twistings for two hundred feet or more. The walls were as smooth and cool as a dog's nose, but not cold. Indeed, the air grew mild as milk as I groped in twilight. The rope had stopped at the beginning of the gallery. I had nothing to follow after that.

The gallery stopped, also. It was a blind alley. I went back to the foot of the descent and tried another avenue, but I had no better luck. Three times the result was the same. Yet I could hear a confused echo of talking at no great distance. I sang out. A voice answered me. A second voice blended with it. I stumbled onto two men who like me had gone wrong and failed to find the main body of the crew. There was no use in chancing the black passages any further, I argued, when we had no light. It was better to go back to the entrance and wait for the others to come out. So we struggled back to the light by great good luck and went hand over hand up the rope into the sunlight.

We waited there till the cold got into our blood, but nobody appeared. The men grouched because they were losing a share in the iron.

I said, "I didn't smell any iron. But I smelled gas. I'll be satisfied to 'get those lads back safe and sound." And I headed for the ship.

I wanted Priest's advice, but he was in no shape to help. He was drunk. That was odd. Of all men, Priest was the least likely to get drunk, or even to take one drink. Yet he was sprawling over the table with a bottle at his elbow. He blinked foolishly. When I stormed at him, he began to shed tears.

"I'm sick," he muttered. "Strength's gone out o' me. Can't get warm. Did for me—thass what. Dragged it out o' me. Weak as a baby—thass what I am."

No more than that could I extract from him; it was all he knew and all he would talk about. Yardley's fingers had drained him, he kept repeating. It sounded impossible but for my own feeling when Yardley's cold hand had touched mine. Now I was frightened in earnest and didn't stop to ask myself how he did it. I was frightened for the crew. Yardley possessed some hypnotic power.

I bolted out and fled over the ice and up the hill to the gulley. I scrambled into the cave, yelling, "Yardley! Yardley! Yardley!"

Feet came scuffing from far off. I crouched in the dark and held my gun in my hand. Grunting and spitting, a figure loomed out of one of the galleries and started past me up the rope. I let him go part way, thinking to follow him into the sunshine, for it was hard to see clearly in this rat-hole. But he stopped before he reached the top, as if he realized that I was behind him.

Then something peculiar happened. It was twilight in that entrance till he came. Now the light rushed in, stronger and stronger, and surrounded him in bright rays of yellow and red. They flowed over him, danced on his head and shoulders, and flowed out. Not sunlight, any of it, but a sort of curtain of colored fire. Many a time I've seen that curtain dancing across the night sky on the Norway coast. It was the aurora borealis looking like lightning when it struck Yardley.

I forgot everything in watching it. It was so much like lightning that I wondered why it didn't strike the man down. As I thought about it, I knew it was made of the same stuff as lightning—a stream of electricity rushing through the atmosphere from the sun to the earth's poles.

And Yardley attracted it. He was magnetic. More than that, it had an effect on him. He stood up straight and threw back his shoulders and drank it in greedily. He thumped his chest, swung his arms. Sparks went from him to the walls. He was a storage battery receiving a new

charge. Here was the explanation of the burns on Priest's neck. Yardley had the enormous vitality and conducting power of a bar of metal. It must have kept him alive in the cake of ice when other men would have been congealed in five minutes.

From being frightened for the crew, I became filled with fear for myself. He had turned and was coming down. The rays grew dimmer as he put the outer world behind him. They flickered toward him but no longer reached him.

"Who's there?" he demanded. "Who called me? Speak up!"

I shrank back. "I took the wrong turn," I said. "Lead the way in."

"Oh, ho! It's the captain. Give me your hand. I'll lead you."

An electric flashlight played on my face. I stared into it.

"No," I said. "You won't touch me. You see this gun? Put down the light and start in where my men are. I'll pick it up and follow."

"You don't need to be afraid," he answered. "I won't hurt *you*." And he put down the light and walked away.

I RAN and picked it up and played it on him. He nodded and strode off into the gloom, which after a bit thinned as if light was coming from farther in. The gallery widened, emptying into a broad chamber almost as light as high noon. It was warmer here than in the passages. In the rock-ledges grew tufts of tall, pale grass and little stunted trees with half-grown, colorless leaves. I heard a tinkling spring and saw a pool of water at one side.

I saw more than this. On the edge of the pool my men were sitting and lying in attitudes of comfort. The sight relieved me, and I sang out to them.

Hardly a head turned. Not one raised his voice. I bawled at them again and went to one and clapped him on the back. I got no response. Heaving him around, I looked into his face. It was the face of a sick man, pallid, lost to all interest, without much sense in it. I sprang to another and gripped him by the arm. His teeth were chattering.

Angrily I faced Yardley and accused him. He shook his head.

"You've been listening to Priest," he protested. "Ned Priest never liked me. But ask these Jacks if I hurt them. Why should I? Who'll take out the iron if they don't? What's wrong with them; tell me that."

"The same thing that's wrong with Priest," I barked. "The very touch of you curdles the blood. You put your hands on 'em. That was enough."

"Yes, I put my hands on them, easing them down the rope. What of it?"

"What of it? You've killed before. I know stories of you."

"Maybe I have. I get mad quick. And don't you bait me, if you're wise. But these boys—I never struck one, nor wanted to. I helped each one down the rope, and something came over them, and they slumped down like you see them. Look here—what I've done in the past is over. There's a fortune here, but two men can't dig it, and two men can't sail a ship through icebergs. That's pure iron!"

He pointed to a red streak inlaid in the rock, a mammoth vein, and I thought now that I could smell it. But I was not concerned with iron. The fate of a ship's company appeared to be settled. Life was playing a horrible joke: burning men in the frozen Antarctic. It could not be doubted, for I examined the skin of these apathetic faces, while weakened arms tried to push me away, and every face had tiny blue spots—or if not the face, then the arms and the hands.

I was afraid to give them first aid. Artificial respiration might overtax the heart and rupture it. In a rage I confronted Yardley, who had

dropped down on a boulder and was staring at his hands doubtfully.

"I'm going to the ship for brandy, and you'll come, too," I told him.

"Brandy—ay, let's have brandy," he growled.

"Not you. I'm taking you so you can't do any more harm here. Get up!"

"Go careful! I get mad quick," he warned me. "I'll have brandy, too."

"Will you? I'd be wasting it," I flung out harshly. "You're dead."

He gave me that blank look he had given Priest. Suddenly I thought I understood what that look meant. He seemed to be wondering if I was right. It came to me with a funny feeling that Priest might have been nearer to the truth than he knew when he said that Yardley was dead. Wasn't he as cold as ice? Wasn't his every movement automatic and expressionless? No man could live two months in an ice-cake. But dead men had been restored to life—at least for a time—by modern science. One way was to massage the heart, to stimulate it.

"It's a lie," he stated, his fishy eyes on mine. "I'm as much alive as you are. You couldn't do what I did to those fellows there. See these muscles."

"Neither could you do it by yourself," I snapped him up. "Enough electricity has flowed into you to kill you—if you weren't already dead. Maybe it killed you. Maybe you froze to death. While you were lying there, the electric current switched from the North Pole to the South Pole, and you were in the path of it. In a moment it may switch back, Yardley. This is only temporary."

It was a bold stroke to scare him into submission. But it worked in the opposite way. His pale face became green. He choked and spat and flung out his arms and came at me. He was still capable of violent anger.

"What do you know of physics?" he bellowed. And I knew I had touched him on a raw spot. He was admitting that *he* knew physics.

I threw up the revolver and checked him. "You knew what you were doing when you touched those men!" I dared him. "You never wanted iron, you crook! It was *silver* you wanted, silver you could mine yourself! I see it behind you—that dark strip—or I'm blind! Only one pick could work at a time. Share it? Not you!"

A cunning, desperate distortion of his features answered for him.

"Put down the gun! I wasn't sure it was silver, but you know—you're sure, are you? It's all a lie about the men there, but it can't be helped now——"

I broke in: "Why, rot you, they're not dead yet!" I glanced up into the shaft that had grown dark all in a minute. "Walk, Yardley! A storm's coming, and I'll shoot you like a snake to save these lads!"

At that his filmy eyes woke up with real passion. They flamed hot. His lips worked. His nerves jerked. He coughed and spat.

"Easy there!" he said in his throat. "I'm riled bad. Stop, I tell you!"

But he was talking to himself more than to me. He was fighting down his fury before it should make his heart pump too fast. Ay, he had to go softly to save that swollen heart of his from giving way. He got control of himself.

"I'll go with you," he agreed. "Why not? You can't find this place again. Say good-bye to your men when you walk out. Just you and I left."

A lucky thought! I hunted around, and my eyes fell on the tufts of yellow grass. I jumped to pluck handfuls of it, an armload. I motioned him ahead. Once in the passageway, I began dropping bits of grass as I went, to make a trail so that I might not be lost when I returned. At last we stood below the entrance.

The light was poor above us. As Yardley climbed, no colored curtain of polar rays drove in to surround him. Something had happened to the atmosphere, to the aurora borealis. But all I could see when we arrived outside was that the wind was blowing strong and thick clouds blotted the sun.

We came out of the gulley onto the bare, rocky slopes. And without warning, snow drove at us like a fog full of stinging needles. It came so quickly that in one gasp I was blinded.

Close on Yardley's heels I pressed as he stumped over the ridge into the next hollow for shelter. But the wind roared the length of the hollow and dazzled me with its white shrapnel. In two minutes I could see nothing but Yardley's great body lurching in front, his head bent forward. He made little headway and presently slued around to yell something and point back from where we had come. At once he charged the ridge. I rushed after him, determined to halt this retreat and keep on to the ship, which would be in danger now.

But the broken rock tripped me. Down I went on hands and knees and tried to pull myself up the rise. My eyes were half shut when a stone, dislodged by Yardley's boots, skipped straight for me and clipped me on the side of the head. I was dazed for an instant and grabbing right and left for support. The one thought was to catch up with him, and I managed to do it, although my brain was whirling. I reeled into him before I saw him, and he leaped about, his face close against mine.

"Warp about!" I bawled. I lifted my right hand—then realized in a cold sweat that the gun was not in it. The gun was gone; I had dropped it!

Yardley was not slow to grasp the situation. His teeth showed. His great paw swept toward me. I flung to one side, aided by a furious gust that pitched us apart and took the breath out of my lungs. I slid off the ridge backward and fumbled among the stones while I descended, searching with my fingers for the lost revolver. My eyes were no good at all. They were filled with fine dust sifting with the snow.

Almost on top of me he came. Frantically, hopelessly I scuttled to avoid him, so anxious to find the gun that he had me before I could gather myself and run. Madly I lashed out, filled with panic at the idea of his touching me. But he was at my back, gripping my coat and trousers and partly lifting me.

"It's the cave, fool!" he gasped above the screaming blizzard. "My-game! Up! Up!" He pushed me toward the rocks again.

I left off struggling. He was not touching me; it was the slack of my clothes he held. He held on firmly, too firmly for me to reach and unbutton the coat and slip out of it. But not a finger on my flesh! He was saving me from his poison touch. If I behaved, I might escape the evil that had overtaken the others.

We mounted the ridge without falling. There the blizzard tore us this way and that as if we were empty garments on a wash-line. It blew me over, and him with me. When I could stagger up, his face was close to mine, and I saw a great gash in his face where a stone with a razor edge had cut deep into the flesh. He must have seen me staring at it, for he put his fingers to it.

"Why don't you bleed?" I blurted, wondering at the lack of gore.

He drew in his breath and let it out in a furious noise. Yet he nodded as he yanked me after him by the clothes, dragged me into the gulley again with unerring instinct, although I was completely lost, and found the cave when any other man would have missed it a mile. He ran, crawled,

stumbled, fled to it, sniffing a scent that I could not smell. I know now that it was blood he smelled. *Blood* his bloodless veins called for. He gabbled while he tore on. At the bottom of the slide we fell apart, but his wild gabbling kept me plunging after him in the black passage without the need of the grass tufts to guide me by.

We were quickly spewed out of the dark into the light central chamber where the men still hunched about the pool. He made straight for them, charging like a bull. I had no idea what he was up to, but I reasoned that he meant them harm, and that is why I yelled with all my might and hurled myself at his legs.

He went down. The faces of the men lifted and turned to us. Pale? They were more than pale; they were white as alabaster. They were faces drained of life. Lying there, grappling Yardley's legs and roaring for help, I saw more than the pallor of those faces; I saw a cheek, a neck, an arm ripped as by a jagged weapon and oozing dried, caked, blackish stains. I raised my head and stared harder. Each man wounded by the same identical means! And I *knew!* There could be no mistake about what had ripped that flesh. Those were the double marks of teeth—teeth that had fastened on, a mouth that had sucked the pulsing stuff of life.

Wild though this thought was, the evidence convinced me. Yardley's frozen blood was water except for the blood he could draw from others. And he had drawn it. He had rushed back for more when he found how little he had left.

All this raced through my mind in a few dreadful seconds. Then the feet I was clutching began to double up and Yardley's upper body to double down. In a moment he would have me and put those killing hands on me. There was probably enough electric current in them even now to sap my strength and make me like these others. It would be my blood first. He was too strong for me.

But these forms of men that had been poor flies in his spider-web had started to move. Dopy and anemic though they were, they had heard an officer roar, and they were briny sailormen to the core. They appeared to be in a dream, not knowing rightly what it was all about, and some could not stand but crawled. The best of them tottered. Like the corpses in the *Ancient Mariner* they came at the pace of a crab, while I hauled at those legs to keep out of reach of those hands. And when that devil Yardley *did* grasp at me, it was my hair he seized and not my skin—as if he would save me if he could. He pulled. I bore the blinding pain as long as possible before I gave up trying to break his foot with a toe-hold.

His hand clamped on my back. His voice snarled at my ear:

"Don't get me mad, you bilge-rat! I'm saving you! The silver for us two that can work the ship! Avast now! Leave 'em to me! Blood—warm blood!"

I cursed him and pitched about, driving my knee for his groin, making him keep his attention on me. For those wobbling, flabby fellows were dragging nearer and nearer. Three yards—two yards—he let out a terrible noise. He had seen them. Letting go all caution, he went for me. His left hand swept over my face toward my throat. I yelled again—and then they were on him—a slow-moving wave.

Not a hand among them could have squeezed juice out of a tomato. Not a ray of hope lived in their gaunt faces. But somewhere inside of them was the call of vengeance. They flopped across him and pinned him down, and others flopped across them, and still others clawed up onto the human heap to sag like rag dolls. Nothing but dead weight to fight with,

yet I thought for a while they would surely smother him. The touch of him they never shrank from. They were throwing themselves away—all that was left of them; squaring accounts with me for having deserted the ship.

But they played into his hands. At the bottom of the press he was surely taking toll. I knew and shuddered at the picture of that beast in his inhuman appetite. I was right. The pile began to sway. Man after man fell off, powerless to cling. Not that they weren't an enormous load to cast off. It took a giant's strength to do what Yardley did and to get out from under. He made it at last and got up, trembling from the exertion. He looked as haggard as they did.

I crouched to spring. I had my fists. If I could knock him out, the job was done. He was looking toward me, too. Was he? Past me, rather. I chanced a glance behind me. Ned Priest stood at the edge of light—Ned Priest, drunk—drunk!

No doubt of it: he swayed and barely kept his feet; his eyes were red, and the lids drooped. He had a candle. The fellow I had found lost in a blind passage was at his elbow. He and the grass tufts had guided Priest to us. But he was drunk. Priest was drunk.

Just the same, the whisky served a purpose. Past me he stumped and reeled, ignoring me. I saw a knife in his other hand, the cook's carving-knife. He had murder in his heart along with the false courage of the burning liquor.

"You Ralph Yardley!" he trumpeted. "Dog me, you scum, you'll answer for plenty! Back to the grave, you moldy ghost! You and your Borneo witchcraft!"

And Yardley stepped back. Out of the welter of limp men he retreated slowly. Priest lunged after him. I gripped his arm and demanded the knife and cursed him for a sot that could not strike straight. But he shook me off.

Into the pale shadows surrounding the far margin of the pool Yardley backed, into the darkness of another antechamber leading God knew where. Suddenly he was out of sight. Tripping over his own feet, Priest was after him and into the rift which, when I reached it, I saw was not too dark to make out shapes.

And if the chamber behind us was decently warm, the passage ahead was all but hot. The air coming out of it felt like a dank human breath.

"Stop!" I cried out to Priest. "The place is foul! It's a trap! Stop here! He's got to come out!" But I might have been talking to a wooden post.

The fool! But I had to stay with him. He was the only hope I had of making out to sea again. We kept on, wading through twilight to what?

We were wading through more than that. The footing grew slimy and soft, and I thought things crushed when I took a step—things that wriggled. A dull light shone at some distance, with Yardley bulking against it. Priest in his fury of impatience broke into a run. Before the passage ended, he almost ran right into Yardley, who had purpose in his moment of waiting there. For when in the nick of time he stepped aside and avoided the thrust of the knife, Priest was rushing off balance down a fairly steep grade into a vast marsh and could not stop himself.

I braced myself between the passage walls and blocked the hole so that Yardley—who reasoned that Priest was alone—banged into me as he charged back from the hideous place into which he had led us. I made an instinctive thrust outward and sent him back. He slipped on the mossy edge and skittered down after Priest.

Ay, it was moss that grew here. And beyond the moss was a steaming

swamp out of which rose a veritable jungle of spotted, leprous mangrove trees and scaling palms whose bleached leaves never rustled and were yellow—yellow.

In that swamp, fuming with humidity, other trees had fallen to rot away, as other things were rotting away—the lost crew, I told myself, of the *Rambler*. Its stench was horrible. Not all vegetable matter—no; and all the flesh in it was not dead. Some of the logs moved. Black snake-eyes lifted on a long neck. The subterranean lake was alive with reptiles.

I had forgotten the blizzard of short minutes before. This was the stinking hinterland along the tropical Congo or deep in the tulgy equatorial recesses of the fever-hot Amazon country. The sweat ran down into my eyes. My clothes stuck to me. Strength seeped out of me. It was the most amazing thing in the world when from a hundred feet overhead a cold flurry that was snow drifted down onto my head. I looked up and saw a great opening whence the light came, reflected from huge blocks of ice. The earth's extremes of climate prevailed here *one hundred feet apart.* I breathed deep of the gusts of bracing air.

Then out of the mists below came the baying voice of Priest. It was the desperate voice of fear. He was bellowing hollowly and slashing with the knife. Something had got hold of him. I inched down the slippery slope, calling encouragement. It was not Yardley he slashed at. There was Yardley—behind him—unseen—wading silently knee-deep toward Priest's hunched back and lifting his deadly hands. They reached and touched Priest. They clamped upon his bare throat. I shouted—but the mischief had been done. Those fearful fingers were biting home!

Nevertheless, the mate did not stiffen and drop. Instead he came around like a figure on a pivot. He whirled on the impulse of his nerves and let drive. The knife took Yardley on the ribs, bit deep—and broke off. A mortal wound in the lung! But Yardley was not mortal. I knew it when he paid no attention to the thrust and swarmed over Priest, wrapping him in his arms. Priest's broken blade cut at him and ripped his clothing and his hide, so that I knew he was not done for yet. All the same, there was strength enough in Yardley to put the mate under if he could not be killed. Besides, Priest had slipped and was down on one knee.

It was the saving of him. A frightful black head had risen out of the dark water on a neck as long as a giraffe's. It towered above the men, its beady little eyes ablaze. Then it whipped down with narrow jaws agape. Its yellow fangs were buried in Yardley's shoulder. A jerk—and Yardley was lifted into the air, screaming. He released Priest and flapped his arms and snatched at nothing. A while he hung there, giving Priest his moment to splash crazily shoreward and claw up the mossy bank. I pulled the mate to safety and stared at the awful picture below. While I held my breath, those venomous jaws bit through and dropped the body of Yardley into the mire. A chunk as big as my two fists was torn from him. He threshed there—in a death flurry, I felt certain.

No! He was up and beating toward the bank, his pasty face wild with fear, the strange life in him carrying him on. Slipping, clutching, up he came, unquestionably mad with terror. And he made it, made the rock wall and the rift through which he had come into this hellish place. He was gone.

At his heels went Priest. I followed, listening for a spent body to drop. Yardley was running. He led us out into the chamber where the

(Continued on page 143)

Outside the Universe

By Edmond Hamilton

"Around we swept in one great lightning curve, and then were rushing straight back upon the three racing ships."

1. *The Swarm From Space*

THE floor beneath me, slanting swiftly downward, flung me across the room and against its metal wall as our whole ship suddenly spun crazily in mid-space. For the moment following I had only a swift vision of walls and floor and ceiling gyrating insanely about me while I clutched in vain for some hold upon them, and at the same moment I glimpsed through the window the other ships of my little squadron plunging helplessly about behind us. Then as our craft's wild whirling slackened I stumbled to my feet, out of the room and up the narrow stair outside it, bursting into the transparent-walled little pilot room where my two strange lieutenants stood at the ship's controls.

"Korus Kan! Jhul Din!" I exclaimed. "Are you trying to wreck us all?"

The two turned toward me, saluting. Korus Kan, of Antares, was of the metal-bodied races of that star's countless worlds, his brain and heart and nervous system and vital organs encased in an upright body of gleaming metal whose powerful triple arms and triple legs were immune from all fatigue, and from whose ball-like upper brain-chamber or head his triangle of three keen eyes looked forth. Jhul Din, too, was as patently of Spica, of the crustacean peoples of that sun's planets, with his big, erect body armored in hard black shell, his two mighty upper arms and two lower legs short and thick and stiff, while from his shiny black conical head protruded his twin round eyes. Drawn as the members of our crews

were, from every peopled star in the galaxy, there were yet no stranger or more dissimilar shapes among them than these two, who confronted me for a moment now in silence before Korus Kan made answer.

"Sorry, sir," he said; "it was another uncharted ether current."

"Another!" I repeated, and they nodded.

"This squadron is supposed to have the easiest section of the whole Interstellar Patrol, out here along the galaxy's edge," said Jhul Din, "but we're no sooner clear of one cursed current than we're into another."

"Well, currents or no currents, we'll have to hold our course," I told them. "The Patrol has to be kept up, even out here." And as Korus Kan's hands on the controls brought our long, slender ship back into its proper path I stepped over beside him. Standing between the Antarian and the Spican and glancing back through our rear telescopic distance-windows I could make out in a moment the other ships of our squadron, falling again into formation far behind us. Then I had turned, and with my two friends was gazing forth into the great vista of light and darkness that lay before us.

It was toward our left that the light lay, for to the right and in front and behind us the eye met only blackness, the utter, unimaginable blackness of outer space. Left of us, though, there stretched along the ebon heavens a colossal belt of countless brilliant stars, the gathered suns of our galaxy. A stupendous, disk-like mass of stars, it floated there in the black void of space like a little island of light, and hundreds of billions of miles outward from the outermost suns of this island-universe our little squadron flashed through space, parallel to its edge. Looking toward the great galaxy from that distance, its countless thousands of glittering suns seemed merged almost in one mighty flaming mass; yet even among those thousands there burned out distinctly the clearer glory of the greater suns, the blue radiance of Vega, or the yellow splendor of Altair, or the white fire of great Canopus itself. Here and there among the fiery thousands, too, there glowed the strange, misty luminescence of the galaxy's mighty comets, while at the galaxy's edge directly to our left there flamed among the more loosely scattered stars the great Cancer cluster, a close-packed, ball-like mass of hundreds of shining suns, gathered together there like a great hive of swarming stars.

On our right, though, sharply contrasted with the galaxy's far-flung splendor, there stretched only blackness, the deep, utter blackness of that titanic void that lies outside our universe. Black, deep black, it stretched away in unthinkable reaches of eternal emptiness and night. Far away in that blackness the eye could in time make out, hardly to be seen, a few faint little patches of misty light, glowing feebly to our eyes across the mighty gloom of space; faint patches of light that were, I knew, galaxies of stars, island-universes like our own, separated from our own by a titanic void of millions of light-years of space, an immensity of emptiness into which even the swiftest of our ships could not venture, and beside which the distances between our own stars seemed tiny and insignificant.

In silence we gazed into that mighty panorama of thronging stars and cosmic void, standing there together as we three had stood for many an hour, Antarian and Spican and human. From the ship's hull, stretched beneath the little pilot-room in which we stood, there came dimly to our ears the strangely differing voices of our crew. Over these occasional voices, too, there beat unceasingly the deep, droning

hum of the great mechanisms whose tremendously powerful force-vibrations were propelling us on through space at almost a thousand light-speeds. Except for these familiar half-heard sounds, though, there was only silence in the pilot room, and in silence we three gazed as our ship and the ships behind it flashed on and on. Then, abruptly, Korus Kan uttered a sharp cry, pointing upward.

"Look!" he cried. "That swarm on the space-chart!"

STARTLED, our eyes lifted to where the Antarian pointed, toward the big space-chart on the wall above the window. A great rectangle of smooth, burnished metal, upon its flat surface were represented all in the heavens immediately about us. On the chart's left side there shone scores of little circles of glowing light, extending outward from the left edge for several inches, representing the outmost suns of the great galaxy to our left. Inches outward from the outermost of those glowing circles there moved upon the blank metal, creeping upward in a course parallel to the galaxy's edge, a formation of a dozen tiny black dots, the dots that were our squadron of ships, holding to our regular patrol far out from the galaxy's edge. And inches outward from our ship-dots, in turn, out in the blank metal at the chart's right, there moved inward toward us and toward the galaxy a great swarm of other black dots, a close-massed cluster of thousands of dots there on the chart that represented, we knew, a mighty swarm of matter moving in out of the void of outer space toward our ships and toward the galaxy to our left!

"A swarm of meteors!" I exclaimed. It could be nothing else, I knew, that was approaching our galaxy out of the unplumbed, awful void. "A swarm of meteors from outer space! And moving at unthinkable speed!"

"A swarm of meteors from outer space," repeated Korus Kan, thoughtfully. "It's unprecedented—and yet the space-chart doesn't lie."

I glanced again at the big chart. "The swarm's heading almost straight toward us," I said, watching the close-massed dots creeping across the big chart. "But it's traveling at thousands of light-speeds, and must be caught in an ether-current of inconceivable velocity."

"Its speed seems to be steadily slackening, though," said Jhul Din as we gazed up at the space-chart in silent awe.

I nodded. "Yes, but it ought to reach us within a few more hours. We'll halt our ships here until it reaches us, and as it passes we can ascertain its extent and report to General Patrol Headquarters at Canopus. They can send out meteor-sweeps then to destroy the swarm before it can enter the galaxy and menace interstellar navigation."

Even while I spoke Korus Kan had swiftly shifted the levers in his grasp, quickly reducing our craft's great speed, while the half-score of ships behind us slowed their own flight at the same moment in answer to his signal. The humming drone of our great propulsion-vibration generators waned to a thin whine and then died altogether as our ships came to a halt, while at the same moment the dozen ship-dots on the space-chart ceased to move also, hanging motionless on that chart as we were hanging motionless in space. Inches to the right of them, though, the close-massed dots of the mighty swarm were still creeping steadily across the chart, though now their unheard-of speed was fast slackening. In silent awe we regarded them. Out there in the awful void

beside us, we knew, the great swarm was rushing ever closer toward us even as those thousands of close-massed dots crept toward our own ship-dots, and a strange tension held us as we watched them moving nearer.

To any of our comrades in the Interstellar Patrol it would have seemed strange enough, no doubt, the tense silence in which we watched the approach of the swarm, for surely a meteor swarm more or less was nothing new to us. We had met with many a one in our patrols inside the galaxy, and many a time had aided in the work of the great star-cruising meteor-sweeps which keep free of them the space-lanes between the galaxy's suns. But this swarm, rushing toward us out of the mighty depths of outer space, was different. Never in all our history had any such mighty swarm of matter as this come toward our galaxy from the unplumbed outer void, and at such a speed as this one. For though it was moving slower and slower there on the space-chart, the great swarm was still flashing through space toward the galaxy at more than a thousand light-speeds, a velocity greater than that of any of our ships.

Silently we watched, there in the pilot room, while the swarm of close-massed dots crept across the big space-chart, toward the galaxy and toward the dozen dots that were our ships. Slower and slower still it was moving, its speed smoothly and steadily decreasing as it swept in toward the galaxy from outer space. Such a decrease in speed was strange enough, we knew, but knew too that if the swarm was being borne on toward us by a terrific ether-current its speed would slacken as the speed of the current slackened.

The minutes dragged past, forming into an hour, and another, and another, while we watched and waited there, and steadily still the swarm crept on toward us, moving on now at a steady velocity of five to six hundred light-speeds. Our ships hung silent and motionless still in space, with away to our left the flaming torches of the galaxy's thronging suns, and to our right the great vault of blackness out of which that mighty swarm of matter was rushing toward us.

Straight toward us almost it was heading on the space-chart, and now, as it crept over the last half-inch that separated it on the chart from our ships, I gave an order that sent our ships and those behind it slanting steeply upward. In swift, great spirals our squadron climbed, and within a moment more was hanging thousands of miles higher in space than before, our prows pointed now toward the galaxy. Tensely I watched the space-chart and then, just as the great swarm of black dots reached the dozen dots that were our ships, I uttered a single word, and instantly our squadron was racing toward the galaxy at a full five-hundred light-speeds, moving now at the same speed as the great swarm and hanging thousands of miles above it as it rushed on through space toward the galaxy. It was the familiar maneuver of the Interstellar Patrol in reconnoitering a meteor-swarm, to hang above it and race at the same speed with it through space, but never yet had we essayed it on such a swarm as this one, moving as it was at an incredible speed for inanimate matter, and without any signs about it of the ether-current which we had thought was the reason for that speed.

Now, as our ships hummed swiftly on, I stood with Jhul Din at the projecting distance-windows, gazing down into the mighty abyss of space that lay beneath us. Somewhere in that abyss, I knew, the great swarm was racing on at the same speed as ourselves, but as we gazed tensely

down our eyes met nothing but an impenetrable darkness, the cold, empty blackness of the infinite void. I turned, signaled with my hand to Korus Kan at the controls, and then our ship began to drop smoothly to a lower level as it raced on, following a downward-slanting course now with the ships of our squadron behind close on our track. Down we slanted, still racing onward at the same terrific speed, while the Spican and I searched the darkness beneath with our eyes through the thick-lensed propecting windows, yet still was nothing visible in the tenebrous void below. Lower, still lower, our ships slanted, and then suddenly Jhul Din gave utterance to a short exclamation.

"Down there!" he cried, pointing down through the little window. "Those shining points — you see them?"

I GAZED tensely down in the direction in which he pointed, and for a time could see nothing still but the infinite unlit blackness. Then suddenly my eyes too made out a few gleaming little points of light in the darkness far beneath us, points of light far separated from each other and driving on through space toward the galaxy far ahead, at the same speed as ourselves. And now, as our ships slanted still down over and toward them, they became more and more numerous to my eyes, a vast, far-flung swarm of fully five thousand gleaming points, spaced a thousand miles from one another, and racing on through space in a great triangular or wedge-shaped formation, the triangle's apex toward the galaxy ahead. The light with which each gleamed made the whole vast swarm seem like a throng of tiny ghosts of stars, driving through the void, though I knew that metallic meteors sometimes shone so with light reflected from the stars.

Never yet, though, had I seen a swarm gathered in such a precise formation as this one, or one that flashed onward at such vast and uniform speed. It was like a scene out of some strange dream, lying there in the black void beneath us, the mighty, silent swarm of light-points whirling on through space at that awful speed toward the massed, burning suns of the galaxy far ahead, out of the mysteries of outer space. Held still silent by the strangeness of it we gazed down upon it, as our ships slanted lower still. Then, as our squadron drove down at last to within a few hundred miles of the great swarm, the nature of those driving points of light became suddenly visible, and we gasped aloud.

For these were no meteors that drove through space in that mighty swarm beneath us! These were no fragments of cosmic wreckage out of the flotsam of smashed worlds and stars! These were mighty, symmetrical shapes of smooth metal, each an elongated oval in form and with rounded ends, each a great ship as large or larger than our own! The front end of each of these great oval ships glowed with white light, the light-points we had glimpsed from above, since the front end of each was transparent-walled like our own pilot room, and brilliantly lit inside. In those white-lit pilot rooms we could half glimpse, as we flashed along, masses of strange machinery and switches, and stranger beings that seemed to move about them, apparently directing the course and speed of their great ships as the whole mighty swarm of them rushed on through space, toward the galaxy's suns ahead!

"Space-ships!" My exclamation held all the stunned amazement that had gripped us all. "Space-ships in thousands from the outer void——"

Before I could complete the

thought that was flashing across my mind there was a cry from Jhul Din, beside me, and I wheeled about to find him pointing downward, gazed swiftly down to see that a score or more of the great, strange ships beneath were suddenly slanting up toward us, as we raced along above them. With the swiftness of thought they flashed up toward us, and I had a lightning vision of the white-lit pilot rooms at the nose of each, rushing toward us like blurs of brilliant light. Then, as I shouted aloud, Korus Kan swung the controls in his grasp with lightning speed, and instantly our ship flashed sidewise in a twisting turn.

Even as we swerved, though, there leapt from the foremost of the up-rushing craft a pale broad beam of ghostly white light that stabbed up toward and past us, grazing our ship, and that struck the foremost of the ships of our squadron behind us. I saw the broad beam strike that ship squarely, saw it playing on and through it, and for a moment could see no effect apparent. Then, as the great pale beam played across the ship in a swift slicing sweep, I saw that as it shone through that ship's pilot room the figures inside it suddenly vanished! The next moment the ship had suddenly driven crazily off into space, whirling blindly away without occupant or crew, all life in it wiped instantly from existence by that terrible death-beam that had played through it! Now the attacking ships were leaping up toward us, flashing up lightning-like with ghostly beams of death whirling and stabbing about and toward us, and now, over the wild clamor of sudden battle in the hull beneath, I heard the great cry of Jhul Din, beside me.

"Space-ships in thousands, and they're attacking us! They've come from somewhere toward our galaxy—have come out of outer space itself to attack our universe!"

2. *Chased Through the Void*

THE moment of swift, terrific battle that followed was to me then only a wild uproar of flashing action and hoarse shouts, as the mighty ships beneath leapt up toward us. It was only another sudden twisting turn of our ship by Korus Kan that saved us from annihilation in that wild first moment of combat, since the score or more of pale, deadly beams from beneath, stabbing past us as we twisted, struck the ships of our squadron behind and in another moment had sent half of them reeling blindly and aimlessly out of sight, driving haphazardly off into space as the ghostly beams annihilated all the life inside them. Then, as we raced still through space above the mighty swarm, the score of attacking ships suddenly divided, a dozen of them driving up toward the ships behind us while the remainder flashed toward us, their great, pale rays still stabbing and slicing as they leapt on.

Even as our ship swerved from the pale beams leaping up toward us, though, I had shouted an order into the tube beside me, and now from our own craft there stabbed down toward the upward-rushing ships a half-dozen long, narrow rays of brilliant red light. Four of the ships below were struck squarely by those brilliant rays, and from our crew came shouts of triumph as those four vanished in blinding flares of crimson light. It was the deadly ray of the Interstellar Patrol, destroying all matter it touched by raising its frequency of vibration, since matter itself is but a certain frequency vibration of the ether, and when that frequency is raised to that of light-vibrations the matter is changed in that moment from solid matter to light.

Even in the moment that the four ships vanished beneath our rays, though, I had glanced backward and

had seen the last of the ships of our squadron behind vanishing in a wild chaos of whirling death-beam and crimson ray, since scores of other ships were leaping up to attack us from the mighty swarm far beneath. Toward us now, it seemed, ships were flashing from every direction, and I heard the hissing of the ray-tubes below as our crimson rays burned out to meet them, saw three more of them flare and vanish, glimpsed a dozen shafts of the death-beam graze past us as Korus Kan twisted our ship in an erratic, corkscrew course. Not for moments longer, though, I knew, could we keep up this wild and unequal battle, since the mass of ships behind that had annihilated our squadron were now leaping after us. Our only chance was in flight.

I shouted to Korus Kan, and then, as scores of the ghostly beams swept through the void toward us, I saw him swerve the control-levers in his hands sharply sidewise, so that our ship abruptly turned squarely to the right, away from the great swarm and the attacking ships about us. It was a maneuver that caught those ships off their guard, and traveling as we were at the terrific velocity of five hundred light-speeds, it put millions of miles of space between us and the great swarm before the attacking ships could realize what we had done. In a split-second they had vanished from sight about us and we were again rushing on through black and empty space, turning now and again heading toward the galaxy's far-flung suns. But, as I gazed anxiously at the big space-chart, I saw that now the great swarm of black dots upon it had slanted from their former course and was heading straight after the single dot that was our ship. By means of their own space-charts, which I knew they must have, they had discovered our trick and were in pursuit!

"Let her out to full speed!" I cried to Korus Kan. "They're after us and our only chance is to get to the galaxy ahead of them!"

Instantly Korus Kan opened wide the power-controls, and with a mounting humming roar our great ship went rapidly into its highest speed, its great generators flinging it on through the ether at a thousand times the velocity of light, propelling it headlong onward toward the galaxy that lay still far ahead, its mighty disklike mass of shining suns stretched across the blackness of space before us. And behind us rushed the great swarm, too, racing on after us and toward the galaxy still. I knew that the speed of that mighty swarm of ships must be inconceivably greater than that of our own, since we ourselves had seen them on our charts racing in toward the galaxy from outer space with velocity unthinkable, a velocity which we had thought could only be due to some great ether-current, and which they had only slackened as they drew near the galaxy. There was a slender chance, though, that we might yet escape, and now as we rushed on toward the galaxy in headlong flight I turned quickly to the speech-projection instrument beside me, pressing a button in its base. A moment later there came from it a clear, twanging voice.

"General Patrol Headquarters at Canopus," it announced, and swiftly I responded.

"Dur Nal, Captain of Patrol Squadron 598-77, speaking," I said. "I desire to report the discovery of a swarm of some five thousand strange space-ships which have appeared out of outer space, heading toward the galaxy. These ships are apparently capable of immense speeds and are armed with a form of death-beam unfamiliar to us, but extremely deadly in operation. On discovering these ships we were attacked by them and all of my squad-

ron except my own ship destroyed. Our own ship is now being chased inward toward the galaxy, heading in the general direction of the Cancer cluster, and though the swarm is gradually overhauling us we may be able to escape. From the size, number and deadly armament of these alien ships it is apparent that they contemplate a general attack upon our universe."

There was a moment's pause when I had finished, and then from the speech-instrument there came the metallic voice again, as calm as though I had made only a routine report of position and progress.

"Order of Lacq Larus, Chief of the Interstellar Patrol, to Dur Nal. You will make every effort to elude the pursuing swarm, and if you can do so will endeavor to draw it into the Cancer cluster. All the cruisers of the Interstellar Patrol will be assembled inside the cluster as swiftly as possible, and if you are successful in drawing the pursuing swarm inside it will be possible for our fleet to fall upon it in an unexpected attack, and destroy these invaders, whatever their source or purpose, before they can obtain a foothold in the galaxy. You have the order?"

"I have the order," I replied, as calmly as possible, and with a word of acknowledgment the twanging voice ceased.

I wheeled around to Korus Kan and Jhul Din, a flame of excitement leaping within me. "It's a chance to destroy them all!" I exclaimed. "If we can hold out until we reach the galaxy—can lead them into that cluster——"

Their own eyes were afire now as they saw the chance, and now Korus Kan tightened his grasp on the controls, gazing grimly ahead with power open to the last notch, while Jhul Din strode swiftly out of the pilot room and down to the ship's hull beneath, where, in a moment more, I heard his deep voice booming out orders to the crew as they labored to wring from our throbbing generators the last ounce of speed. Yet now, too, looking up at the big space-chart, I saw that the gap on it between our single little ship-dot and the great swarm of dots behind was terrifyingly small, a gap of less than a half-inch which represented no more than a few billion miles of space. And slowly, steadily, that gap was closing, as the great swarm slowly overhauled us. With their immense potential speed they could have flashed past us in a moment, had they so desired, yet I knew too that they dared not use such terrific speed so near the galaxy, and that even did they use it we would be able to turn and double before they could slow down enough to catch us. Their plan, it was obvious, was simply to overhaul us slowly until they had just reached us, and then sweep down on us with the death-beams while we strove in vain to escape them.

So at our utmost speed we flashed on through the void toward the galaxy, a mighty belt of burning suns across the blackness before us, and toward the close-massed cluster of suns at its edge that shone among the scattered stars around it like a solid ball of light, while there rushed after us through space at the same mighty speed the great swarm of strange craft which we were attempting to lead into that cluster.

SURELY in all time was never so strange a flight, a pursuit, as this one—a flight inward through the void with unimaginable beings from the mysteries of infinite outer space as our pursuers, flashing on in thousands on our track, toward us and toward the galaxy they meant to attack.

Far ahead in that galaxy, too, I knew, its forces would be preparing to meet that attack, and from the

central sun of Canopus the alarm would be flashing out across our universe from star to star, from world to whirling world, flashing in warning from end to end of the galaxy, to all the stars and worlds and races of the Federated Suns. And even while that warning flashed, the great star-cruisers of the Interstellar Patrol would be gathering in answer, would be rushing headlong between the suns across the galaxy from every quarter of it to mass in force inside the Cancer cluster. Could we escape the pursuing swarm and lead it into that cluster it would still be hours, I knew, before we reached it, even at our tremendous speed, and in those hours all the fighting-ships of the galaxy would be racing toward the rendezvous there and massing to meet this mighty invading fleet.

Could we escape? The thought beat monotonously through my brain as I stood there with Korus Kan, silent as the Antarian as we watched the great swarm of dots creep closer and closer to us on the space-chart. On and on our ship was racing, the throbbing generators now making the whole ship vibrate with their vast power, and visibly the galaxy's shining suns were largening ahead as we flashed on toward them; yet as the minutes passed, forming into an hour, and then another, the great swarm behind crept ever remorselessly closer. Rocking and swaying as we plunged through great ether-currents, we held still straight toward the ball of swarming suns that was the Cancer cluster, at the galaxy's edge ahead; yet still we had covered no more than two-thirds of the distance that had separated us from it, and now the great swarm was no more than a few million miles behind, a mere fraction of an inch on the space-chart.

It was as though our pursuers were but playing with us, so calmly and steadily did they overtake us, and in despair I turned from the galaxy's mighty rampart of stars, ahead, to the rear distance-windows. A moment more, I knew, and the thousands of ships behind would be drawing into sight in those windows, would be speeding down upon us even as we sought to flee and would annihilate us with an attack which we could not hope to escape a second time. Hopelessly I gazed back into the blackness of space behind, but then wheeled back suddenly as there came a sudden exclamation from Korus Kan. He had swerved our flying ship's course a little and was pointing up toward the space-chart now, his strange eyes agleam with excitement.

"If we can make it, it's a chance to throw them off our track," he exclaimed, and as I gazed up toward the space-chart I suddenly understood.

On that chart our single ship-dot was rushing on toward the glowing circles of the galaxy's suns, with the mighty swarm of black dots that were our pursuers close behind, and now I saw that a little ahead of our own ship-dot there hung stationary on the chart another dot, one not of black but of red. Instantly I recognized it as one of the great space-buoys hung in space to mark the positions of the mighty ether-maelstroms which were the most perilous of all the menaces to interstellar navigation. Formed by the meeting of vast ether-currents, these maelstroms had been marked for all space-navigators by placing near each a special space-ship, or buoy, which automatically and without crew kept its position, showing as a red dot on all space-charts to warn passing ships of the maelstrom's position. The great maelstrom ahead, I knew, was one of the mightiest of all in and around our galaxy, and now as our ship sped straight through space toward it I saw Korus Kan's plan and caught my breath with sudden hope.

"We'll head straight toward the maelstrom, and then swerve aside just before we reach it," he was saying. "The swarm behind can have no knowledge of its existence, and if they run into it before they can change their course it'll delay them, at least."

Tensely I watched now as our ship raced on, the humming roar of its generators rising a half-pitch still higher as Jhul Din, beneath, drove the crew to their last strength to win another light-speed. A scant few million miles ahead the great maelstrom lay, marked only by the red dot on the chart, and as we sped straight on toward that dot our ship already was rocking and bucking as we drove through the mighty ether-currents whose meeting formed the maelstrom. Braced against the room's wall we stood, eyes straining ahead through the darkness and against the glare of the galaxy's suns in the distance, and then, as I turned to glance back, I saw that behind us now there gleamed in the blackness points of shining light, points that were swiftly largening and nearing us, countless in number and driving through space straight on our track. With each fleeting moment they were flashing nearer toward us, and now were so near that through the distance-window I could plainly make out their white-lit pilot rooms as they drove after us. A moment more, I knew, would see them close enough to loose the death-beams upon us, but at that moment there was a half-breathed exclamation from Korus Kan, and I turned swiftly about.

He was gripping the controls tensely, gazing forward into the blackness that lay between us and the galaxy, and even as I turned I saw that our ship-dot had flashed past the red danger-dot on the space-chart. Instantly then Korus Kan twisted the controls sharply to the left, and immediately our craft was flashing off in a great curve from the path it had been following, veering suddenly toward the left while the great swarm just behind us raced still for the moment straight ahead. Then, before they could swerve aside to follow us, I had a single flashing glimpse through the window of the whole mighty swarm suddenly disintegrating, shattering, the thousands of ships that made it up suddenly whirling away in all directions in blind chaos of aimless movement as they rushed straight into the mighty ether-maelstrom into which we had led them. Then they had vanished, whirling blindly about, as we flashed on out of sight, our own craft swaying wildly as we drove on through the great currents about the maelstrom. On the space-chart, though, I saw the great swarm's pursuit for the moment had ceased, the myriad dots that made it up milling aimlessly about in the mighty maelstrom's grip while our single ship-dot raced straight on.

"A chance!" I cried, as our ship flashed on toward the galaxy's suns. "A chance yet—if we can get to the Cancer cluster before them!"

Now our cruiser was again flashing on at its very highest speed, straight toward that cluster, while behind us the great swarm whirled chaotically about. Before us the galaxy's suns were burning out in waxing splendor as we shot through space toward them, the cluster of closer-packed suns that was our goal changing now from a ball of solid light into a ball-like mass of thronging, flaming stars as we drew nearer it. But as Jhul Din came back into the pilot room from beneath, as we three contemplated the space-chart and then the great wall of suns in the blackness ahead, our faces set again after our brief triumph, for we knew that billions of miles of space lay still between us and those suns.

And now, too, we saw on the chart that the great swarm of ships behind had escaped from the maelstrom's grip at last and was racing after us once more in swift pursuit, a hundred of their ships in the van now of that pursuit with the main body of the swarm behind.

"It's the last stretch!" I exclaimed, as we gazed tensely at the chart and into the void ahead. "Unless we get to the Cancer cluster ahead of them now it's the end."

Our ship was leaping forward still at its uttermost speed, its strained generators functioning nobly, but the great swarm behind was again picking up speed itself, the hundred ships massed together a few million miles ahead of the main swarm hardly more than an inch behind our own ship-dot on the space-chart. On—on—straight toward the fiery mass of the Cancer cluster we fled, while behind us, in cruel repetition of the first part of this wild chase the pursuing ships slowly cut down the gap between us, the hundred foremost ones leaping every moment closer toward us, while behind them the main swarm came on more deliberately. Ahead now the galaxy filled the heavens before us, myriads of burning stars that gemmed the infinite night with their flaming brilliance, but of all in the stupendous scene around and before us we had eyes only for the thronging suns of the Cancer cluster, and for the space-chart above us.

On—on—the minutes of that mad onward flight were passing each like an eternity as we leapt forward, tensely braced there in the pilot room, peering forward, with behind us the hundred pursuing ships close on our track, remorselessly overtaking us, with behind them the great swarm of thousands of ships that were driving to attack our universe. Ahead of us, I knew, there somewhere in the flaming cluster of suns before us, the cruisers of the great Interstellar Patrol, the warships of our universe, would be gathering and massing to meet that great invading fleet, but unless we could escape and lead it into the cluster where they waited they would have no chance for a surprize attack. Before us by now the great cluster lay in waxing, flaming splendor, only a scant few billion miles ahead, its thronging, gathered suns burning out in supreme glory amid the galaxy's looser-swarming suns, but now the hundred foremost ships of the mighty swarm behind were almost upon us.

Even as I turned, now, toward the distance-window behind me, I heard a deep exclamation from Jhul Din, who had turned to gaze back also, and as I too gazed through that window a chill seemed to creep through my very blood, for light-points were showing there in the blackness behind, and drawing swiftly nearer. It was the hundred foremost ships! Ever closer they were racing toward us, overtaking us again with every moment, while far behind them the main swarm raced on after them. With each passing moment the light-points behind were broadening, brightening, as the ships came closer, but now the great cluster ahead loomed full before us, its myriads of flaming, thundering suns drenching all in our pilot room in their fierce, terrific glare. Straight ahead of us, at the mighty cluster's outmost edge, flamed a great double star among all the other thronging stars that made it up, two giant white suns separated only by a comparatively narrow gap. And straight toward that narrow gap our fleeing ship was heading!

Behind us now the hundred long oval ships were drawing into plain sight, their white-lit pilot rooms giving us brief glimpses inside of massed machinery and slender beings we could but half-glimpse that moved inside. From the foremost of

those ships, now, there stabbed out toward us the broad, pale, ghostly beam of death, but as yet the gap between us was too wide for the beam to bridge, and we flashed onward still, the gleaming shapes of our pursuers leaping still closer. Before us now the whole firmament seemed a wild chaos of gigantic suns, as we raced straight in toward the mighty cluster, with ahead the narrow gap that separated the two giant white suns toward which we were heading.

Jhul Din gripped my shoulder, pointed ahead, shouted to me over the roar of our generators. "Unless we slacken speed we'll never make it through that gap without driving into one of the suns," he cried.

I shook my head. "It's death either way!" I yelled to him. "Our only chance is to drive between them at full speed!"

Now before us the whole heavens seemed a single vast sheet of boiling white flame as we drove in toward the two mighty thundering suns, the gaps between them seeming no more than a narrow black cleft at the terrific velocity at which we were moving. At our topmost speed we rushed toward that narrow gap, the ships behind still leaping full upon our track, closing swiftly down upon us now. And now, as Korus Kan braced himself and held our controls still steady, we were flashing squarely in between the two gigantic suns. On either side of us they towered, thundering, boiling upright oceans of devouring, brilliant white flame, whose awful glare all but blinded us, seeming to fill all the universe about us with one great mass of raging fires. Out toward our onward-flashing ship there licked from the great suns on either side titanic tongues of flame bursting out toward us for millions of miles, huge prominences that could have licked up worlds like midges, but straight on between the walling fires our throbbing ship still flashed.

Now the hundred ships behind, still after us through that hell of light and flame, were racing down upon us even as we sped between the giant flaming suns, and now from behind shot shaft upon shaft of the pale death-beams, hardly to be seen in the awful blinding glare. As the beams sprang toward us, though, Korus Kan swerved to the left, and for a moment it seemed that we had swerved from death in one form only to meet it in another, since at our terrific speed we veered millions of miles in that moment toward the left gigantic sun. Its boiling fires were all about us, seemed to encompass us, and then just as it seemed that we were racing into the mighty glowing corona to our deaths Korus Kan had swerved our ship backward into the center of the narrow gap. And now we were reaching that gap's end, were passing from between the giant suns, and out into more open space inside the great cluster, with the pursuing ships again leaping forward to loose their deadly beams.

Out from between the two great suns we flashed, before us now the interior of the mighty cluster, a great swarm of flaming suns that thronged space all about us, and about many of which swung great families of planets, dozens of whirling worlds. Even as we shot into the interior of the great cluster, though, from between the two giant suns, the hundred pursuing craft had leaped forward upon us with one great burst of sudden speed, were behind us, on each side, all about us. It was the end, we knew, and there was an instant of sheer silence as we waited for that end, waited for the pale beams of death from the ships about us. But before they could loose those beams there flashed suddenly upon them from each side other ships, two mighty masses of ships like our own, that burst suddenly out upon our pursuers from

behind the two great suns between which we had just come. Ships like our own! Ships long and slender and gleaming! Ships of the Interstellar Patrol, striking at the vanguard of the invaders in defense of our universe!

3. *Death-Beam and Crimson Ray*

EVEN as the great masses of ships on each side leapt out upon our pursuers, Korus Kan had glimpsed them, and had swung our own ship instantly around in a great curve. On each side of us, now, were the thousands of cruisers of the great patrol, and before us were the hundred ships that had chased us in toward the galaxy through space. Before those ships could recover from their surprize, before their occupants could realize the trap into which they had ventured, our whole vast fleet was leaping upon them from both sides, flashing down upon the hundred invading craft before they could turn from their onward flight.

Down with them swooped our own ship now, and we shouted aloud as we saw from all the swooping ships about us, as from our own, myriad brilliant shafts of the brilliant red ray flashing down and striking the enemy ships ahead and below. Within an instant, it seemed, half those racing ships had flared and vanished in brilliant bursts of crimson light, while the rest had dipped and turned in a wild effort to escape. Back toward the two great white suns they raced, seeking to escape between them into outer space again, to rejoin the oncoming main swarm of their great fleet, but down before and ahead of them leapt our Patrol cruisers, the red rays again whirling and cutting in great circles of death. And now as they vanished one by one beneath those rays, struggling still through space toward the two great suns, the death beams of the remaining ships sprang savagely up toward us, and I saw cruisers here and there in our own fleet driving aimlessly off, smashing into one another and whirling blindly away as the beams wiped out all life in them.

But now we were leaping after the fleeing ships between the great suns again, and as we shot after them through those terrific walls of flame our rays again took toll of them; so that as we flashed out from between the two mighty suns and into outer space once more but a scant half-dozen of them remained, and these leapt instantly forward and out into the blackness of outer space to rejoin the main body of their approaching fleet, while we in turn sprang after them in hot pursuit, though our ships were not capable of the tremendous speeds of those invading ones.

"Score for us!" cried Jhul Din as our ships flashed on. "We've all but wiped out those hundred!"

"Wait!" I told him. "The main body of their fleet's coming on toward us——"

Even as I spoke I saw the ship of Lacq Larus, Chief of the Patrol, the flag-ship of our fleet, slackening its speed ahead of us, and a moment later there came from the speech-instrument beside me his clear, unruffled voice.

"All ships halt and mass in battle formation!" he ordered; and at once, in answer to that command, our flashing ships slowed and stopped, forming instantly into three thick, short columns and hanging motionless in space.

On the space-chart above, now, we could see the mass of thousands of dots that was our fleet hanging motionless a little out from the galaxy's edge, and could see, too, a little outward from that mass of dots, another and equally large mass, that moved slowly in toward us, the great swarm that was the invading fleet. Already the few fleeing survivors of our hun-

dred pursuers had raced back into that main swarm, and now, moving ever more slowly but coming steadily forward, it was driving through space toward us. The great swarm was moving still in a triangular formation, the triangle's apex toward us, and now at last, as we stared forward into the blackness, we made out light-points ahead, a vast swarm of them in that steady triangular formation, moving deliberately toward us.

Slowly now those light-points were largening, were changing into great, gleaming ships as their fleet came on toward us. Ever more slowly it moved, now at but a fraction of a light-speed, for it was evident that they, like us, sought no fight-and-run skirmish but a battle to the finish. At last they had stopped, had halted just out of ray-reach ahead and were hanging motionless in space like ourselves, facing us. And then, for a moment, it seemed as though about us was an unbroken stillness and silence, as the two mighty fleets, numbering each fully five thousand ships, faced each other there in space.

I think that never in all space and time could there have been a moment as strange as that one, when the mighty fleet of our galaxy lay prow to prow with this other mighty fleet from the dark, unguessed mysteries of outer space. All about us lay the cold, lightless blackness of the eternal void, with the great galaxy's colossal rampart of flaming suns stretched across the heavens behind us alone blazing in that blackness, the great Cancer cluster at its edge, just behind us, flaming with all the glory of its mass of gathered suns. A single instant that silence and stillness reigned in the stupendous scene about us, an instant that to our strained nerves seemed endless, and then a sharp order rang from the speech-instrument beside me, and as one our great fleet leapt forward while the opposing fleet sprang to meet us. The battle was on.

I saw the enemy fleet flashing straight toward us, the apex of its triangle pointed full at our center, and knew instinctively that it meant to cut us into halves with the great wedge that was itself. But as it flashed straight toward us and upon us there rang another order from the instrument at my side, and instantly our three short columns of ships veered to the right, changing in a moment into one long column, which instead of meeting the onrushing triangle flashed along its side. As we shot past thus I had a lightning glimpse of the masses of countless oval ships racing by, glimpsed too a score or more of ships at the center of their fleet that seemed not oval but round and disklike in shape, and then forgot all else as from all our ships there burst the brilliant red rays, raking the side of their fleet with a deadly fire as we flashed past it. Then scores upon scores of their ships were vanishing in crimson flares of light as those rays found them, and though their death-beams found our own ships here and there as we flashed by, the great mass of their ships dared not loose their beams upon us lest they destroy their own ships, so skilful had been our maneuver.

Only a moment did it last, that passing of the two fleets with red ray and death-beam crossing, and then we were past them, were turning and circling and racing back upon them to deliver another blow. Ahead we could see the enemy fleet turning and racing back to meet us, with beyond them the great suns of the galaxy flaming in the blackness of space, and again we leapt straight toward them there in the abysmal void; but this time they had anticipated our maneuver and as we swerved to the right of them their whole great fleet swerved right also, so that in order to avoid a head-on

collision with their fleet we were forced to swerve still farther to the right, our long column racing along through space now parallel to the galaxy's edge, with the enemy ships strung in a similar column between us and the galaxy, racing along with us through space at the same speed as ourselves, their pale ghostly beams whirling toward us even as our crimson shafts cut through the void toward them.

Ships on each side were vanishing, now, some flaring in wild explosions of red light and disappearing as the scarlet rays found them, others driving crazily and aimlessly away as the pale beams wiped out in an instant all the crews inside them. But now we found ourselves at a disadvantage, for our enemy's gleaming ships could hardly be made out against the flaring suns of the galaxy, beyond them, while our own glittering cruisers stood out clearly against the darkness of outer space. It was an advantage of which they took swift use, for now the broad pale beams were reaching toward us in increasing numbers as we flashed along, while our own rays were all but ineffective, since, blinded as we were by the flaring suns behind the opposing ships, we could only loose the rays at random.

On still we raced, along the galaxy's edge, the great Cancer cluster dropping behind us now as we sped on, our two great fleets striking and grappling with each other even as they flashed on. Black space and flaming suns, pale ray and red, oval ships and long cruisers, all mingled and whirled in that wild scene like the features of some tortured dream, but dream it was none to us, flashing on with our fleet while in the hull beneath our crew loosed their red rays of death upon the chance-seen enemy ships that flashed between us and the dazzling suns. At an order flashed from the Chief's flag-ship our whole fleet increased to its utmost velocity, striving to pass the enemy fleet and get between it and the galaxy again, but the immeasurable speed of these great invaders from outer space defeated our efforts. At the same speed as ourselves they raced forward, keeping always between us and the suns, and when we slowed our speed suddenly to fall behind them they instantly did likewise.

Meanwhile ships all about us were driving aimlessly away, reeling blindly off into space or smashing into each other, as the pale death-beams found more and more of them in that mad running fight. Not for many minutes longer, I knew, could the unequal contest be kept up. Already we were past the Cancer cluster, still racing along the galaxy's edge, and then abruptly there came another sharp order from the instrument beside me. Instantly, in obedience to that order, all our racing, battling ships slowed, swiftly grouped themselves into a triangular formation, its apex in turn pointing toward the long line of the enemy's fleet, between us and the galaxy. Then, before they could mass their own fleet again, our triangle of mighty cruisers had leapt straight toward the galaxy, its apex tearing full into the long line of their ships.

THERE was a moment of reeling, crashing shock, as our massed fleet crashed into that line, and all about me in that moment, it seemed, patrol-cruisers and oval ships were smashing into each other, colliding and bursting wildly there in mid-space. Then suddenly we were through, the mass of our fleet ripping through their line by main force; but now, as we smashed on through, another order sounded and we curved swiftly about, and still in that close-massed formation rushed back upon the shattered enemy line of ships. Before they could reform that broken line, before they could

mass again in their own close formation, we were upon them, and then again our wedge-shaped mass was driving through them, shattering their disorganized masses still further and sending scores of them into annihilation now with our red rays as we flashed through.

"We've won!" shouted Jhul Din, at the window, as our massed fleet again wheeled and sped back upon the disorganized mass of ships before us. "We've won! We've broken up their fleet!"

Now, though, we were rushing back to strike another deadly blow, and before us, I saw, the thousands of the invading ships were still milling aimlessly there in space, their organization shattered by the smashing blows we had dealt them. With red rays flashing we sped upon them again, but now, from the disorganized mass before us, I saw a score or more of ships rising, flashing upward with immense speed, ships that were not oval like the rest but flat and round and disklike, ships that I had vaguely glimpsed in our first rush on the enemy fleet and which through all the battle they had kept protected from us at their fleet's center. Now, with all their terrific speed, the disk-ships were flashing upward, and even in the instant that we rushed again upon our enemies they had attained to a great height above us.

In that instant I gave them but a glance, since again we were darting upon the mass of oval ships, our own cruiser now toward the rear of our fleet's formation. But in the next moment, even as we flashed on in our swift charge, I saw the score of disk-ships hanging high above suddenly glow and flicker with strange force, the whole great lower side of their big disks alive with a flickering, rippling, viridescent light. And at the same moment I saw the ships of our fleet ahead of us suddenly breaking from their mad charge forward and lifting slowly upward, saw them twisting and turning and reeling but still moving steadily up, toward those score of disk-ships high above, as though pulled upward by a mighty, unseen grip.

"Attraction-ships!" I shouted, as I saw what was happening. "Those disk-ships above—they're pulling our cruisers up with some magnetic or electrical attractive force, that affects the metals of our ships but not of theirs!"

We were still racing forward, at the rear of our fleet, but as I saw that all the thousands of our cruisers before us, almost, were in the grip of the attractive forces from above, were being pulled helplessly upward, I shouted to Korus Kan, and he shifted the controls swiftly sidewise, sending our cruiser veering away before it came beneath the disk-ships high above and was pulled up likewise. We had escaped for the moment, but now from ahead all the disorganized masses of the oval invading ships had gathered together again and were leaping forward, springing upon our own helpless masses of cruisers as they were pulled resistlessly upward. From all about those masses of twisting, turning cruisers the pale death-beams smote toward them, and only here and there could a few shafts of the red ray answer them, caught as our ships were in that tremendous grip.

Swiftly the cruisers of our fleet were being wiped clean of all the crews inside, as the death-beams swung and circled through them from all about. But a few score of cruisers at the rear of our fleet, like ourselves, had managed to escape the relentless grip of the disk-ships above, and now upon ourselves other masses of the oval ships were rushing. Wildly we battled there, the hordes of the invading ships spinning and flashing about us, but swiftly our few score of cruisers were sent reeling blindly off by the death-beams; and now, looking back an instant, I saw that the last of our mighty fleet of thousands of cruisers

were being annihilated by the death-beams of the oval ships that swarmed about them, as they were drawn helplessly upward. We and a few other cruisers, struggling wildly there against the encircling masses of the oval ships, were all that remained of the galaxy's once mighty fleet!

Even as we fought there, with the mad energy of despair, I saw the last of our companion cruisers whirling away as the death-beams found it, and realized that except for a few stragglers here and there like our own ship the great fleet was annihilated, and that our only chance was in flight. With every moment the oval ships about us were increasing in number, completely encircling us, now, and it was only by a miracle of veering, twisting turns by Korus Kan that our ship was able to avoid the death-beams that reached toward us from all sides. Escape seemed impossible, so completely were we hemmed in by the circling, striking ships, and another moment would see our end, I knew; and so I wheeled, shouted hoarsely to Korus Kan.

"We'll have to break through them!" I shouted. "Give her full speed, Korus Kan, and head straight in toward the galaxy!"

Instantly he jerked open the power-control to the last notch, and as our ship leapt forward like a living thing toward the masses of ships that surrounded us he sent it driving straight toward the galaxy, and toward a spot where there showed a momentary gap between the ships that hemmed us in. But a single instant it took us to reach that gap, pale beams whirling all about us while our own red rays flashed sullenly forth, but in the instant that we reached it one of the oval ships had seen our intention and had leapt forward to close the gap. An instant too late it was to close it completely, but the oval ship's nose, containing its transparent-walled pilot room, lay across our path as we reached the gap, and straight into it we crashed!

THERE was a terrific, rending shock as our great prow tore into the transparent-walled nose of the enemy ship, and beneath that shock we saw the whole fore portion of the oval ship crumpling up and collapsing, reeling away a shattered wreck of metal. Our own cruiser rocked and swayed crazily at the collision, and for a moment it seemed that we too were doomed, but the next our battered ship leapt forward, and in an instant was free of the masses of oval ships that had encircled us, and was driving now in toward the galaxy's suns, with a score of the oval ships behind in hot pursuit.

In we drove, speeding now past the great Cancer cluster as we flashed at our utmost speed into the galaxy, its great ball of gathered suns flaring in the black heavens to our left as we sped inward. Behind came our pursuers, racing on close after us; and now, glancing back beyond them, I saw the whole mighty fleet of the invaders, still fully three thousand ships in number, moving in toward the galaxy also, toward the great Cancer cluster, with its swarming suns and thronging worlds, saw the great fleet slowing, slanting down toward those suns, those worlds, and knew then that these invaders, having annihilated the galaxy's fleet, were settling upon the suns and worlds of the Cancer cluster as a first foothold in our universe, a base from which they could subdue all that universe. Then their fleet had vanished from our distance-windows as we fled on, and of the score of our pursuers all but three had turned back to rejoin that fleet.

The three remaining ships, though, drove straight on our track, and swiftly were overhauling us, though inside the galaxy they dared not use all their tremendous speed. Yet remorselessly after us they came, and

I knew that moments more would see our end unless we could escape them. Directly ahead of us, though, there flamed a small crimson sun, a dying, planetless star not far inward from the Cancer cluster, largening each moment before us as we drove on toward it with terrific speed. As I saw it a last plan flashed through my brain, and I turned to Korus Kan.

"Head straight toward that sun!" I told him. "It's our only chance—to get in close and lose them in its corona!"

He nodded grimly, swerving the ship a little, and now straight toward the red star we raced, Jhul Din and I gazing out with him toward it as we flashed on, and then behind to where the gleaming three ships of the invaders drove after us. Swiftly they were overtaking us, two close behind us and the remaining one a little behind the two, but ahead the crimson star was filling almost all the heavens, now, a great sea of fiery red flame that stretched above and beneath us, ahead, as though occupying all the firmament. Its glare was awful, now, for we were racing straight in toward the mighty corona of it, the glowing outer atmosphere of radiant heat about it in which, I knew, no ship, however heat-resistant, could live for more than a moment. On we raced, our cruiser creaking and swaying still from the effects of the collision with the ship we had smashed into, but flashing on with unabated speed.

Behind us, the three gleaming shapes of our pursuers were following with unslackened speed, too, gradually drawing nearer, the two foremost of those ships just behind us, now. Another moment and their death-beams would stab toward us, and though we might destroy one or even two of them the other would surely destroy us before we could turn to it, I knew. The heat, too, of the great star before us was penetrating into our ship, and full before us, not a dozen million miles ahead, glowed the great corona. On we flashed—on—on—and then, just as we were about to burst into the terrible, glowing corona, just as the two ships close behind us sprang closer to stab with their beams toward us, Korus Kan jerked the controls suddenly back, and instantly our ship shot upward in a great vertical rush, while beneath, before they could see and follow our change of course, the two racing oval ships pursuing us had flashed on and into the mighty glare of the corona. Then we glimpsed them shriveling, twisting, vanishing, in the awful heat there, while our own cruiser turned now away from the red sun.

Beneath we saw the single remaining oval ship turning, too, since it had been far enough behind the two to change its course in time to avoid the terrible corona. It seemed to pause, hesitate, and then, as though satisfied that our ship too had met death in the corona with its own two companions, it began to flash backward toward the galaxy's edge, toward the Cancer cluster where the mighty invading fleet had settled. And now, burning for revenge, our own cruiser was slanting back with it and down toward it, as it drove on unsuspectingly beneath. Another moment and we would be above it, would loose our red rays on it before ever it suspected our existence. I was breathing with relief at our escape, now, and heard an exulting cry from Jhul Din as he strode down into the cruiser's hull from the pilot room, to direct the ray-tubes there, but the next moment all our triumph vanished, for from our cruiser's hull, toward its battered prow, there came suddenly a succession of appalling cracks.

Standing suddenly tense we listened, and then, as there came from beneath a prolonged, cracking roar, I heard shouts of fear from our crew, and then Jhul Din had burst up into the pilot room from beneath.

"The cruiser's walls are giving!" he cried. "That collision with the oval

ship when we smashed our way out strained and wrenched loose the whole prow and side-walls — the cruiser can't hold together for five minutes more!''

There was a stunned silence in the little room then, a silence in which it seemed that all the disasters that had befallen us were crowding together upon us, overpowering us. This was the end, I knew. Within minutes more the walls about us would collapse and in the infinite cold and emptiness of interstellar space we would meet our deaths. We were hours away from the nearest friendly planet, with all our companion ships destroyed. It was the end, and for a moment I bowed to the inevitable, stood in stunned despair awaiting that end. But then, as my eyes fell upon the oval ship beneath, toward which our collapsing cruiser was still slanting downward, I saw that upon its broad metal back was the round circle of a space-door, like the double space-doors of our own ship, and as I saw that, all the ancient combativeness that has carried men out into the remotest of the galaxy's depths surged up in me, and I wheeled around to the other two.

''Order all our crew down to the cruiser's lower space-door,'' I cried, ''and have an emergency space-suit issued to each of them!''

They stared at me, strangely, tensely. ''What are you going to do?'' asked Jhul Din, at last, and my answer came out in a shout.

''We're going to do what never yet has been done in all the battles between the stars!'' I told him. *''We're going to put our lives on one last mad chance and board that enemy ship in mid-space!''*

4. A Struggle Between the Stars

A MOMENT there was silence in the pilot room, a silence of sheer surprize, in which my two lieutenants gazed at me in utter amazement, and then from Jhul Din came a great shout.

''It's a chance!'' he cried. ''If we can do it we'll escape yet!''

''Down to the space-door at once, then!'' I told him. ''The ship can't last for seconds now!''

For even then there had come to our ears another long, cracking roar as our battered walls gave still farther. Now Jhul Din was racing down from the pilot room to assemble the crew, and now our cruiser was slanting still farther down toward the long, gleaming oval ship beneath. Down we slanted, until our own swaying cruiser hung at a distance of a score of feet above the enemy ship, which, believing us destroyed, never dreamed of our presence as we raced on through space at the same speed as itself. And now Korus Kan hastily set the automatic controls in the pilot room that would hold our cruiser at the same speed and course without guiding hand, and then we too hurled ourselves down the narrow stair, through the big power room where the great generators were still throbbing on, down through the succession of compartments in the cruiser's hull until we had reached the long, low room that lay at its very bottom, and in the floor of which was set the cruiser's lower space-door.

In the long room all our crew was gathered now, with Jhul Din at their head, a hundred odd in number, and a strange enough aggregation they were, drawn as they were from the far-different races of the galaxy's peopled stars. Octopus-beings from Vega, great plant-men from Capella, spider-shapes from Mizar—these and a score or more of differing forms and shapes stood before me, listening in disciplined silence as I briefly explained our plan. About us the walls were wrenching and cracking fearfully, but when I had finished those before me raised a fierce shout, and then each of us was hastily climbing into the emergency space-suits which

were kept always in all interstellar ships in case outside repairs to it were necessary in mid-space.

A moment more and we all stood attired in the hermetically sealed, clumsy-looking suits of thick, flexible metal, with head-pieces of metal in which were transparent vision-plates. As we donned them each pressed the button which set the little air-generators inside each suit pouring forth their supply of fresh air and purifying the breathed air; and then, with a swift glance around that showed each in his suit, I motioned to Jhul Din and at once the big Spican pressed the stud in the wall that sent the round space-door in the floor sliding open.

We could not feel through our insulating suits the tremendous cold that instantly invaded the ship, but we heard plainly the swift, terrific swish of air about us as it rushed out of the ship into the mighty void outside. Now, looking down through the open door, we could see a score of feet beneath the broad metal back of the great oval ship, still racing on unsuspectingly beneath us. I turned back to the crew about me, saw that each had gripped one of the metal bars that were to be our only weapons in this attempt, since the use of rays would destroy the ship beneath, which was our only hope of life. Then, reaching forth again to the switch-case on the wall, Jhul Din at my motion threw off the cruiser's gravity-control, so that the attraction-plates built into the floor beneath us, which pulled us always downward and enabled us to walk upright and normally inside the cruiser, no longer pulled us. Instead, though, we were being pulled down now by the gravitational force of the racing ship beneath and a step through the open door would send any of us hurtling down toward that ship.

Now I gave one last glance around, even while the cruiser's walls cracked terribly again, and then swung myself over the edge of the opening in the floor, hanging by my hands from it and swinging there in the infinite void of interstellar space a score of feet above the oval ship's broad metal back. It seemed, that moment that I swung there, a time of endless length, and surely never before had any hung thus between two ships racing on through the void. Then, as another cracking roar came from the walls about me, I loosed my hold upon the edge and hurtled down through empty space toward the back of the ship below.

Down, down—that fall seemed endless as I rushed down through space, but unimpeded as I was by air-resistance it was but an instant before I had slammed down on the ship's broad back, lying motionless for an instant and then rising carefully to a sitting position. Just above me hung our racing cruiser, the opening in its bottom directly overhead, and in another moment Korus Kan had followed me, striking the ship's back beside me while I gripped him and held him tightly. Then came one of the crew, and another, and another, until in a moment the last of them was dropping down among us, Jhul Din alone remaining above. He stepped toward the opening, to lower himself and drop down to us likewise, but even as he did so I saw the great walls of the cruiser above collapsing and buckling inward as they gave at last. I motioned frantically to Jhul Din as the walls collapsed about him, saw him give one startled glance around, and then as the cruiser's sides crumpled up about him he ran forward and leapt cleanly through the opening in the floor, hurtling down toward us and striking full in our midst, just as the crumpled cruiser above, the power of its generators gone with its collapse, jerked sharply out of sight toward the crimson sun behind, hurtling away from us a twisted wreck of metal.

IT WAS with something of a tightness in my throat that I saw the wreck of our familiar, faithful ship drive away from us, but I turned toward our own desperate situation. We were clinging to the back of the great oval ship as it drove on toward the Cancer cluster, with above and all about us the blackness of the void, and the galaxy's flaming suns. Ahead shone the gathered suns of the great cluster, and I knew that we must capture the ship soon if at all; so now, half creeping and half walking, we made our way along the great ship's back toward the round space-door set midway along that back. In a moment we were clustered about it, and found it closed tightly from within, as I had expected. Instantly, though, we set to work on it with the metal bars and tools we had brought with us, drilling down through the thick metal of the door while we clung, like a hundred odd tiny mites, upon the mighty ship's back as it flashed on and on.

What might lie in the ship beneath, what manner of beings might these terrible invaders be, we could not even guess, but it was our one chance to penetrate inside, and frantically we worked. Within moments more we had drilled through in a dozen places, were swinging aside the great bolts that held the door closed inside, and then were sliding it open and dropping swiftly down inside. We heard a little rush of air outward as the door opened, and knew that this ship was inhabited by air-breathing beings, at least, and then we found ourselves in the room beneath the space-door, a bare little vestibule chamber in whose side was a single square door.

Before opening this, however, we closed the round space-door above us, plugging the holes we had drilled in it by driving in sections of metal bar, and then I turned toward the door in the wall, felt carefully around it, and finally pressed a small white plate inset beside it, at which it slid silently aside. We stepped through it, bars raised ready for action. We were in a corridor, a long corridor apparently running the length of the great oval ship, but quite empty for the moment. The throbbing of great generators was loud in our ears, a throbbing much like that in our own ships but with another unfamiliar beating sound mingled with it. Silently we gazed about, then began to make our way down the corridor toward the ship's front end, toward the pilot room at its nose, stopping first to divest ourselves silently of the heavy space-suits, and then starting on.

Now we had come to an open door in the corridor's side, and peering cautiously through it we saw inside a long room holding a score or more of great, cylindrical mechanisms from which arose the throbbing and beating of the oval ship's operation. About these mechanisms were moving some two dozen of the ship's occupants, and as our eyes fell upon them we all but gasped aloud, so utterly strange and alien in shape were they even to us, who held strange shapes enough in our own gathering. Many and many a strange race had we of the Patrol seen in our long journeys through the galaxy, but all these were familiar and commonplace beside the shapes that moved in the room before us. For they were serpent-people!

Serpent-people! Long, slender shapes of wriggling pale flesh, each perhaps ten feet in length and a foot in diameter, without arms or legs of any kind, writhing swiftly from place to place snakelike, and coiling an end of their strange bodies about any object which they wished to grip. Each end of the long, cylindrical bodies was cut squarely off, as it were, and in one such flat end of each were the only features—a pair of bulging, many-lensed eyes like those of an insect, big and glassy and unwinking, and a small black opening below that was the only orifice for their breathing. These were the beings who had come

out of outer space to attack our universe! These were the beings who had annihilated the galaxy's fleet and were preparing now to seize the galaxy itself!

I turned from my horror-stricken contemplation of them to Jhul Din and Korus Kan, close behind me. "The pilot room!" I whispered. "We'll make for it—get the ship's controls!"

They nodded silently, and silently we stole past the open door and down the long corridor, toward the door at its end that we knew must lead into the pilot room at the ship's nose. Past other doors we crept, all of them fortunately closed, and as we stole on toward the door at the corridor's end I began to hope that at last our luck had turned. But ironically, even as I hoped, the door at the corridor's end, not a score of feet ahead, slid suddenly aside, and out of it, out of the pilot room beyond it, came one of the writhing serpent-creatures. It stopped short on seeing us, then gave vent to a strange, hissing cry, a high, sibilant call utterly strange to my ears, but at the sound of which the doors all along the corridor behind us slid swiftly open, while through them scores of the serpent-beings writhed out, and upon us!

"The pilot room!" I yelled, above the sudden hissing cries of the serpent-creatures and the shouts of our own crew. "Head for it, Jhul Din!"

Down the corridor we leapt, and out from the pilot room there came to meet us a half-dozen of the serpent-creatures, while one remained inside at the controls still. Then they were rushing toward us, and as they reached us were coiling about us, endeavoring to crush us by encircling us with their bodies and coiling with terrific power about us. As they did so, though, our own metal bars were crashing down among them, sending them to the corridor's floor in masses of crushed flesh as we plunged on toward the pilot room. Now we were through them, had crushed them before us, and were leaping through the door, the single serpent-creature inside wheeling to face us. Before he could spring upon us, though, Jhul Din had lifted him high above his head and then had flung him far down the corridor, where he struck against the wall and fell crushed to the floor. Then Korus Kan was leaping to the controls, swiftly scanning them and then twisting and shifting them, heading the racing ship around in a great curve, away from the Cancer cluster ahead and back in toward the galaxy's center, while Jhul Din and I now sprang back down the corridor to where our crew was struggling fiercely with the hordes of serpent-creatures rushing up from all parts of the ship.

Down that corridor, and down another, through rooms and halls and twisting stairways, down through all the great ship the battle raged, the serpent-creatures leaping and coiling about us with the courage of despair while we strode among them, metal bars smashing down in great strokes, mowing them down before us. Despite their overpowering numbers they were no match for us in such hand-to-hand fighting, and they dared not use ray-tubes, like ourselves, lest they destroy their own ship about them. So we forced them on, ever sending them down in crushed, lifeless masses, as they gradually gave way before us.

I will not tell all that happened in that red time of destruction, but quarter there could be none for these things that had come to attack our universe, that had destroyed our comrade ships in thousands; and so within a half-hour more the last of the serpent-creatures had perished and we were masters of the ship, though but a scant two score of us were left to operate it, so fierce had been the battle.

OUR first action was to clear the ship of dead, casting them loose into space through the space-doors; then Jhul Din and I made our way

back into the pilot room, where Korus Kan was holding the ship to a course inward into the galaxy. The controls, he had found, were very much like those of our own cruisers, but the great generators, as we found, were much different. Instead of setting up a vibration in the ether to fling the ship forward, as in our own cruisers, they projected a force which caused a shifting of the ether itself about the ship, forming a small, ceaseless ether-current which moved at colossal speed, bearing the ship with it. The speed could thus be raised or lowered at will by controlling the amount of force projected, and as the general nature of the generators was clear enough the remaining engineers of our crew took charge of them while we fled on into the galaxy.

"We'll head straight for Canopus," I said, indicating the great white star at the galaxy's center far ahead. "We'll report at once to the Council of Suns; our capture of this ship may be of use to them."

While I spoke Korus Kan had opened the power-control wider, and now our newly captured prize was racing through the void toward the mighty central white sun at thousands upon thousands of light-speeds, though I knew that even this terrific velocity, all that we dared use inside the galaxy, was but a fraction of what the ship was capable of in outer space. Glancing about the pilot room, I endeavored for a time to penetrate the purpose of some of the things about me, as we flashed on. Above our window, as in our own cruiser, was a great space-chart, functioning similar to ours, I had no doubt, and showing the dot that was our ship flashing on between the sun-circles that lay about us. There was a device for flashing vari-colored signals, also, such as space-ships inside the galaxy use to show their identity on landing. There was, too, a cabinet containing a great mass of rolls of thin, flexible metal, inscribed with strange, precise little characters that I guessed formed the written language of the serpent-people, though they were beyond all comprehension to me. I turned back to the windows about me, gazing forth into the vista of thronging suns and worlds that lay all about us now as we flashed on into the galaxy toward Canopus.

From all the suns about us, our space-chart showed, great masses of interstellar ships were also flashing inward into the galaxy, the first exodus of the galaxy's people from the outer suns and worlds, driven inward by the fear of these mighty invaders from the outer void who had already destroyed the galaxy's fleet, and were preparing now to grasp all our universe. Far behind us I could see the great ball of suns that was the Cancer cluster, glowing in supreme splendor at the galaxy's edge, and I knew that even now, on the worlds of those thronging suns, the great fleet of the invading serpent-creatures would be settling, would be moving to and fro, wiping out the races that thronged those worlds, wrecking and annihilating the civilizations upon them and making of all the suns and worlds of the great cluster a base for their future attacks upon and conquest of the galaxy. Could we, in any way, save ourselves from that conquest? It seemed hopeless, and now, weary as we were with crushing fatigue from the swift succession of events that had crowded upon us in the last few hours, since our discovery of the invading swarm's approach, it was with a dull despair that I watched Canopus largening ahead as we flashed on toward it.

On between the galaxy's thronging suns we raced, our vast speed carrying us through them and through the swarming, panic-driven ships about them before they could glimpse us. Onward, inward, we flashed, veering here and there to avoid some star's far-swinging planets, dipping or rising to keep clear of the masses of traf-

fic that were jamming the space-lanes leading inward, racing on at the same unvarying, tremendous velocity while we three in the pilot room, and the remainder of our crew beneath, strove to remain awake and conscious against the utterly crushing oppression of fatigue that pressed down upon us. At last we were flashing past the last of the suns between us and Canopus, and the great white central sun lay full before us, a gigantic globe of blazing, brilliant light. As we leapt toward it I saw Korus Kan gradually decreasing our speed, our ship slackening in its tremendous flight as we slanted down toward the planets of the great sun, and toward the inmost planet that was the center of the galaxy's government.

Down, down—our speed was dropping by hundreds of light-speeds each moment, now, as we sped down through the terrific glare of the vast white sun toward its inmost world. As we shot downward I saw that Jhul Din, now, was lying on the floor beside me, overcome by the fatigue that crowded down upon me also; only Korus Kan, of all of us, holding to the controls untiring and unaffected, the metal body in which his living organs and intelligence were cased being untrammeled by any weariness. Beneath us now lay the great masses of traffic, countless swarms of swirling ships, that had fled in to Canopus from the outer suns at the invaders' attack, and as they glimpsed our great oval craft these swarms broke wildly from before us. They took us for a raiding enemy ship, we knew, but down between them unheedingly we flashed, heading low across the surface of the great planet, still at tremendous speed.

Moments more and there loomed far ahead and beneath the colossal tower of the Council of Suns, toward which we were heading. By then I felt all consciousness and volition beginning to leave me, as an utter drowsy weariness overcame me, and I realized but dimly that Korus Kan was slanting the ship down toward the great tower, until abruptly there came from him a sharp cry. With an effort I raised my gaze and saw that from below, as we sped downward, three long, shining shapes were arrowing up to meet us. They were cruisers of our own Interstellar Patrol, and as they flashed upward there suddenly leapt from them a half-dozen brilliant shafts of the crimson rays of death, stabbing straight toward us!

5. *For the Federated Suns!*

HALF conscious as I was, it seemed to me in that dread instant that the whole scene about us was but a strange, set tableau, racing ships and flashing rays frozen motionless in mid-air. Then another cry from Korus Kan jarred me back to realization.

"The signal!" he cried. "Flash the signal of the Interstellar Patrol before they annihilate us!"

At his cry a flash of realization crossed my darkened brain, and I understood that the Patrol cruisers beneath had recognized our craft as an enemy ship, that Korus Kan himself dared not leave the controls even for an instant to flash from the signal our identity. With a last summons of my waning strength I rose, staggered blindly across the room toward the switch, and then, as from beneath the crimson rays flashed blindingly toward us, grasped the switch and swept it around the dial, flashing from our ship's nose the succession of colored lights that proclaimed us of the Patrol. I felt myself sinking to the floor, then, seemed to see the three uprushing ships swerving by us at the last moment as they glimpsed the signal, and then as Korus Kan sent the ship slanting down and over the ground to land I felt a bumping shock, seemed to sink still deeper into the drowsy darkness, then knew no more.

How long it was that I had lain in that darkness, in a stupor of sleep

from the weariness of our hours of rushing action, I could not guess when next I opened my eyes. I was lying upon a thick mat on a low metal couch, in a small room lit by a flood of white sunlight that poured through a tall opening in its side. On a similar couch beside me lay Jhul Din, just waking like myself; and for a moment we stared about in bewilderment. Then the sunlight, the brilliant pure white glare of light that could never be mistaken for the light of any star but Canopus, gave me my clue, and I remembered all—our discovery of the approaching swarm while patrolling the galaxy's outer edge, our flight inward and the great battle, our capture of the enemy ship and our escape. I jumped to my feet, and as I did so Korus Kan came into the room.

"You're awake!" he exclaimed, as his eyes fell on Jhul Din and me, standing. "I thought you would be, by now; the Council of Suns is waiting for us."

"The Council!" I repeated, and he nodded quickly as we strode with him to the door.

"Yes. We've been here for many hours, Dur Nal—you and Jhul Din sleeping — and in those hours the Council has been in almost constant session, deliberating this invasion of our universe."

WHILE he spoke we had been traversing a narrow, gleaming-walled corridor, and now turned at right-angles into another, strode down it and through a mighty, arched doorway, and were in the tremendous amphitheater of the Council Hall, a room familiar to all in the galaxy, the vast circle of its floor covered now by the thousands of seated members. It was toward the central platform that we strode, where Serk Haj, the present Council Chief, a great, black-winged bat-figure from Deneb, stood before the vast assembly, behind him on the platform the score of seated figures who were the heads of the different departments of the galaxy's government. It was toward seats among these that he motioned us, as we reached the platform, and as we took our place in them I glanced about the great hall, interested in spite of the cosmic gravity of the moment. It was with something of a leap in my heart that I saw, among all those dissimilar thousands of strange shapes from the galaxy's farthest stars, the single human figure of the representative of my own little solar system. Then, as Serk Haj went on with the address to the assembly which our entrance had interrupted, I turned my attention to his words.

"And so," he was saying, "it is clear to you how these strange invaders from outer space, these serpent-creatures from outside our universe, have been able to annihilate all but a few ships of our great fleet, to settle upon the worlds of the great Cancer cluster as a base, to set up clear around the edge of our galaxy the watchful patrol of their ships that our scouts report. All this they have done with a fleet of a few thousand ships, have shattered our galaxy's defenses and sent wild panic flaming across that galaxy; yet these few thousand ships, as we have now learned, are but the vanguard of the countless thousands that are soon to follow, to pour down upon us in colossal, irresistible hordes!

"It was through the feat of Dur Nal, here, and his companions, that we have learned this. You have heard how, after the great battle, he and his party were able to do what never before was done in all the annals of interstellar warfare, to board and capture an enemy ship in mid-space and bring it back, intact, to Canopus. That ship has been thoroughly examined by the best of the galaxy's scientists, and in its pilot room was found a collection of metallic sheets or rolls covered with strange characters, the written records of these serpent-invaders. Upon those records for

hours our greatest lexicologists have worked, and finally they have been able to decipher them, and have found in them the facts of the history and purposes of these strange invaders from outer space.

"These invaders, as the records show, are inhabitants of one of the distant universes of stars like our own, lying millions of light-years from our own in the depths of infinite outer space. So far are these mighty galaxies like our own that they appear to us but faint patches of light in the blackness of space, yet we recognize them as universes like ours, and have given them names of our own, calling one the Andromeda universe, and another the Triangulum universe, and so on. The universe of these serpent-creatures, though, although one of the nearest to our own, has never been seen or suspected by us because it is invisible from our distance, being not a living universe of flaming stars like our own and the ones we see, but a darkened, dying universe.

"It is a universe in which the thronging stars have followed nature's inexorable laws and have darkened and died, one by one, a great universe passing into death and darkness and decay as our own and all others, some time in the far future, will pass. For eons upon it had dwelt the great masses of the serpent-people, thronging its countless worlds, and as their suns began to fail them, one by one, as their universe swept toward its final darkness and death, they saw that it was necessary for them to migrate to another universe unless they wished to pass also into death. So they constructed great space-ships which were able to travel at millions of light-speeds, by causing an ether-shift about the ship; space-ships in which it would be possible to do what never had another done, to cross the vast gulf between universes. Five thousand of these, when finished, they sent out with serpent-crews and death-beam armament as an advance party which was to locate a universe satisfactory for their races and then attack it, gaining a foothold upon it while the rest of the countless serpent-hordes would build a still mightier fleet of tens of thousands of ships, which would transport all their great hordes to the universe they meant to conquer.

"So the five thousand ships drove out from the dying universe into the void, toward the Andromeda universe, the nearest to their own. Down they poured upon it in swift attack, but up to meet them rose the people of the Andromeda universe, a single race ruling all of it, whose science and power were so great that with mighty weapons they drove back and defeated the five thousand attacking ships, forcing them back into outer space again. It was clear that for the present the Andromeda universe could not be conquered, so they turned at a right angle, and after flashing a message by some means of etheric communication to the masses of their peoples in the dying universe, struck out through the infinite void in a new direction, toward our own universe.

"Across the void they came, toward our universe, and rushed in upon it after the long days of their tremendous flight through space, met and annihilated our own great fleet at the galaxy's edge, and have settled upon the Cancer cluster, gaining the foothold they desired. Soon from their dying universe will come their vast main fleet with all their hordes, and with a mighty weapon which the records mention as now being constructed in the dying universe, a weapon to annihilate all life on our worlds with terrific swiftness. They will come, in all their masses, and when they have annihilated the races of the Federated Suns and hold all our galaxy in their grasp will then sail back with renewed power to pour down upon the Andromeda universe and conquer it also. A

cosmic plague of conquest and destruction, creeping through the infinite void from universe to universe!''

Serk Haj was silent a moment, and all in the great room were silent, a silence such as surely none ever experienced before. I was listening tensely, Jhul Din and Korus Kan beside me, but no whisper broke that stillness until the Council Chief's voice went calmly on.

''Doom creeps upon us,'' he said, ''yet there is still one chance to stay that doom. We know that before attacking us the serpent-creatures attacked the Andromeda universe and were repulsed, that they plan to return to that attack after they have conquered us. So if we could send a messenger across the terrific void to the Andromeda universe, to tell its peoples of the serpent-creatures' attack upon us and their intention to invade the Andromeda universe once more, after conquering us, there is a chance that those peoples would come to our aid, with the powerful weapons with which they have already once repulsed the serpent-creatures, and would help us to crush these invaders before all their resistless hordes can pour down on our galaxy. It is a chance—a chance only—but on that chance rests the fate of our universe!

''This chance, a chance to seek the help that may save us, has been given to us by Dur Nal and his companions, in their capture of the enemy ship in mid-space; for this captured ship, with its colossal speed, can do what none of ours can do: it can cross the mighty void that lies between us and the Andromeda universe, and carry an appeal for help to that universe. The captured ship has been thoroughly studied by our scientists, for we plan to build a great fleet of others with mechanisms like it, to help in crushing these invaders whom we can not crush alone. A special crew of picked engineers and fighters, from various of our stars, has been selected for it, and now waits in it for the start of this great flight through the void that they are to make for our galaxy. The command of it, though, can go only to the one who captured it, to Dur Nal, who was first to warn us of the oncoming peril, and to his lieutenants, Jhul Din and Korus Kan!''

With the words we three snapped to our feet, the great assembly rising likewise in their excitement, and now Serk Haj turned to face us.

''Dur Nal,'' he said, steadily, ''it is not for me to exhort you and your friends to do now your best, who have done always your best. If you can break through the enemy's patrol around the galaxy's edge, can cross the mighty void which never yet has any of our galaxy crossed, and can carry to the Andromeda universe our appeal for help, it may be that you will save us all—it may be that you will save the races and civilizations of all the Federated Suns from conquest and annihilation and death. To you three, who have spent your lives in the service of the Federated Suns, I need say no other word.''

We saluted, and there was a moment of deathlike silence, until I spoke. ''We start at once!'' I said, simply.

THE next moment we three were striding down the broad aisle across the mighty hall, between the thousands of members who, still in the grip of that strange silence, watched us go, the one chance of our universe with us. Out of the great hall we strode, and down the big corridor, out of the great tower into the white glare of Canopus' light, and toward the long, gleaming oval shape of our waiting ship. Inside it our crew awaited us, a full eight score of strange, dissimilar shapes from every quarter of the galaxy, among them the two score who had been of my cruiser's crew and had helped capture this ship. Swiftly I gave to them our first

orders, heard the space-doors clanging as we ascended to the pilot room, and then as Korus Kan stepped to the controls heard the mingled throbbing and beating of the great generators beneath.

I gave a brief signal, and Korus Kan gently opened the mighty ship's controls, its nose lifting now as it shot smoothly upward. Past us now from beneath there rushed up two cruisers of the Patrol, speeding up ahead of us and flashing signals that cleared swiftly from before us the masses of swarming traffic above, that swept hastily to either side as our long, grim ship drove up and outward. Up, up —and then we were clear of the last of them, our escorting Patrol cruisers dropping behind us now and turning back as with rapidly mounting speed we shot out from the great planet and upward, mighty Canopus blazing full behind us now, as we flashed out again from it, out with our velocity increasing by leaps and bounds, out toward the Cancer cluster once more, toward the galaxy's edge.

With the passing minutes our generators were throbbing faster and faster, and we were leaping on through the galaxy at a speed that equaled or exceeded that of our flight inward. Suns were flashing by us on either side now, at a rate that was an index to our appalling speed, but still we flashed on with greater and greater speed, racing out between the thronging suns of the galaxy toward its edge, the great ball of suns of the Cancer cluster expanding before us as we raced on in its direction. On—on—until the mighty cluster lay full to our right, until we were flashing past it, the blackness of outer space stretching ahead, and in that far-flung blackness the dim little patch of light that was the Andromeda universe. We were passing the mighty cluster, now, heading straight out into the black abyss, and my heart hammered with excitement as we flashed on. Could we pass the patrol of enemy ships around the galaxy's edge without a challenge, even? Could we—but suddenly there was a low exclamation from Korus Kan, and I turned to see, racing up beside us at our left, a close-massed squadron of five great oval ships!

They had glimpsed us on their space-charts, we knew, and now were flashing beside us through space at a speed the same as our own, drawing nearer toward us while from their white-lit pilot rooms their serpent-pilots inspected us. A moment I held my breath, as they flashed on at our side, peering toward us; then, apparently satisfied that our great oval craft was but one of their own fleet, they began to drop behind, to turn and resume their patrol. I breathed a great sigh, but the next moment caught my breath again, for the foremost of the five ships, as it dropped behind, had paused at our side, had veered a little closer as though still unsatisfied. Closer it came, and closer, until the serpent-creatures in its pilot room were clear to our eyes, as it and the ships behind it raced on with ourselves through space. Then suddenly from that foremost ship a signal of brilliant light flashed to those behind it, and at once all five drove straight toward us!

"They've seen us!" shouted Jhul Din. "They know we're not of their own fleet!"

But as he shouted I had leapt to the order-tube, had cried into it a swift command, and then as the five ships veered in toward us there leapt from our vessel's sides long, swift shafts of crimson light, the deadly red rays with which our captured ship had been equipped at Canopus, narrow brilliant shafts that touched the two foremost of those five racing ships and annihilated them even as they sprang toward us. The other three were leaping on, though, their death-beams reaching like great fingers of ghostly light through the void toward us, and I knew that we could not hope to

escape them by flight, since they were as swift as our own craft; so in a moment I made decision, and shouted to Korus Kan to head our ship about.

Around we swept, in one great lightning curve, and then were rushing straight back upon the three racing ships. Into and between them we flashed, death-beams and red rays stabbing thick through the void in the instant that we passed them. I saw one of the great pale beams slice down through the rear end of our ship, heard shouts from beneath as those of our crew in that end were wiped out of existence, and then we were past, were turning swiftly in space and flashing back outward again, and saw that two of the three ships before us were visible only as great crimson flares, the other ship hanging motionless for the moment as though stunned by the destruction of its fellows.

"Four gone!" yelled Jhul Din, as we flashed toward the last of the five ships.

That last ship, though, paused only a moment as we raced toward it, and then suddenly flashed away into the void to the right, vanishing instantly from sight as it raced in flight toward the Cancer cluster. We had destroyed and routed the squadron that had challenged us, had broken through the enemy's great patrol! Korus Kan was opening our power-controls to the utmost, and now the throbbing and beating of the great generators beneath was waxing into a tremendous, thrumming drone, as we shot outward into space, the Cancer cluster falling behind us as we flashed out at a tremendous and still steadily mounting speed.

Out—out—into the vast black vault of sheer outer space that lay stretched before and about us now, the awful velocity of our great craft increasing by tens of thousands, by hundreds of thousands of light-speeds, as we shot out into the untrammeled void. Behind us the mighty, disklike mass of flaming stars that was our universe was contracting in size each moment, dwindling and diminishing, but before us there glowed out in the vast blackness misty little patches of light, universes of suns inconceivably remote from our own. Strongest among them glowed a single light-patch, full before us, and it was on it that our eyes were fixed as our ship at utmost speed plunged on. It was the Andromeda universe, and we were flashing out into the mighty void of outer space toward it at a full ten million light-speeds, to seek the help which alone could save our universe from doom!

The unthinkable perils and dread horrors that awaited Dur Nal and his crew will be told in next month's WEIRD TALES.

THE CRUISE OF THE VEGA

By LIEUTENANT EDGAR GARDINER

I HAVE been told a hundred times or more that the story, *The Cruise of the Vega*, has set a new high mark in romantic historical novels, that it bears the deft, sure touch of a master, and that it transports the reader to the time and the place of the Conquistador heroes as never such a tale had done before. Perhaps even more often I have been complimented on the accuracy with which I followed that recently dis-

covered account that had lain buried in the Spanish archives, to be finally exhumed almost simultaneously with that great story. It has been a source of amazement to the historians that I boldly discarded all of their preconceived thoughts of the Conquest; that I disregarded those inaccuracies completely and struck boldly out in an entirely unexpected direction.

They have asserted that I must have been the first to read that hitherto unknown manuscript and base my story on it alone; they point out that even the names of the gentlemen-at-arms are retained in the story with commendable accuracy.

I am but now come from a dinner given in honor of this newest literary and historical prodigy which is myself, where I listened again to fulsome praise and adroit questions. Where did I obtain my heroes? Why did the great galleon, Vega, strike out due north instead of northwesterly, and so land in an entirely unsuspected quarter? And above all, where did I obtain my remarkable knowledge of the customs and dress and habits of that far-off time? of Indians as well as Spanish grandees? True, of the Indians no vestige now remains; they and their customs have long since gone to the limbo of forgotten things; but much of what I had written so sympathetically and withal so authoritatively was borne out by vestigial fragments found in the scanty narratives of the time.

The ladies have surrounded me eagerly, to talk of my Don Sebastian and of that wonder princess, to talk of my little Miguel whose downward path was such a poignant sorrow, yet who redeemed himself so magnificently in the end.

Yet I have stedfastly declined to enter into controversy, to explain, to talk in any way upon that monumental work; and for that I have been praised all undeservedly. My interviewers have written columns about my unassuming modesty, my poise; the thousand and one bits of tittle-tattle that envelop the great and the near-great. They have used countless columns in speculation as to the next great thing that may be expected from my pen, while I sit as mute and inscrutable as the Sphinx.

But I will talk tonight; indeed, I must talk or else go mad. I must tell the bald truth, incredible as it may seem; and tomorrow, when all the world shall know, then perhaps someone may rise who can explain and, explaining, relieve me of my doubts and fears and worries.

If I have not spoken about *The Cruise of the Vega*, it is not because I did not wish to do so. When all the world was reading it and talking of it, wondering, arguing, questioning, I wanted to do likewise—I, whose name appeared in gold lettering beneath its title on the gaudy, soul-stirring illustrated cover. Yet I was the one man who could not question and exclaim; my questions must be forever stifled, for I was its author. The gods on high must laugh at that, even as the world will do tomorrow! But I must make haste and write lest my courage fail me even now.

I need not weary you again with the story of my early beginnings when I studied till far into the night, ambitious to master the writer's art. Nor need I tell you of those early failures when each story came back to me like a homing pigeon times without number, and I faced the fact that such a craft was not for me. That has been told and retold in all its myriad changes by interviewers who seized upon the little they could find and magnified it out of all proportion. No; I shall tell the tale of *The Cruise of the Vega*, and you who read this shall judge its worth.

IT WAS in that hour of deepest despondency, when I knew myself for what I was, an utter failure, that it first came to me. Night after night I tossed sleeplessly; day after day I

wrote interminably, only to tear up all that I had written and cast the fragments aside. Well might I be desperate as I saw myself sinking inescapably into the quagmire of mediocrity.

Came the fateful night when before my sleepless eyes I saw the warm brown walls and spires of that wonder city gleaming above the waving jungle greens; saw the proud Armada of mighty Spain bowing, dipping, swinging before its crescent of white beach. Like a brilliant-colored motion-picture the scene unrolled vividly before me. Oh, for the pen of a master to write down what I saw there! But, alas! I was only a bungler!

Night after night I saw that panorama unroll before me until I began to look for its appearance, even as I looked for my long periods of sleeplessness. And night after night I rose in desperation, to sit at my desk trying to put it all down on the bald white paper, only to compare my poor weak efforts with the brilliant pageantry of the original and grow more despondent than ever.

At last came a night when even the gorgeous vision failed me, and I sat in sleepless misery over my desk with the blank, lifeless paper before me. Oh, that I might see those bare white sheets glow with the life and color of my dreams, I thought, as I dropped my burning face upon my arms and pulled my dressing-gown the closer against the night's damp chill! I must have dropped asleep at last, there before my desk; for I awoke only when the birds in the trees without began their praise of a new-born day. Wearily I arose and stretched my cramped, aching limbs. The glories of that new day had no joys for me. I saw only a drab, dull vista of another failure ahead. Idly I picked up the scattered sheets, the litter of blunted pencils. Had I then, after all, written through the night just passed? But no; that could not be, else I should have remembered it. Anxiously I looked over those scattered sheets that I was gathering up—more food for the ravening maw of the ever-yawning waste-basket.

I read the page; with quickened interest I found the next, then feverishly went through the entire dozen. I had never seen that fine, neat script before; certes, it was altogether unlike my own coarse, angular scrawl; but I was in no mood to ponder upon such trifles as these, for before my delighted eyes glowed that wonder that had recurred to me so often; in all its glowing color and life the mighty Armada and the gleaming battlements of the Spanish Main were passing before me.

Yes, and more! Woven throughout its warp and woof was a tale as precious as old wine; that stirred my blood; a tale to quicken the pulse of young and old alike! Though I could not write, yet I knew a master tale when I read it, and here was a story that only a Sabatini could write! And then my heart sank like lead: the story was incomplete; it stopped short in mid-stride!

Half the day I sat there, trying desperately to pick up that broken thread, to bring the story to a triumphant conclusion, only to cast each halting, futile effort into the ever-ready basket at my feet. I tossed my latest bit disconsolately aside as the afternoon shadows lengthened and acknowledged utter failure.

Yet I could not bring myself to cast that beginning after the abortive efforts of the day. Might I not catch the thread once more after typing the precious sheets, I wondered? Obedient to the impulse, I drew the aged, battered machine forth and painstakingly ground out the dozen sheets; but it was no use: I was as hopeless as before.

The hours slipped by unnoticed while I toiled desperately but ever

more hopelessly, writing feverishly, only to cast my efforts aside with a groan, then try again with no better result. Midnight chimed from the darkened village before I gave it up and sought my bed.

Again a new day flamed in the east and again it found me cramped and shivering before my desk, chilled to the bone in spite of my warm dressing-gown that had once been an Indian blanket of a weave now seldom seen. And again my dazed eyes took in the litter of dulled pencils and scattered sheets that bore the same fine, careful hand I had seen once before. And again my heart flamed with delight as I read further of that epic tale.

Once more I typed those closely written sheets, nor did I try this time to aid by my poor weak efforts its unfinished end. When that task was done I walked alone in the cool green woods with a curiously uplifted heart. Something within me gave me cheer for the first time in months; something assured me that on the morrow I should find another heap of manuscript and a furtherance of that tale that so enthralled me.

And so, from day to day, from night to night, I slaved, the servant of an unknown, the unconscious, uncomprehending pawn of I knew not what destiny, and with each new sun the sheaf of typewritten manuscript in the locked bottom drawer of my desk grew ever larger and more absorbing until the day came when it was finished; all save the title, for title it had none, nor foreword, nor author. There it lay for weeks while I threshed out in my mind what course to pursue.

I knew the tale was worthy of the highest in the printer's art. Were it published it would flame meteor-like across the literary world—the crowning triumph of a master. But dare I publish it? And if I did, whose the name it should bear? Surely, not mine, for I was but the typist who copied endlessly the work of one far greater than myself.

With fear and trembling, I sent it out at last, adding to it only the title which it bears, and speedily I heard from it again. It was accepted with delight. From the thin envelope of acceptance fell a check that made me gasp, and within a few short weeks I was famous. Though I had signed no name to that bulky manuscript, yet the publishers had put my name beneath the title.

That first check I banked at once and each succeeding check of the mounting royalties went the way of the first, nor did I touch that money, for it was not mine, any more than the book was mine.

If I have not commented on *The Cruise of the Vega*, it has been that I did not care to criticize the work of another, and that one a master such as I can never be. Yet my heart is like a stone within my bosom. At the bank under my own name lies a sum that belongs to the unknown who nightly wrote at my humble desk. Who he may be I can not guess. Is that neat fine script that I transcribed a very record of truth, indeed? Was it the disembodied spirit of one of those Conquistadores come back at this late date to write by my hand his memories of that unforgettable trip with a vividness and a color that we of a later age may not hope to equal, much less surpass? If not such an one, who then? Alas! I do not know. Perhaps this side of the Great Adventure I may never know.

The literary world is agog with speculation. What will be the next great thing to come from my pen? What will be the next from one who has shown such artistry and mastery of that romantic age? My pen, indeed! Will there be a next? Or does that unseen, unknown now lie forever mute?

DOCTOR PICHEGRU'S DISCOVERY

By Carl F. Keppler

"My ape hands closed about his throat."

AS I TOOK one of the cigars from the box that Pichegru offered me, my hand quivered a bit with the excitement that I could not wholly suppress. He noticed it, and his little pale eyes twinkled under their faded brows.

"Nervous?"

I laughed shortly. "Natural, isn't it? After getting a message like yours."

He smiled a bit grimly and sank into the chair opposite me. "I hope I haven't excited you unduly, Mr. Cavanaugh," he murmured, "but—in my mind at least—the discovery of which I spoke is quite well worth getting excited over." He leaned suddenly toward me, his eyes glowing with the light of a fanatic, his voice tense and vibrant. "One of the most important, I believe, if not *the* most important, in the history of scientific experimentation!"

I looked at him in astonishment. Odd old codger that he was, there was one thing of which Pichegru could never be accused, and that was overstatement.

"But I did not call you here tonight," he went on, his voice dropping back into its old dry rattle, "simply for the purpose of telling you about the discovery, but for a far more practical reason. The truth of the matter is, Mr. Cavanaugh, that the discovery is still in the experimental stage, and I intend to perform the final experiment, an extremely complex and delicate piece of work, tonight. For it I need an adept assistant."

I started to speak, but he interrupted me by raising his hand.

"Before you accept," he said, his voice growing very hard and cold, "it is only fair for me to warn you that such assistance will involve a consid-

erable amount of inconvenience, as well as—not a little danger."

Danger! A delicious little thrill ran down my spine. You can not imagine how welcome a thrill can be to the dry and tedious humdrum of scientific life.

"I'm ready to start any time you are, Doctor," I told him steadily.

He smiled delightedly. "Wonderful! You'll never regret it, Cavanaugh. Tonight's work, if all goes well, should not only bring us both to the peak of fame, but should also be the means of securing for us — I speak with assurance — untold amounts of wealth." He paused, studying the effects of his words with his little glassy fish-eyes. "And now"—he drew his chair closer—"now for the discovery. I'll boil it down as much as I can, so listen closely.

"It deals primarily with the formation of the brain." Pichegru essayed a little amateurish puff at his cigar, blowing the smoke away quickly, as though it had burned him. "You remember, Cavanaugh, when you first took up the study of psychology in college, the brief dissertation we made upon the formation of the brain itself?"

I remembered, vaguely.

"It is composed, if you will recall, of various centers; for example, the two cerebral hemispheres at the top, the optic thalami, medulla oblongata, and so forth. Without going into details, the surface of the brain is filled with innumerable cells, called neurones, from which project threads of fibers known as axones. These axones project out for a distance of several feet through the body, and connect themselves with threads projecting from nerve cells in the different muscles, and so forth.

"The whole importance of my discovery lies in the fact that it refutes the belief held at present by scientists: namely, that the body can not live without the brain, nor the brain without the body. They can not do so long, I admit; but for a short time, and under the right conditions, they are able to subsist separately.

"But I fear that you do not understand me," he went on with a frown. "The whole gist of the matter is this: these axones, these threads that connect the brain with the body, can be severed, and the brain removed from the skull, and brain and body will go on living as before — provided, of course," he added, "that both are under the influence of an anesthetic at the time, and that the severed ends of the axones are carefully covered."

I saw, now, but it was with a keen sense of disappointment that I finally became aware of what he was saying. So this was his discovery! I had been expecting—I don't know what, but certainly something more thrilling than this. This! What did it mean in my life, or in his, or in anyone else's?

He must have divined my thoughts, or perhaps my face did not remain as impassive as I thought. At any rate, he arose, and, throwing aside his cigar butt, said bruskly: "Perhaps an example or two will serve to clarify my assertion, or at least heighten your interest in the matter. Come!"

HE LED the way to a door at the rear end of the hallway, down a long dark flight of stairs, and, unlocking a heavy door, passed into a huge, brightly lighted chamber, windowless, with cement floor, walls, and ceiling, and with a row of closely barred cages along the wall.

"I have here a number of rare and interesting specimens," said he, nonchalantly. "For example, in this cage, to the left—no, this one, with the wire on top—see, a full-blooded Argive hen, which has held the world's laying record for the last ten years."

I looked through the wire netting, as he directed, and saw, crouched on a pile of straw in the corner of the cage, a great, beautiful, snow-white hen. She glared at us unblinkingly with her beady black eyes, her head sway-

ing to and fro with the monotonous regularity of a clock pendulum.

"Superb!" I ejaculated involuntarily.

"Aye, superb, without a doubt," agreed the psychologist somewhat dryly, "but do you notice anything strange about her?"

"Strange! N-no," I rejoined dubiously, "unless it is that singular swinging of her head, or the limp way she lies on the ground there, as though her legs were broken."

"Reach in and smooth her feathers," he suggested, unlocking the cage. "She likes that."

I did as he directed, but no sooner had my hand come within a foot or so of her than the swaying stopped, the eyes seemed to glow like twin points of fire, and a hiss, thin and faint, but unmistakable, issued from her throat. Then with the speed of lightning, the head darted up; the bill buried itself in my finger-tip. With a cry of pain and anger, and sundry remarks concerning the fowl's parents, lineage, past history, and general character, I withdrew my hand.

Pichegru had been chuckling to himself all the while, and now he burst into a hoarse cackle of mirth, which ceased, however, when he noted the furious expression on my face.

"There, there, Mr. Cavanaugh," he placated me. "At least you will admit that affairs are taking a more interesting turn. Turn your attention now to the adjacent cage, here: another very rare specimen, the bola-boi of the Malay peninsula, one of the most dangerous snakes in existence. Would you care to fondle it, my friend?"

I shuddered slightly at the sight of the occupant—a huge reptile with a thick, gaudily colored body and a wicked-looking, triangular-shaped head.

Smiling strangely, the doctor opened the cage door, and, reaching in, softly stroked the fearful head, rubbed his fingers over the scaly, loathsome skin. And the snake lay perfectly quiet, emitting a strange clucking sound of content.

Utterly confounded, I stood between the two cages, looking dazedly from one to the other; now at the chicken that acted like a snake; now at the snake that acted like a chicken. What did it all mean? What——

"You understand, of course, how all this is achieved?" asked Pichegru, as he shut the door of the cage.

Dully I shook my head.

"Why, it's all very simple; just use your wits. I said before that the brain can exist without the body, and the body without the brain. At present the brain of the snake is existing in the body of the chicken, and vice versa."

"But how——"

"Very easily. See—first I split open the head of the chicken—after subjecting the bird to an anesthetic—and remove the brain. Delicate work, of course, but none the less possible. Then I do the same with the snake. Then, hurrying lest either body or either brain perish during the process, I insert the snake's brain into the chicken's skull, fastening the brain fibers of the snake to the muscle fibers of the chicken. I repeat the process with the snake's body and the chicken's brain, and the experiment is complete. On the one hand we have a snake, or rather a chicken, externally, but with the brain—and incidentally all the brain capabilities — habits, memory, instincts, emotions, and so forth—of a snake. And on the other hand, we have the exact opposite: a snake's body with a chicken's brain. Intricate, isn't it?"

I nodded uncomprehendingly. Here was a snake that was a chicken; here was a chicken that was a snake. But how could a snake be a snake and still be a chicken? . . .

Again Pichegru chimed in with my thoughts.

"I sometimes wonder," he mused softly, "just which is the chicken and which is the snake. Or whether either is each or each is either."

I swept my gaze over the remainder of the cages. There was a great eagle, barking and whining and trying to wag his feathered appendage. And there was the dog, squatted on his haunches, striving piteously to swing his forelegs out to his sides, and uttering long, shrill cries. There was—oh, why go on? It was all so grotesque, so fantastic, so *cruel*.

"Well!" snapped the doctor suddenly. "Enough of these trifles."

"Trifles?"

"Just that. Pawns in the game of life. They have served, I hope, to illustrate to you the background of my discovery. If so, they have served the purpose. And now let us turn our attention to a matter of vastly greater importance. Come!"

At the far end of the room was a heavy door, barred from the inside, and which, I thought at first, opened into an adjacent chamber. Dropping back the bolt, the doctor threw open the door, and stepped aside. Thinking that he wanted me to precede him, I went to step through the doorway, but found my progress arrested by a row of stout iron bars, about an inch in thickness. Beyond, all was darkness, and at first silence, though soon an audible rustling, and then a series of sharp, shrill, barking noises sent me shrinking back from the bars.

With a short laugh, Pichegru snapped a button near the door, flooding the place with light.

"Look closely, Mr. Cavanaugh!" he cried.

THE chamber was a small one, of sheer cement, with straw scattered about the floor. And in the center, deep eyes glowing from beneath heavy ridges, thin lips drawn back from great curved teeth in a ferocious snarl, stood the most awe-inspiring monster it had ever been my lot to witness. I say "monster," for this is the first word that flashed into my mind as I saw it; but as the first shock passed away, I gradually became aware that it was a gorilla, a huge beast easily six feet in height, and with proportions so tremendous as to verge on the grotesque.

The light seemed to anger the beast. Throwing his head back, and clapping his heavy fist against his bare chest, he gave vent to a most terrific and ear-splitting roar, which fairly shook the solid floor beneath our feet.

"Quiet!" snapped the doctor, but his voice was drowned in the torrent of noise.

"Quiet!" he warned, seizing a long whip from the wall, and uncoiling it with a great snap. "Quiet, Gormaz!"

At the sight of the lash the beast cowered abruptly, and in an apparent agony of terror scampered over to the corner of his cell, where he made a vain effort to conceal himself under the straw, chittering all the while in a shrill, almost humanlike voice.

"What do you think of this little pet, Cavanaugh?" was the doctor's query as he fondled the tip of the lash.

"An awe-inspiring figure indeed, but he seems natural enough," I replied. "What's wrong with him?"

The doctor grinned.

"Nothing. He is a full-fledged gorilla from the jungle of central Africa; probably the largest in captivity."

"Intact in brain as well as body?"

"Quite intact."

I was puzzled. "Then what do you intend to do with him, if anything?"

He drew forth his watch. "I shall answer that question in precisely two minutes," he said deliberately.

His remark astonished me more than anything else; yet such was the effect of his stipulation that I had to pull out my own watch, and anxiously follow the passing seconds. At the end of two minutes he turned toward me again, and I noticed an odd smile on his lips.

"You are feeling quite all right,

Cavanaugh?'' he inquired solicitously.

''Fit as a fiddle. Save for a little dizziness, perhaps,'' I added as an afterthought. For I was beginning to feel dizzy, though I considered it more due to the shocks of the last few minutes than anything else.

''Ah!'' The doctor seemed pleased. ''I thought it was about time.''

''Time?''

''You are—ah!—I noticed with satisfaction the deep inhales which you took on the cigar I offered you earlier this evening. Yes, the cigar was doped, you know, with a narcotic which requires about fifteen minutes to take effect, but which is none the less extremely powerful. What, a yawn? Cavanaugh, your attitude is positively insulting. And another? Well, well, if you *must* sleep, I'll excuse you. But about that gorilla: I *do* intend to operate on him, by the way; yes, I propose to replace his brain by that of a human being, you know.''

I could no longer see him, for his face, and the room, and the cages, and all, were whirling about at the most horrible and incredible speed; but I lunged at that hateful voice, that droned on and on. I seemed to miss, however, and to slip, and fall, down, down, down, into a void of utter blackness.

FOR interminable ages I was tossed about on the limitless bosom of a raging sea, where the waves were points of fire, spurting up fumes of choking smoke. Flames, which stood out blacker than the blackness itself, licked over my tortured body, tore at my throat, shot up my nostrils. Then suddenly I shot upward, whirling about, whirling, whirling, with a speed which dizzied me, sickened me, yet filled me with a strange sort of satisfaction. And gray demons rushed up out of the shadows, and seized me, and bore me on and on . . .

''Feeling better?'' came a voice from the far heavens. And then I heard a groan—a pitiful, heart-rending groan — another, and another. What poor being, I thought dreamily, was venting forth his heart and soul in such awful groans? And then I heard another, and felt an odd tingling in my throat and lips. Could the sounds be my own? I was filled with amazement by the thought.

''Feeling better?'' repeated the voice, this time so close that I opened my eyes. For several moments I could see nothing; then gradually objects began to assume shapes and significance.

I was lying on some sort of a cot, or a table, rather, covered with soft white padding. Above me was a level expanse of frescoed ceiling. Slowly and painfully I slid my legs over the side of the table and pushed myself to a sitting position. For a time my head swam, and a sickening feeling prevailed around the pit of my stomach.

''Don't exert yourself, Cavanaugh,'' he admonished me casually; ''you shouldn't try to smoke such strong cigars.''

''Well, that was a pretty trick of yours, Pichegru!'' I snapped angrily, forgetting the deferential ''Doctor'' as recollection of his artifice returned. ''I thought that practical jokes were out of your line.''

''Calm yourself, calm yourself, Cavanaugh,'' he soothed me. ''I made it perfectly clear, earlier in the evening, that the task of assisting me in this great scientifical enterprise would involve no small degree of danger and inconvenience.''

I cleared my throat irritably. My voice was husky, and it was with the greatest difficulty that I could enunciate clearly.

''You didn't make it clear that I was to serve as a source of amusement to you by smoking a doped cigar! And what the devil good did that little stunt do your scientific enterprise, anyway?''

''An enormous amount of good.

Your assistance has been of the most indispensable nature, Mr. Cavanaugh, though rendered without your knowledge or consent. And as for the cigar; well, I regret the incident, but it really didn't do you any harm, did it?''

''Not much!'' I replied with a groan. ''Oh, my head!''

Gingerly I fingered my aching skull. And now a chill of horror shot down my spine like an electric shock. Running along the middle of my head, from the top of my forehead to the base of my skull, was a thin strip of adhesive tape. But it was not this as it encountered my finger-tips that so startled me, but the *hair* on each side of the bandage. My own had been long and black and wavy; this was a short, stubby growth like the bristling pelt of a prize-fighter.

With a puzzled frown, I dropped my hand, and as it passed before my eyes I received another shock, a far more poignant one this time. For my hand was a hand no longer, but a veritable paw, huge and hairy, with great, thick talons. My horror-stricken gaze wandered up my arm; it was long and thick, like a great log, and covered with heavy, dark-gray hair. In almost a frenzy of terror I glanced over the rest of my body, noted the great black chest, the swelling, hairy paunch beneath it; the bowed stubby legs; the hairy, handlike feet.

Small, icy hands were clutching at my throat as I raised my eyes to Pichegru. I could not speak a word.

The sardonic smile on his faun-like face deepened. ''What is wrong, my dear Mr. Cavanaugh? Surely the brain is not displeased with its new habitation?''

My lips trembled to say the words which my heart dreaded to utter. Still smiling, he took me by the arm—the strange hairy arm—and led me, unresisting, to the far corner of the room, where stood a shining full-length mirror. ''Calm, now!'' said he, as he shoved me before it.

I looked in — oh, God! how can I express the horror of it all? There before me, my own reflection, mirrored in the shining glass, stood the great, hulking figure of a gorilla, scowling savagely at me with eyes deep-sunk beneath heavy ridges! I started back with a cry of terror.

''Easy, easy, Cavanaugh,'' he admonished in his dry, rasping voice at my side. ''It is yourself, you know, no one but yourself.''

With a snarl I turned on the author of my plight, my hands reaching instinctively for his throat. ''You, you—dastardly——''

The smile vanished, his face turned a sickly green with fear, and he jerked an ugly automatic from his pocket. ''Back! Back, I tell you!'' he warned me.

Reluctantly I dropped my hands, but I felt satisfied, somewhat, in having frightened him. Gradually fear left his face, and he put up the automatic.

''Use a little reason, for the love of heaven, Cavanaugh,'' he cautioned me in a hollow voice. ''Remember that the secret of your transformation is known to me alone; with my death passes your last chance of ever regaining your former shape.''

I scarcely heard him, I was so sick at heart with the horror of it all. Oh, God! could it be—it *must* be a joke—that was it, just a joke, a hideous, monstrous joke my diseased frenzy was playing on my mind! For an instant I struggled to step before the mirror; but at length I turned away with a shudder; I could not view that hairy, inhuman face again, with its great tusks curving out under thin lips, and its scowling, bloodshot eyes.

I slumped down on the table, and with odd thrills of horror rubbed my great hairy hands over my great hairy body. Pichegru, smiling still the smile that was a sneer, sat down beside me.

''Don't take it so hard, Cavanaugh,'' he consoled. ''Nothing really very

horrible has happened. You have simply been changed, for a short period, from a man into a gorilla. You should be grateful for the enormous strength and vitality which you possess in your present form. And it will not be difficult, when I have rested for a time, to restore your mind to its former beloved habitation.''

I glanced up with a ray of hope.

''My—body——?''

''Is in perfect condition, and not at all displeased with its new master. Wait! I shall reassure you.''

He arose and left the room.

In a moment I heard the sound of shoes scraping down the passageway, and then, in through the door shuffled—myself! Shoulders hunched forward, arms swinging limply, legs bent awkwardly at the knees, eyes blinking dully in the bright light of the chamber, yet in all particulars the figure before me was my own! So here was I and there was I, and in the name of heaven which was I?

Now Pichegru pushed in behind. I noticed that he carried a whip in his hand.

''Into the corner, Gormaz!'' he snapped, pointing with the whip, and my body scampered over submissively and lay down.

''You see,'' explained the psychologist, as he joined me, ''as I had no desire to lose so useful a subject as Gormaz, and as I rather expected you would care to employ your body again at some future time, I united the two that they might keep each other alive.''

''Pichegru!'' I cried. ''This joke has gone far enough! If it has served as a source of enjoyment to you, or of progress in your confounded scientific enterprise, well and good, but enough is enough. Restore me to my former condition!''

''Wait. There is plenty of time. First I have a proposition to make to you. I am the only person on earth, you know, who can effect the retransformation which you desire.''

''Do you suppose I am ignorant of that? And——''

''Wait. I am the only person who can perform the difficult task, and I shall do it, as you wish, but—*first*, you must do a little deed for my benefit.''

''Name it, man!'' I broke out in relief. ''Name it, and it is done!''

He turned toward me, and never was there such a change in the face of a man. Gone were the dry, prim, ultra-prudish lines to which I had been accustomed; gone was the dull, thoughtful film which had covered his eyes. It was a very evil face which looked at me now.

''To put the matter briefly, then: You are possessed at present, by virtue of the operation which I have performed, of miraculous, of superhuman, strength and agility. These powers, which I have so magnanimously afforded you, I wish you to put into play for a short time in my interests, though the matter, I promise, will not prove entirely unremunerative.''

He was silent a moment, drumming his fingers on the edge of the table. I said nothing. Soon he continued.

''You have seen the Godding mansion, at the other end of the town? Then you are, of course, familiar with its setting. It occupies an entire block, you know, and is built on the order of a mediæval castle, surrounded by a high piked wall. Watchmen patrol the place incessantly. Dogs are let loose within the grounds every night.''

''Well?''

''At the southeastern corner of the mansion, high up on the top story, is a little stone chamber, with a little barred window and a heavy steel door. Within the room is a great steel safe. Within that safe is—one million dollars' worth of jewels!''

I sat in mute astonishment.

''The wall outside the window,'' he went on, ''is sheer glazed stone; not

a foothold, not a handhold on it. But —and here is where you come in— about twenty feet from the wall grows a large tree, reaching up toward the window. You understand, now?''

Dumbly I shook my head. He frowned as if irritated.

"Well, then; listen. You are to climb that tree early in the evening, before the dogs are released. I shall divert the attention of the watchmen. Later, when all is dark, you will swing from the branches over to the barred window. It should be but the work of a moment for you to tear away the network of bars. Once inside, and with the combination of the safe, which I possess——''

I cried out in horror: "Pichegru— you—you damned fiend!''

His face turned livid with rage and disappointment.

"You refuse? You refuse, do you? Too damn moral and uppity to touch somebody else's jack, are you? Why, you maudlin, little——''

He broke off, choking with anger.

"Then to hell with you!'' he screamed with the voice of a madman. "Live on the way you are, then—*be* a gorilla the rest of your life! And as for this jabbering piece of dirt here——''

Blinded by fury, he struck out with his whip in the direction of my body. A red welt appeared across my forehead, blood trickled down my white cheeks; and I heard Gormaz shriek in pain. Again he swung the whip, and again the corded lash cut through my tender skin.

Now Gormaz could stand it no longer. Cowed as he was by years of submission to that cruel, powerful, snake-like thing, the excruciating agony of the welts on his strange sensitive hide screamed for revenge, threw him into sudden action. With a great roar he leaped at the throat of his tormentor. Coolly Pichegru reversed the lash and with a sickening thud the heavy butt crushed against Gormaz's forehead. The poor beast-man slumped down on the floor without a groan.

A snarl, curiously savage and animal-like, rumbling in my throat. You've seen a she-bear when she sees her cubs maltreated? Well, my own body was a great deal dearer to me than ever was a cub, animal or human, to its mother.

Pichegru turned around just in time to jerk his neck away from the great hairy fingers which wrenched at it. With a sudden scream of terror he sprang back until his shoulders touched the wall, at the same time jerking the automatic from his pocket.

"Back — back, you fool!'' he squeaked like a cornered rat. "Back —Cavanaugh, be reasonable, you can't—I'll fill you full of lead, I tell you——''

What an awful laugh it was that welled from my lips! The doctor's face turned sick with horror as he heard it. Slowly I advanced.

There was a report, like the pop of an uncorked bottle, and I felt hot liquid trickle down my side, and something tore a furrow along my sloping forehead. And still another and another and another. All bullets landed, yet I scarcely felt them.

Pichegru gave a gasping scream, and flung the empty gun at my face. But I caught it in the air and crushed it into a shapeless mass with my fingers.

"Cavanaugh!''

I shook the blood out of his eyes, and leered down at him.

"For the love of God, Cavanaugh!''

For an instant my hands paused before his throat. His eyes rolled, and he half slumped to his knees. "Remember——'' was his last word, choked out by my ape hands as they closed about his throat.

SLOWLY and dazedly I sank into a chair; I felt strangely weak and listless. Before me, at my very feet, lay my body, its chalky white face spattered with blood. Gently I gath-

ered it into my great arms, stroked its blood-stiffened hair with my clawlike fingers, crooned to it tenderly, lovingly.

Suddenly a horrible thought cut at my heart. Trembling, I felt the slender wrist. Ah! the pulse was still beating, though feebly. There was still time — still time — if Pichegru would only—but where was Pichegru? Oh, yes, I had killed him; in my rage I had throttled him to death. He had gone to the land where they never see the sun.

"Remember," had been his last word. "Remember;" yes, that was it. Remember—remember—*what?* Slowly the words trickled through the labyrinth of my memory:

"The secret of your transformation is known to me alone. With my death passes your last chance of ever regaining your former shape."

Steadily the pulse-beat ebbed away beneath my finger-tips. At last it ceased altogether. Gormaz was dead, and with him had died my body—my beloved body. My last chance was gone. My part in the drama of life —as a human being, at least—was ended. The play was played out.

I shook my head dazedly, and suddenly my heart leaped with the thought that there was still a chance! My own body was dead—lost forever —but there were others. There were other surgeons than Pichegru, quite as brilliant as he; they could rediscover his secret; they could retrieve my brain from the hideous form in which it was encased and restore it again to a human shape. Any half-wit or madman or condemned criminal would do. The world would not miss *him,* and in me it would regain one in the prime of a busy, serving life. Could there be any hesitation?

I leaped to my feet. There was no time to be lost. I would call Von Sternen, the "wizard of European surgery." He would understand; he would study the matter; he if anyone could save me. Of course it would sound strange to him at first, and weird and impossible. But — who could doubt a gorilla that talked?

At the thought I burst out into a roar of laughter, then tore open the door and dashed up the stairway, my clawlike toes clicking against the polished wood. Up the hallway I ran, and through the brightly lighted sitting-room, and jerked the telephone receiver up to my ear.

"Number, please?" chimed the operator.

I started to speak, but suddenly my whole great form froze into the immobility of horror. From my throat came a series of sharp, shrill, barking sounds, like those of the brain-dead Gormaz. *I had lost the power of human speech!*

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THE gorilla surged against the bars of his cage, and roared out his great thunder-roar. The visitor, a pudgy little man with a pink little face, shrank back against the wall.

"Quiet!" shouted the guard, uncoiling his whip with a loud crack. "Quiet! Back there, Gormaz!"

Slowly the gorilla sank down on the straw, utter despair and hopelessness pictured on his hairy face, in his eyes the awful terror of a soul that has lost its way. The guard turned back to the little man.

"Vicious beggar, that," he grunted, with a jerk of his head toward the cage. "Killed two men not mor'n a week ago. They're going to shoot him, I hear."

The pink-faced man gasped. "Killed —two men?"

"Uh-huh. A doctor and another man in town. They had him out in a private house—jolly fool thing to do anyhow—performing some sort of experiment on him. They must have gotten him mad in some way, because he slaughtered them both—throttled one and bashed the other's skull in, I think. Then" — the guard laughed

harshly—"blimey if he didn't go to the telephone and try to call the police!"

The pink-faced man shook his head. "So they're going to shoot him?" he murmured, pressing a coin into the guard's hand. "Almost human, isn't he?"

The guard stole a glance at the coin. "Yep," he agreed cheerfully, dropping it into his pocket, "almost human."

Folks Used to Believe

by ALVIN F. HARLOW

Salty Superstitions

IT IS astonishing to contemplate the number of superstitions that have been connected with so commonplace a table article as salt. Not only the English-speaking peoples, but German and some of the Latin races have for ages regarded the spilling of salt at the table as a presage of calamity—especially domestic quarrels and disasters, quarrels with friends, bone fractures, great pain or other bodily misfortunes. The coming misfortune may be averted, however, if you quickly pick up a pinch of the salt and throw it backward over your head. There are many people who are afflicted with this superstition today. Leonardo da Vinci, in his painting of the Last Supper, represented Judas Iscariot as in the act of overturning the salt; thereby foretelling his betrayal of his Lord and his own ignominious death.

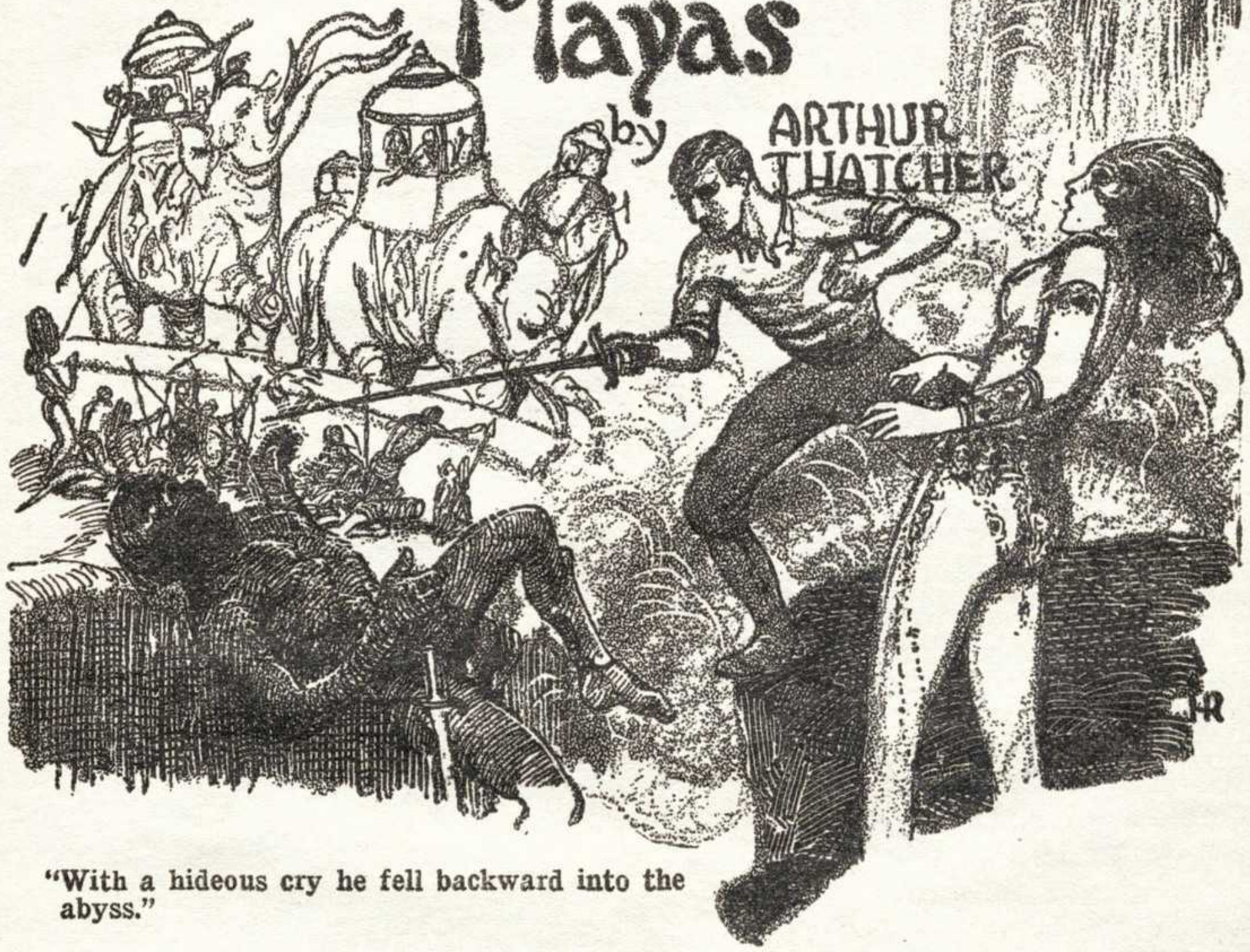
It is an old English superstition that if you wished to see your absent lover, you must throw salt on the fire for nine days in succession and say:

> It is not salt I mean to burn
> But my true lover's heart I mean to turn,
> Wishing him neither joy nor sleep
> Till he come back to me and speak.

In the north of England it used to be considered unlucky to put salt on another's plate; but the bad luck might be averted by giving a second helping. Eating salt was formerly supposed to excite anger or cause melancholy. In the Isle of Man people used to feel safer when they went out if they had a little salt in a pocket, and they never thought of moving from house to house without being thus protected. Many people there today will not put a child out or take one to nurse without a mutual interchange of salt; and it used to be that a poor beggar who was almost famished would not accept food from anyone unless a certain quantity of salt accompanied it.

The Last of the Mayas

by ARTHUR THATCHER



"With a hideous cry he fell backward into the abyss."

The Story Thus Far

RUTH BENTON, Fred Carkhuff and Harold Stillwell get separated from an exploring party in the wilds of Yucatan during a storm, and take refuge in a vast cave. Captured by natives, they are carried to the City of the Rainbow, ruled by Queen Regi, a white descendant of the ancient Mayas. Ruth and the queen are captured by huge weird apes known as gorabutos, through the treachery of Sebol, chief of chieftains, and carried away into the forest, where they are rescued by Stillwell and Carkhuff with the help of the natives. Queen Regi plans to marry Carkhuff on her return to the city, but Sebol has seized the throne during her absence.

10. King Sebol

WHEN Sebol heard the screams of Queen Regi and Ruth, as they were carried from their sleeping-quarters in the palace by the invading gorabutos, he laughed gutturally.

"Now has Sebol's time come," he soliloquized. "Sebol will be king by acclamation of the people of the Ronalans."

He stole from his room and proceeded in the darkness along the corridor leading toward the one connecting with the throneroom and the queen's suite. He paused in his advance, as he heard Stillwell and Carkhuff leaving their room. He watched them as they came into the corridor carrying one of the palace torches.

Without proceeding further, he waited until he saw the two return to obtain their guns and accouterments for the trip after the gorabutos. When they had again departed, Sebol

stole to the entrance, and with his own hands began replacing the stonework. He found a quantity of mortar, still fresh, which the masons had failed to remove, and quickly completed the task.

"Sebol is now safe," he laughed. "Regi and the white strangers are gone."

Returning to his room, he strapped his sword to his side and proceeded to the room where Regi and Ruth had been sleeping when seized by the gorabutos. In the light of his torch, he viewed with admiration the various luxuriant trappings that were Regi's.

"These shall become the property of the new queen, Neda," he gloated. "The fair daughter of Walmar shall wed King Sebol ere seven suns have passed. Together they will reign in the Palace of the Rainbow."

With the coming of the dawn, Sebol's attention was attracted to the shouting of a number of warriors in the garden. He rushed to one of the narrow stone windows and peered out. He recognized Walmar, the chief of the palace hunters.

Sebol called to Walmar, and the latter, recognizing his voice, returned the salutation and announced: "The gorabuto invasion is over. The greater number of the animals have passed to the south of the city, and only a few have passed through the City of the Rainbow."

"We'll break open the entrances of the palace at once," announced Sebol. He hastened to call the other warriors of the temple, and the work of removing the stonework was hurriedly accomplished.

Sebol sent for Walmar, and the latter came into the throneroom, where Sebol informed him what had taken place in the palace during the night.

"Good for the gorabutos!" exclaimed Walmar. "Now shall Walmar dwell here with King Sebol as chieftain of the chiefs."

"Yes," agreed Sebol, "and Neda the daughter of Walmar shall reign with Sebol as his queen. Go and proclaim to the people of the city that Sebol is now king, and bid them assemble seven suns from now to view the royal marriage before the cataract of the rainbow. Take a force of warriors with you and make all swear allegiance to the new king. You must slay those who refuse. Lelock has gone with a small party to the Red Forest in search of the white female and Regi, accompanying the men of the thunder poles."

"Suppose that their efforts to rescue the queen and the white female should be successful, would not Regi upon her return make an effort to recover her throne?"

"I will trust to Walmar to take care of any situation that may arise. He is now chieftain of the chiefs. If his spies ascertain that the queen still lives, and has been saved from the gorabutos by the men of the thunder poles, then Walmar and Sebol must arrange to slay the entire party upon their return."

"I will send Shoto across the clearing to the border of the forest to learn, if possible, what has become of the party that set forth to attempt the rescue of the women," announced Walmar, turning to a warrior who had accompanied him to the throneroom. "Go, Shoto, and learn what has become of the former queen and those who seek to rescue her."

Shoto bowed in acknowledgment of the order and left the castle. When he had entered the garden and proceeded for a short distance, he turned and looked back at the structure.

"Sebol shall never claim the allegiance of Shoto," muttered the warrior. "Shoto will go into the forest and find the white strangers and Lelock. He will tell them how Sebol has become king, and how he plans their death upon their returning to the City of the Rainbow."

Shoto continued on his way and left the garden. Through the city he

took his way, until the clearing was reached. He hastened across the stretch of treeless territory until he discovered the members of the rescuing party.

11. A Council of War

SHORTLY after the arrival of Shoto at the place where the rescuing party had gathered, Lelock and his companion returned with a large quantity of fruits that they had gathered. Carkhuff informed him of what had occurred in the City of the Rainbow.

The chieftain remained silent for a time, pondering the news. Then he spoke. "Not all of the Ronalans will be loyal to Sebol. There are many who, if they knew that the queen still lived, would steal away from the city and come and join her here. Shoto must return and announce to Sebol that he has found no trace of us. To the ones he feels certain can be trusted, he may tell that Regi still lives with the white strangers and Lelock in the forest. He can suggest that they steal from the City of the Rainbow and join her forces. In that manner we can hope to raise an army of loyal people to help recover the city for Queen Regi.

"There is a small tribe of people that live three days' journey toward the rising sun who might be enlisted to help Regi. They are not numerous but are good warriors. Regi has visited their kingdom and they are friendly to her. We can withdraw to a chosen place in the forest where Sebol's spies can not find us. There we may gather the loyal Ronalans together into an army. Lelock and the other warriors here will journey toward the rising sun and talk with the king of the Sidons. The Sidons have many great elbomos which they have captured and trained to work and fight for them."

"Those are the great elephantlike animals with the divided trunks," remarked Carkhuff.

Lelock nodded. "If we can enlist the Sidons with several hundred of their elbomos, we can retake the City of the Rainbow and rout Sebol's forces."

"Let's follow the plan outlined by Lelock," suggested Carkhuff. "Let us find a rendezvous in the depths of the forest and there marshal our fighting forces. Lelock and his companions will start at once, and Shoto can return to the city and carry out his part of the plan."

The breakfast of fresh fruits was hurriedly eaten, after which the company advanced into the forest, while Shoto returned across the clearing toward the City of the Rainbow.

Two miles from the border of the clearing a rendezvous was agreed upon, and Lelock, accompanied by three of the five warriors, started on their journey for the land of the Sidons.

"May success be yours, Lelock," encouraged Regi, as she bid the native general farewell.

THE two remaining warriors, assisted by Carkhuff and Stillwell, began the preparation of a shelter for the company. With their swords the warriors hacked down saplings and cut them into poles. The material was used to fashion the outer walls of a building, the poles being set side by side upright in the ground.

A quantity of branches from trees bearing palmlike leaves were cut in the adjacent forest, dragged to the camp site, and placed in position to form the roof of the building.

When the building had been completed, the warriors went in search of fruit, and Carkhuff, taking his rifle, strayed into the adjacent forest in search of game.

He had proceeded several hundred yards from the camp, when he paused by a game trail. He withdrew into the underbrush and waited for a short time. His attention at the end of that period was attracted by the sound of

voices, and he peered through the bushes, to discover a small company of Ronalans advancing along the game trail. They were headed by Bloto, the instructor, who was talking about Sebol's seizure of the City of the Rainbow.

Carkhuff was at a loss to determine whether they were friendly to the cause of Regi or opposed to her recovery of the kingdom. The statement of Bloto, which he caught, set his mind at ease.

"The kingdom of the Ronalans must never pass permanently to a dynasty headed by such as Sebol," announced the instructor, conversing with the warrior by his side as they walked past the bushes where Carkhuff was concealed. "Through Queen Regi's leadership of the people, our tribe has become master of all other tribes in the land of the Red Forest. When other tribes learn that Sebol is king of the Ronalans they will immediately make war against us, for the tribes of the valley dislike him because of his misdemeanors as chieftain of the chiefs."

As Bloto finished speaking Carkhuff stepped from his place of concealment and called a greeting. Bloto and his followers halted and returned his salutation.

"Shoto told us we would find you somewhere in the Red Forest away from the border of the great clearing," explained Bloto. "There are sixty of us who have stolen quietly away from the City of the Rainbow to join the forces of our queen. We are ready to fight for her against the usurper, Sebol."

"Great," ejaculated Carkhuff. "I will lead you to our camp site. Then we had better send a few outposts to keep a watch upon any movement that may occur in the clearing about the city. They can pilot the friends of our cause to the camp. Lelock will return with reinforcements from the tribe of the Sidons within a week, and we can then plan a stroke for the recovery of the city and the kingdom for Regi."

Carkhuff led the way to the camp, where Bloto and his followers cheered Regi. Bloto then requested that the story of the rescue of the queen and Ruth Benton be told to him. Carkhuff began to relate the method followed and was interrupted by Regi, who said: "The white warrior is not boastful of his great bravery, so Regi will tell the story herself." The queen proceeded and thrilled her listeners with the story of the slaying of the gorabutos.

When darkness fell upon the forest, Ruth and Regi entered the hut prepared earlier in the afternoon, while Carkhuff and Stillwell lay down to sleep near the place with the other loyal warriors of the Ronalans. At Carkhuff's suggestion a dozen of the company were stationed at various points to give warning of any surprize attack.

THE morning brought an increase of more than a hundred reinforcements, and thus the army of the queen in the forest grew, until at the end of seven days more than two thousand loyal warriors had secretly left the City of the Rainbow and gathered at the rendezvous.

On the afternoon of the eighth day, Carkhuff was seated before the temporary hut of Regi conversing with her and Ruth. Stillwell was reclining on the ground near by, listening to their discussion. Suddenly there came from the distance the sound of wild trumpeting, as if a number of great elephants had become enraged and were stampeding through the jungle.

"The elbomos of the Sidons are coming!" exclaimed Regi, her eyes flashing excitedly as she rose to her feet. "Lelock has been successful, and they are coming to fight with Regi for the recovery of her kingdom!"

The wildest excitement spread through the encampment of Rona-

lans, and they waited expectantly for the arrival of the army of the Sidons.

Fifteen minutes later a heavy movement of great animals through the Red Forest could be detected by the loyal Ronalans encamped with their queen. A hundred great beasts suddenly loomed into view and were halted by their riders at the edge of the encampment.

The animals were twice as large as the ordinary elephant. Two enormous tusks protruded from the sides of the great head, and the eyes were set just above the intersection of the long trunk with the skull. The trunk, about four feet from the skull, divided into two distinct minor trunks. The elbomo utilized the double trunk to excellent advantage while feeding, seizing branches and shoots with one of the minor trunks, and stripping the leaves from the twigs with the other, then stowing them into the elephantlike mouth.

One of the largest of the beasts was driven to the hut where Regi stood. In the car that surmounted its back were stationed Lelock, Verigus the king of the Sidons, and a dozen warriors. Lelock was the first to descend from the car on the elbomo's back. He lowered himself by utilizing a short rope braided from strips of animal hide, one end of which remained fastened to the side of the car on the elbomo's back. King Verigus dismounted after Lelock, and following him came the other warriors who had made the journey with the king of the Sidons.

The occupants of the cars on the backs of the other elbomos dismounted also. Stillwell counted more than two hundred of the animals within view of the hut, and he could hear the trumpeting of unseen hundreds of the great creatures.

Verigus bowed before Queen Regi. "The king of the Sidons has come to aid the queen of the Ronalans," he announced. "Lelock has told Verigus of all that has occurred, and also of the great power of the white strangers and their thunder poles. Verigus has brought five hundred of his best elbomos, and there are ten fighting men on each animal, with their bows and spears. He and his warriors are ready to attack whenever Regi shall say."

"The day is fast passing," returned Regi. "She will ask that Verigus and his men rest tonight before the battle on the morrow."

"We shall do so," replied Verigus.

Turning from the place, he gave orders for his army to encamp for the night. Later he returned and joined with Lelock, Carkhuff and Stillwell in planning an attack upon the forces that Sebol had under his command.

"The people of the Red Forest land speak a common language," explained Regi, when Carkhuff, after the conference, returned to converse with her and Ruth.

"The elbomos are wonderful creatures," observed Carkhuff. "It is my plan to transport some of the animals to my country, the United States, as an advertisement for this great country, which has remained unexplored for so many years."

Two of the Ronalans approached the place where Regi and Carkhuff were seated. "There are spies of the army of Sebol in the forest," they announced. "We have seen them return across the great clearing to the City of the Rainbow. We have observed a great army of warriors forming near the city and establishing a camp in the clearing."

"Continue to have a close watch kept upon them," commanded Carkhuff. "It is hardly probable that they will advance this evening. They are mobilizing for an offensive of some kind, but the light is too near gone to anticipate much of a movement forward today. Let the information regarding the activities of the Sebol crowd be made known to all of our forces and every precaution be taken to prevent any surprize attack. In

the morning we will march to retake the city.''

12. The Battle

WITH the coming of the new day, the combined forces of Regi and Verigus were astir early. Verigus approached Regi, who was talking to Carkhuff, and announced: ''The king of the Sidons will be pleased to have the queen of the Ronalans ride in the car on his elbomo if she decides to go into the battle.''

''Regi will lead her people in the fight,'' announced the queen.

''I would rather that you stayed here with Miss Benton,'' urged Carkhuff. ''The danger to yourself would be too great. Sebol would order his men to slay you at all costs to themselves. I will ride with King Verigus and lead the Ronalans in battle with Sebol.''

''But it is Regi's desire, my warrior,'' she returned, ''to go into the fight for the recovery of her throne.''

''I understand your feeling in the matter,'' said Carkhuff, ''but I want you to understand fully my attitude. I am anxious for your safety. Since I am to become king of the Ronalans through my marriage with you, I insist that you remain where no harm can befall you. It is my affection for you that makes me insist that you remain in a position of safety.''

''Regi will yield,'' she announced after a slight hesitation, ''to the demands of her warrior. She will remain with the white woman here until after the battle — and may victory come hurriedly.''

''Then we will fight together,'' said Verigus, placing his hand on the shoulder of Carkhuff. ''Come; let us mount our elbomo and set off for the conflict.''

''Don't forget that I am in on this scrap with you,'' exclaimed Stillwell, following Carkhuff and Verigus.

He followed after the two, until they halted by the side of the massive elbomo of Verigus. Verigus seized the braided hide rope trailing from the car on the animal's back and quickly ascended. Carkhuff imitated his example, and Stillwell quickly joined them. A half-dozen of the warriors of the Sidons then followed into the car. The rope was pulled up, and the driver spoke a word of command to the elbomo.

At the voice of the driver, the elbomo began moving through the forest toward the border of the clearing adjacent to the City of the Rainbow. The other animals, with their cars loaded with warriors, followed after and continued until the border of the clearing was reached. Following the animals came the loyal warriors of the Ronalans on foot.

''We will advance toward the enemy and break his ranks with the force of elbomos,'' suggested Carkhuff to Verigus. ''Then the footmen of the loyal followers of Regi can have an easier time.''

''That will be the best plan,'' agreed Verigus.

The great elbomos with their riders advanced from the shelter of the forest into the clearing. As they left the cover of the forest, Carkhuff and the others in the car were the first to sight the army of Sebol before the City of the Rainbow.

The latter force had started to march from the encampment of the night before in battle formation toward the border of the forest. The spies of Sebol had reported to him the preceding evening the presence of the loyal followers of Regi with the queen and the three white people at the rendezvous in the forest. The report of his spies had been made to Sebol before the arrival of the Sidons.

At sight of the great drove of elbomos advancing from the cover of the forest, Sebol and his army were seized with uncertainty regarding the outcome of the impending clash.

''Regi has enlisted the aid of the Sidons to recover the throne of the Ronalans,'' Sebol exclaimed to Wal-

mar as they caught sight of the great force of animals with the cars on their backs loaded with warriors whose spear-points glistened in the morning sunlight.

"They are going to lead the attack," said Walmar. "Order our men to form ranks with spears projecting forward. The elbomos will not charge through a fence of spears. Our bowmen can shoot the riders in the cars from behind the fence formed by the spearmen."

The order was given to form ranks for resisting the anticipated charge of the Sidons and their elbomos. Three ranks of spearmen formed in front of the bowmen. The front rank formed with the butts of their lances fixed against the earth, the shaft of the spear with its point extending far forward. The second and third ranks formed similarly.

CARKHUFF noted the battle formation, and turned to Verigus, who was studying the activities of the enemy. "Will your beasts charge against such a bristling fence of points?" he queried.

"They will have to be forced against the barrier, but I believe that we can break it. Our bowmen will shoot a breach in the ranks of the spearmen with arrows. Their bowmen will not prove very effective against our warriors, as we can crouch and shoot from behind the walls of our cars. Once we have formed a breach in their spear ranks, our animals will force through the opening, and we can break up their force. It will then be difficult for them to reform."

"We can shoot a breach in their ranks from here, ourselves," Carkhuff suggested, turning to Stillwell.

As the elbomo on which they were riding drew near the formed ranks of Sebol's Ronalans, the two groups opened fire. Verigus viewed with amazement the result in the ranks of the enemy, and gave a war-whoop of satisfaction at the repetition of the firing.

The elbomo was excited by the sound of the rifle reports, and rushed ahead of the others. His driver headed him toward the breach which Stillwell and Carkhuff had created in Sebol's ranks, but the enemy quickly closed the gap. The rifles spoke again, and when the line of elbomos had approached close enough to the Sebol forces, the bowmen of the Sidons went into action. The accuracy of their arrow shots was astonishing to Carkhuff and Stillwell. Hundreds of the Ronalans fell before the onslaught, and numerous breaches were created by the Sidon bowmen, who concentrated their arrow fire at particular points, to shoot an opening through the wall of spears for their elbomos.

The bowmen of the Ronalans replied, but hundreds of their arrows instead of reaching the bodies of the Sidons stuck in the sides of the cars.

At a hundred points the charging beasts of the Sidons crashed through the ranks of the Ronalans. Sebol, beholding the prospect of certain defeat for his army, fled from the spot, leaving charge of the battle to his designated chieftain of the chiefs, Walmar.

As he approached the City of the Rainbow with a small bodyguard of fifty warriors he was met by a half-dozen others of his followers who had served in the forest as spies.

"Great news!" exclaimed one of the spies, greeting Sebol. "We found the queen, when her army had departed, and captured her and the other white female. We have brought them to the palace and confined them in the old suite of Regi. We have left them under guard there, and have hastened to bring you the news of the great accomplishment."

"Now shall the vengeance of Sebol be gratified!" exclaimed the apelike native. "The battle is going against Sebol on the plain, but he can hold his castle and the walls surrounding the garden for weeks against the in-

vaders, for the elbomos can not walk over the garden walls. Go to Walmar on the plain and tell him to retreat to the garden of the palace and resist the further efforts of the enemy there.''

Sebol hastened to the city and rushed for the palace intent on taunting the captive queen, whom chance had again thrown into his power.

13. Prisoners of the Usurper

WHEN the army of the Sidons and the accompanying Ronalans left the encampment, Regi and Ruth walked from the hut where they had been quartered into the adjacent forest. Ruth carried her rifle, lest some unforeseen danger might befall them. A score of Ronalans had been assigned by Lelock, who led the footmen toward the distant battlefield, to act as a bodyguard for the two women until the return of the army from the battle, or word telling of victory should be sent. Two of the warriors followed the girls into the underbrush, while the others remained at the encampment site.

A band of spies of the forces of Sebol had been scouting in the forest in the direction taken by the girls. At their approach, they hid in the underbrush, until the two and the accompanying warriors had passed, then followed them until they had proceeded quite a distance from the camp.

''I never saw anything so wonderful as the immensity of these red trees,'' enthused Ruth, as she and Regi strolled together.

''They are noble,'' admitted Regi. ''Many of them are possibly as old as the City of the Rainbow.''

A warning cry from the two warriors some distance to the rear of the girls caused them to turn. As they did so they were seized by a half-dozen of the spy band, while the remainder of the followers of Sebol attacked the two warriors and chased them toward the scene of the encampment. The six made off through the forest with their captives. One of the spies had seized Ruth's rifle and carried the weapon, realizing that it might prove an element of danger in the girl's possession.

The small band arrived at the border of the clearing. A view of the two armies approaching each other could be obtained in the distance. The spies took a circuitous route toward the city, keeping close to the border of the forest. When they arrived in the city, they rushed their captives to the palace, where they placed them under guard in the queen's suite.

They then returned to the plain to inform Sebol of their capture, and encountered their leader as the latter fled, before the complete defeat of his army had been effected.

In the meantime, the two warriors loyal to Regi had escaped from the remnant of the spies of Sebol, and made their way to the encampment where they spread the alarm of the capture.

The warriors immediately set forth to follow the trail of the spy band carrying away the girls. They arrived at the forest border to view the ones they were pursuing about to enter the City of the Rainbow. They turned back and made their way toward the battling forces in the center of the plain, to convey to Lelock and Carkhuff the unpleasant news of the capture of Regi and Ruth Benton.

THE breaking through the ranks of Sebol's spearmen had a disheartening effect upon the bowmen in the rear of the front ranks. As they saw the line of defense crumble, they broke and fled toward the City of the Rainbow.

The Sidon drivers of the elbomos, when they had passed through the breaches in the ranks of the Sebol spearmen, wheeled their great steeds about and drove them into the rear of the forces that still attempted a defense. Scores of Sebol's men were

trampled under the feet of the charging monsters.

Carkhuff from his car called to the opposing Ronalans about him: "Men who are fighting for the usurper, Sebol, lay down your arms, and you will be spared. Queen Regi still lives and will reign over you, as she has done before Sebol deceived you. We do not seek to slaughter you. Surrender and renew your allegiance to your former ruler, Queen Regi."

A hundred of the Ronalans, fighting in the vicinity of the elbomo on which Carkhuff rode, threw their spears to the ground at his announcement and raised their arms above their heads in token of surrender. The movement became contagious along the entire ranks of the spearmen, and in ten minutes the entire army of Sebol had surrendered to its opponents, except some five hundred of the bowmen who retreated to the city, where they were hurriedly mobilized by their leaders within the garden of the palace for the defense of the place.

Carkhuff and Stillwell dismounted from the car on the elbomo of Verigus, and, with Lelock, arranged the terms of the surrender with the deposed followers of Sebol. Lelock, as chieftain of the loyal army, agreed to allow those who had surrendered to return as subjects of Regi without further penalty.

"I understand," he told Carkhuff, "that hundreds of them joined the Sebol forces through fear of refusing to do so. They believed that Regi must have been killed by the gorabutos, and accepted Sebol as their new ruler, which course was to be expected by virtue of his position as chieftain of the chiefs. They will continue as faithful subjects of Regi. We must continue on into the city and complete the overthrow of Sebol. Now is an excellent opportunity for those who have renounced Sebol as a usurper and a cheat to turn against him and help finish the task of restoring Regi to her throne."

Many of the warriors who had recently surrendered, hearing Lelock's suggestion, expressed their willingness to aid as he had suggested.

Several warriors of the company that had been left to aid in guarding Regi and Ruth Benton in the forest rushed up to Lelock and Carkhuff. They quickly announced the recapture of the queen and Ruth, adding that they had been taken into the city by their captors.

"We must advance into the city at once," said Carkhuff. "The girls have no doubt been taken to the palace, where they are even now at Sebol's mercy. The usurper fled from the field of battle with a company of his followers before the end of the battle. Give the order for all the loyal followers of the queen to march at once into the city."

Lelock complied with the order, and Carkhuff at the head of the loyalists began a rapid march toward the City of the Rainbow.

SEBOL, following the information furnished him by the spies regarding the recapture of Regi, hastened toward the palace. He entered the place upon his arrival and proceeded immediately to the throneroom. He gave hurried instructions to his followers gathered there regarding arrangements for defending the palace garden, then proceeded to the queen's suite, where guards were stationed in the doorway to prevent any attempt on the part of Regi and Ruth to escape.

Sebol spoke to the guards in greeting, and passed into the queen's suite. Regi rose at the sound of his approach into the room, where she and Ruth were reclining on their couches of white wood with the leopard-skin covers.

Sebol's features were overspread with a smile of triumph. "Regi is at the mercy of the king of the Ronalans," he laughed. "She shall be subject now to his desires. He will

compel her to be his wife now and do his bidding. The same shall be the fate of her white companion, for Sebol will have many wives to serve him."

"Sebol is not the king of the Ronalans," returned Regi, her eyes flashing with anger. "How dare he enter Regi's private room? For this error he shall surely die."

Sebol grasped her in his arms and crushed her to his chest in spite of her efforts to resist him. "Sebol dares," he laughed harshly, "because he is powerful and has the strength to do what he desires. He does not fear the anger or the lightning glances of hatred from Regi. Sebol will keep her here. Tonight he will come to her again when the other battles of the day are over."

The sound of numerous trumpetings of elbomos entered the room. Sebol released his hold of Regi and retreated through the doorway of the suite.

"The enemy has attacked," announced one of the guards at the doorway. "What remains of our force have sought to stay their advance toward the palace by entrenching behind the stone wall. The enemy, though, has brought in a great number of elbomos whose backs are higher than the wall, and they are slaughtering the defenders of the garden by shooting arrows down from the cars on the animal's backs."

Sebol rushed from the palace. The sight that greeted him sent him back again into the structure. Hundreds of the Sidons and loyalists were overwhelming the defenders of the wall, and were pouring across the garden toward the palace itself.

Sebol rushed into the suite of the queen. "Sebol's followers are overwhelmed," he announced, "but Sebol will never be taken while he breathes. Regi shall be wedded with him in death in the waters of the cataract which forms the rainbow, where lovers pledge themselves for life to one another. Sebol will carry Regi with him to the great waterfall. He will leap with her into its depths. Then will he be avenged, and her other lover, the white stranger, can only have her spirit, which he will see in imagination in the eternal rainbow that hangs in the mists above the cataract. Regi must die with Sebol."

Regi withdrew from his mad rush and fought to resist his seizing her. Ruth Benton clung to one of her arms as Sebol grasped her, but fell to the floor at a blow from the great brute's hand.

From the queen's suite Sebol bore Regi into the corridor. Along the corridor leading to the side entrance into the garden he fled. Toward the roaring cataract with its eternal rainbow he ran as rapidly as his burden would permit, the dangling sword at his belt nearly tripping him into a fall on several occasions.

14. The Fight at the Waterfall

Carkhuff and Lelock with their followers encountered no resistance to their advance as they entered the city. As they approached the palace garden, they encountered a number of the outposts of the remaining forces of Sebol. These were easily swept aside, and the walls surrounding the garden were approached. The attack against the forces barricaded back of the enclosure threatened the loss of many lives for the loyalists.

"Wait until some of the elbomos can be brought to the edge of the wall," commanded Carkhuff. "The warriors can shoot over the top of the wall from their cars on the beasts' backs and dislodge the defenders from their strategic position."

The advice was heeded, and fifteen minutes later two hundred of the great steeds of the Sidons were driven up to the sides of the wall, where the occupants of the cars on their backs began to shoot at the defending warriors of the followers of Sebol.

The attack was too much for the defenders, who began throwing their

bows and weapons to the ground in sign of surrender.

Carkhuff and Lelock, followed by Stillwell and a score of other loyalists, entered the gateway into the garden and followed in pursuit of a small detachment of the fleeing enemy along the pathway leading toward the Cataract of the Rainbow.

The scream of a woman, as they approached the great waterfall, attracted their attention. Carkhuff felt a thrill of horror surge over him as he caught sight of Sebol, carrying Regi in his arms and rushing toward the edge of the river near the cataract. He anticipated Sebol's motive, and thrusting his rifle forward he commanded Sebol to halt. The distance separating the two was less than thirty paces, where Sebol had emerged from the shrubbery with his burden. Less than another thirty separated Sebol and the edge of the river, where the water took its tremendous fall to the bed of the river far below.

"I will shoot you if you move another step," warned Carkhuff, advancing, as Sebol held Regi between them to intercept the anticipated bullet.

"The white stranger is a coward," challenged Sebol. "But for the magic that dwells in his thunder pole, he would be powerless before such as Sebol. He would not fight Sebol sword to sword."

"Release the woman," commanded Carkhuff, "and I will make you eat your words."

Sebol released his hold of Regi, who rushed from him toward Carkhuff.

"Give me your sword, Lelock," Carkhuff commanded. "I'll fight him sword to sword, man to man."

Lelock withdrew his sword from the girdle about his waist and passed it to Carkhuff.

"You can not stand against him in a duel," warned Regi, pleadingly. "Use the power you possess, my warrior, to slay Sebol. Do not risk your life, for your queen's sake."

"I must deny this one request, Regi," he replied. "I will fight with the gorabuto."

Sebol had already drawn his sword, and the two advanced toward each other. Sebol rushed Carkhuff with a series of impetuous blows and thrusts which were parried by the latter with expert ability. Closer and closer to the edge of the river they drew, until they stood at the brink of the deep chasm into which the river fell.

The swordsmanship demonstrated by Carkhuff aroused the admiration of Lelock and the others who stood watching the duel under such strange circumstances. Never before had Lelock seen any warrior surrender the advantage he possessed over another and meet his opponent on the same footing, as Carkhuff had done. With keen admiration for the white stranger, he cheered his every stroke.

Regi stood silent, with her hands clasped tightly, fearfully watching the progress of the duel. A terrific assault by Sebol, who put all the power of his gorillalike strength into every blow, drove Carkhuff to the edge of the precipice.

"Oh my warrior, my warrior!" exclaimed Regi.

The tones of her voice reached Carkhuff's ears. He parried the tremendous blows of Sebol, and, as the latter faltered from the tremendous exertion of his strokes, he rushed the great ape-man. A sharp thrust pierced Sebol's breast. Nearer and nearer to the edge of the precipice Carkhuff drove. A light of fear suddenly shone in the eyes of the chieftain of the chiefs as he fought to save himself. A terrific lunge by Carkhuff drove his sword-point half-way through his opponent. Reeling on the edge of the precipice, Sebol lost his balance and toppled backward with a hideous cry into the abyss behind him.

A wild cheer of triumph issued

from those who had been watching the fierce fight, and Regi rushed to Carkhuff's side, where she knelt and clasped his hand, pressing it to her warm, red lips.

Carkhuff raised her to her feet and clasped her in his arms, the sword of Lelock falling from his grasp to the ground at his feet.

Her eyes rested on the rainbow hovering above the mist of the falls.

"See, my warrior!" she exclaimed, pointing to the bow of many colors. "The rainbow is the symbol of love among the Ronalans. Before this bow we make our promise and pledges of love for life. Here are all our weddings performed. Whenever one has wed another, the sight of the rainbow here always reminds one of the pledge of love."

"Before this bow, dear heart," he said, "I pledge my love to you, and may this and the greater rainbows that follow the storms not only be a reminder of the great Creator who placed the bow as a symbol of his pledge to mankind, but also bring to me renewed thought of the pledge I make to you."

"It is here," she continued, "when Regi has prepared herself, that she and her warrior will make their vows of marriage."

Lelock and his followers had departed from the spot as the two stood talking, and Regi and Carkhuff followed after them. Stillwell and Ruth came to meet them as they neared the palace.

"Everything is over so far as the insurrection is concerned," advised Stillwell. "The last of the enemy has surrendered, and Lelock has just informed me that Sebol is dead. Walmar has fled to the Red Forest. In the slang of the Ronalans, 'May the gorabutos get him!' "

"Seven evenings from this," announced Regi, "my warrior and I will take our vows before the rainbows of the cataract. Then will Regi no longer be ruler of the Ronalans. My warrior will be king, and I shall be his subject."

A WEEK later, as the sun was descending behind the top of the distant Red Forest, a company of gorgeously costumed maidens of the queen's guards issued from the side entrance of the palace of the Rainbow. Following them came Regi, dressed in a costume of purest white. The sparkle of thousands of jewels was reflected from her costume by the fading sunlight. At her side walked Carkhuff. Following them came Stillwell and Ruth. Then came Lelock, Verigus the king of the Sidons, and a small host of lesser chiefs of both tribes. When the company had arrived before the cataract, they paused and stood watching the beauties of the mists ever present above the great waterfall.

As they waited, Bloto, the instructor, the performer of the marriage ceremonies of the Ronalans, advanced from the screen of shrubbery where he had been awaiting the arrival of the wedding party.

He advanced toward Regi and Carkhuff. At his command, the two joined their right hands.

"Carkhuff," spoke the instructor, calling him by name for the first time since he had known him, "do you take Regi, the queen of the Ronalans, to be your earthly wife forever, to be constantly reminded as ever you approach this spot of her love for you and her affection for you?"

Carkhuff spoke in a firm tone, "I do, I take Regi to be my wife."

Bloto then addressed Regi as he had Carkhuff, and her musical voice answered clearly. "Yes, to love him forever, until there is no longer any rainbow above the falls of the Ronalans."

"Then," spoke the instructor, "by virtue of my power as dealer of justice in the courts of the Ronalans, and the expounder of their knowledge, I give Regi to be the wife of Carkhuff

forever. May you reign long and happily in the City of the Rainbow."

When the congratulations had ceased, Stillwell approached Carkhuff.

"Well, old boy," he said, "we are at the parting of the ways, I guess. Ruth and I must return and attempt to find the other members of the Henry expedition. If they have departed from the locality in which we were when we first entered this country, then we must go on to the coast and return to the United States."

"I wish you might remain with us here always," urged Carkhuff. "I am going to return in about a month to the United States myself, dispose of my effects there and then return to my Regi. I will send Lelock with a strong guard of natives to see that you and Ruth reach the coast safely, since you are apparently anxious now to return to what you call civilization. I will return for a time, later, then come back here to remain always. You must promise, however, not to forget, and when you and Ruth sometime decide to get married, consent now to spend your honeymoon at the palace of the rainbow with the king and queen of the Ronalans."

Stillwell laughed as he spoke. "You must not embarrass Ruth and me, but some day we may surprize you and return also."

A sound of weird music issued from the distance. The members of the wedding party turned along the path by which they had come and advanced to the feast that had been prepared. Carkhuff and Regi followed, after they had been preceded by all the others. In the last light of day they turned and viewed for a moment the rainbow still visible above the falls.

"We both promise," she said, smiling up at him.

"Yes," he said, as they continued toward the palace.

[THE END]

Forbidden Magic

By **ROBERT E. HOWARD**

There came to me a Shape one summer night
  When all the world lay silent in the stars
  And moonlight crossed my room with ghostly bars.
It whispered hints of weird unhallowed sight;
I followed, then in waves of spectral light
  Mounted the shimmery ladders of my soul,
  Where moon-pale spiders, huge as dragons, stole—
Great forms like moths with wings of wispy white.

Then round the world the sighing of the loon
  Shook misty lakes beneath the false dawn's gleams.
    Rose-tinted shone the skyline's minaret.
    I rose in fear and then with blood and sweat
  Beat out the iron fabrics of my dreams
And shaped of them a web to snare the moon.

An Utterly Bizarre Story Is

Night-Thing

By WILFORD ALLEN

A SURGE of revulsion came hard on the realization of what those strange space-cars meant—a wild, indescribable feeling that swept shudderingly over me. Such an emotion—utterly unreasonable it had then seemed to me—I had seen in the hearts of men at sights which caused my own soul to leap with exultation.

Back when I had the form of a man for a brief period, with power commensurate with my desires, I had caused such shrinkings to tear at the hearts of my followers even, that time I had massacred an entire population. The sight of death with its visible evidences had been wine to my soul; yet then, uncomprehending, I had seen the hardiest of my men shudder at death upon such a scale—men who had joyously dealt death to many a lesser group with a will that matched my own. But their emotion that once, evident enough, was inexplicable to the soul of me, which burned with a cold fire that fed on death and gloated over its remains! That day I despised the tribe of men.

Later, free from the limitations of the body, I have seen that shuddering in the hearts of multitudes at sights which caused me, all unseen by them, to cavort madly with a frantic glee. Scuttling astride the winds of the north under the cold dead moon, I have come upon the unburied who could lie for months in the snow, exposed yet retaining their forms to throw long gray shadows pointedly over the white surface. Again, when the moon rode high and the shadows had drawn back into the motionless things, I have returned to such rendezvous with joy, at times to find the dead encircled by ravening lupine forms which fled howling at the presence which they knew full well. Sometimes I have met a party which has located the body. And then, always, I have seen that unexplainable emotion in the hearts of those fearful gatherers of the dead—that shrinking horror of what for the soul and being of me and mine was feast.

The cold of space—when I had the form of a man, men knew nothing of space. Since then I have seen some knowledge of it growing among men, and again in their hearts it has bred that feeling, as much at variance with mine as the measure of the space between the worlds of flame and death. Men shudder when they contemplate it, as they shudder in the presence of death, while I at times must swirl out to seek it eagerly, after a time upon the warmer earth, as man, poor ignorant know-it-all, rushes into the coolness of the night to escape from the stuffy warmth of a closed space, or the burning rush of his puny emotions. The cool of space—the perfection it is, of death, which only I and mine appreciate. The death of all—which is the absence of emotion—rest. For all death brings cold and rest. Out There, all is cold—and the delight of perfect rest and exultation.

So I was There, exulting in the chill which instruments can not measure, but only the soul, when I saw the first of the great space craft.

"Aha!" I chuckled and rubbed my hands with heatless mirth. "Some of

those inventors have slipped one over on me! I knew some fools were working on plans to penetrate space while yet they held to their corporeal forms—poor fools! But I didn't know they had succeeded. *Arko!* I must see! There's death in the making, and a cold death!" And I chortled.

But too soon I knew the incredibly disagreeable truth. Not from Earth were those ships. No mortals, predestined to a cold death by their boldness. Those who guided the great cars had no dealings with death. They had lived for a trillion times a trillion years. Far older than I, they were. Small sustenance for my needs in such folk, and I would have darted off with a crackling curse, but a chance thought adrift in space crossed my brain, and I stayed.

Then, before I was even sure of the thought, the ship in which I had stationed myself dissolved in a puff of green-blue light. It was there—then it was no more! Untouched myself, I could not realize the truth for a time, although the hint of it had come to me in that surge of terror which I had caught from those people before they had *poufed* from the world. But then I looked, and saw! And knew!

Far off was another car, larger than that which had vanished. It darted swiftly away—was gone with a speed which I have not often surpassed, and in the same flash of vanishment went the companion craft of the annihilated ship, avengers eager on the trail. A great flare out in space where they had disappeared; and I knew even before I reached the spot in the next light-mile of time, that the destroyer had been destroyed.

War! And the end of people! But such an end! No bodies here for the gripping cold to encompass and stiffen! No corpses to spring again to life of humbler, crawling sort under warmer influences! Life which had outlasted the earth itself—then nothing! No death—for death leaves its dead. No comfort in that for my soul, but only a crawling shrinking like that incomprehensible emotion I had so often wondered at in the souls of men faced with death.

It was just beginning. Repressing the urge to flee from the scene, because some sense told me it would be futile, I forced myself to enter another of the victorious craft. It was hard—never have I done a thing so hard before, and I felt such creepings in my heart as I knew were counterparts of those then inexplicable vibrations which had racked the brains of men at sights which had been joy-drink to my soul. And as I learned the full truth, a shivering set in within my own brain which, uncontrollable for a time, seemed destined certainly to wreck it. It was war. Between two sets of the creatures. This would have been well enough. The first disappointment of my expectations over, I would be content for them to exterminate one another, so long as I still had my Earth and its men. But one group, and that the aggressor, was determined to wipe the human race from its home! No bodies would be there any more for the feeding of my soul! Nothing! Nor ever again! Robbed of the nourishment that was horror to men, what was there for me?

Then I began in dread fact to understand those emotions which I had so often seen in men, but only to stare at in amazement before. Held fascinated by the hovering fate, I attached myself to those creatures while they battled. Two groups there were, as I said. The original group, the Lirans, and another, Mordans, beings from some distant star who had stolen the secrets of the Lirans and set out to annihilate from the universe all life but theirs. And the Mordans were in a fair way to achieve their purpose.

For the first time I felt in my soul an intense desire for the earth to

survive. Each time a party of Lirans met and annihilated a squadron of Mordans I chortled gleefully, forgetful of the fact that the catastrophe was productive of no bodies for the slaking of the feverish thirst which was rising within me and which even space was unable to cool. Each time a Liran fleet suffered I ground my teeth until their points chipped gratingly, sending shivers of pain to my brain.

I SOON found I had only met the flank guards of the retreating Lirans. Beaten backward for a thousand years they had been, and after them the destroying Mordans had pressed always. To them all, time was nothing.

Fascinated by what impended when they should sweep by the Earth, which the Mordans would wipe free of all vestiges of what had been life before darting on in pursuit of the beaten Lirans, I took my post with the central body of the latter. Back we were swept. Back until the rings of Saturn hung luridly above us. Then, perhaps inspired by the cold glory of the sight, the Liran defense stiffened. Crescent-shaped their formation was, and into it plowed the wedge of the pursuers, millions strong in ships and billions in lives. Flare after flare colored that space where other matter was not, as the advance guards met, to fuse into one great flash of green-tinged crimson as the main body of the enemy struck and tore through. Its outer layers had vanished as they encountered the matter-destroying rays of the Lirans, but it was only the peeling of the outer skin from an onion. The body remained, as strong as ever and more dangerous. Then it developed that the Lirans were the fleeter of the two forces. Like a flash the crescent closed in, peeled one more layer from the onion, and was off to form again a half billion miles beyond. Thus it had been for ages. Fight and retreat. Winning sometimes, in minor engagements, but not daring to stand long in the major fights. Stalling for time.

Earth became visible, a faint star not many degrees from the crimson streamers of the sun. A wave of despair engulfed me. Another such stand and flight, and the rout would stream past the Earth. A few of the pursuing fleet—a few would be more than sufficient for the task—would drop out to swoop upon that unsuspecting world. For the first time I cursed the invisibility of my form which rendered me helpless to warn or to battle live beings of flesh. Life would vanish from the globe in a series of flashes which would be so rapid that not even the word of the first would ever be told to those about to die next. A few light-miles and Earth would be bare of life—and, more horribly, of death! On it would be nothing but water and ray-pocked rock. And I, left, unable even to die by the rays which could bring death to beings built of the matter of flesh! I laughed crazily at the grisly joke of it so my jaws ached with the spasm. I—who exist so intensely though coldly! But not for long would I exist, with death annihilated along with life. I would shrivel and die. The agony of that death commenced in my soul with the thought, as the fever mounted.

The next stand of the Lirans came quickly. They were nearing the end of their power of resistance, yet did not flee more than the distance requisite for reforming, just within the orbit of Jupiter. In the short fury of that conflict I exulted doubly, as it seemed for a brief instant that the Liran force would triumph at last and the earth be saved—for death and me and such as I. But it was not so. The battle—and then the Liran fleet was speeding back for a chance to form again. A million deaths in that brief instant! But no! Not deaths—extinctions. No forms of

the dead for the delectation of my soul. I ground my teeth in rage at Mordan and Liran together, for by then I knew that it was the Lirans who had discovered ways to cheat death, prolonging life until extinction intervened.

When the Lirans formed for a third stand—mad with the certainty of the end they must have been—it was so near the Earth that the lights from annihilated cars and men must have been seen from the northern hemisphere, had it been night on the side turned toward the fight.

Knowing in advance the inevitable defeat of the defending fleet in this, the last stand possible before the Mordan cars would overrun the unsuspecting Earth, I tore and slobbered with rage.

Then I sensed a strange stirring which came over the crew of the car in which I was. A message had arrived, and in a moment the fleet was in full flight. It was the end for me! In a long line the Lirans were streaming past the pole of the Earth, deserting it to its fate. Deserting me!

The Mordan host paused, as bewildered as I at the unexpected yielding, then gave chase. Suddenly, far to the south, above the Earth, a spot of blackness appeared. Like an opaque veil it seemed to pounce from space, shutting in between the fleeing Lirans and their pursuers. I had stayed behind, for what avail was there in going on, or for the matter of that, in staying, except that the space about the Earth was my home? Home? I cackled hysterically. Home! Abode of nothing, in a moment! Home of nothing, not even of the something that was nothing which was I!

THE veil of darkness advanced swiftly, hid from view the sun and earth. All in that direction was shut off as though by an impenetrable blanket. A small thing at first, the screening blackness loomed rapidly until it assumed the appearance of a great dark wall of solid matter, onrushing at terrific speed. As star after star vanished it was as though that wall had annihilated them as completely as the strange rays of the battling hosts annihilated each other.

Desperately, the Mordan fleet crowded on speed to escape, recognizing a threat in the oncoming dark. Up they darted, down, and sideward. The leading elements, seeing early that they had no time to turn, dashed into that wall of black seeming-emptiness. Head on, savagely, with the despair that breeds frantic effort, they tore ahead, the rays which, streaming to the front like giant headlights had never failed to blast a path through opposing matter, stabbing out angrily. But those rays had met their match. Not even a flicker of light marked the points where individual beams struck the onrushing blackness.

With a yelp of fright as I realized my position, I flashed swiftly from the path of the oncoming destruction, which might have wiped out even me. I forgot in the sudden surge of terror that a moment before I had feared that I could not find such a swift, clean death. Behind, I saw the leading ships of the Mordan fleet already flashing into nothingness. By the sight, I knew that their destroying rays, reflected back upon them from that wall at which they dashed as it advanced remorselessly, were consuming the things which had generated them. On they dashed, to vanish in evanescent flame. Only those who had been able to essay flight remained, and they were diminishing into the far distance. But not swiftly enough.

As though that blackness were sentient, it seemed to see the escaping Mordans and leaped after them with the snap of a tiger's bound. So I had leaped upon the very first to fall beneath my weapons—a play-

mate of mine all unsuspecting the bloodlust which flared within my soul. I had been young when I first knew my destiny. Now, watching that leaping death-engine which had no form, I knew my master. I stared entranced, then shrieked soundlessly with glee. The edges of the darkness were up with the fleeing ships. They passed. The black mass closed in like the two jaws of a huge inky maw. No eyes saw those ships again.

As suddenly as it had appeared, there was no black curtain in the heavens. The stars shone again with undiminished brilliancy out there in the cold, and among them were the bunched lights of innumerable hosts of space-cars—the lights of the Canopians, a branch of the Liran race who had colonized the region of Canopus. With their invention, the wall of force, they had arrived to turn the tide, to wipe it out.

The Liran fleet reassembled, swung to join the Canopians. Together, a vast armada, they streamed off into that outer space where they have abolished death. Rage swelled in my brain at the thought, to be transformed into relief as the next thought came. The space of the Sun was ours again. Mine!

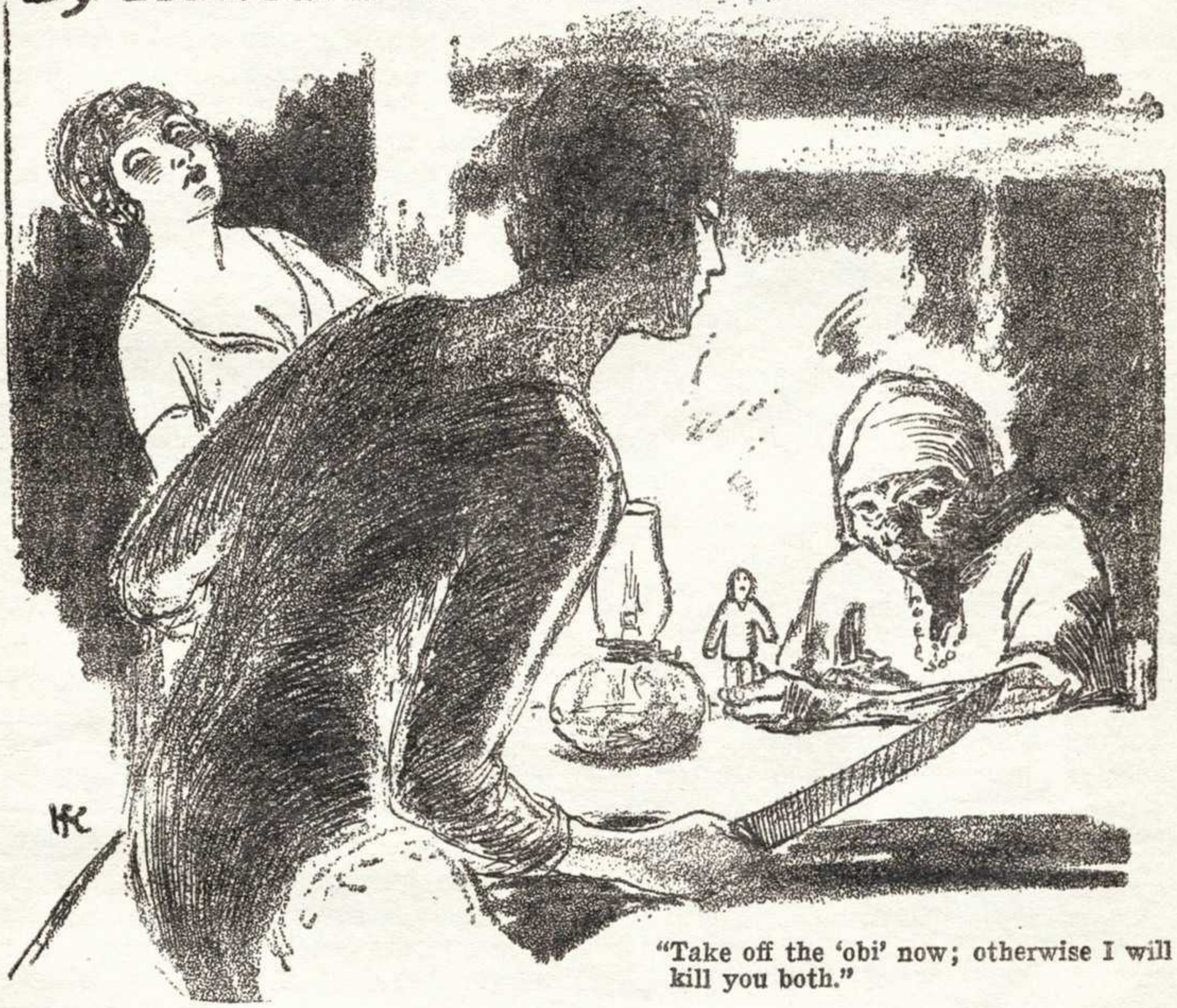
AFTER the tension lifted, a cold sweat came out on me. Every particle sagged and shook, and I must have gone out of my head, as I did once on Earth, back in those days before history when I had human form. At least, the next that I knew I was on the nightward side of the Earth. There on a frozen plain was a body. About it circled a wolf-pack, snarling, while lesser scavengers skulked in the background. After my arrival the wolves, too, their hackles risen, slunk back, while I, beside the corpse, laughed with wild triumph at the cool, familiar scene. The moon sailed blue and cold; the wind was vibrant with nameless thrills, and shrill. Here was Earth again, as of old, all unsuspecting the fate that had swung above it, or that there could be, out there in space, a race which had conquered death. If Earth beings but guessed that it had been done, they would somehow find the way to emulate those others. The Lirans, too, had once been subject to death and decay, before they discovered the secret which cheats my kind. But by now the Lirans, with the Canopians, are far out, beyond the brighter stars—perhaps beyond the Milky Way, speeding toward worlds in other nebulæ. Only *I* know the truth.

Only *I* know the truth! And why should I give up my secret and rob myself of my own? Ha! Ha! Ha! The joke of it is that I could not tell if I would. No man may hear me, for I have no voice for men. And as if I would! And who would believe if I could? At the sight of me men would lose their minds. That horrible feeling which I now know so well, though once it puzzled me, would course through their brains and drive out the power to think or know. Ho! Ha!

Up! Gloat! And follow the moon to another appointment with death! Adrift of the air comes a message from bare crags in the west. Out there another wolf-pack circles a dark spot which still lives. But soon it will be cold. The kill will be made by the wolves, my old tools, but it is I who will enjoy it to the full!

SWEET-GRASS

by HENRY S. WHITEHEAD



"Take off the 'obi' now; otherwise I will kill you both."

A TALE, this, of the Black Obayi of Ashantee. . . .

Nybladh, administrator for the Copenhagen Company of the Rasmussen Centràl, allotted Estate Fairfield to young Cornelis Hansen, just out from Denmark to the Danish West Indies to begin the life of a sugar planter. Cornelis, tall, straight, ruddy-cheeked, twenty-two, fell in love with the island of Santa Cruz and with his pretty little house.

Nybladh had indeed used diplomacy in that allotment. An inexperienced estate manager could do little harm at Fairfield. The house stood, quite near the sea, at the western end of the Centràl's many properties, among dimpling hills. Hillside cane was a losing venture. Very little was grown at Fairfield, and that on its small proportion of level bottom-land. Then, Cornelis could be promoted as soon as he became accustomed to the practicalities. That would mean a favorable report to Old Strach, Cornelis' uncle in Copenhagen. Old Strach owned the Centràl.

Cornelis proved to be a social success from the very start. The Santa Crucian gentry drove up to call on him in their family carriages, to the little stone house glistening frostily in the Caribbean sunlight. It had been

freshly whitewashed—Crucian wash, held together with molasses, and now baked to the appearance of alabaster by the relentless sun.

At their own houses Cornelis met the resident planters, chiefly Scottish and Irish gentlefolk and their sons and daughters. Also he became acquainted with the officers at the three Danish garrisons — at Christiansted, Frederiksted, and Kingshill. Many visitors, too, came over from St. Thomas, the capital, forty-three miles away; others, too, from the English Islands — Antigua, St. Kitts, even sometimes from Montserrat or St. Lucia. There was never any lack of good company on Santa Cruz. This tropical life was vastly different from Copenhagen. Cornelis was never homesick. He did not want to go back to cold Copenhagen. There, it seemed now to Cornelis, he had been spending a beginningless eternity, absorbed in his chemistry, his English, and other dull studies. All that had been to fit him to take his place here in this pleasant, short-houred, expensive life of a tropical planter in the sugar-trade. He enjoyed the new life from its very beginning. Yet, in spite of his pleasant housing, his hospitable entertainment, his unaccustomed freedom to come and go, he was, sometimes poignantly, lonesome.

His new friends did not, perhaps, realize the overpowering effect of the sudden change upon this northern-bred man; the effects of the moonlight and the soft trade-wind; the life of love which surrounded him here. Love *whispered to him* vaguely, compellingly. It summoned him from the palm fronds, rustling dryly in the continuous breeze; love was telegraphed through the shy, bovine eyes of the brown girls in his estate-house village; love assailed him in the breath of the honeylike sweet grass, undulating all day and all night under the white moonlight of the Caribbees, pouring over him intoxicatingly through his opened jalousies as he lay, often sleepless, through long nights of spice and balm smells on his mahogany bedstead—pale grass, looking like snow under the moon.

The half-formulated yearnings which these sights and sounds were begetting were quite new and fresh in his experience. Here fresh instincts, newly released, stirred, flared up, at the glare of early-afternoon sunlight, at the painful scarlet of the hibiscus blooms, the incredible indigo of the sea—all these flames of vividness through burning days, wilting into a caressing coolness, abruptly, at the fall of the brief, tropic dusk. The fundament of his crystallizing desire was for companionship in the blazing life of this place of rapid growth and early fading, where time slipped away so fast.

At first he had wondered, vaguely, how other men had met this primal urge. Very soon he saw that the answer to that was all about him, here in his own estate-village. Here were ruddy *zambos,* pale-brown mulattoes, cream-colored octoroons—*mestizos* of every type, of every shade of skin. That was one answer; that had been the great answer, here in the West Indies, from time immemorial; the answer here on Santa Cruz of the Spaniards and the Dutch, as many names showed; of the French and of his own people, the Danes. He wondered, whimsically, what had been the answer in the case of those austere Knights of Malta who had owned the island for a season.

But, for Cornelis, fastidiousness intervened. Across the edge of that solution hung the barrier of his inertia, his resistance, his pride of a Caucasian. The barrier seemed insurmountable to Cornelis.

Marriage? Was he not young for that? He asked himself that question many times. One did not marry, ideally, without love; love true and deep and trustful; love founded on

acquaintance, appreciation, some conviction of permanence. Those were the backgrounds of marriage.

Some daughter of one of the gentry planters, perhaps? Those girls had the domestic virtues. But—he was comfortable enough with his good servants at Fairfield House. His yearnings had little relation to somebody to preside over his household. Somehow, to Cornelis, these young ladies of the planter gentry were not alluring, vital. The most attractive of them, Honoria Macartney, he could hardly imagine beside him perpetually. Honoria had the dead-white skin of the Caucasian creole lady whose face has been screened from the sun since infancy.

"And how are you enjoying the island?" she had asked him on an afternoon when he had been visiting the Macartney's, eating some of Honoria's perfect small frosted cakes; drinking her rather too-strong tea on the east gallery of her father's estate-house near Christiansted.

Cornelis reassured her. He was enjoying himself very much indeed. Everything Honoria said, did, wore—he felt instinctively—was—*suitable*. That was the English word for it. Yes.

Looking at her, as he had looked at her various other afternoons, Cornelis was certain his mother in Copenhagen would approve of her as a daughter-in-law. Most of the Crucian young gentry ladies were like that. Suitable—that was the precise word. . . .

THAT night he lay, sleepless, on the mahogany bed. The grass on the rolling hillsides seen through the opened jalousies under the full moon of February was at its palest, more than ever suggesting snow. That he had observed driving up the straight road from the sea to his house less than an hour before. He had dined with the Macartneys—a placid, uneventful evening. Mrs. Macartney had mentioned that Honoria had made the dessert. It had been a Danish dessert, for him: "red grout"—sago pudding stained purple with cactus-fruit. Honoria had made it perfectly. He had complimented her upon her pudding.

The warm, pulsing breath of the sweet grass surged through the open windows in a fashion to turn the head of a stone image. It was exotic, too sweet, exaggerated, like everything else in this climate! Cornelis turned over again, seeking a cool place on the broad bed. Then he sat up in bed, impatiently throwing off the sheet. A thin streak of moonlight edged the bed below his feet. He slipped out of bed, walked over to a window. He leaned out, looking down at the acres of undulating grass. There seemed to be some strange, hypnotic rhythm to it, some vague magic, as it swayed in the night wind. The scent poured over him in great, pulsing breaths. He shut his eyes and drew it in, abandoning his senses to its effect.

Instinctively, without thought or plan, he walked out of his open bedroom door, down the stairs, out upon the south gallery below. The smooth tiles there felt caressingly cool to his bare feet. Jessamine here mingled with the sweet grass. He drew a light cane chair to the gallery's edge and sat, leaning his arms on the stone coping, his shadow sharply defined in the cold moonlight. He looked out at the sea a long time. Then he shut his eyes, drinking in the intoxicating, mixed odors.

A sound secured his attention. He raised his head, looked down his narrow private road toward the sea. Clearly outlined in the moonlight a girl, possibly fifteen, came along the road toward him. About her lithe body hung a loose slip, and around her head, carelessly twined, turban-wise, was draped a white towel. She was quite close, making no sound on the sandy road with her bare feet.

His shadow moving slightly, perhaps, startled her. She paused in her

languorous stride, a slender neck bearing erect a fawnlike head, nostrils wide, eyes open, taken unawares.

Then the girl recognized him and curtsied, her sudden smile revealing white, regular teeth set in a delicate, wide mouth, a mouth made for love. In the transforming magic of the moonlight her pale brown skin showed like cream.

"Bathing in de sea," she murmured explanatorily.

Lingeringly, as though with reluctance, she resumed her sedate, slow walk, the muscles flowing, rippling, as though to pass around the house to the village at the rear. Her eyes she kept fixed on Cornelis.

Cornelis, startled, had felt suddenly cold at the unexpected, wraithlike sight of her. Now his blood surged back, his heart pounding tumultuously. A turbulent wave of sea air sweetened from acres of sweet grass surged over him. He closed his eyes.

"Come!" he whispered, almost inaudibly.

But the girl heard. She paused, looked up at him, hesitating. He managed to nod his head at her. The blood pounded in his veins; he felt detached, weak, drowned in the odor of sweet grass and jessamine.

The girl ran lightly up the gallery's stone steps. The pattern of the small jessamine leaves played grotesquely upon her when she paused, as moonlight filtered through them and they moved in the light, irregular sea breeze.

Cornelis rose and looked down into the girl's eyes. Their amber irises were very wide and an eery light played in them; a kind of luminous glow, a softening. . . .

Trembling, he placed a tentative hand on her shoulder, gently. She leaned toward him; his arms went about her firm, slender body. Young Cornelis Hansen felt, for the first time, a girl's heart tumultuously beating against his breast.

A hush enveloped the quiet of the pure, clear night. No dog muttered from the sleeping estate-village. A fresh breath, enervating, redolent of the acres of waving grass, fanned the gallery. A delicate beam of moonlight seemed, to young Cornelis, entranced, bewitched, to usher them into the open doorway of his house. . . .

Then, suddenly, almost brutally it seemed, even to him, he thrust this pale, brown girl of gossamer and moonlight away from him. He stood clear of her, no longer bemused by the witchery of the breeze and the moonlight's magic. With more of gentleness he laid again his hand on the delicate, rounded shoulder. As gently he turned the girl about and marched her, resolutely—like a Dane—toward the gallery steps. His fastidiousness had reasserted itself.

"Good night—my child," said Cornelis.

The girl looked up at him shyly, out of the corners of her eyes, puzzled and resentful.

"Good night, sar," she murmured, and slipped down the steps and like a shadow around the corner of the house.

Cornelis walked firmly into his house and shut the door behind him. He went into his dining-room and poured himself a glass of French brandy at the sideboard. He drank his brandy and rinsed out the glass from the earthenware water-gugglet, throwing the water onto the stone floor. Then he mounted the stairs to his bedroom, got into bed, rolled over on his side, and went to sleep.

ON THE morning after his tea he was riding about his fields so early that he was finished with his managerial inspection before 9. Ten o'clock saw him, very carefully shaved, and wearing spotless white drill and his best Danish straw hat instead of a sun helmet, driving a pair of horses in the light phaeton toward Christiansted.

That same afternoon, during the period devoted to swizzels of old rum or brandy and, especially among the Danes, tea and coffee and cakes—the period of sociability before the company at the various great houses broke up before its various dinner-parties—Cornelis called at the Nybladhs'. The Administrator and his wife were pleased to see him, as always. Several others were present, quite a company in fact, for the swizzel-hour at Nybladh's was almost an official occasion.

After a quarter of an hour, Cornelis drew the Administrator aside and they spoke together briefly, then returned to the company gathered about an enormous mahogany table which held the silver swizzel jug and the afternoon's lunch.

At the next pause in the conversation Nybladh rose, focusing his guests' attention upon himself. He held up his glass.

"Be pleased to fill all glasses," he commanded, importantly.

There was a considerable bustle about the great round table. Nybladh noted the fulfilling of his command. Servants hurried about among the guests. When all were freshly served he cleared his throat and waved his own glass ceremoniously.

"I announce"——he paused, impressively, all eyes dutifully upon him. "I announce—the engagement of Herr Hansen and Miss Honoria Macartney. Skoal!" He boomed it out sonorously. Every glass was raised.

Cornelis bowed from the waist, deeply, to each of his pledgers, as they drank the health of himself and his bride-to-be.

Thus did Honoria, daughter of the great Irish-West Indian family of the Fighting Macartneys, become the Fru Hansen, after an exceptionally brief engagement, and leave her father's house to live at Estate Fairfield with her husband who was the nephew of Old Strach.

A West Indian family does not pick up titles from the populace by knocking about their estates and doing nothing. The Fighting Macartneys were well worthy of theirs. Even Saul Macartney, their ancient black sheep, who had paid the penalty of piracy by hanging in St. Thomas in 1824 along with the notorious Fawcett, his chief, and who, as some believed, had been strangely magicked even after his death by his cousin Camilla Lanigan who was believed to practise obeah and was immensely respected by the negroes—even the disgraced Saul was no poltroon. The jewels Saul and Captain Fawcett buried under Melbourne House, Saul's Santa Cruz mansion, had not been handed that miscreant over the counter!

This young Honoria was of that sanguine blood, even though her sheltered life had made her walk somewhat mincing and there was no color in her cheeks. She began her reign at Fairfield like a sensible young housewife, studying Cornelis' likes and dislikes, satisfying him profoundly, beyond his very moderate expectations. The ardent yet self-contained young man had linked to himself something compounded of fire and silk. Honoria brought to her housekeeping, too, great skill and knowledge, from her young lifetime in her mother's great house near Christiansted.

She was a jewel of a wife, this young Honoria Hansen, born Macartney. Cornelis came suddenly to love her with an ardency which even he had never dreamed of as possible, like flame. Then their love was tempered in a fearful happening.

ONE morning when Cornelis was riding early about his sugar fields, it came to him, traversing a cane-range on his black mare, Aase, that never, before or since that sleepless night when he had called the girl to him on the gallery, had he laid

eyes upon that girl. That he would recognize the girl whom, for a moment of abandoned forgetfulness of his fastidious reserve, he had held in his arms, whose body had lain against his heart, was beyond question in his mind. Then it occurred to him that he had thought of the girl as living in his village. That night when he had dismissed her, she had walked away around the house toward the cabins at the rear. He shuddered—those cabins!

Yet the fact remained that, cogitate the matter as he might, riding along at Aase's delicate walking pace, he could not recollect having laid eyes upon her, either before or since that night when he had sent her away. It was very curious, inexplicable indeed—if the girl lived in his village. There was really no way to enquire. Well, it did not greatly matter, of course! A brown girl was—a brown girl. They were all alike. Cornelis rode on to another canefield.

Telepathy, perhaps! When he arrived at Fairfield House toward 11, under the mounting brilliance of the late-morning sunlight, and tossed his bridle-reins to Alonzo his groom at the front gallery steps, the girl stood beside the door of Fairfield House, inside the high hallway. She curtsied gravely to him as he passed within.

Cornelis' mouth went dry. He managed to nod at the girl, who reached for his sun helmet and hung it on the hallway hatrack.

"Mistress say de brekfuss prepare' in few moments, sar," announced the girl.

Honoria, in his absence, it appeared, had engaged this girl as a house-servant. There was no other explanation of her presence in the house. She had been carefully dressed, rustling with starch, the very picture of demureness. Cornelis strode upstairs to wash before late breakfast, which came at 11.

His equanimity was sufficiently restored after breakfast to enquire of Honoria about the new housemaid. The girl had been engaged that morning, taking the place of one Anastasia Holmquist, a Black girl, who had sent a message, by this girl, Julietta Aagaard, that she was leaving the service of Fru Hansen, and had obtained Julietta to take her place.

"She seems a very quiet, good girl," added Honoria, "and she knows her duties."

"She is not of our village, eh?" enquired Cornelis, tentatively.

"No. She says she lives with her mother, somewhere up in the hills." Honoria indicated with a gesture the section of the island behind Fairfield.

Cornelis found his mind relieved. The girl was not of his village. Only one thing remained to be explained. He understood now why he had not observed the girl about the estate. But what had she been doing "bathing in the sea" at night? Such a practise was unheard of among the negroes. Few, indeed, would venture abroad or even out of their houses, unless necessity compelled, after dark. The houses themselves were closed up tightly, at nightfall, the doors of the cabins marked with crosses to keep out Jumbee—ghosts; their corrugated-iron roofs strewed with handfuls of sea-sand, the counting of which delayed the werewolf marauding nightly. A vast superstition ruled the lives of the Santa Crucian negroes with chains of iron. They believed in necromancy, witchcraft; they practised the obeah for sickness among themselves, took their vengeances with the aid of the Vauxdoux; practises brought in through Cartagena and Jamaica; from Dakar to the Congo mouths in the slave days; Obayi from Ashantee; Vauxdoux, worship of the Snake with its attendant horrors, through the savage Dahomeyans who had slaved for King Christophe in the sugar fields of Black Haiti.

To go from up in the hills to the sea, at night, for a bath—it was simply unheard of. Yet, the girl, see-

ing him there on the gallery, had been plainly startled. She had come from the sea. Her lithe body, the towel about her head, had been sea-damp that night. It was unheard of, unless——. Cornelis had learned something in the six months of his residence on Santa Cruz.

"Who is Julietta's mother?" he enquired suddenly.

Honoria did not know anything about Julietta's mother. This was the West End of Santa Cruz, and Honoria had lived all her life near Christiansted.

But, three days later, from a browbeaten Alonzo, Cornelis learned the truth. The deference with which the young Julietta had been treated by the other servants, the Black People of his village, had been marked. Reluctantly Alonzo told his master the truth. Julietta's mother was the *mamaloi*, the witch-woman, of this portion of the island.

Beyond satisfying his curiosity, this news meant little to Cornelis. He was too much a product of civilization, too much Caucasian, for the possible inferences to have their full effect upon him. It was not until some days later, when he surprized the look of sullen hatred in Julietta's swiftly drooped eyes, that it recurred to him; that the thought crossed his mind that Julietta had come into service in Fairfield House to retaliate upon him for her rejection. Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned! There was no Danish equivalent to the English proverb, or if there was, it lay outside Cornelis' knowledge. Yet, although a European Dane—despite the fact that his residence on Santa Cruz had not been long enough for him to realize what such deadly dislike as he had surprized in Julietta's glance might mean—Cornelis, no imbecile, did realize at the least a certain sense of discomfort.

Honoria, born on the island, could have helped the situation. But—there was no developed "situation." Cornelis wished this girl at the bottom of the sea; transplanted to another and distant island of the archipelago, but beyond that there was no more than the sense of discomfort at the girl's quiet, efficient presence about her duties in his house. He could not, of course, explain to his young wife his reason for wishing lithe Julietta away.

But the sense of discomfort, somehow, persisted strangely. He could not see Julietta, demure, neat, submissive to her young mistress, without being unpleasantly reminded of what he came to think of as his folly.

THEN, without rime or reason, the sense of discomfort localized itself. Cornelis, annoyed during the night by a vague itching on his upper arms, discovered in the early-morning light a slight rash. Prickly heat, he told himself, and anointed his burning arms with salve. Useless. The rash persisted, annoyed him all through his morning field-inspection.

That late-morning, in his shower bath after his ride among the cane fields, he noticed that the rash was spreading. It ran now below his elbows, was coming out about his neck. It burned detestably. He was obliged to towel himself very softly on the arms and neck that morning before he dressed for breakfast in his spotless white drill.

Julietta, waiting on table, did not look at him; went about her duties like a cleverly made automaton, her look distant, introspective.

Honoria reported an annoyance. One of Cornelis' shirts had disappeared. They discussed it briefly over breakfast.

"But—it must turn up." Cornelis dismissed the topic, spoke of his plowing of the field abutting on Högensborg.

That night he was nearly frantic with his itching. Pustules, small, hard, reddish knobs that burned like fire, covered his arms and neck, were

spreading across the firm pectoral muscles of his chest, down his sides.

Honoria offered sympathy, and some salve for prickly heat she had brought from her father's house. Together they anointed Cornelis' burning skin.

"You must drive in to Frederiksted and see Dr. Schaff in the morning," commanded Honoria. She dusted her husband's body with her own lady-like rice-powder.

The dawn after a sleepless night discovered Cornelis' torso a mass of the small, red, hard pustules. He was in agony. Honoria it was who drove in the five miles to Frederiksted, fetched Dr. Schaff from his duties at his municipal hospital, leaving his assistant, Dr. Malling-Holm, in charge of the cases there assembled. Cornelis, Old Strach's nephew, must not be kept waiting. Besides, Honoria had been insistent. She had seen something of the suffering of her man.

Schaff had been on the island five years; had earned his promotion there to be Chief Municipal Physician. He knew much about tropical mischances in his field of medicine. He looked with interest at the pustules. Coldbloodedly he punctured several. He wanted an analysis. He left a new kind of salve, drove back to the hospital with his specimens.

He drove back late in the afternoon, when the hospital day's rush was over. He found Cornelis writhing in bed, his body tortured with the solid spread of the infection. Curiously, his hands and face were free of the now solidly massed red pustules. They stopped at his wrists, and again at his neck. Below the waist, at the sides, his body was free of the infection, which extended, however, down the front and back of his thighs.

"It iss verree curious, this!" commented the doctor, speaking English on Honoria's account. "It iss as though he had worn an infected shirt."

Cornelis, through his three degrees of fever, spoke to Honoria.

"Have you discovered my shirt? You said there was a shirt gone."

"Ha—so-o-o!" muttered the doctor. "And where?"

"I can not say," said Honoria, her lips suddenly dry. She and the doctor looked at each other.

"A servant, perhaps?"

"It must be." Honoria nodded. "No one else——"

Honoria disappeared while the doctor anointed Cornelis, writhing, afresh; soothed him with a long, bitter draft.

Below, Honoria had resolutely summoned all the servants. They stood before her, expressionless.

"The master's shirt is to be returned this night," commanded Honoria imperiously. "I shall expect to find it—on the south gallery by 9 o'clock. Otherwise"—she looked about her at each expressionless face—"otherwise—the fort. There will be a dark room for every one of you—no food, no sleep, until it is confessed. I will have none of this in my house. That is all."

She came upstairs again, helped the doctor assiduously. At the door when he took his departure, she whispered:

"I have ordered them to return the shirt by 9 tonight."

The doctor looked at her meaningly, an eyebrow lifted. "So! You understand, then, eh? It is bad, bad, this Black 'stupidness'. Burn the shirt."

"Yes—of course," said Honoria.

At 9 she descended the stairs, went out upon the south gallery among the scents of the white-flowering jessamine; the sweet grass. All was silent. The servants had left the house, as usual, about an hour before.

The shirt hung over the stone gallery-coping. She ran down the steps, found a stick, lifted the crumpled shirt on its end, carefully, carried it into the house. It bore no marks, save the crumpling. It had been soiled before its disappearance.

She carried it into the kitchen, carefully lowered the corner of the thin garment until it caught fire from the embers of a charcoal-pot. The thin linen flamed up, and with her stick she manipulated it until every particle of it was consumed, and then stirred the embers. A few sparks came out. The shirt was completely burned.

Her face drawn, she returned to the bedroom above. Cornelis was asleep. She sat beside his bed for two hours; then, after a long look at his flushed face, she departed silently for her own room.

In the morning the fever was broken. Many of the smaller pustules had disappeared. The remaining rash was going down. Cornelis, at her beseeching, remained in bed. At noon he arose. He felt perfectly well, he said.

"All that vexation about a little prickly heat!" Honoria sighed. She had four brothers. Men! They were much alike. How often had she heard her mother, and other mature women, say that!

That night Cornelis' skin was entirely restored. It was as though there had been no interval of burning agony. Cornelis, apparently, had forgotten that painful interval. But the reaction had made him especially cheerful at dinnertime. He laughed and joked rather more than usual. He did not even notice Julietta as she waited, silently, on the table.

Two nights later, at the dinner-table, Cornelis collapsed forward in the middle of a phrase. He went deathly white, his lips suddenly dry, a searing pain like the thrust of a carving-knife through and through his chest. Sudden froth stood at the corners of his mouth. The table-edge athwart him alone kept him from falling prone. He hung there, in intolerable agony, for seconds. Then, slowly, as it had "gone in," the white-hot "knife" was withdrawn. He drew in a labored breath, and Honoria supported him upright. She had flown to him, around the table.

As she stood upright propping him back into his chair, she saw Julietta. The brown girl's lips were drawn back from her even, beautiful teeth, her wide mouth in an animal-like snarl, her amber eyes boring into Cornelis' face, a very Greek-mask of hatred. An instant afterward, Julietta's face was that of the blank, submissive housemaid. But Honoria had seen.

At a bound her hands were clenched tight about the girl's slender arms and Julietta was being shaken like a willow wand in a great gale. Her tray, with glasses, shot resoundingly to the stone floor, to a tinkle of smashed glass. The Fighting Macartney blood showed red in Honoria's pallid face.

"It's you, then, you deadly creature, is it, eh? You who have done this devilish thing to your master! You—in my house! It was you, then, who made the rash, with your double-damned 'magic'!"

In the primitive urge of her fury at one who had struck at her man, Honoria had the slim brown girl against the room's wall now, holding her helpless in a grasp like steel with her own slender arms.

Cornelis, faint after that surge of unbearable, deadly pain, struggled to speak, there in his chair. Well-nigh helpless, he looked on at this unaccountable struggle. At last he found his voice, a voice faint and weak.

"What is it?—what is it, Honoria, my dear?"

"It's this witch!" cried Honoria, through clenched teeth. "It is she who has put the obeah on you." Then, "You she-devil, you will 'take it off' or I'll kill you here and now. Take it off, then! take it off!"

Honoria's voice had risen to a menacing scream. The girl cowered, wiltingly, under her fierce attack.

"Ooh Gahd—me mistress! Ooh,

Gahd! 'Taint I, ma'am, I swear to Gahd—I ain't do it, ma'am. Ooh, Gahd—me boans! Yo' break me, mistress. Fo' Gahd-love leave me to go!"

But Honoria, unrelaxed, the fighting-blood of her clan aroused, held the brown girl relentlessly.

"Take it off!" came, ever and again, through her small, clenched teeth. The brown girl began to struggle, ineffectually, gave it up, submitted to be held against the wall, her eyes now wide, frightened at this unexpected, sudden violence.

"What is it that you tell her to do?" This from Cornelis, recovering, shocked, puzzled.

"It is their damnable 'obi'," hissed Honoria. "I will make her 'take it off' you or I'll kill her."

"It is her mother," said Cornelis, suddenly inspired. "I know about her mother. I asked. Her mother, this girl's mother, there in the hills—it is the girl's mother who does this wickedness."

Honoria suddenly shifted her desperate grip upon the girl's numb arms. She twisted, and Julietta's slender body, yielding, collapsed limply to the floor. With a lightning-like motion, back and then forward again, Honoria menaced her with the great carving-knife, snatched from before her husband.

"Get up!" Her voice was low now, deadly. "Get up, you devil, and lead me to your mother's house."

Julietta, trembling, silent, dragged herself to her feet. Honoria pointed to the door with the knife's great shining blade. In silence the girl slipped out, Honoria following. Cornelis sat, still numb with that fearful reaction after his unbearable pain, slumped forward now in his mahogany armchair at the head of his table. His bones felt like water. His head sank forward on his arms. He remained motionless until Alonzo, the groom, summoned from the village by the frightened, gray-faced cook, who had overheard, roused him, supported him upstairs.

THE two women passed around the corner of Fairfield House, skirted the huddled cabins of the estate-village in silence, began to mount the steep hill at the back. Through tangled brush and twining, resistant guinea-grass, a slender trail wound abruptly upward into the deeper hills beyond. Up, and always up they went, the Caucasian lady grim and silent, the great knife held menacingly behind the unseeing back of the brown girl who stepped around turns and avoided roots and small rocks with the ease of custom.

At the head of the second ravine Honoria's conductress turned sharply to the right and led the way along the hill's edge toward a small clearing among the mahogany and tibet-tree scrub. A dingy cabin, of wood, with the inevitable corrugated iron roof, hung perilously on the hill's seaward edge. Straight to its door walked Julietta, paused, tapped, opened the door, and pressed close by Honoria, entered.

A dark brown woman peered at them across a small table. With her thumb, Honoria noted, she was rubbing very carefully the side of a small waxlike thing, which glistened dully in the illumination of a small, smoky oil lamp standing on the table. The woman, her eyes glassy as though from the effects of some narcotic drug, peered dully at the intruders.

Honoria, her left hand clenched tightly on Julietta's wincing shoulder, confronted her, the knife's point resting on the table beside the brown hand which held the wax. This was molded, Honoria observed, to the rough simulacrum of a human being.

"That is my husband!" announced Honoria without preamble. "You will take your 'obi' off now. Otherwise I will kill you both."

A long, blackened needle lay beside

the brown woman's hand on the table. She looked up into Honoria's face, dully.

"Yes, me mistress," she acquiesced in a singsong voice.

"You will do that at once!" Honoria tapped her knife-blade on the table decisively. "I am Fru Hansen. I was Honoria Macartney. I mean what I say. Come!"

The brown woman laid the wax image carefully down on the table. She rose, dreamily, fumbled about in the semi-darkness of the cabin. She returned carrying a shining, new tin, half filled with water. This, as carefully as she had handled the wax image, she set down beside it. Then, as gingerly, she picked up the image, muttered a string of unintelligible words in the old Crucian Creole, thickly interspersed with Dahomeyan. Honoria recognized several of the words—"*caffoón*," "*Shandràmadan*"—but the sequence she could not grasp.

The brown woman ended her speech, plunged the image into the water. She washed it carefully, as though it had been an incredibly tiny infant and she fearful of doing it some injury by clumsy handling. She removed it from the tin of water, the drops running down its surface of oily wax. She handed the image, with a suggestion of relaxed care now, to Honoria.

"Him aff, now, me mistress; I swear-yo', him aff! I swear yo' be Gahd, an' help me de Jesus!"

Honoria took the image into her hand, looked at it curiously in that dim light, made upon it with her thumb the sign of the cross. Then she slowly broke it into pieces, the sweat standing in beads on her face. She turned, without another word, and walked out of the cabin. As she proceeded down the trail, laboriously now, her legs weak in her high-heeled slippers, she cast crumbling bits of the wax right and left into the dense scrub among the bushes at the trail's sides. Her mouth and throat felt strangely dry. She murmured inarticulate prayers.

She limped into Fairfield House half an hour later and found Cornelis entirely restored. He asked her many questions, and to these she returned somewhat evasive answers. Yes—she had gone to Julietta's mother's cabin up the hill. Yes—the "stupidness" of these people needed a lifetime to realize. No—there had been no difficulty. Julietta's mother was a "stupid" old creature. There would be no more trouble, she was sure. It was extraordinary what effects they could produce. They brought it with them from Africa, of course—stupidness, wickedness—and handed it down from generation to generation. . . .

She might have her own thoughts—men were very much alike, as her mother had said—as the days wore into weeks, the weeks to the placid years which lay before her, with her man, here at Fairfield for a while, later, perhaps, in some larger house, in a more important position.

What had caused that devilish little Julietta to contrive such a thing? Those eyes! that mouth! Honoria had seen the hatred in her face.

She would, of course, never ask Cornelis. Best to leave such matters alone. Men! She had fought for this man—her man.

She would give him of her full devotion. There would be children in time. She would have, to replace Julietta, a new housemaid. There was one she remembered, near Christiansted. She would drive over tomorrow. The affairs of a Santa Crucian wife!

Cornelis plainly loved her. He was hers. There would be deviled landcrabs, sprinkled with port wine, dusted with herbs, baked in the stone oven, for breakfast. . . .

The GUILLOTINE CLUB

by Capwell Wyckoff

"That is Queen Marie Antoinette sitting beside him. All of them have been guillotined."

MONSIEUR DALLARD, the scholar, was greatly beloved by his neighbors. They considered him a good-natured, studious sort of man, kindly to his acquaintances, and harmless. He studied constantly, but it made no difference in his manner—he was always jovial and sociable. Those most interested noted that he paid particular attention in his studies to the great revolution which had set France free; indeed, he had written a history of the French Revolution which the critics proclaimed as better than the average, and he seemed fascinated by the drama which had taken place around him so many years ago. His neighbors, not in any sense literary people, heard vaguely that he was an ardent champion of the aristocratic class which had been wiped out by the Terror, but as long as he was not aristocratic with them, they did not care. He was their neighbor, and they liked him.

One evening late in the fall, Monsieur Dallard sat, deep in thought, beside the little iron stove which heated his modest lodgings in the Rue St. Jacques. It was while he sat thus that his maid put her head in the door and coughed meaningly.

"Eh?" inquired Monsieur Dallard, looking up.

"Monsieur Clubin to see you, *Monsieur,*" the maid said.

Monsieur Clubin was the neighborhood baker, one of the best in Paris, so Dallard thought, and a humble man. Nevertheless, *Monsieur* could not have been more polite to a prince, had one come to his door.

"Show him up," Monsieur Dallard said, setting some papers in order on his desk.

Monsieur Clubin came in at once, bowing to the scholar, who smiled

agreeably. The baker sat down in the chair that the scholar pushed toward him and lighted a cigar.

"*Peste!*" said Dallard, without looking fully at him. "A most gloomy countenance, my friend. What troubles you?"

Clubin sighed dismally. "I wish that I had not laughed at the story of Anthony Ferroe, the ironworker," he said.

"What do you mean?" Monsieur Dallard asked, sharply.

"That I have had the same experience, my friend," said the baker.

"*Ma foi!* I think you both dream," the scholar scoffed.

"That is what I told Ferroe when he told me his story, but I am ready to apologize now. Let me tell you how it happened. I was abroad last night at a very late hour, toward 1 in the morning, to be exact, and I returned to my house by way of the Rue St. Antoine. You perhaps know where I mean, down by that alley which leads to the darkest dens of the street, a place I would instinctively avoid in the daytime, and would certainly have avoided at night if I had not been in a hurry. Well, *Monsieur*, just as I passed the throat of that dark alley I noted before me a very old man, walking slowly, and the circumstance did not at once impress me; for, after all, why should not someone else be walking the street at that hour and in that place? But as this old man moved out into a splash of the brilliant moonlight, I noted something that quickened my interest. Monsieur Dallard, this man was not dressed in the modern fashion. I can not describe him to you, for I never saw such clothes, all lace and silk and bows and ruffles, much like the pictures which one sees in the books that you have. I realized that he looked exactly like the unknown man described to us by Monsieur Ferroe, and I slowed my pace, half afraid, but interested, nevertheless.

"As we approached the end of the Rue St. Antoine he slowed his step, making it compulsory for me to come up to him. I had some thought of crossing the pavement to the other side, but thought better of it, as I was a little ashamed; so I drew up to him. When he heard my footsteps he turned and waited for me. Upon my joining him he bowed slightly and asked me the way to the Place de la Revolution!"

"Eh! Ah!" Monsieur Dallard exclaimed, "is not that exactly what the same man, or one like him, asked Monsieur Ferroe only last week?"

"Exactly. The same question. And the circumstances were the same. I looked at him closely, and what do you suppose I saw? The red ring around his neck, just as friend Ferroe has said. I saw that ring very closely, and what do you think? It cuts into the skin, much as though the head had been cut off at one time and glued back on again!"

"Ha!" ejaculated Monsieur Dallard. "Go on, my friend!"

"It was all very unusual, so I thought as we stood there. The city was asleep, at that point at least, and the voice of this old man echoed a trifle loudly. I pointed the way to him, and he thanked me kindly and moved off. It was then that I saw he was not real!"

"Come," the scholar said, impatiently. "You are dreaming, Monsieur Clubin."

"Was Ferroe dreaming? I said as much to him. But as this strange old man moved from the darker shadows I saw right through him! Clearly I saw the lamp post across the street, right through his body, as plainly as I see you now, friend Dallard. Well, this remarkable old man left me and walked rapidly away, leaving me rubbing my eyes in astonishment."

"It is very strange," mused Dallard, after a moment of silence. "From anyone else I would not listen to such a story, but you and Ferroe are honest men. Yet I find this much difference in your stories: Ferroe said

it was a young man who stopped him. True, the hour was the same, the question the same, and as you say, the body without substance, yet Ferroe insists that this was a young man, with a fine, aristocratic face and a fierce mustache. What does that signify?''

''I do not know,'' Clubin shrugged, helplessly. ''I have told you what happened, that is all.''

MONSIEUR FERROE owned a small ironworking shop in the heart of Paris, one of the oldest in the country. It had been handed down from father to son for generations, and Ferroe loved it jealously. He worked at times at the forges and benches and although he was fairly well off, was known as Ferroe, the ironworker. He gloried in the reputation as he gloried in the business itself. To his shop accordingly went Monsieur Dallard the scholar bright and early the following day.

He found the ancient doors wide open and a scene of uproar. Two gendarmes talked with Ferroe and a crowd of ragged children hovered about the shop, standing on tiptoe to look inside. When Ferroe had finished talking with the police Monsieur Dallard asked him anxiously what had happened.

''Bah!'' said Monsieur Ferroe, angrily. ''I have been robbed!''

''Robbed!'' exclaimed Dallard, knowing that Ferroe kept no cash at any time in his shop.

''Come inside, away from those who would hear everything,'' Ferroe invited. And when the scholar had stepped inside, the ironworker continued, ''I have been robbed of that which was more precious to me than gold.''

''What was it, my friend?''

''The ax of the guillotine which sheared off the head of Louis XVI!'' the ironworker replied.

''*Mordieu!*'' cried Monsieur Dallard, falling back a step. ''What do you mean?''

''I mean just that. Perhaps you are not aware that it was in this shop that the ax-blade of the guillotine which stood in the Place de la Revolution, and on which Louis XVI was executed on the 21st of January, 1793, was made. Yes, my friend, it is so. Well, at the time that the Terror came to an end one of my ancestors was in charge of dismantling the famous guillotine upon which so many lost their lives, and he carried the knife back here, where it has lain for more than a century. Last night someone stole that blade.''

''*Mon Dieu!*'' Monsieur Dallard murmured, dazed at being so near an actual relic of the revolution he studied so much about.

''The perplexing part is this: it is not known how they broke in. Not a door or window has been touched. It was only yesterday that I last looked at the knife, to see if rust was attacking it. It has lain up there in my loft in a packing-case for more than a hundred years, and I watch it closely. This morning I looked again; and it was gone, the packing-case broken open. The police think I am crazy, but I am not,'' concluded Monsieur Ferroe, who looked quite wild, nevertheless.

MONSIEUR DALLARD thought much of the theft of the guillotine ax in the days that followed, dropping around to see Ferroe at stated intervals, to learn whether the blade had been recovered, but it had not. Dallard longed for a glimpse of the sharp weapon which had cut off the heads of the fairest and noblest of French chivalry, hoping for an experience which would lend indescribable romance to his life, wrapped up as it was in the happenings of the past. But he was disappointed, and gradually his visits fell away. Time had almost erased the memory from his mind when a piece from a daily paper revived it.

Sitting in his study before the fire Monsieur Dallard read the following with more than unusual interest:

Thieves, showing once more an amazing interest in things of the remote past, have again turned their hands to affairs relating to the Terror and the Revolution. Monsieur Dumont, who keeps the extensive and ancient lumberyards in the Rue Paysanne, reports the theft last night of two upright pieces of wood and a crossbeam, said by him to be the actual pieces of the guillotine which stood in the Place de la Revolution, formerly the Place Louis Quinze, where King Louis the XVI was executed by the republicans under General Santerre on January 21st, year 1793. This remarkable theft, coming as it does after a similar affair at the iron-shop of Monsieur Ferroe, at which time the blade of the same guillotine was stolen, baffles the police. Two witnesses have testified that late last night they saw two men going down the old Rue St. Antoine with these timbers on their shoulders.

Considerable interest has been awakened by these two amazing thefts, and speculation has been heightened by the fact that the men bearing the timbers of the historic guillotine were dressed in costumes unknown to the present day, being so odd that the witnesses were unable to describe them at all. It is thought in some quarters that they have been carried away to be sold to foreign collectors.

After many hours of deep thought Monsieur Dallard the scholar came to a decision. With the knowledge of the two men who had asked the way to the Place de la Revolution in his mind he was far from thinking that common thieves had stolen the parts of the historic guillotine. Monsieur Dallard looked below the surface of things at all times, and he was convinced that there was depth to this affair. Accordingly, he began to leave the house late at night, to return hungry and disappointed in the morning. His landlady tried hard to find the key to his movements, but failed.

The truth of the matter was that Monsieur Dallard, wrapped in his overcoat, patrolled the streets night after night without avail. From one end of Paris to the other he walked, looking for something which he could not name, but which lured him on, nevertheless. Most of his wanderings led him down the dark well that was the Rue St. Antoine, that den from which a frenzied twenty-five million poor of France got the impetus to send them at the throats of the aristocracy. He was familiar with the street from his studies of history, and the dens were well known to him. But one house in the narrowest rut of the street which had been transformed under Napoleon was unknown to him.

He found himself regarding it musingly. It was off the main street, in a blind alley, a little, squat house with darkened and shuttered windows, surrounded by a low wall that was smothered by a black vine which weaved and twisted its way over it like some horrible monster. In the daytime this house was forbidding enough, and at night it was repulsive to the last degree. It was the source of the corruption and rot which had at one time dominated the entire section, and the scholar found a particular fascination in it. Approaching an old inhabitant of the district late one winter afternoon the scholar inquired concerning the house.

"It is the Plotters' House," the old man said, after studying him for a moment through bloodshot eyes.

"What do you mean, my friend?"

The old man explained readily. "At the time of the Terror a group of aristocrats, seeking to escape by hiding in the very neighborhood of those who sought to tear them to pieces, lived in that house and hatched plots against the republican government. At the time that Louis and Marie Antoinette were imprisoned the plotters met there to formulate plans to deliver them. In time they were taken, and all perished on the guillotine in the Place de la Grève. Since then, no one has lived in the house, for it is haunted."

"Come, my friend," coaxed Dallard. "This is a modern day; we laugh at ghosts. You romance, surely."

The old man looked fixedly at him for a moment and then turned away. "Listen some day at the doors or the

windows, my friend, and you will hear sobbing that will break your heart,'' he said, and so was gone.

After that Dallard found the Plotters' House a place of fascination. For hours he roamed there, watching the house and wondering. The inhabitants of the street thought him crazy and mothers kept a wary eye on their children. But the man who paced the street had eyes for nothing but the house which squatted inside of its wall as though defying the feeble efforts of men to penetrate its secrets.

IT WAS the night of the 21st of January when Dallard took his last walk down the Rue St. Antoine. He had begun to weary of his nightly excursions, the more so as they had proved fruitless except in the matter of the house which was such a find to him, but by this time he knew its outward appearance so well that he could do without seeing it for some time to come. He approached the house to look at it for the last time, and the fact that it was near 2 o'clock in the morning did not occur to him. He approached the rusty iron gate that opened like a grinning mouth in the wall and looked in.

The place was wrapped in intense darkness, but a film of light shone from under the front door. Surprize gripped him. He had been given to understand that the house was empty: what, then, was a light doing in the house? He leaned a little too heavily on the gate in order to see more clearly, and it swung back. This was stranger yet, for at other times he had failed to budge it. He pushed his way past it and walked up the uneven stones, his heart beating rapidly with excitement and a certain fear.

The porch was scarce a foot above the weedy yard, and he stepped carefully upon it. As he approached the door he was oppressed by a sense of evil, a feeling of something wrong and out of place. The impression lingered in his mind that in crossing the small yard he had crossed the years to the fearful days of the Terror, when suspicion and murder stalked the country. And as the scholar drew near to the door a sound reached him that chilled his blood.

It was the sound of terrible sobbing!

All the sobs that human beings ever uttered might have been there in that house that night as he listened, too terror-stricken to move. Soft, almost silent, in volume, it reached him, that terrible, shuddering sound of suffering that unnerved the body and numbed the brain. Outside of that there was no sound: even the wind was quiet, the stiff branches of a few ghostly trees standing erect and mute in the front yard. St. Antoine was silent as the grave, and except for the sobbing there might have been no living soul in the world, for Monsieur Dallard was now not quite sure that he was alive.

Suddenly the sobbing ceased, leaving the world as silent as a tomb. There was no movement or sound inside the Plotters' House. Driven to his wits' end, undecided as to whether to run away or to seek further, the scholar leaned weakly against the thick front door.

It opened without a sound, throwing him into a single room.

White with terror the scholar jumped from his knees where he had landed and looked around. He was in a low, vaulted room of some width and length, and he was by no means alone. The strangest company in the world was assembled, watching him mutely, a medley of different expressions on their faces. Leaning against the wall the scholar looked at them attentively.

A score of men and as many women stood back of a long table looking at him, and such men and such women! Spectral, every one of them, for he saw objects back of them easily, as Monsieur Clubin had seen through the old man of the Rue St. Antoine, but life unmistakable in their burning

eyes. Dressed in silks and satins, in knee-breeches and flowing gowns, the men and women were plainly aristocrats, living or dead. With a thrill Dallard noted one characteristic that made them all kin: Each shadow had a red ring around his or her neck!

Three-score candles burned on the table, but the candles were spectral, too. They gave light, but there was no substance to them. No candle-grease fell from them and no breath disturbed their flame. From the candles Dallard shifted his eyes to the company, to find that the men all held their hands on the hilts of their swords and that the women were silently crowded together.

One of the men, a tall individual with a turned-up mustache, turned to the man at the door, the one who had opened it so suddenly, causing Dallard to fall in.

"Count Cagliostro, who is this man?"

The count, whom Dallard recognized from his study of history as the arch-quack of pre-Revolution history, bowed slightly and gracefully.

"My Lord Charolois, this is Monsieur Dallard, a scholar of the Rue Vendôme. He has written a history of the revolution, in which he loudly defends the nobility of old France. That makes him our friend indeed, and if I could prevail upon your lordship to admit this one human being to our yearly meeting, I should be most happy."

Charolois shrugged his shoulders. "Since he is our friend, I care little. The rapid changes which sweep over our city may soon wipe out this meeting-place, so I do not greatly care. See you to it, Count."

Count Cagliostro bowed again, and the others, losing their interest in the newcomer in the pressure of whatever business had brought them back from the spirit world, seemed to forget him. Cagliostro, on the contrary, moved nearer the scholar and engaged him in conversation.

"No doubt you are greatly surprized to find yourself in such company, Monsieur Dallard?"

Dallard made him a stately bow. "I am delighted, my lord. Who are these people?"

"This is the Guillotine Club," the notorious count explained. "A society of spirits murdered during the Reign of Terror. I am admitted because of my connection with it in prophecy. You will recall that I eloquently prophesied the Revolution."

"I recall your prophecy well," the scholar said, now more at his ease. "But tell me, is that man who spoke to you the infamous Charolois who went about the country shooting slaters and plumbers from off of roofs just for the pleasure of it?"

Cagliostro placed a hand lightly on his arm. "Softly, friend Dallard! Be careful of the use of that word 'infamous'! Yes, that is Charolois. You see who is sitting beside him? That is Queen Marie Antoinette, and to his left is Louis XVI. All of them have been guillotined, as you may see from the red ring about the neck. Look down the board. You note the lady with the lofty bearing and the red mark on her cheek? That is Charlotte Corday, who slew the terrible Marat in his bath, saving scores of lives by doing so. That red spot is the place where the brutal executioner struck her when he held the head up for the people after it had fallen into the basket. And that lady with the snow-white hair is the lady maréchale who exclaimed concerning the Count d'Artois, 'Depend upon it, sir, God will think twice before damning a man of that quality.' The others are of less importance — Mirabeau, the traitor Phillipe and others."

Count Charolois had risen by now and a hush fell over the assembled spirit. The shadow of the roof-sniper addressed them.

"Brothers and sisters of the Guil-

lotine Club, confederation of death," he said solemnly, "we are here once more in this most worthy house to transact the business which engages our attention yearly. On this, our anniversary of the damnable murder of King Louis, we consider briefly those matters of business which concern this eternal association." Picking up a list he scanned it rapidly and then went on: "It has been your pleasure to nominate me chairman. First in order of business is the election of president of the Guillotine Club."

There was a bustle and a stir, and under cover of it Dallard whispered to the count, "How is it that Mirabeau is a member? He was never guillotined."

"His sympathy and gallantry toward the queen make him a member," Cagliostro replied.

King Louis XVI arose and addressed the gathering: "Mr. Chairman and comrades. It has been your pleasure to make me president in years past, but I must decline with thanks on the present occasion. It is my thought that we have with us one more worthy to lead our distinguished club than myself. I am referring to Louis Pelletier, the highwayman, the first man ever to go to his death under the guillotine. Most of you will recall that Monsieur Pelletier was executed in the Place de la Grève on April 25th, 1792. Under the circumstances, I feel sure that Monsieur Pelletier is more worthy the office than I am."

Pelletier arose and bowed. He was a short, swarthy man with the look of a villain. The red ring around his neck seemed to be of a deeper red than the others, the scholar noticed. He was voted into office and the meeting went on.

"We will pass over the much disputed question that comes up yearly," the infamous chairman went on. "I mean the question as to whether Charlotte Corday was struck on the face by the executioner or if the eternal red mark came from the rough bottom of the basket when the head hit it. In my own case, I recall very distinctly that the bottom of the basket which I faced as the knife sheared my head off looked to be exceedingly rough. But we'll let that pass for now. There is the matter of the puce coat of King Louis."

"Question, *Monsieur*," interrupted Pelletier.

The chairman bowed to him. "It seems that after our king—God bless him!—was guillotined, the rabble took his puce coat and tore it to shreds. Most of the material has perished, but to this day there are two or three finger rings in existence in France with King Louis' puce coat fragments in it. We must locate and confiscate these rings. With this in mind I delegate Count Cagliostro and Philippe Égalité to investigate and report on it definitely at the next meeting, one year from tonight."

The two delegates bowed. The chairman went on: "Now for the pressing business of the evening. Each year we kill in some manner or other a descendant of the man who sent us to the guillotine. By heart attacks and loathsome maladies which we bring up from the pit of death with us, each year we rid the world of an offspring of the rabble that murdered us. Tonight we have on our list the name of Anthony Ferroe, direct descendant of the man who made the blade of the guillotine of the Rue de la Revolution!"

Dallard started at hearing his friend's name. The company showed the liveliest signs of interest and pleasure.

"By what means, Monsieur Chairman?" Marie Antoinette inquired.

"We have been exceedingly fortunate in securing from the shop of Monsieur Ferroe the ax of the guillotine itself, and from a local lumberyard the timbers of the original ma-

chine. I regret to say, however, that the basket into which our heads fell could not be found. Apparently it has been burned up. But we can do without it. Listen!"

A hush fell over the ghastly company, and above it could be heard the hammering of timbers. Charolois turned to the company again.

"They are putting up the guillotine now. It will be our pleasure in a few minutes to stand by and watch this Ferroe die under the ax as we died." Reaching forward he touched a tiny gold bell which rested on the table before him. "Bring in the prisoner," he said, as two lackeys appeared at a back door.

While they waited for the prisoner conversation ran high. The assembly seemed enchanted by the coming spectacle.

A MOMENT later Anthony Ferroe was led in, his arms tightly bound. He did not see Dallard, but was marched to the table and faced the count.

"Monsieur Ferroe," said the murderous count, solemnly, "you have been informed as to why you are to die. Have you any request to make of this company before you die?"

Ferroe, his eyes bulging with amazement, but calm notwithstanding, only shook his head. The chairman continued: "It gives us great pleasure to do this. Within a sufficient number of years we shall have wiped out the descendants of our murderers, and then our task will be complete. Remove the prisoner to the guillotine!"

Scholar Dallard sprang forward. In a loud voice he cried: "Wait! Anthony Ferroe is my friend, and he must not go to the guillotine!"

Charolois looked balefully at Cagliostro. "Upon your head be this, Count Cagliostro!"

Ferroe had recognized his friend and sprang toward him. Side by side they faced the ghostly company. Dallard stripped off the ironworker's bonds.

"Monsieur Ferroe leaves this house with me at once," he said, quietly.

With a single movement the men rose and placed hands on swords. The ladies moved back, making room.

President Pelletier strode forward. "Arrest both of these men. They both die on the guillotine at once," the highwayman announced.

Cagliostro had moved away from Dallard and took his stand with the men of the Guillotine Club. Ferroe, now sure of himself, swung his heavy fists.

"We'll see who goes to the guillotine," he roared.

Louis XVI drew his sword. "We can't waste time. Dawn is near. At them, gentlemen."

A small forest of swords was leveled at them and the men of the guillotine bore down on the two moderns. They had no arms and turned to flee, but Cagliostro had turned the key before joining the others. They found themselves forced apart, and their case desperate.

A multitude of small cuts suddenly appeared on Dallard as the sharp swords of the nobles cut him. Ferroe had succeeded in wrapping his massive arms around most of the weapons which were aimed at him. Out of the corner of his eye, even in his agony, Dallard saw Charlotte Corday unsheath her dagger, the same one with which she had killed Citizen Marat.

"Hark!" thundered Mirabeau, suddenly.

A bell rang out on the streets outside. Orders were given and someone pounded on the door.

"The gendarmes, *Messieurs*," panted Cagliostro, the prophet. "Vanish, all!"

"After a final thrust," hissed Pelletier. "That for treachery, sir scholar!" And he ran his sword through Monsieur Dallard.

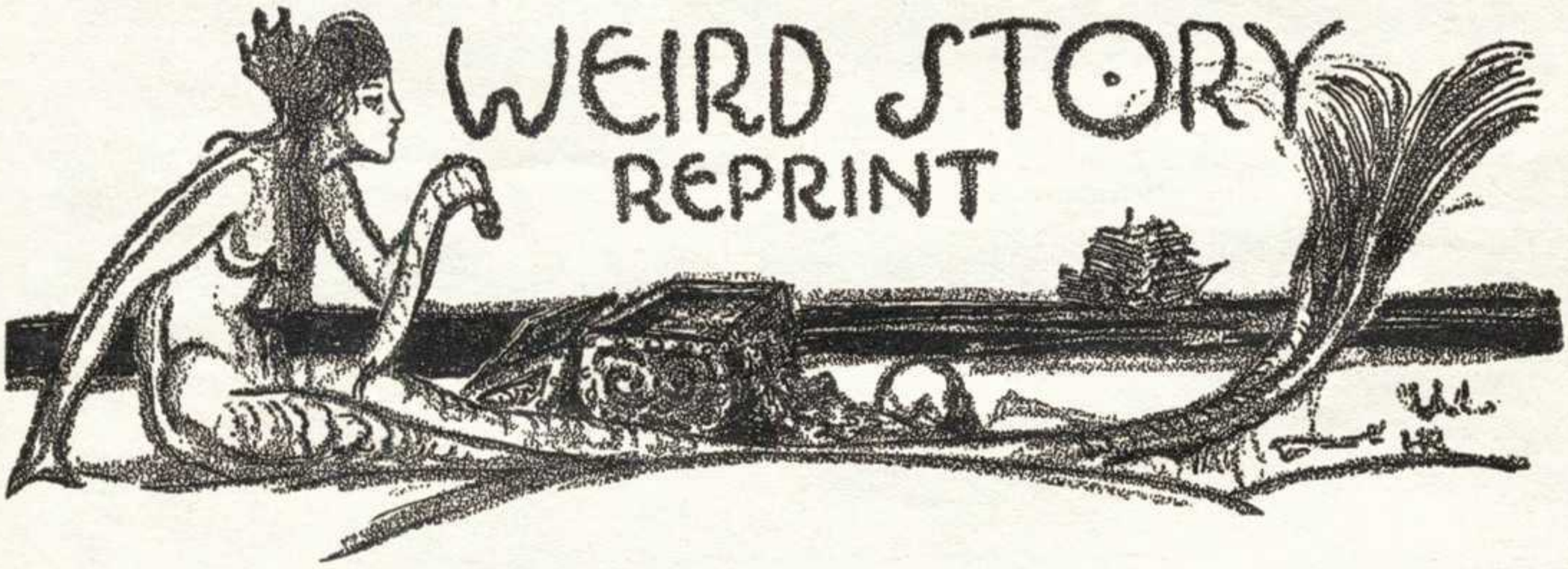
THE papers carried this account of the affair in the Rue St. Antoine on the following day:

When the police, having been notified by neighbors that something strange was going on in the old house on the alley off the Rue St. Antoine, known to history as the Plotters' House, burst into the place they found it empty except for Monsieur Louis Dallard, a scholar of the Rue Vendôme, and Monsieur Anthony Ferroe, owner of the iron foundry of that name. The house was empty of furniture except for a long table.

Monsieur Dallard had just expired from a wound, presumably inflicted by a knife, and Monsieur Ferroe was exhausted. The story that Monsieur Ferroe told was so wild and incredible that he will be held for examination as soon as possible. It is supposed that the two men were set upon by some bandits and severely used before the police arrived.

But the most remarkable circumstance of all is the fact that a complete guillotine, said by experts to be the very one which stood in the Place de la Revolution during the Terror, was found assembled in the rear yard of the Plotters' House. It will be taken down today and placed in the custody of the police. Plotters' House will be razed at once and a new structure erected on its site.

Small wonder was expressed today by the neighbors of Monsieur Dallard, who said that long study and erratic habits, one of which was constant night-wandering, had apparently broken his health mentally and taken him often to the house and to business which, judging by Monsieur Ferroe's peculiar mental state, will ever remain a profound mystery.



The White Old Maid

By NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE

THE moonbeams came through two deep and narrow windows and showed a spacious chamber richly furnished in an antique fashion. From one lattice the shadow of the diamond panes was thrown upon the floor; the ghostly light through the other slept upon a bed, falling between the heavy silken curtains and illuminating the face of a young man. But how quietly the slumberer lay! how pale his features! And how like a shroud the sheet was wound about his frame! Yes, it was a corpse in its burial-clothes.

Suddenly the fixed features seemed to move with dark emotion. Strange fantasy! It was but the shadow of the fringed curtain waving betwixt the dead face and the moonlight as the door of the chamber opened and a girl stole softly to the bedside. Was there delusion in the moonbeams, or did her gesture and her eye betray a gleam of triumph as she bent over the pale corpse, pale as itself, and

pressed her living lips to the cold ones of the dead? As she drew back from that long kiss her features writhed as if a proud heart were fighting with its anguish. Again it seemed that the features of the corpse had moved responsive to her own. Still an illusion. The silken curtains had waved a second time between the dead face and the moonlight as another fair young girl unclosed the door and glided to the bedside. There the two maidens stood, both beautiful, with the pale beauty of the dead between them. But she who had first entered was proud and stately, and the other a soft and fragile thing.

"Away!" cried the lofty one. "Thou hadst him living; the dead is mine."

"Thine!" returned the other, shuddering. "Well hast thou spoken; the dead is thine."

The proud girl started and stared into her face with a ghastly look, but a wild and mournful expression passed across the features of the gentle one, and, weak and helpless, she sank down on the bed, her head pillowed beside that of the corpse and her hair mingling with his dark locks. A creature of hope and joy, the first draft of sorrow had bewildered her.

"Edith!" cried her rival.

Edith groaned as with sudden compassion of the heart, and, removing her cheek from the dead youth's pillow, she stood upright, fearfully encountering the eyes of the lofty girl.

"Wilt thou betray me?" said the latter, calmly.

"Till the dead bid me speak I will be silent," answered Edith. "Leave us alone together. Go and live many years, and then return and tell me of thy life. He too will be here. Then, if thou tellest of sufferings more than death, we will both forgive thee."

"And what shall be the token?" asked the proud girl, as if her heart acknowledged a meaning in these wild words.

"This lock of hair," said Edith, lifting one of the dark clustering curls that lay heavily on the dead man's brow.

The two maidens joined their hands over the bosom of the corpse and appointed a day and hour far, far in time to come for their next meeting in that chamber. The statelier girl gave one deep look at the motionless countenance and departed, yet turned again and trembled ere she closed the door, almost believing that her dead lover frowned upon her. And Edith, too! Was not her white form fading into the moonlight? Scorning her own weakness, she went forth and perceived that a negro slave was waiting in the passage with a waxlight, which he held between her face and his own and regarded her, as she thought, with an ugly expression of merriment. Lifting his torch on high, the slave lighted her down the staircase and undid the portal of the mansion. The young clergyman of the town had just ascended the steps, and, bowing to the lady, passed in without a word.

YEARS—many years—rolled on. The world seemed new again, so much older was it grown since the night when those pale girls had clasped their hands across the bosom of the corpse. In the interval a lonely woman had passed from youth to extreme age, and was known by all the town as the "Old Maid in the Winding-Sheet." A taint of insanity had affected her whole life, but so quiet, sad and gentle, so utterly free from violence, that she was suffered to pursue her harmless fantasies unmolested by the world with whose business or pleasures she had naught to do. She dwelt alone, and never came into the daylight except to follow funerals. Whenever a corpse was borne along the street, in sunshine, rain or snow, whether a pompous train of the rich and proud thronged after it, or few and humble were the mourners, behind them came the lonely woman in a long white garment which the peo-

ple called her shroud. She took no place among the kindred or the friends, but stood at the door to hear the funeral prayer, and walked in the rear of the procession as one whose earthly charge it was to haunt the house of mourning and be the shadow of affliction and see that the dead were duly buried. So long had this been her custom that the inhabitants of the town deemed her a part of every funeral, as much as the coffin-pall or the very corpse itself, and augured ill of the sinner's destiny unless the Old Maid in the Winding-Sheet came gliding like a ghost behind. Once, it is said, she affrighted a bridal-party with her pale presence, appearing suddenly in the illuminated hall just as the priest was uniting a false maid to a wealthy man before her lover had been dead a year. Evil was the omen to that marriage. Sometimes she stole forth by moonlight and visited the graves of venerable integrity and wedded love and virgin innocence, and every spot where the ashes of a kind and faithful heart were moldering. Over the hillocks of those favored dead would she stretch out her arms with a gesture as if she were scattering seeds, and many believed that she brought them from the garden of Paradise, for the graves which she had visited were green beneath the snow and covered with sweet flowers from April to November. Her blessing was better than a holy verse upon the tombstone. Thus wore away her long, sad, peaceful and fantastic life till few were so old as she, and the people of later generations wondered how the dead had ever been buried or mourners had endured their grief without the Old Maid in the Winding-Sheet. Still years went on, and still she followed funerals and was not yet summoned to her own festival of death.

One afternoon the great street of the town was all alive with business and bustle, though the sun now gilded only the upper half of the church-spire, having left the house-tops and loftiest trees in shadow. The scene was cheerful and animated in spite of the somber shade between the high brick buildings. Here were pompous merchants in white wigs and laced velvet, the bronzed faces of sea-captains, the foreign garb and air of Spanish creoles, and the disdainful port of natives of Old England, all contrasted with the rough aspect of one or two back-settlers negotiating sales of timber from forests where ax had never sounded. Sometimes a lady passed, swelling roundly forth in an embroidered petticoat, balancing her steps in high-heeled shoes and curtsying with lofty grace to the punctilious obeisances of the gentlemen. The life of the town seemed to have its very center not far from an old mansion that stood somewhat back from the pavement, surrounded by neglected grass, with a strange air of loneliness rather deepened than dispelled by the throng so near it. Its site would have been suitably occupied by a magnificent Exchange or a brick block lettered all over with various signs, or the large house itself might have made a noble tavern with the "King's Arms" swinging before it and guests in every chamber, instead of the present solitude. But, owing to some dispute about the right of inheritance, the mansion had been long without a tenant, decaying from year to year and throwing the stately gloom of its shadow over the busiest part of the town.

Such was the scene, and such the time, when a figure unlike any that have been described was observed at a distance down the street.

"I spy a strange sail yonder," remarked a Liverpool captain—"that woman in the long white garment."

The sailors seemed much struck by the object, as were several others who at the same moment caught a glimpse of the figure that had attracted his notice. Almost immediately the various topics of conversation gave place

to speculations in an undertone on this unwonted occurrence.

"Can there be a funeral so late this afternoon?" inquired some.

They looked for the signs of death at every door—the sexton, the hearse, the assemblage of black-clad relatives, all that makes up the woful pomp of funerals. They raised their eyes, also, to the sun-gilt spire of the church, and wondered that no clang proceeded from its bell, which had always tolled till now when this figure appeared in the light of day. But none had heard that a corpse was to be borne to its home that afternoon, nor was there any token of a funeral except the apparition of the Old Maid in the Winding-Sheet.

"What may this portend?" asked each man of his neighbor.

All smiled as they put the question, yet with a certain trouble in their eyes, as if pestilence, or some other wide calamity, were prognosticated by the untimely intrusion among the living of one whose presence had always been associated with death and wo. What a comet is to the earth was that sad woman to the town. Still she moved on, while the hum of surprize was hushed at her approach, and the proud and the humble stood aside that her white garment might not wave against them. It was a long, loose robe of spotless purity. Its wearer appeared very old, pale, emaciated and feeble, yet glided onward without the unsteady pace of extreme age. At one point of her course a rosy little boy burst forth from a door and ran with open arms toward the ghostly woman, seeming to expect a kiss from her bloodless lips. She made a slight pause, fixing her eye upon him with an expression of no earthly sweetness, so that the child shivered and stood awestruck rather than affrighted while the Old Maid passed on. Perhaps her garment might have been polluted even by an infant's touch; perhaps her kiss would have been death to the sweet boy within the year.

"She is but a shadow," whispered the superstitious. "The child put forth his arms and could not grasp her robe."

The wonder was increased when the Old Maid passed beneath the porch of the deserted mansion, ascended the moss-covered steps, lifted the iron knocker and gave three raps. The people could only conjecture that some old remembrance, troubling her bewildered brain, had impelled the poor woman hither to visit the friends of her youth—all gone from their home long since, and forever, unless their ghosts still haunted it, fit company for the Old Maid in the Winding-Sheet.

An elderly man approached the steps, and, reverently uncovering his gray locks, essayed to explain the matter.

"None, madam," said he, "have dwelt in this house these fifteen years agone—no, not since the death of old Colonel Fenwicke, whose funeral you may remember to have followed. His heirs, being ill-agreed among themselves, have let the mansion-house go to ruin."

The Old Maid looked slowly round with a slight gesture of one hand and a finger of the other upon her lip, appearing more shadowlike than ever in the obscurity of the porch. But again she lifted the hammer, and gave, this time, a single rap. Could it be that a footstep was now heard coming down the staircase of the old mansion which all conceived to have been so long untenanted? Slowly, feebly, yet heavily, like the pace of an aged and infirm person, the step approached, more distinct on every downward stair, till it reached the portal. The bar fell on the inside; the door was opened. One upward glance toward the church-spire, whence the sunshine had just faded, was the last that the people saw of the Old Maid in the Winding-Sheet.

"Who undid the door?" asked many.

This question, owing to the depth of shadow beneath the porch, no one could satisfactorily answer. Two or three aged men, while protesting against an inference which might be drawn, affirmed that the person within was a negro, and bore a singular resemblance to Old Cæsar, formerly a slave in the house, but freed by death some thirty years before.

"Her summons has waked up a servant of the old family," said one, half seriously.

"Let us wait here," replied another; "more guests will knock at the door anon. But the gate of the graveyard should be thrown open."

TWILIGHT had overspread the town before the crowd began to separate, or the comments on this incident were exhausted. One after another was wending his way homeward, when a coach—no common spectacle in those days—drove slowly into the street. It was an old-fashioned equipage, hanging close to the ground, with arms on the panels, a footman behind, and a grave, corpulent coachman seated high in front, the whole giving an idea of solemn state and dignity. There was something awful in the heavy rumbling of the wheels.

The coach rolled down the street, till, coming to the gateway of the deserted mansion, it drew up, and the footman sprang to the ground.

"Whose grand coach is this?" asked a very inquisitive body.

The footman made no reply, but ascended the steps of the old house, gave three taps with the iron hammer, and returned to open the coach door. An old man possessed of the heraldic lore so common in that day examined the shield of arms on the panel.

"Azure, a lion's head erased, between three flowers de luce," said he, then whispered the name of the family to whom these bearings belonged. The last inheritor of its honors was recently dead, after a long residence amid the splendor of the British court, where his birth and wealth had given him no mean station. "He left no child," continued the herald, "and these arms, being in a lozenge, betoken that the coach appertains to his widow."

Further disclosures, perhaps, might have been made had not the speaker been suddenly struck dumb by the stern eye of an ancient lady who thrust forth her head from the coach, preparing to descend. As she emerged the people saw that her dress was magnificent, and her figure dignified in spite of age and infirmity—a stately ruin, but with a look at once of pride and wretchedness. Her strong and rigid features had an awe about them unlike that of the white Old Maid, but as of something evil. She passed up the steps, leaning on a gold-headed cane. The door swung open as she ascended, and the light of a torch glittered on the embroidery of her dress and gleamed on the pillars of the porch. After a momentary pause, a glance backward and then a desperate effort, she went in.

The decipherer of the coat-of-arms had ventured up the lower step, and, shrinking back immediately, pale and tremulous, affirmed that the torch was held by the very image of Old Cæsar.

"But such a hideous grin," added he, "was never seen on the face of mortal man, black or white. It will haunt me till my dying day."

Meantime, the coach had wheeled round with a prodigious clatter on the pavement and rumbled up the street, disappearing in the twilight, while the ear still tracked its course. Scarcely was it gone when the people began to question whether the coach and attendants, the ancient lady, the specter of Old Cæsar and the Old Maid herself were not all a strangely combined delusion with some dark purport in its mystery. The whole town was astir, so that, instead of dispersing, the crowd continually in-

creased, and stood gazing up at the windows of the mansion, now silvered by the brightening moon. The elders, glad to indulge the narrative propensity of age, told of the long-faded splendor of the family, the entertainments they had given, and the guests, the greatest of the land, and even titled and noble ones from abroad, who had passed beneath that portal. These graphic reminiscences seemed to call up the ghosts of those to whom they referred. So strong was the impression on some of the more imaginative hearers that two or three were seized with trembling fits at one and the same moment, protesting that they had distinctly heard three other raps of the iron knocker.

"Impossible!" exclaimed others. "See! The moon shines beneath the porch, and shows every part of it except in the narrow shade of that pillar. There is no one there."

"Did not the door open?" whispered one of these fanciful persons.

"Didst thou see it too?" said his companion, in a startled tone.

But the general sentiment was opposed to the idea that a third visitant had made application at the door of the deserted house. A few, however, adhered to this new marvel, and even declared that a red gleam like that of a torch had shone through the great front window, as if the negro were lighting a guest up the staircase. This, too, was pronounced a mere fantasy.

But at once the whole multitude started, and each man beheld his own terror painted in the faces of all the rest.

"What an awful thing is this!" cried they.

A shriek, too fearfully distinct for doubt, had been heard within the mansion, breaking forth suddenly and succeeded by a deep stillness, as if a heart had burst in giving it utterance. The people knew not whether to fly from the very sight of the house or to rush trembling in and search out the strange mystery. Amid their confusion and affright they were somewhat reassured by the appearance of their clergyman, a venerable patriarch, and equally a saint, who had taught them and their fathers the way to heaven for more than the space of an ordinary lifetime. He was a reverend figure with long white hair upon his shoulders, a white beard upon his breast, and a back so bent over his staff that he seemed to be looking downward continually, as if to choose a proper grave for his weary frame. It was some time before the good old man, being deaf and of impaired intellect, could be made to comprehend such portions of the affair as were comprehensible at all. But when possessed of the facts, his energies assumed unexpected vigor.

"Verily," said the old gentleman, "it will be fitting that I enter the mansion-house of the worthy Colonel Fenwicke, lest any harm should have befallen that true Christian woman whom ye call the 'Old Maid in the Winding-Sheet.'"

Behold, then, the venerable clergyman ascending the steps of the mansion with a torch-bearer behind him. It was the elderly man who had spoken to the Old Maid, and the same who had afterward explained the shield of arms and recognized the features of the negro. Like their predecessors, they gave three raps with the iron hammer.

"Old Cæsar cometh not," observed the priest. "Well, I wot he no longer doth service in this mansion."

"Assuredly, then, it was something worse in Old Cæesar's likeness," said the other adventurer.

"Be it as God wills," answered the clergyman. "See! my strength, though it be much decayed, hath sufficed to open this heavy door. Let us enter and pass up the staircase."

Here occurred a singular exemplification of the dreamy state of a very old man's mind. As they ascended

the wide flight of stairs the aged clergyman appeared to move with caution, occasionally standing aside, and oftener bending his head, as it were in salutation, thus practising all the gestures of one who makes his way through a throng. Reaching the head of the staircase, he looked around with sad and solemn benignity, laid aside his staff, bared his hoary locks, and was evidently on the point of commencing a prayer.

"Reverend sir," said his attendant, who conceived this a very suitable prelude to their further search, "would it not be well that the people join with us in prayer?"

"Well-a-day!" cried the old clergyman, staring strangely around him. "Art thou here with me, and none other? Verily, past times were present to me, and I deemed that I was to make a funeral prayer, as many a time heretofore, from the head of this staircase. Of a truth, I saw the shades of many that are gone. Yea, I have prayed at their burials, one after another, and the Old Maid in the Winding-Sheet hath seen them to their graves."

Being now more thoroughly awake to their present purpose, he took his staff and struck forcibly on the floor, till there came an echo from each deserted chamber, but no menial to answer their summons. They, therefore, walked along the passage, and again paused, opposite to the great front window, through which was seen the crowd in the shadow and partial moonlight of the street beneath. On the right hand was the open door of a chamber, and a closed one on their left.

The clergyman pointed his cane to the carved oak panel of the latter.

"Within that chamber," observed he, "a whole lifetime since, did I sit by the death-bed of a goodly young man who, being now at the last gasp——"

Apparently there was some powerful excitement in the ideas which had now flashed across his mind. He snatched the torch from his companion's hand, and threw open the door with such sudden violence that the flame was extinguished, leaving them no other light than the moonbeams which fell through two windows into the spacious chamber. It was sufficient to discover all that could be known. In a high-backed oaken armchair, upright, with her hands clasped across her breast and her head thrown back, sat the Old Maid in the Winding-Sheet. The stately dame had fallen on her knees with her forehead on the holy knees of the Old Maid, one hand upon the floor and the other pressed convulsively against her heart. It clutched a lock of hair—once sable, now discolored with a greenish mold.

As the priest and layman advanced into the chamber the Old Maid's features assumed such a semblance of shifting expression that they trusted to hear the whole mystery explained by a single word. But it was only the shadow of a tattered curtain waving betwixt the dead face and the moonlight.

"Both dead!" said the venerable man. "Then who shall divulge the secret? Methinks it glimmers to and fro in my mind like the light and shadow across the Old Maid's face. And now 'tis gone!"

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The Eyrie

(Continued from page 6)

sure it is not he, after all, who is the very first-rankest one of all, much as I admire Lovecraft and now and then one or two others.''

From Huntington Park, California, writes Barbara Ross in a letter to the Eyrie: ''Having read your really unique magazine since 1923, I feel that it is about time that I wrote to you, this being my first letter, to tell you how much I enjoy your magazine. When I began to read it I was only sixteen. I was staying with a girl friend of mine at the time, and her husband happened to bring a copy home. They went out that night, and I thought I'd have a peaceful evening alone, reading. Well, the evening was not peaceful and I wasn't alone, but I enjoyed it nevertheless. I never will forget how scared I was, so much so that I couldn't get up to turn off the light, just had to sit there and wait till my friends came home. That was some night! Since then I just simply can't do without WEIRD TALES at all—I just wait for the first of each month to hurry and come around. My favorite character is Jules de Grandin—don't ever stop letting us hear about him. I have followed him from the very beginning—when he first meets Trowbridge, you know—and I feel that he is 'my very good friend.' So keep him with us, please.''

Readers, what is your favorite story in this issue? The most popular stories in the May issue, as shown by your votes, were Edmond Hamilton's interstellar epic, *Within the Nebula,* and Bertram Russell's tale of a doom from the animal kingdom menacing the world, *The Scourge of B'Moth.*

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The Corpse-Master

(Continued from page 26)

even the strongest sorcery can not transcend. The poor, dead *zombie* must be fed, for if it were not so, he could not continue to serve the purpose of his execrable master. But he must be fed only certain things. If he taste salt or meat, though but the tiniest bit of either be concealed in a great quantity of food, he comes to a realization of his own deadness and goes back to his grave, nor can all the magic of his owner stay him from returning for one little second. Furthermore, when once he goes back, he is forever after dead—truly dead—and not to be again raised by any magic incantation, for Death which has so long been cheated at once reasserts his mastery, and putrefaction, which was stayed during the *zombie's* period of servitude, takes place quickly, so that the *zombie* dead six months, if it returns to its grave and touches its hand to the earth, becomes at once like any other six-months-dead corpse—a mass of corruption, not pretty to the sight or pleasant to the nose, but preferable to the horrid dead-alive thing it was a moment before.

"Consider, then: The steward of the Rangers' Club told me of the awful tales this Monsieur Wallagin was wont to tell so boastfully—tales, said he, which made the hair to rise and the flesh to creep—and when I pressed him for an explanation, he told me that Wallagin had bragged that he had been a *zombie*-maker, a corpse-master in black Haiti, and that the mysteries of *Papa Nebo, Gouédé Mazacca* and *Gouédé Oussou,* those dread oracles of the dead, were an open book to him.

"'So, Monsieur Wallagin,' I say, 'I damn suspect you have been up to the business of the monkey here in this so pleasant State of New Jersey. You have, it would seem, brought here the black mysteries of Haiti, and with them you wreak vengeance on those you hate, *n'est-ce-pas?*'

"Thereupon I take my way to his house and wait beyond his gate in hope something will transpire. It does. It is a little, so small Chinaman who has been discharged from this Wallagin's employ.

"For why? *Because he had put salt in the soup this Wallagin serves to his four guests!*

"'Four guests?' I say. 'I had not thought there were so many.'

"'*Nom d'un nom,* yes,' the *Chinois* tell me. 'There are one man and three so lovely women in that house, and all seem sleeping most of the time, save in the dark of night, when he has the women dance for his delight, and calls the men to witness the performance. Sometimes, too, he sends the men abroad at evening. It is at night he feeds them the soup without salt or meat which are not fit for a mangy dog to lap.'

"'Oh, excellent young man of China, oh, paragon of all Celestials,' I tell him, 'you are truly of much assistance to me. Behold, I give you much money; come with me and we shall hire another cook for this Monsieur Wallagin the damned, and we shall bribe him well to smuggle a so small piece of meat into the soup which he shall prepare for those four "guests." Salt the monster might easily detect when he tastes the soup before it are served, but a little, tiny bit of meat would pass unnoticed by his palate. Nevertheless, it will do sufficiently for my purposes.'

"*Voilà,* my friends, there is the explanation of this night's so dreadful scenes."

"But what are we going to do?" I demanded. "You can't arrest this Wallagin. No court on earth would believe your story long enough to try him."

"Do *you* believe it, my friend?" de Grandin addressed Costello.

"Sure, an' I do," the other returned. "Ain't I seen it wid me own eyes?"

"Perfectly. And what would you say this so monstrous Wallagin's punishment should be?"

"Ouch, Dr. de Grandin, sor, is it kiddin' me ye are? Sure, what would I do if I seen a poison snake runnin' across th' road as I was walkin' down th' street wid a jolly bit o' blackthorne in me hand?"

"*Précisément,*" de Grandin agreed. "Are you willing?" His fierce, uncompromising glance caught and held the Irishman's eyes a moment; then, as a light of understanding dawned in Costello's face, he thrust out his slender, womanishly small hand and lost it in the depths of the detective's great fist.

"*Très bon,* we are arrived; let us do what is to be done quickly," de Grandin announced as I drew up before the Wallagin gate.

Without ceremony we marched up the garden path, turned the handle of the front door and hurried down the wide central hall of the big house.

Wallagin sat, or rather squatted, at ease on the pile of cushions in the superheated room in which we had witnessed the dance of the dead a half-hour or so before. As we entered he raised supercilious, faintly amused eyebrows.

"Ah, Dr. de Grandin," he greeted affably, "I've been rather expecting a visit from you—*and* Sergeant Costello. I've heard you gentlemen had paid me the compliment of prying into my poor affairs. Pray be seated—if you can so far debase yourselves as to repose on the floor. Unfortunately, I possess no chairs."

"*Monsieur*"—there was more pity in the eyes of a hungry cat regarding a mouse than in the gaze de Grandin bent on the sneering toad-man—"we are come to settle a reckoning with

you—*parbleu,* a reckoning which is exceedingly long overdue!''

''So-o?'' the other drawled. ''Just how do you propose going about it, if I may be pardoned the curiosity? Let us suppose I admit everything you charge—assume I agree that I raised Gyp Carson from his grave to —er—eliminate the Clark brat and that sniveling old fool of an Evans and that pious hypocrite, Wolkof? What of it? Let us go a step further; suppose I admit bringing Clark's slut of a wife from the grave, together with Evans' niece and Wolkof's sister, and confess I made them my—er —let us say playthings? What can you do? No grand jury would give your story a moment's credence; they'd never bring in a true bill against me. If they did, no petit jury would convict me on such a fantastic story. This is the Twentieth Century, and we are in practical, hard-headed America, my dear sir. They stopped hanging witches here in 1692, you know. If I confess everything in open court it will simply be taken as sure proof of my mental derangement. I *might* be confined in an asylum for a time, but I'd have small difficulty in persuading the doctors I'd regained my reason within a few months, and in less than a year I should again be free. No, no, my clever friend; I'm just a bit too sharp to be taken in your trap. You're stalemated before you begin to play, I fear.''

He turned his fat, voluptuous, unspeakably evil grin on each of us in turn, then continued tauntingly: ''Suppose I surrender myself to you, Sergeant Costello. You're an officer of the law and can't very well use violence on a prisoner who expresses his willingness to accompany you. Come, take me to the station house and tell the story of my confession to the lieutenant—you'll be kicked off the force for drunkenness on duty tomorrow morning, if you do. You might ask your clever French friend how he managed to smuggle the meat into my pets' soup before we go, however. I assume that, with his Latin freedom from scruples, he resorted to bribery and corruption of my cook? They do such things in Paris, I understand.''

Again he faced de Grandin, smiling contemptuously. ''This scheme of things would seem to require the preachers' fiery hell for adjustment, *cher docteur,*'' he remarked pleasantly. ''Earthly justice seems pitifully inadequate to the occasion, *n'est-ce-pas?*''

''*Monsieur,*'' de Grandin assured him, speaking in a low, even monotone, ''this business will be adjusted here and now; make no mistake.

''Trowbridge, my friend,'' he turned to me, ''I regret that I must request you to leave us for a little time. Your Saxon stomach could not stand that which is about to be enacted here. Await us with the car, if you will, good friend. Meantime, Sergeant Costello and I have that to do which will admit of small delay. Are you ready, *Sergent?*''

From inside his jacket he drew a bundle of slender sticks, no thicker than match stems, but about six inches in length. ''You have undoubtlessly traveled in China, *Monsieur?*'' he asked pleasantly, regarding Wallagin with a smile. ''You recognize these and know the excellent use to which we propose putting them, *hein?*''

Something like terror showed in the livid, unhealthy face of the seated man. ''Surely,'' he began, ''surely you won't resort to—Sergeant Costello, I appeal to you as an officer of the law—I'm under your protection as an arrested prisoner. Mercy, man, save me!—save me from——''

''Dr. Trowbridge, sor,'' the Sergeant turned to me, ''would ye be so kind as to keep this bit o' joolery for me till I join yez at th' gate? 'Tis a favor I'd be grateful for.'' From the underside of his coat lapel he detached the blue-enamel-and-gold shield of his office and handed it to me. ''Now, my bye,'' he turned to

face Wallagin once more, "I'm right *wid* ye!"

I HAVE seen more pity depicted on the faces of torturers of the Inquisition in mediæval paintings than appeared in de Grandin's and Costello's features as they wheeled with one accord and advanced on their cringing, whimpering prisoner. Without a second look I turned and hastened from the room, nor did I slacken my hurried walk till I reached the car and clambered into my seat behind the steering-wheel.

Once I heard a horrid, thick-voiced scream from the house behind me, but it died almost as quickly as it came. After that, for what seemed eternity, there was ominous silence.

At last de Grandin and Costello emerged from the big dwelling, both serious-faced, but with an expression of grim satisfaction on their countenances.

"Well, Dr. de Grandin, sor," the sergeant remarked as he retrieved his shield from my custody and pinned it to his coat once more, "I shouldn't much wonder if that's another mysterious suicide th' force'll be raked over th' coals for not explainin'. Eh?"

"*Tiens,* it was a most unpleasant task, but I can vouch that it was well done," the little Frenchman answered. "*Ah bah,* I have the vilely unpleasant taste in my mouth, *cher Sergent.* Come, we shall both be the better for a pint of brandy apiece."

The Wishing-Well

(Continued from page 34)

been taken ill. She knew that the power she had absorbed into her when she embraced that spectral horror by the wishing-well was being drained out of her by some vaster potency, which, vampirelike, was drinking up her own vitality as well. She had been quite conscious all day, but often she had seen, waveringly, like the flame of a candle blown this way and that in the draft, the dim semblance of the shrouded figure round which she had cast her welcoming arms. It seemed to be still attached to her by some band of filmy whiteness and to be incomplete, but about the hour of sunset she saw that the specter stood by her bed, fully formed and severed from her. The face was now deeply pitted by corruption, and it floated away from her and drifted out of the window. She was left here, human once more, but sick unto death.

She remembered how she had written Steven's name, and dedicated him to the power of the wishing-well. Yet what had come of that? For the last week now Steven had brought the morning's milk, hale and handsome, with inquiries about her from his mother. Could it be, she questioned with herself, that she had failed in some point of the damnable ritual, and that what she had written was active not for his doom but for hers? It would be wise to destroy that slip of paper, if she could only get to it, not because she had ceased to wish him evil, but from the fear that it was her vitality that was being drained from her on that fruitless purpose.

She got out of bed, giddy with weakness, and managed to get into a skirt and jersey, and slip her feet into her shoes. The house was quiet, and step by step she struggled downstairs and to the door. The wholesome wind off the sea put a little life into her, and she shuffled along the strip of turf down which she had danced and capered, which lay between the lich-gate and the well. She passed round the screen of bushes, and there, on the stone bench, was Steven's mother. She rose as Judith appeared and curtsied.

"Aw, dear, why you look poorly indeed, Miss Judith," she said. "Is it wise of you to come out? To the wishing-well, too: there have been strange doings here."

"Oh, I'll be mending soon," said Judith. "A drink from the wishing-well was what I fancied."

She knelt down on the curb, leaning one hand against the wall of the well, while with the other she felt among the ferns that fringed it. There was the slip of paper she had hidden, and she drew it forth.

"Take your drink, then, Miss Judith," said Mrs. Penarth. "Why, whatever have you found? That's a queer thing to have gotten! A slip of paper, is it? Open it, dear soul: maybe there's some good news in it."

Judith crushed it up in her hand: there was no need for her to look, and even as she knelt there, she felt a sweet lightening and cooling of her fever come over her.

Mrs. Penarth shot out her hand at her.

"Open it, you slut, you paltry witch!" she screamed. "Do my bidding!"

Judith opened it, and read her own name written there. She tried to rise to her feet; she swayed and staggered and fell forward into the wishing-well. It was very deep, and the sides of it were slippery with slime and water-moss. Once she caught at the step on which she had knelt, but her fingers failed to grasp it, and she sank. Once after that she rose, and there came a roaring in her ears, and to her eyes a blackness, and down her throat there poured the cool water of the wishing-well.

The Death Touch

(Continued from page 48)

crew was—and past them unmolested. Now he was in the passage beyond. We rushed after him and were at the bottom of the cave entrance when he plunged into the white, frozen Antarctic. Gaining the top, we saw him wading through the snow.

"He'll make for the ship! Cut him off!" cried Priest.

I could not answer. The sudden cold, after the dank tropical heat, froze my throat. I plowed on, watching that lumbering mass ahead of us. I could not have moved faster, nor could Priest.

But something was coming over Yardley. The swing was going out of his body and giving way to a stiffness. Bowed against the wind, he became all of one piece, as rigid as stone. His legs moved with no roll to them but only a mechanical jerkiness, and they were lagging presently. We were able to gain on him.

Where the hills sank to the bay on our left, he did not turn. We could see the ship now, but he did not see it or turn his head to find it. He kept on past it. I crept up closer, until that great hole in his shoulder was plainly visible, white as leprosy.

At the last I yelled at him, and Priest flung his broken knife and hit him in the back. There was no response. He kept on at that mechanical gait, on—on—on. . . . I laughed and stopped Priest.

"Can't you see? He's frozen!" I said. "He doesn't know what he's doing. He'll go on and on until——"

Priest's bloodshot eyes met mine. "Until what?" he demanded.

I had no answer. Until he was dead? Let electrical science explain how he was alive at all. But electrical science would never know.

"There's maybe half a crew to save," I said, and turned around.

But we were held there in spite of

ourselves, our eyes on that single moving thing in all the vast motionlessness. It dwindled to the size of a penguin and then to a mere speck. Beyond it was nothing but polar silence.

The Haunted Forest

By EDITH HURLEY

There is a forest deep and dark,
  Where never sunbeam strays;
Untraveled are its winding paths,
  And all untrod its ways.

And there are dusky violets
  In little, silent dells,
And a dim cave within a rock
  Where Pan, the goat-god, dwells.

And in one still and hidden spot
  There is a crystal pool;
Serene its surface as a glass,
  And weirdly beautiful.

No wind disturbs those ancient trees,
  And nothing living stirs;
For broken are the shrines of Pan,
  And gone his worshipers.

Yet on some mystic nights in May,
  Safe from the eyes of man,
Above a strange wind's crying,
  Long call the pipes of Pan.

And from the hills and hollows
  The fairy people come,
With flute and lute and viol
  And beat of tiny drum.

Near by the pool's green edges
  They dance the long hours through,
And golden is the moonlight,
  And silver is the dew.

Their songs are all sung softly,
  And gently do they tread;
For lo, the place is haunted
  By ghosts of men long dead.

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Just A Twist Of The Wrist

Banishes Old-Style Can Openers to the Scrap Heap and BRINGS AGENTS $6 to $8 IN AN HOUR

WOMEN universally detest the old-style can opener. Yet in every home in the land cans are being opened with it, often several times a day. Imagine how thankfully they welcome this new method—this automatic way of doing their most distasteful job. With the Speedo can opening machine you can just put the can in the machine, turn the handle, and almost instantly the job is done.

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You undoubtedly know what a nasty, dangerous job it is to open cans with the old-fashioned can opener. You have to hack your way along slowly—ripping a jagged furrow around the edge. Next thing you know, the can opener slips. Good night! You've torn a hole in your finger. As liable as not it will get infected and stay sore a long time. Perhaps even your life will be endangered from blood poisoning!

You may be lucky enough to get the can open without cutting yourself. But there's still the fact to consider that the ragged edge of tin left around the top makes it almost impossible to pour out all of the food. Yet now, all this trouble, waste and danger is ended. No wonder salesmen everywhere are finding this invention a truly revolutionary money maker!

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June 13, 60 Speedos;
June 20, 84 Speedos;
June 30, 192 Speedos;
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M. Ornoff, Va.

PART TIME
14 Sales in 2 Hours

J. J. Corwin, Ariz., says "Send more order books. I sold first 14 orders in 2 hours."

SPARE TIME
Big Money Spare Time

Barb, W. Va., says: "Was only out a few evenings and got 20 orders."

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The Speedo holds the can—opens it flips up the lid so you can grab it—and gives you back the can without a drop spilled, without any rough edges to snag your fingers—all in a couple of seconds! It's so easy even a 10-year-old child can do it in perfect safety! No wonder women—and men, too—simply go wild over it! No wonder Speedo salesmen often sell to every house in the block and make up to $10.00 an hour.

Generous Free Test Offer

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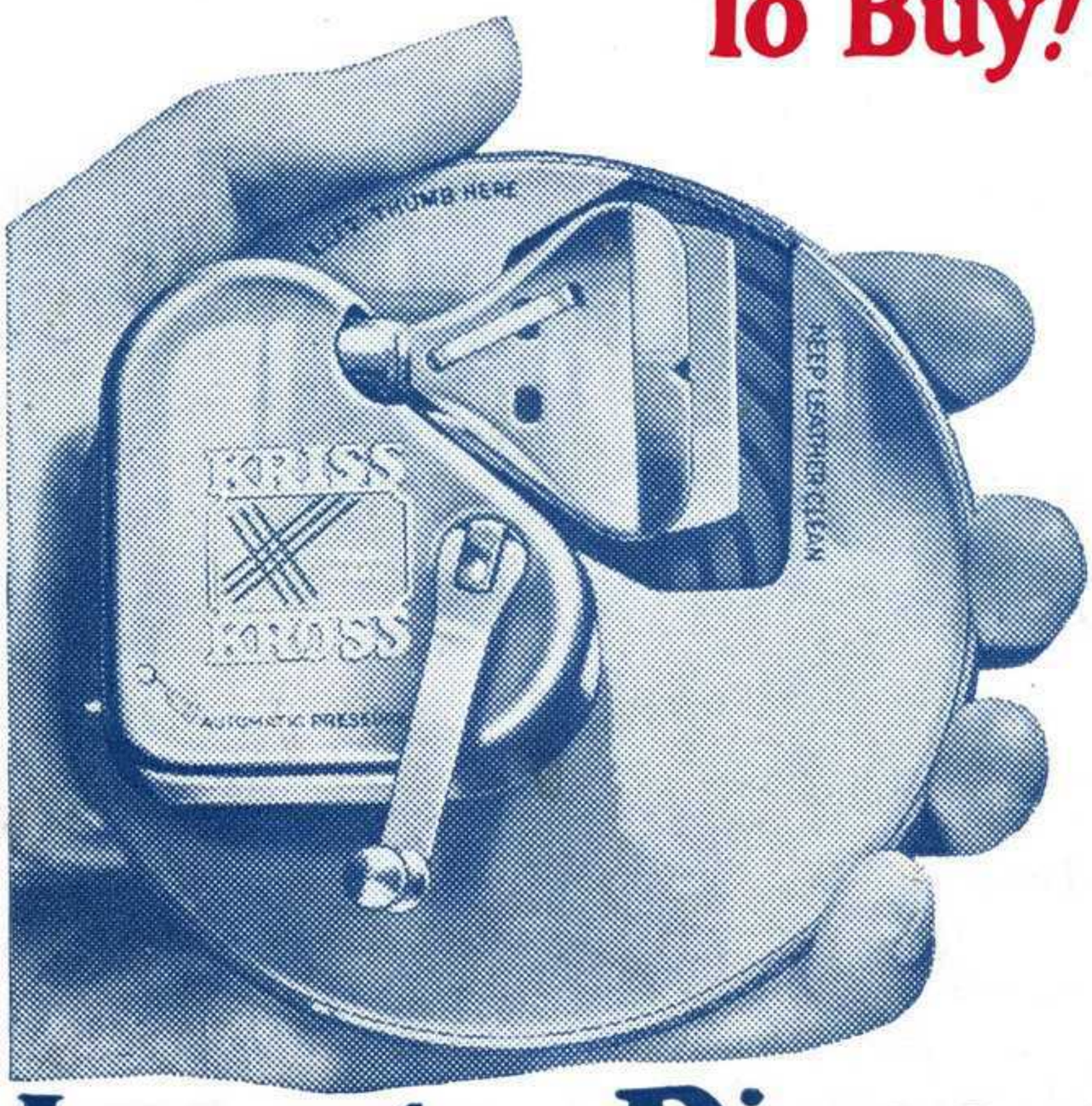

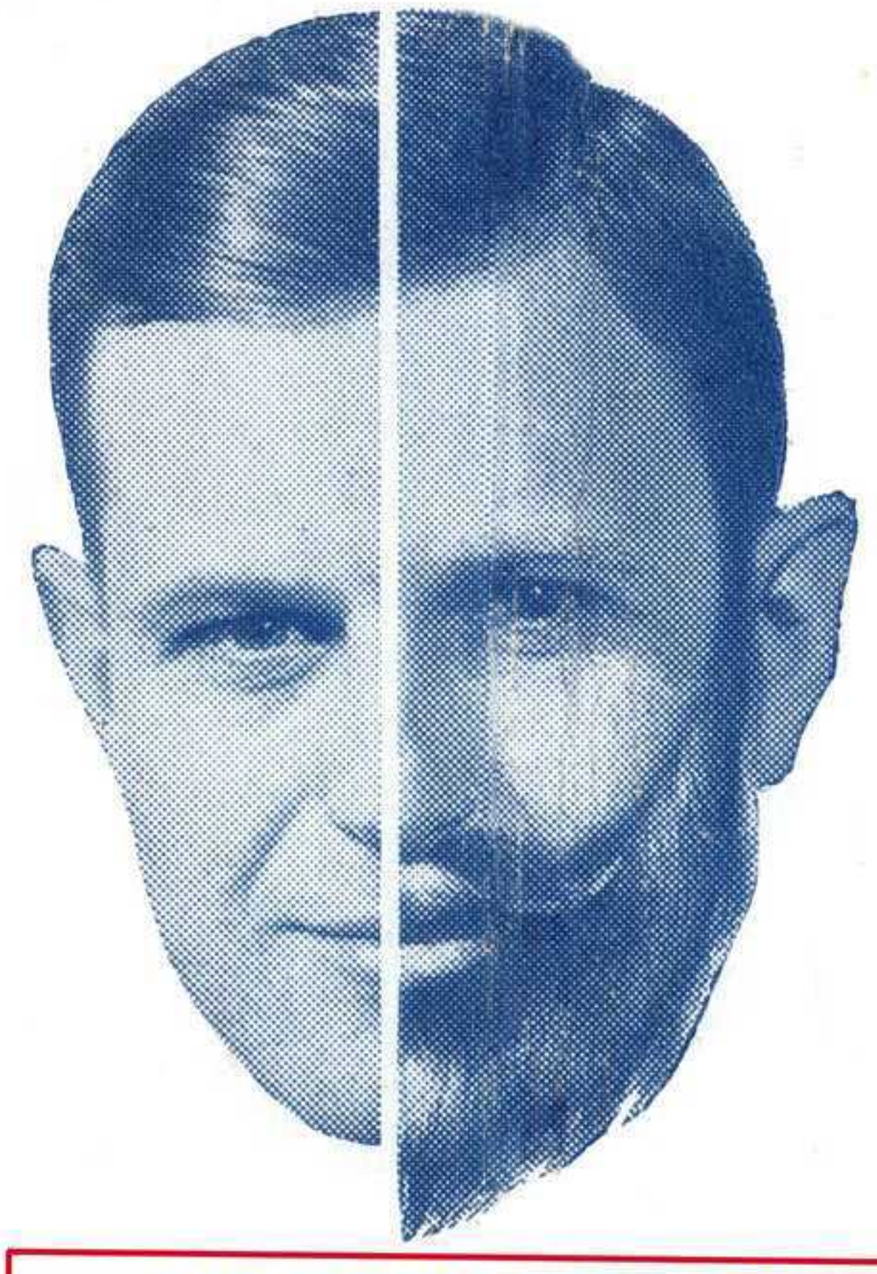

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And now for my surprising offer. To introduce KRISS-KROSS, I am giving with it Free a new kind of razor. Possesses remarkable features. Instantly adjustable to any shaving position. A flip of the finger makes it (1) T-Shape; (2) straight (old style); (3) or diagonal (new way). Gives a *sliding* instead of *pulling* stroke. Simply zips right through the toughest crop of whiskers. Made of *rustless* metal. Comes with 5 special-process blades and is entirely unlike anything you ever saw before!

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