AUGUST, 1929

Weird Tales

The Unique Magazine

WEIRD TALES
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Vol. XIV, No. 2 25c

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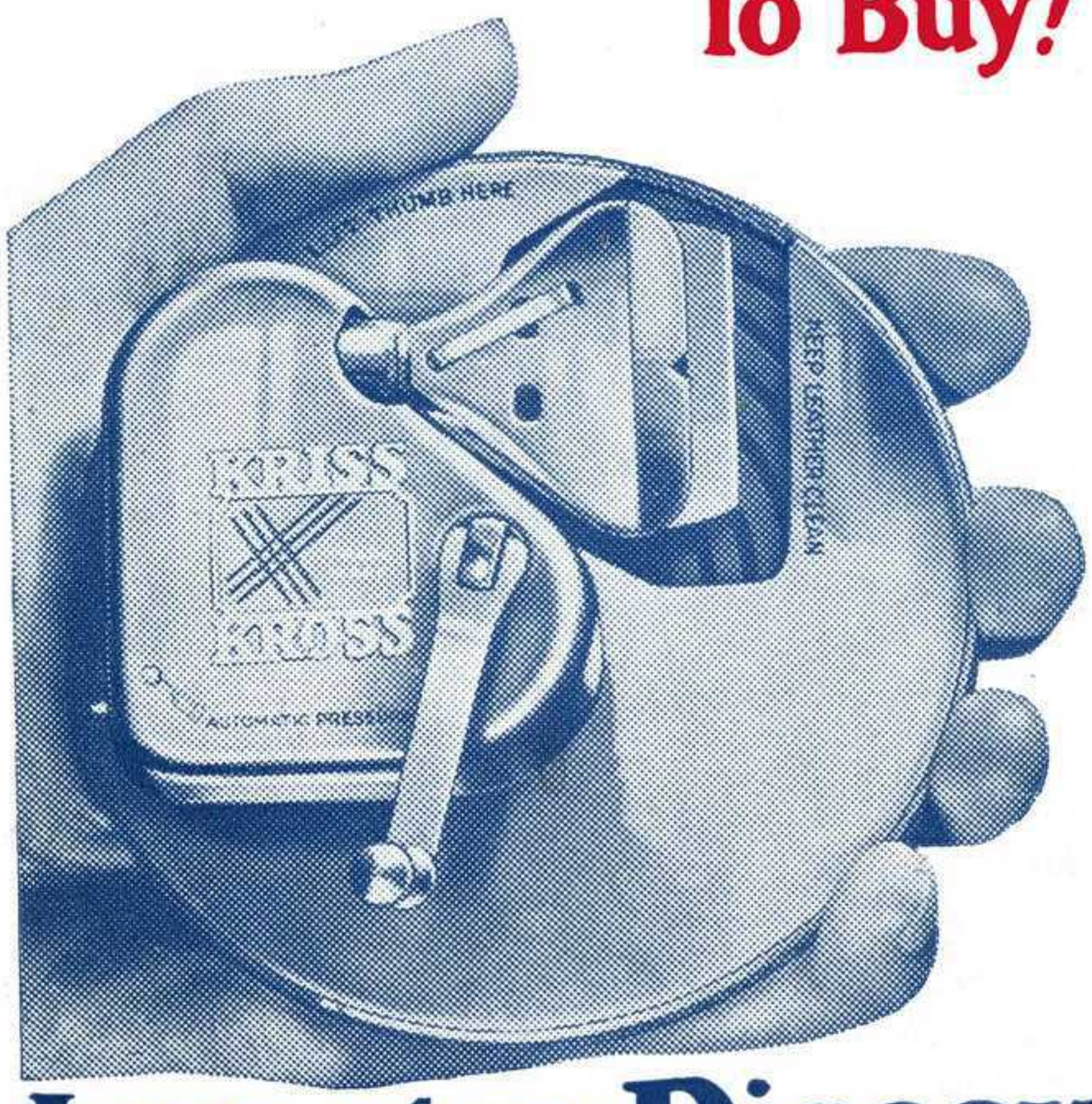

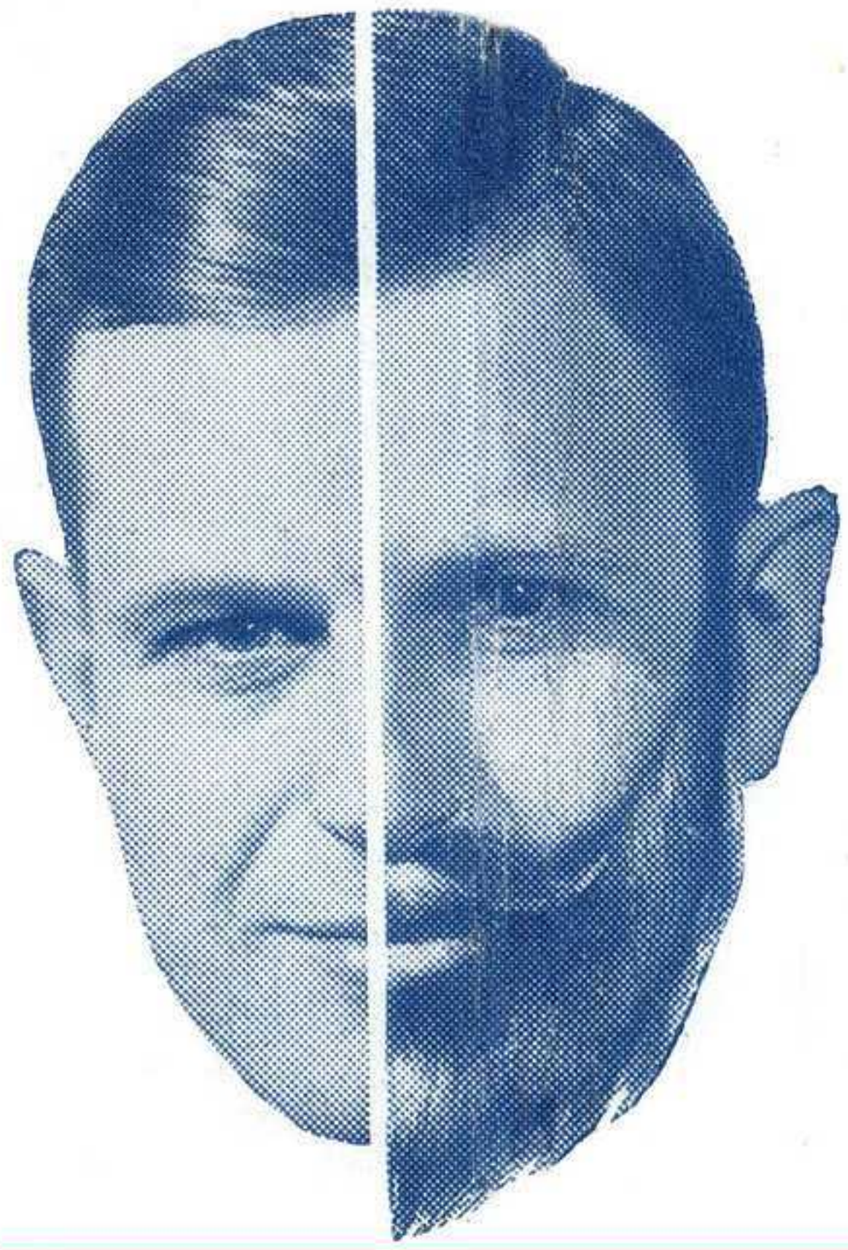

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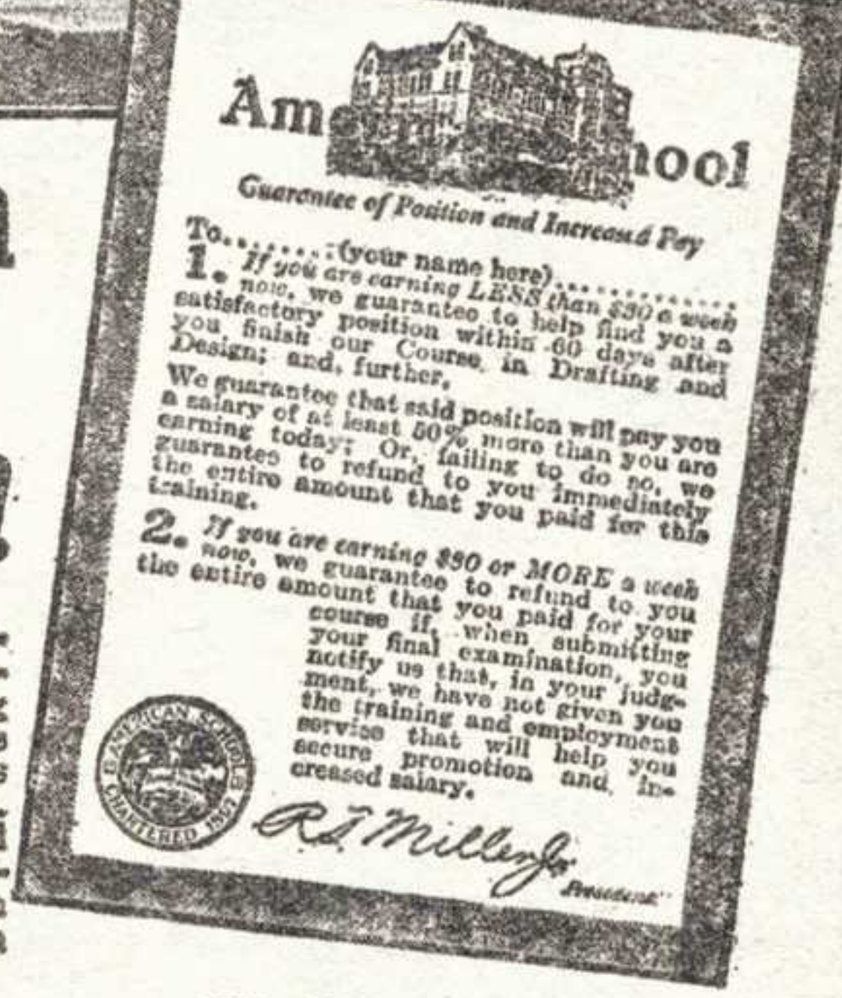

"Only-one other man and I, of six taking California State Board examination for Architect passed. Then I realized the thorough and practical training given by American School. In 18 months I have gone from tracer to Chief Draftsman, in charge of all architectural and engineering work in one of the oldest offices here." R. L. WARREN, Los Angeles, Calif.

"When I started American School training in the Spring of 1915 I was working 14 hours a night, seven nights a week for $1.83 a night. That Fall I got a job in the Engineering Dept. of a large firm near here. Today I work 5½ days a week and my salary is larger than I ever dreamed of when I began that course in Mechanical Drafting." B. H. SEAVERNS, South Bend, Ind.

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Age.....Occupation.....

Weird Tales

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A MAGAZINE of the BIZARRE and UNUSUAL

VOLUME XIV NUMBER 2

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FARNSWORTH WRIGHT, Editor.

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PRAISE is still coming in from the readers of WEIRD TALES for Bertram Russell's strange story in the May issue, *The Scourge of B'Moth*. The following two letters are samples of the enthusiasm aroused by the tale.

Writes Mrs. F. B. Marshall, of Fort Wayne, Indiana: "I can not let the May issue go by without a word of commendation for this splendid collection of stories. Bertram Russell in this issue easily tops Lovecraft. *The Scourge of B'Moth* has, in my opinion, everything that a weird tale should have. It is spine-chilling from start to finish, but although weird, never makes the reader stop with a smile and say, 'The writer has overreached here; this does not ring true.' The sense of complete reality and plausibility is never lost. By all means prevail upon Mr. Russell to give us, if possible, a story in each issue."

Ethelle Stevens, of Syracuse, New York, writes to the Eyrie: "I am not a regular subscriber to WEIRD TALES, but the other day, by chance, I glanced through your May issue. The first story in the book, *The Scourge of B'Moth*, by Bertram Russell, drew my attention. I read it and found it an extremely weird and interesting tale. In fact it was so interesting that I was ten minutes late at the office. Mr. Russell surely 'knows his stuff' when it comes to holding his readers in suspense. It has been some time since I have read such a breath-taking story. So from now on I resolve to read WEIRD TALES regularly, and the entire office force request that you give us more and more stories by Bertram Russell. We'll all be waiting for them."

E. L. Mengshoel, of Minneapolis, writes to the Eyrie: "It was with a certain amount of satisfaction that I learnt in your last issue that Lovecraft's *The Dunwich Horror* had been given the majority of votes for the best story in the April number. Satisfaction, because I would myself have given that one my vote, if I had voted, and, moreover, I find cause to be less pessimistic about the literary taste and imaginative faculties of the average reader of your magazine. *That* story was worthy of a Poe. In fact, I have never read anything from Lovecraft's pen that was not something out of the ordinary, something rendered in a vivid, fascinating manner by a genius of extraor-

(Continued on page 150)

Was It Some Strange Phantom Whispering Through the Ether in the Language of Another Planet ?

Strange and ghostly signals were being picked up out of the ether. What were these weird whispers? What happened when science became fully aware of the existence of some new and sinister—or at least unfathomed—force in the world? The solution is thrillingly narrated 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.

Tremendously Popular

THE MOON TERROR was such a thrilling story that the entire reserve stock of the issue containing the first part was sold out on special orders to those who were not fortunate enough to start the story from the beginning, but began to read it with the second installment. It narrates the sensational attempt of a group of Chinese scientists to obtain rulership of the world by a tremendous threat against the very existence of the earth. The diabolical methods by which they put their scheme into execution, the frantic race across the ocean to circumvent them, the weird and exciting adventures that befell, make one of the most gripping and fascinating novels ever written.

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This book will make a valuable addition to your library collection. It is beautifully bound in rich blue cloth with attractive orange-colored jacket.

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(Continued from page 148)

dinary invention and powerful imagination. He very nearly persuades even a matter-of-fact sort of person to take his yarns for facts. By the way, I would like to ask him if there has not really existed an old work of writing named the *Necronomicon*, which is mentioned in *The Dunwich Horror*. On the whole, the W. T. is growing more and more indispensable to me at least. It is a refreshment compared to the mass of literary farce that we are treated to in the other magazines."

"I am an ardent reader of WEIRD TALES," writes Charles A. Rinschler, of Cincinnati, "and wish to state that I enjoy your stories very much, especially scientific fiction of interplanetary space and highly imaginative stories of the little known regions of our own planet. The first installment of *The Last of the Mayas* is a great imaginative story that has a ring of truth to it, and here's hoping you will publish more like it."

Edwin Meyers, of Oakland, California, writes to the Eyrie: "I recently read *The Moon Terror*. It was a great story. Why not continue putting out books reprinted from your magazine? My favorite author is, of course, Seabury Quinn. My friend and I commute to San Francisco to work and spend many hours of our daily rides on the ferry discussing Jules de Grandin. That little 'Frog' is the greatest character any author ever created. I remember one story in particular, about Jules de Grandin, that appeared about two years ago. It was called *The White Lady of the Orphanage*. For sheer horror and amazement it could not be beaten."

L. H. Hardingham, of San Francisco, suggests: "Why don't you inaugurate a department, and call it *The Philosopher's Stone, The Alchemist, The Alchemist's Corner*, or some name like that, that would appease the insatiable desire of your readers for magic in some measure? It would deal with the whole field of magic, Saracenic, Greek, mediæval alchemy and so on. A correspondence could be carried on with the readers, who would fire in all sorts of questions relating to the weird beliefs of other centuries, and a comprehensive investigation could be made into the whole field of alchemy and mysticism in the course of a year or two. Quotations from Roger Bacon, Browne, Paracelsus, and hosts of others will furnish a realistic background, and their works can be interpreted in the light of modern science. I think it could be made one of the most fascinating features of the magazine."

Writes Philip Almond, of Vancouver, British Columbia: "I want to commend Seabury Quinn's *The House of Golden Masks* as an acceptable and exciting story. Those of this kind, girl-torture narratives, always appeal to the imagination (and that is the object of WEIRD TALES) and do not tax the reader's credulity, but thrill him. Quinn's older story, *The Man Who Cast No Shadow*, and Captain Eliot's *The Copper Bowl* were similar, and A-1 too. Let us have more (I noticed a lady urging this) and the ordeals can not be too

(Continued on page 280)

NEXT MONTH

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

Winged Vengeance

By B. Wallis

A strange little scarlet fly darted like a flash of fire through the air—then another, and another; and where they struck life was whipped out, and death and terror stalked.

Trespassing Souls

By Seabury Quinn

A devil-tale of Pontou, right-hand man of Gilles de Retz in his diabolical villainies; and of Lizette, his light-of-love—a weird adventure of Jules de Grandin.

The White Wizard

By Sophie Wenzel Ellis

A great scientist rifles the dead brains of the world's master-minds and thereby obtains super-knowledge and power—an uncanny weird-scientific novelette.

The Lips

By Henry S. Whitehead

A powerful story of a slave-ship in the West Indies, the brutality of the mate, and the savage hurt inflicted upon him by African witchcraft.

Automata

By S. Fowler Wright

A tale of the last man on Earth, when the Machine Age has triumphed, and soulless automata rule the world—by the author of "The Deluge."

A Jest and a Vengeance

By E. Hoffmann Price

A bizarre orientale breathing the witchery of the East—a story of the Dreamer of Atlanaat, and the Twelve Bearded Kings—by the author of "The Stranger from Kurdistan."

Outside the Universe

By Edmond Hamilton

The marvelous wonders of the Andromeda universe and its gaseous inhabitants are thrillingly described in the swift-moving chapters of next month's installment of this epochal weird-scientific serial.

The Mirrors of Tuzun Thune

By Robert E. Howard

Another weird tale of Kull the King, and Brule the Spear-slayer, and the ancient kingdom of Valusia—a fascinating, eery story by the author of "The Shadow Kingdom."

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

SEPTEMBER ISSUE ON SALE AUGUST 1

The INN of

"SPEAKING of women," said Chaulieu, "I would never wish any of you a honeymoon like the one I took with my first wife. Besides coming very close to losing our lives . . . But here's the story without any further preamble. On my return from Saigon, I asked headquarters for a furlough and took advantage of it to marry little Maria-Luce of Mourillon, as had been previously decided. Her father had died in Madagascar and she lived with her grandfather.

"We went to Switzerland on our honeymoon. It was my idea, because at heart I'm a staid fellow, a landlubber, and I hate adventures. If I was a sea captain for twenty years, it was simply to follow the family tradition and to please my parents, but the very thought of it in the beginning made me seasick.

"Well, there we were in Switzerland, my young bride and I, as in the days of Töppfer. We were very much in love, and . . . Have you ever been in Soleure?"

"I was married in Borneo," chuckled Dorat, the biggest wag in the party of old sea-dogs who spun their yarns on the terrace of the "Café of the Old Wet-Dock," in Toulon.

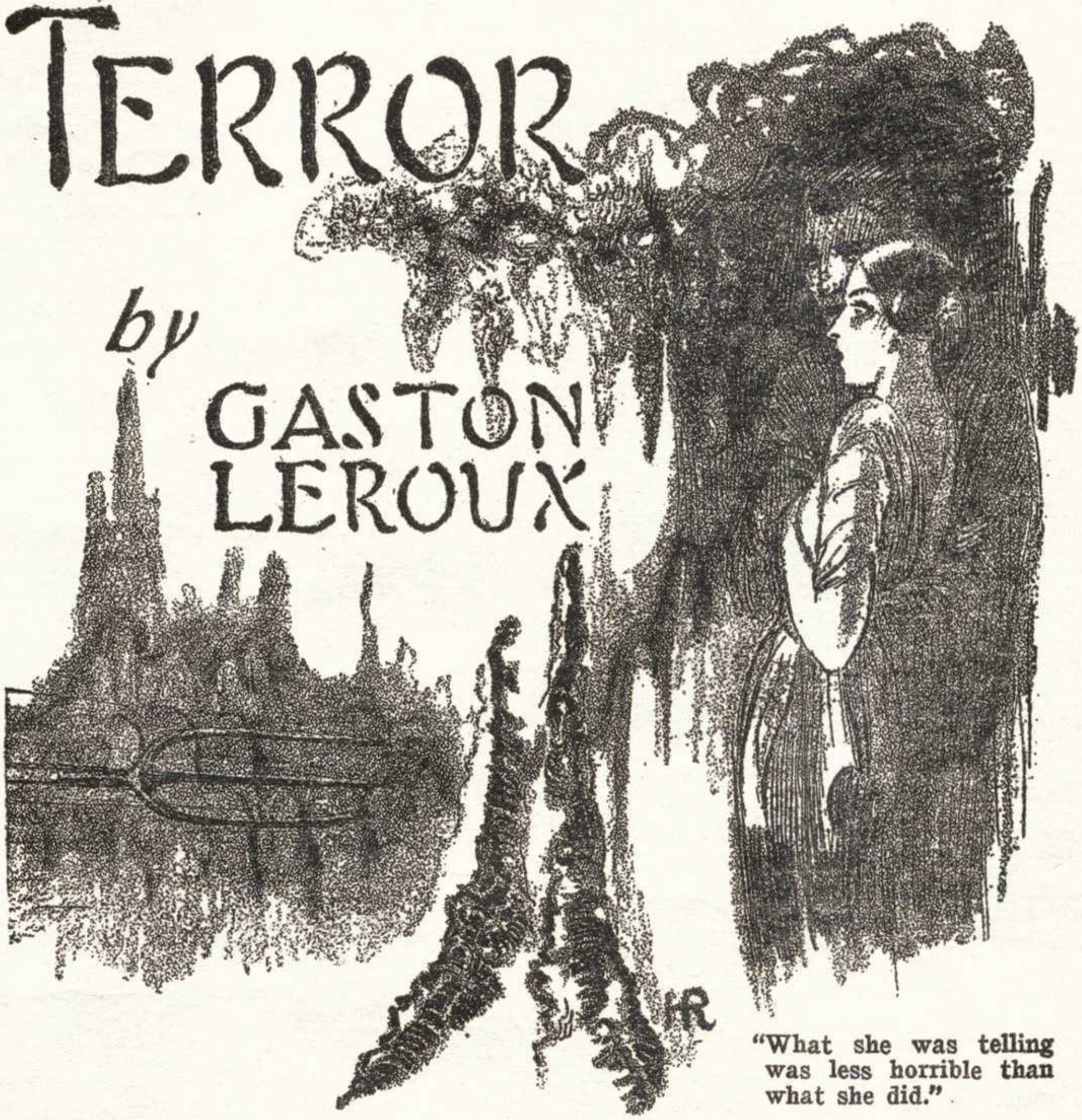
"I see. . . . Well, Soleure might be called the capital of French Switzerland—a long, quiet street with picture sign-boards swinging on their rods at the slightest puff of wind from the Wesseinstein.

"The Wesseinstein is one of the summits in the Jura mountains. It

Translated by Mildred Gleason Prochet.

TERROR

by GASTON LEROUX



"What she was telling was less horrible than what she did."

rises at the northwest of the town. More than one tourist has lost his way in the gorges and paths of the forest, and there are no hotels before reaching the summit, with the exception of one which at the time boasted a very sinister reputation.

"Two years before our trip, the town board had discovered, at the bottom of a well and in a near-by grotto, twelve skeletons and some objects belonging to travelers who had found a fatal hospitality there.

"The inquest in investigations brought to light the fact that the crimes had been committed by a couple who had so thoroughly terrorized the neighborhood that even the death of the two innkeepers, the dreadful Weisbachs — you may remember the story perhaps; it was in all the newspapers at the time—did not loosen any tongues. You see, a few old-timers in the mountains had suspected some of the goings-on; but Jean Weisbach had made it very clear that he did not care to have people meddling in his business, and they had let bad enough alone.

"The innkeepers had died quietly in their beds, in the end, rich and esteemed, as also did their factotum, one Daniel. When the mare's nest was discovered, the examining magistrates

were able after questioning hither and yon and forcing some stubborn old neighbors to speak, to reconstruct the crimes. The most important witness was an old woman with a goiter, who related certain horrible details which showed that, besides a grim greed for money, the Weisbachs had had a strain of sadism and cruelty in them that has rarely been exceeded.

"Naturally, this story was the chief topic of conversation in Soleure. The travelers, who were to go by coach to the peak of the Wesseinstein, to sleep in the hotel made famous by Napoleon, and from there go back into France through the Belfort gap, promised themselves by all means to stop for a drink, half-way up, at the 'Inn of Blood.' It had been called that as much because of the story as for the color it was painted. To stop there was one of the things planned in the trip up the mountain. While the driver gave the horses to drink, the tourists went inside to the bar and gossiped with the new proprietors. These two had been there only a year. Their predecessors, the immediate successors of the Weisbachs, had left the premises, as soon as the scandal broke, on the grounds that they were ruined. But the Scheffers, being shrewder, had said to themselves that there were plenty of fools in the world, whose curiosity would probably make them rich. Their reasoning had not been bad, if one could believe what was said in town. All the strangers now passing through Soleure wanted, of all things, to see the 'Inn of Blood,' and some even went so far as to sleep there.

"The weather was fine the day that Maria-Luce and I left for the Wesseinstein by diligence. We had had an excellent lunch and were prepared to enjoy a lovely drive, and live a few ideally romantic hours like a chapter from a novel. We had left our luggage in Soleure and were to return there for it. Maria-Luce had only a small hand-bag with her. Ah! we narrowly missed never returning to Soleure and also lived that romantic chapter of ours in a way we would never have wished! You will see why. . . .

"When I think of it! . . . Perhaps that is what killed my good little Maria-Luce! . . . She was so pretty, so gay, so full of life . . . with such a clear lovely skin, and cheeks like roses. Well, such is life—a never-tiring destroyer. . . . I often wonder why we are born at all. . . .

"Ah! we were in love! . . . I had hired the coupé of the stage-coach just for the two of us, so that we could be by ourselves and kiss when we felt like it, which was only natural after all!

"JUST as we were about to leave, a man and woman arrived on the scene . . . a handsome pair! . I'll never forget them as long as I live, and with reason. They were Italians: he, a big, handsome man, too handsome, in the thirties, with big, dark eyes like velvet, the kind of eyes they have in Italy and that make the signorinas lose their heads . . . flashing teeth, olive skin, clean-shaven and the appearance of an actor. He was one, in fact, a tenor who was already well-known and had had a brilliant success at La Scala in Milan . . . Antonio Ferretti as we learned later. . . . Amiable, jovial, in perfect health, he felt that he owned the world.

"His companion, who adored him openly with every look, was obviously his, body and soul. She was a young, ravishingly beautiful woman, as golden-haired as a Venetian, which she was, and belonging to the highest aristocracy. Her name belonged to history from that day on, judicial history, alas! . . . Countess Olivia Orsino. The handsome tenor had abducted her.

"I'm telling you all this at the start to get rid of it, so that you can understand the people at first sight, which

was more than we did; all we considered at the moment was the fact that an annoying couple wanted to join us in the coupé, under the pretense that the interior compartment of the coach was already practically full, and would even have driven us out if it had been possible. An argument ensued, of course; the handsome tenor's free and easy manner irritated me, and I was even more annoyed because I had been so pleased with the idea of just the two of us taking this little trip together. If he had been more polite, however, Antonio Ferretti would certainly have won his cause, because after all I'm not a roughneck, and as I said before, his companion was charming.

"Maria-Luce advised me to give in, but one word spoiled everything, something like 'damned savages, these French.' I slammed the door violently, and as I had already paid for the four seats I insisted on my right and they were obliged to sit with the others. As a matter of fact, if it annoyed them to travel by diligence they had only to rent a carriage, but it wasn't an easy thing in those days before automobiles to find horses and carriage to go up to the Wesseinstein. They had to be wagons specially built like the diligence, with a hanging rod always ready to grip the road in case of slipping back, which was always to be feared. If I have lingered over this incident it is because it assumed a terrible importance, alas! for some of us.

"Our drive started through a pretty little cut in the hills, fresh, wooded, resounding with rippling waters, and in which nestles a little retreat, famous in that neighborhood—it was that of Saint Venère, Verena Einsiedolei, if I'm not mistaken—with chapels, grottoes, overhanging rocks, and from time to time, beautiful blocks of Soleure marble which caught the sun and shone in great, blinding spots.

"Three hours later we were in the depths of the forest, far from any dwelling, and the sun had disappeared. Big clouds floated between us and the mountain peaks, and before long a black veil hid the entire valley. At the same time a dull noise like thunder rumbled down toward us; but it was not the thunder yet: it was a heavy sledge, loaded with wood, which tumbled down the road on its runners with overwhelming rapidity. A young boy, perched up on top, steered it.

"It was under the threat of a coming storm that we finally caught sight of the 'Inn of Blood.' In the livid light of the twilight, it was not a pleasant sight with its squat, thick walls, barred windows and the old, arched door, studded with iron, which led to the famous well. The whole was covered with a horrible, brownish paint which, it seems, is used on the arms of the guillotine.

"'Heavens, but it's ugly!' Maria-Luce cried, and it really must have been, for that afternoon, I can assure you, we were both in a mood to find everything lovely. We had not been bored with each other on the ride up! We had told each other stories, we had made plans for the future, and we had kissed to the health of our two Italians.

"JUST as the diligence stopped in front of this sinister dwelling, a regular torrent of rain, accompanied by flashes of lightning and great growls of thunder, came down. We rushed into the inn, or rather into an enormous kitchen at the end of which was a tremendous fireplace large enough to burn a tree. At the present moment, however, only an honest little fire of dried branches was crackling away, and above it in an honest little pot, hung from a pot-hook, boiled a beef stew which smelled excellent. Before us stood the innkeeper, round-bellied like a barrel, with a pleasant manner, small, twinkling eyes peering out from creases of fat,

and three chins, the tamest ogre in the world, all smiles.

"'Are you reassured?' I asked Maria-Luce.

"'Yes,' she answered, 'he won't have us cooked in that little pot, and he seems delighted! . . . But what weather!'

"As a matter of fact, the driver had unharnessed the horses and gotten them under shelter because he was beginning to worry about the equilibrium of the carriage under the repeated claps of thunder. I asked him how long we would be staying here.

"'An hour,' he answered. 'I'll be off again in an hour, no matter what the weather does!'

"I figured that we would arrive at the hotel at the Wesseinstein in the middle of the night, if we arrived at all, because the road skirted a precipice on the right. I came to a rapid decision, and Maria-Luce agreed with me; so, taking the innkeeper aside, I asked him if he had a room.

"'I have two,' the stout fellow answered, looking at me with a bantering twinkle in his eyes. 'You want to sleep here?'

"'Yes. Show me your rooms!'

"'If you'll just wait a moment until I have served the lady and gentleman in the drawing-room, I'll be at your service.'

"What he called the drawing-room was a small room off the kitchen, furnished with a round table covered with oil-cloth, four chairs, and a few prints of the battles of the First Empire hanging on the walls, which were whitewashed. Our two Italians had made for this luxurious and comfortable nook on leaving the coach, in order to escape from associations from which they had already suffered.

"When Scheffer, the innkeeper, opened the door which they had closed, I saw the handsome tenor at the window looking out at the landscape sadly. His companion was seated with her elbows on the table and did not seem any more cheerful.

"The innkeeper came back to us.

"'There are two more who want to sleep here! A drive in this rain doesn't attract them. You had better hurry about choosing your room, because, between you and me, there is only one decent one!'

"You can well imagine that I lost no time. We went up a stairway as steep as a ladder, that led on the left to the attic, which was directly over the kitchen, and on the right to a corridor which went to what was called 'the travelers' room.' This room was famous: it was here that almost all the murdered guests had slept.

"'You aren't afraid,' Scheffer chuckled, on opening the door; 'but then, of course, nowadays only honeymooners come here.'

"'That is true of us.'

"'Oh, then I won't worry about you,' he replied; 'you won't have any bad dreams! Have you any luggage?'

"'No, we left it at Soleure.'

"It seemed to me that this detail irritated him. That may have been an idea that I invented later. Later, I also remembered that he eyed Maria-Luce's bag, the jewels she wore, and even the big ring I wore, very keenly. But I won't swear to it. He did it very quickly before leaving us. Outside it was still pouring, but the thunder had stopped.

2

"IN THE fading light of the day, this room seemed a very peaceful retreat to us. It was large and clean, with light, flowered wall-paper; a big bed with white sheets, and an enormous red eider-down quilt, a comfortable Morris chair, the mantel decorated with bouquets of orange blossoms, under a glass globe, and two pictures taken from Monsieur de Chateaubriand's *Atala and the Last of the Abencérages*, the subject of which I explained to Maria-Luce.

"'We'll be very comfortable here,' she remarked, 'and if you were nice

you'd have a fire built on the hearth and we'd dine together in our room!'

"'Good idea. I'll go right down and tell our landlord.'

"'I'll come with you!' she cried. 'You're not going to leave me alone in this room!'

"'Ah! it bothers you just the same. . . .'

"'Heavens, yes, when I think——'

"'Very well, come along, and don't think!'

"We were at the head of the stairs in front of the door of the attic when we heard the Italian's voice.

"'But this isn't a room!' Antonio was exclaiming. 'It's a garret! It's a dirty hole! . . .'

"'It's the only thing I have to give you,' the innkeeper answered. 'I have already explained that my other room is taken!'

"The door opened and we found ourselves face to face with the two Italians and the innkeeper.

"'Ah, you again, signor!' the tenor exclaimed. 'You must admit that we are out of luck.'

"I could not stop a smile. I had caught sight of an iron bed in one corner of the attic which was stuffed with all the dull, rusty articles that one is accustomed to store in such places.

"'In fact,' I answered, 'this is not a very comfortable place to sleep in, especially when one is accustomed to a certain amount of luxury. Do you know what I would do in your place? Now that the coupé is free, I would leave with the diligence!'

"'He is right,' agreed the signora.

"'He is making fun of us!' the other muttered between his teeth.

"I saw that there might be trouble, so I carried Maria-Luce off and went back down into the large, public room of the inn.

"IN SPITE of the rain, the other travelers had wanted to see the well where the executioners had thrown their victims, and they all returned dripping wet. They ordered hot grogs while the innkeeper, still joking a bit sarcastically, gave details:

"'They probably didn't drink the water from that well—everyone has his little niceties—but the peasants around here did. After all it didn't matter much, because the Weisbachs did things neatly. They cleaned their skeletons well. They boiled them for hours and hours in a cauldron that hung from that very pot-hook!'

"Upon which, the travelers asked to see the cauldron, the pitchfork, the ax, and the knife, all the instruments of torture, in fact, that had become famous in this horrible affair.

"'They are in the little dungeon . . . and my wife has the key.'

"Madame Scheffer, detained at some forester's because of the weather, took her time about returning. The driver announced in the meantime that he was ready to leave, and the room emptied itself in a moment.

"The Italians did not come down until after the diligence had left. They seemed to have made up their minds to make the best of their part in the adventure and ordered dinner. We watched them out of the corner of our eyes, and Maria-Luce was very much amused. I was extremely polite and opened the conversation.

"'If I had been alone, I would have given my room up willingly. . . .'

"'A bad night is soon over,' the Italian answered me with a smile.

"The woman, whom I'll call Countess Orsino although I did not know her name at the time, was charming to Maria-Luce.

"'We have been cheated,' she said to her; 'this inn is not at all horrible.'

"A door at the end of the room opened, and Madame Scheffer, the innkeeper's wife, entered. She rid herself of an enormous coat and hood, and as she did so we could not control the chill of terror that ran up our spines. The sight was worse than horrible: it was sinister. Her hideousness was due mostly to her squint-

ing eyes and enormous, grinning mouth. Aside from that, she had sparkling teeth, beautiful golden hair, and a nose that was a bit thick, with ferociously sensual nostrils. I don't know what Madame Weisbach was like, but this woman certainly seemed to exhale an odor of blood. She was strong and still young, about thirty-eight, with firm limbs, and hands used to men's work.

"Behind her came the man-servant, whom we had not yet seen. He was thick-set, slightly humpbacked, and he limped. A red-head with the face of a brute.

"He threw down the burden he was hidden under on the paving and gave a sigh of relief. Then he looked at us in silence and lifted a trap-door under the stairs. He lighted a lamp, which was there prepared, and disappeared down into the cellar, dragging his bundle behind him. The innkeeper was cleaning the dirty wine-glasses and no one had said a word. The three of them had looked at us in silence, that was all.

" 'I'm frightened this time,' Maria-Luce whispered to me.

" 'Yes, it's beginning to become more interesting,' I answered, 'but don't get worked up and we'll have some fun out of it.'

"The innkeeper was the first to break the silence after his wife had disappeared into the cellar behind the servant.

" 'What do you think of my wife?' he asked. 'She fits in well in an inn like this, doesn't she? I couldn't have chosen better! . . . '

"I joined in the game. 'Yes, it's quite a good trick.'

"The little countess had retreated into the shadow of her handsome tenor, and he remarked pleasantly: 'Madame Scheffer would be very good-looking if she didn't squint.'

" 'If she hadn't squinted, I would not have married her,' the innkeeper answered. 'Weisbach's wife squinted! And I wonder if you noticed my man-servant . . . he's humpbacked and bow-legged like Daniel, the Weisbachs' servant. I had to go all the way to Chaux-de-Fonds to find him.'

" 'Why don't you laugh, Olivia?' asked the tenor, who seemed to be enjoying himself.

" 'Did they ever murder anyone in the attic?' Olivia gasped.

" 'Did they ever murder anyone in the attic!' Scheffer exclaimed. 'Well, I should say so! I have all the newspapers if you want to look them over. Daniel slept in the attic and stood guard over the travelers in the other room. When he believed that they were safely asleep, he would knock three times on the floor, and the Weisbachs, who kept themselves in readiness for the signal, came up. . . .

" 'Sometimes the deed was easily and quietly done; other times there was a scuffle. The woman with the goiter told how Mengal from Breslau, president of the court of justice, defended himself so well that his wife was able to escape. But on leaving the room, the unfortunate woman rushed into the attic where Daniel always waited, holding himself in readiness to help. He broke her skull in with one blow of the ax. . . . You will see the ax! . . . '

" 'How horrible!' moaned the countess.

" 'Oh, that's nothing,' the innkeeper went on, shrugging his shoulders; 'there are lots of other tales about them that are more interesting than this. And I'm not making them up. There's the one about the beautiful brunette chained down in the grotto. But you ought to reconstruct the scene of the tale for yourselves in the little dungeon, if you are fond of such things! You will also see the pitchfork that the Weisbachs used to caress the little brunette! . . . '

"I felt Maria-Luce's hand tremble in mine.

" 'Give me a light,' I said to the innkeeper, and when I had lighted

my pipe: 'Scheffer, you're a dirty fraud!'

"'By Gad, no! What about the inquest? . . . and the newspapers?'

"'Possible. . . . But you make me laugh with your ax and your pitchfork! It's as though you told me that the Weisbachs cooked their victims in that pot over there!'

"'You're a shrewd one,' he burst out with a roar of laughter. 'But I found the cauldron I need yesterday. My wife went to pay for it today and the man brought it back with some other little things that won't go badly with the landscape! Yes, it's true, I'm helping the atmosphere along a little. . . . It was my idea. . . . And when everything is just as it was *before,* people will feel that they are back in the times of the Weisbachs. . . . But you must believe! . . . When I tell you that this is the cauldron, this the ax, and this the pitchfork, you must believe, or there's no fun in it. . . . but then you're not an amateur in such things! . . . What I am doing is for the amateurs who specialize in horrors! The fact that it is the actual dungeon, the well, and the inn, is a good start and with a little imagination it won't be hard to believe that the crimes have just been committed . . . without counting the fact that my wife and servant are a stroke of genius! . . . I hope to be rich in ten years. When I think that the people who were here before me had the travelers' room done over and added a drawing-room! . . . The fools! As though it were possible to ruin the "Inn of Blood" like that!'

"He sighed and went on, 'You see, I'm not trying to put anything over on you. You're not out for thrills, so I have shown you the inside of everything. But there are people who would be angry with me if I were to give the show away. There are some, you know, who *love it!* . . . Don't be afraid, little lady,' he said to the Countess, 'if the idea that you are going to sleep in the attic where they murdered that poor woman upsets you, I'll have a mattress put in the drawing-room.'

"'No, we'll sleep in the attic,' Antonio Ferretti declared.

"'Very well. And you,' the innkeeper asked, turning to me, 'does the idea of sleeping in the "travelers' room" bother you?'

"'Not a bit, not a bit! Does it, Maria-Luce?'

"'Oh, the whole place frightens me,' Maria-Luce answered.

"At that, we three men burst out laughing and the women joined us at the end, but only half-heartedly.

3

"MADAME SCHEFFER reappeared out of the trap-door, followed by the servant, and we stopped laughing immediately. Only Scheffer seemed vastly amused by the effect that his wife had had on us. He called out to his servant: 'Daniel!' . . . *like the other one!*

"He ordered him to wring the neck of two chickens, but Olivia said that she was not hungry and that a cup of bouillon would satisfy her.

"'Excuse me, but I am,' Antonio protested, 'and a chicken won't frighten me!'

"'And you?' I asked Maria-Luce.

"'Nor me,' she answered, squeezing up close to me; 'that is the only thing in the house that doesn't frighten me.'

"'Shall we dine together?' Antonio asked. He had obviously forgotten the incident of the diligence.

"'No, thank you,' I answered; 'I've had a fire lit in our room and my wife and I will dine alone in our quarters.'

"'It's very nice up there,' he replied, smiling. 'I have seen the room. You're in luck. I can understand how people sleep there *even at the risk of being murdered!*'

"'You are cheerful!'

"'Oh, I'm only speaking of those who were before you.'

"The innkeeper started to rattle some keys. He had just lighted the lamps, as night had completely fallen.

"'While waiting for dinner, I'll show you around. The rain has stopped and we can go to the well, to the grotto, and in the stable.'

"The women hesitated, but we persuaded them to follow us. The innkeeper went ahead with a swinging lantern; and in the stable, in front of the well, and in the grotto, which was about a hundred yards from the inn and the existence of which had been ignored for a long time, he reconstructed the whole story—and more. He put in a few details of his own! The crimes of the Peyrebelle Inn were mere trifles compared to the crime of the 'Inn of Blood'!

"The Weisbachs had made a sort of crematory oven out of one end of the grotto, and some fragments of human bones, too large to be confused with the bones of sheep, had been found there.

"It was useless trying to be strong-minded; we all came back from that little expedition somewhat upset. We were glad to re-enter the big room of the inn with its cheerful hearth . . . and yet! . . . Yes, but over the fire, two chickens were turning on the spit and filled the air with an extremely pleasant aroma. The bow-legged servant basted them from time to time with their juice, meanwhile polishing up a big leather basin.

"'What are you doing?' I asked him.

"He lifted his brute face up toward me and went on with his rubbing.

"'Don't ask Daniel questions,' the innkeeper said with a little laugh. 'It's a waste of time, because he won't answer you. Not that he is dumb, but I have ordered him to be mute like the other, who really was! You understand?'

"'Oh, yes, I understand. Congratulations, you haven't overlooked a thing.'

"'Nothing. And when the cauldron is on the hearth, you'll see what a sensation I'll make when I repeat the story told to the judge by the woman with the goiter.'

"'What was that?' Antonio asked.

"'Why, the story of what happened to her when she first awoke to the fact that she was working for very peculiar people. One night when she came in from her washing, she found a roaring fire on the hearth. She went closer to see what they were cooking in the pot, and she lifted the cover; but Weisbach appeared on the run and gave her a blow that sent her reeling against the wall. But she had seen! . . . She had seen a man's head turning around in the bouillon, surrounded by chunks of flesh.

"'"'"You see," Weisbach said to her, "curiosity is always punished. If I did what was right, I'd send you to the bottom of the pot to find out what is going on there! But I need you. In the meantime, keep your mouth shut!"

"'The wretched woman threw herself at his feet, swearing that she would never speak. And she stayed with him, because she knew that they would never let her go alive! From that day on, they talked openly before her, and there were even some nights when they forced her to help them in many ways. They would tell her to follow them down to the grotto and close the argument by kicking her down ahead of them. . . .

"'Come, let's go down there now. It's the best part of the whole place.'

"And he picked up his lantern again.

"The women exchanged looks; then, catching sight of the bow-legged man who was staring at them covertly while he continued to polish his cauldron, they made up their minds and we went down into the cellar behind Scheffer. A slimy stairway, a greasy cord, weird shadows thrown by his

flickering light . . . it was awful! We soon heard ringing blows like those of a hammer beating against chains. And, as a matter of fact, that is what it was. At the end of a subterranean passage the man threw open a door and we saw another lantern on the damp earth of the vault. Madame Scheffer was crouched on the ground, busy fastening a piece of chain to a ring in the cave wall, from which hung a lantern. At the end of the chain there was an iron collar. She had her back to us and did not bother even to look up, but continued her hammering with the violence of a madwoman. At last she stopped a moment.

"'That,' the man explained, 'I have had to have done. But it's old iron just the same. The marks of the hammer won't show as soon as it has rusted, and some people will be even able to find blood-stains.'

"'What a beast!' I murmured; 'there is no possible way of being bored with you!'

"'No, eh? Nor with my wife! . . . Wait, and she'll give you a thrill. She'll tell you the story of the pretty little brunette who was imprisoned in this cave. It's worth the trouble of listening. . . .'

"'You ought to set up your little trick in Paris, Boulevard Rochechouart, near the Café of the Yellow-Hammer. You'd be a big success.'

"'I know,' he answered. 'I've traveled. There are plenty of fools in the world.'

"THE grotto was not very big. Nevertheless, there was room enough for a little exhibit. An enormous, rusty knife, a saw, an ax, and all the necessary implements for an innkeeper who conducts his business in the way that the deceased Weisbach did, hung from nails embedded between the cracks of the stones. In one place were a pitchfork and an ox-goad; against the wall were some tongs. Some shapeless, colorless rags also hung from stalactites. Once, it seems, they had been clothes, and in another spot was a pile of debris which included some pieces of old leather, all that remained of some shoes.

"'Read my collection of newspapers and you will see that all this stuff is mentioned. I haven't made up a thing. Unfortunately, the police kept all the originals and I had to replace them as best I could!' He laughed and said to his wife, 'Go to it; it's your turn now.'

"She stood up and came toward us and we shrank back. I shall see those squinting eyes and that big mouth all the rest of my life. And what a setting! The whole was brought into fantastic relief by the fierce, blood-red light thrown by the two lanterns, one of which was still on the ground. It was like a horrible, evil etching. . . .

"The woman put out her arms and grasped the pitchfork almost greedily, and as she spoke she glared at the little countess with such ferocity that the other was forced to turn away. . . . And what a voice! It was like a sound from hell.

"'And yet you know,' Scheffer said to us, 'she only drinks her little swallow of brandy in the morning after her coffee like the rest of the world. Good old Annette!' *(He called her Annette, like the other one!)* 'You will see what a wonder she is.'

"'Perhaps one of the ladies would like to try the iron collar,' she began. 'It doesn't matter that Madame is blond: it would be just as effective.'

"But the suggestion was not very well received, and Annette smiled a horrible smile!

"'Everyone to his own taste. This is what happened, according to the woman with the goiter. A beautiful brunette arrived one afternoon accompanied by a middle-aged gentleman. They were obviously rich and had lots of jewelry. A mishap to their carriage forced them to take shelter

at the inn for the night, and the coachman, who went back to Soleure, was to return the next day with another carriage for them. When he arrived the next morning, he was informed that the two had departed early in the morning and that they had left money for him. He took the amount coming to him and went off without bothering any further about his customers. But his customers had never left the inn. . . .

"'The gentleman, knocked unconscious by Daniel and cut up into pieces by Weisbach, was already in the cauldron. As to the lovely brunette, she was still alive in the little grotto. . . . She lived there for fifteen days, according to the woman with the goiter. Every night as soon as the inn was closed they went down to see her. They had her chained down there to this iron collar. One evening the woman with the goiter heard cries and slipped down into the cellar, but Weisbach, who had sharp ears, discovered her. He dragged her into the vault. "You want to see?" he said to her. "Then see you must . . . see what will happen to you if you talk." And she saw. . . .

"'The lovely brunette was there, completely naked and chained as I have already described. She was just one piece of torn flesh, and Weisbach's wife, now with the pitchfork, now with the goad, was stroking her ribs.'

"So saying, Madame Scheffer went into action. And what she was telling was less horrible than what she did! Half bent over herself, with a savage light in her eyes, and that enormous mouth foaming at the corners, she hurled first her fork and then her goad where the chain hung. And she did it with a fire that suddenly ceased to be play and became a kind of madness and wild enjoyment.

"'The slut!' she screamed, and the sound of her voice sent a chill up my spine; 'she killed the poor little brunette like this! like this! and again! and again! She crushed in her ribs, tore the flesh, while the walls resounded with the other's cries of pain. "Now you're beautiful! Let your lover come now! Ah, and this, too. Now you are more beautiful than I!"

"'I must tell you,' Madame Scheffer said, panting and turning toward us, or rather toward the little countess, who had to lean against the wall to keep from falling, 'I must explain that Weisbach's wife was as ugly as sin, and she squinted! Naturally, she could not bear the sight of beautiful eyes'—so saying Madame Scheffer stared straight into the little countess' eyes—'without wanting to scratch them out!'

"'Let's go! let's go!' Olivia Orsino cried; 'I won't stay here another second!' And she rushed from the vault.

"We all followed her, and Scheffer, who was behind, said with a great laugh, 'I told you she was priceless! She has learned her lesson well. But don't let it upset you. Aside from that, she is as gentle as a lamb . . . and an excellent cook, too, as you will see.'

"And then the woman herself, who had joined us, said, 'So I frightened you? Well, I must tell the story; it will make people come!'

4

"I FELT Maria-Luce tremble and we were all a little pale when we came back into the big room. We looked at each other and finally burst out laughing . . . all except the countess.

"'What a horrible, horrible woman!' she murmured.

"'And with all that, you don't know the end of the story,' said Scheffer, jabbing at the chickens with a fork to see how nearly done they were. He stopped the string which turned the spit. 'They are done to a turn, and with a good salad . . . you'll praise our cook. . . . The end of the story is this: The day when

the woman with the goiter was dragged into the vault was the day in which Madame Weisbach scratched the little brunette's eyes out with the pitchfork. She would teach the other to have more beautiful eyes than her own!'

"'"Squint now, squint now!" is what she shrieked,' Madame Scheffer completed, loading herself with a pile of dishes from a large chest.

"'Enough,' I said firmly, 'we've had enough of an appetizer; let's eat!'

"'Do you know what the Italian woman said to me?' Maria-Luce whispered. 'She doesn't want us to leave them. Let's eat down here.'

"'Oh no!' I protested; 'I'm sick of these stories and I want you all to myself.'

"We took leave of the other two and I led my wife upstairs. We had a little trouble in finding our room in that strange hallway. The stairs were so steep that we came near to toppling down them, and it made me think of the Weisbachs. The traveler would go up the stairs while the servant waited for him in the dark at the top and pushed him down to the innkeepers, who were waiting at the bottom. And that was the end of him.

"We, however, were a bit luckier, and, as there was only one room in the inn, we finally found it. But before locating it I opened doors into several other rooms filled with packing-cases and all sorts of débris. I wondered why, in an inn, they did not make use of so much precious space, and while Scheffer was serving us our supper, in front of a good fire and under a tame enough lamp, I could not help asking him for an explanation of this. He answered that it would be a great expense, useless perhaps . . . and finally after hesitating a moment he added:

"'Besides it seems to me that the Weisbachs *did not care to have too many travelers at one time!*'

"And he left, after putting a bottle of champagne on the table and wishing us good-night.

"'Did you hear?' Maria-Luce whispered to me as soon as he was gone; 'but why does he want to leave things in the same condition?'

"'He hasn't been here long. Give him a chance. You're not going to begin imagining things, are you?'

"By the time supper was over, I had cheered her up again. We had emptied our bottle of champagne gayly and forgotten all about the horrors. We were just about to go to bed when a light knock came at the door. . . . There was no bolt in this door, but there was a key and a sort of hook that fastened to a ring in the casing.

"'Who is there?' I asked.

"'Don't open!' Maria-Luce whispered. She was already terror-stricken, for we had made quite an evening of it and might well be supposed asleep. . . .

"'Open, open quickly,' came a heavy voice which I recognized as the Italian's.

"At that I opened the door and the man threw himself into the room, shutting the door behind him. He was very pale and seemed in the throes of the wildest emotion. . . .

"'I've come to warn you,' he exclaimed, his voice trembling with emotion. 'First of all, we can hear everything they say in the kitchen. These people are murderers. I heard his wife say to Scheffer: "We have nothing to fear. If they find the bones, *they'll think they belonged to that other affair!*" We're not going to stay another second in this den. I've found a rope in the attic and I've fastened it to the window-ledge that overlooks the outside of the house, not the courtyard. Get dressed and follow us!'

"Maria-Luce was already half undressed and I had thrown my coat on the chair.

"'This is a fine tale!' I exclaimed, dumfounded.

"'You didn't see that woman's eyes,' said Maria-Luce, her teeth chattering with fright.

"Seeing that I was undecided, the Italian lost no time and left us. Maria-Luce was dressing hastily, shaking in every limb.

"'Let's go! let's go!' she begged. 'You haven't even a revolver.'

"That was true. And besides it was impossible to oppose Maria-Luce. I took the bag, and two minutes later we were in the attic, after removing our shoes to make no noise. The little wooden door of the garret window was open and the cord fastened to the screw of a pulley. The Italians had already gone. We put our shoes on hastily, and it was then that I discovered a little streak of light coming through a crack in the floor. It came up from the kitchen, and I tried to peer through it. I saw nothing, but I could hear Scheffer's voice say: 'Which one shall we begin on?'"

CHAULIEU had reached this point in his narrative, when Captain Michel hit the table with such a blow of his fist that the saucers under their glasses jumped.

"I expected that! What an original story! But in Paul-Louis Courier's tale the innkeeper says, 'Shall we kill them both?' and he was only referring to two chickens! You take us for geese, Chaulieu!"

"Wait a minute," said Chaulieu. "I don't know what this Paul-Louis thing of your is—I don't know him from the man in the moon—and if you are geese, inform your respective relations of the fact. . . . I'm telling the adventure just as it happened to me."

"Let him finish," said Dorat; "I'll bet he had forgotten all about love when he heard those words."

"Yes, old man, I certainly had, and so had Maria-Luce. And I can tell you we lost no time in making our escape! I made another knot in the cord and grasped hold of it. Maria-Luce, to whom I had given the bag, which contained quite a large sum of money and our toilet articles, got up on my shoulders, and when we reached the ground we ran for ten minutes without stopping. We started down toward Soleure by the first path we came to because we did not dare risk the main road. I expected to catch up to the Italians, but we lost ourselves in the pitch-black darkness. Slipping and sliding and falling on the soaked ground, we plunged on madly."

"You were frightened to death by that time," laughed Michel.

"I should say we were. I couldn't even stop Maria-Luce, who thought we were being pursued by bandits ready to shoot us down at any minute. The worst was that it began to rain again—and how! . . . Good Lord, what a night! . . . lost in a forest, torn and scratched by branches, and pelted with the heaviest kind of rain! Never in my life have I ever spent such hours. And I finally had to carry Maria-Luce, who was nothing more than a dripping bundle of rags. . . . At last, a light! A peasant's cottage. . . . They took us in, warmed us, and gave us a bed. They dried our clothes for us, and in emptying my pockets I found a piece of paper with a few words written on it in pencil:

"Thanks for the room. I leave you the coupé."

"I would have sworn it!" exclaimed Captain Michel. "You must be a fool."

"Wait a minute," Chaulieu said again. "I haven't finished! You can well imagine what a temper I was in over this stupid joke, which, considering Maria-Luce's condition, narrowly escaped being criminal. . . . It was no use rubbing her; she stayed as cold as ice. During the night she was taken with a high fever and I sent to Soleure for a doctor. It was two days before we were able to leave those kind peasants.

5

"I HAD had enough of Switzerland, and we returned to Mourillon the shortest way possible; but, alas! the good southern sun was not enough to cure Maria-Luce. She had always told me that her lungs were not very strong, and from that day on she began to cough. And when at last, a few years later, she stopped coughing she was dead."

Dorat coughed at that to show that he was still very much alive.

"Listen, poor old Chaulieu," he said, "we're all sorry, but as far as Maria-Luce's death is concerned, it is a misfortune which might have occurred under entirely different circumstances, after a damp walk in the woods, for example. The truth of the matter, as far as your story goes, is that they played a rotten joke on you, that's all."

"No!" Chaulieu growled; "not at all. . . . *The story only begins to be interesting from now on!*

"The following year the Italian papers, and finally newspapers all over the world, were full of the disappearance of a man and a woman. And that is how we knew that our two Italians had been Antonio Ferretti and Countess Olivia Orsino. If we had had any doubts, which was impossible because the resemblance between them both was perfect, we would have been convinced by this fact: that they had been traced as far as Soleure, and there the trail ended!

"When Maria-Luce and I learned of this we looked at each other in silence. and the same terrible thought struck us both. The unfortunate pair had wanted to make fun of us. They had hidden in a corner of the hall and after our departure had slipped into our room, where the Scheffers had murdered them *in our place!*

"Well, what do you say to that?" he asked, enjoying the astonishment of his friends. "Not so bad, eh? Wait. . . .

"Remembering all we had seen and heard in the vault, and especially Madame Scheffer's frenzied illustration with the goad and pitchfork, we became more and more convinced that these people had gone from pretense to actuality . . . I mean to say, they had carried the reconstruction of the crimes of the 'Inn of Blood' to the finish!

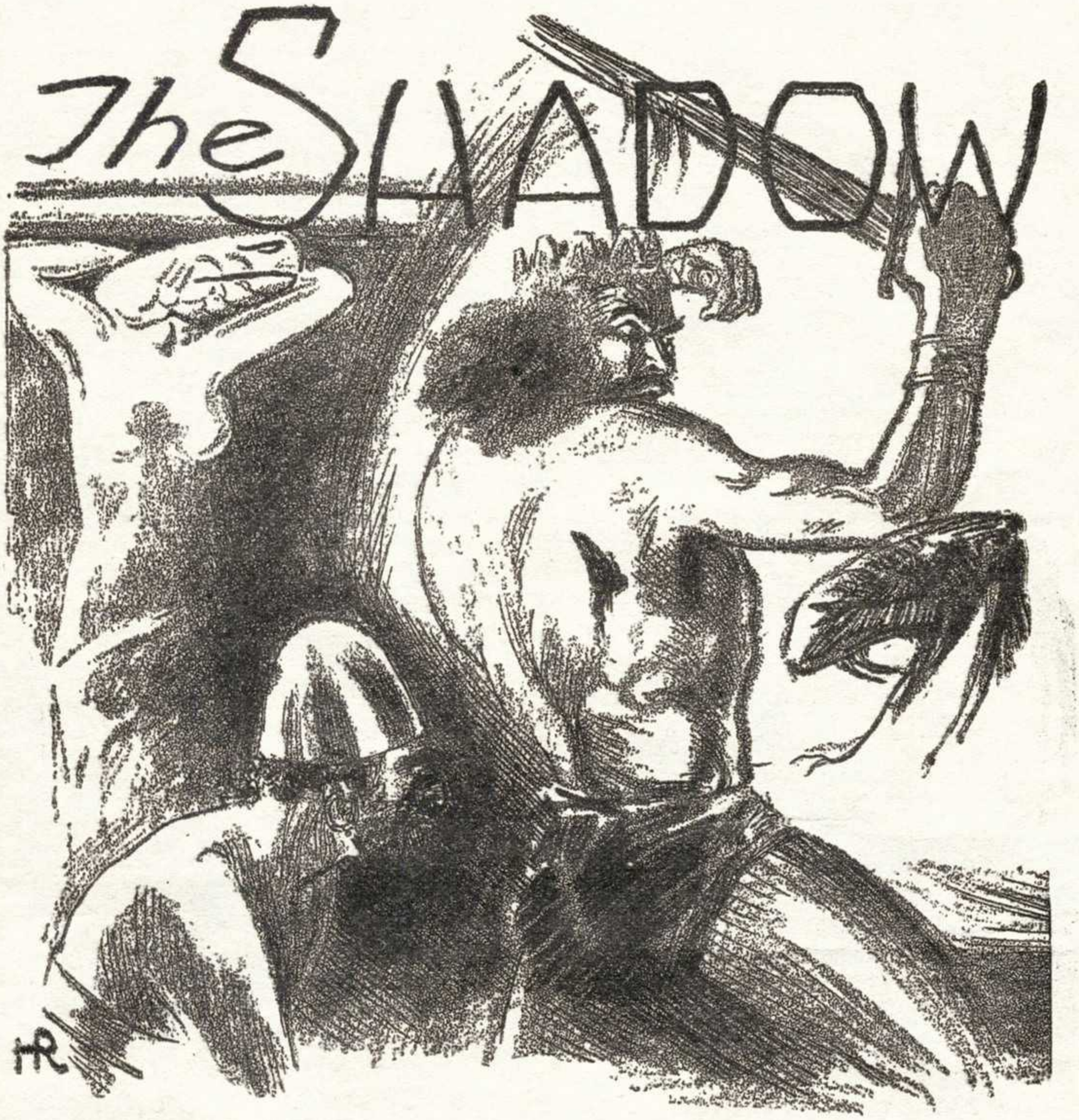
" 'Do you remember,' Maria-Luce said to me, 'do you remember how she stared at the countess?' Here Maria-Luce shivered and went on, 'It was terrifying! One might have believed that the countess was already her prey, chained to the wall like the "pretty little brunette" . . . and that she was scratching her eyes out with the pitchfork! Ah, poor wretches! The ruffians may have tortured her, too, for fifteen days, having already cooked Antonio. And when I think . . . when I think that if it hadn't been for that trouble over the coupé, they would never have played that trick as a revenge! . . . It was we who——'

" 'Don't think about it,' I exclaimed. But the matter could not rest there. Maria-Luce had nightmares about it at night, and so did I. At last, to get rid of the obsession, we did our duty. We returned to Soleure, and our first move was to go directly to the police, where we told the whole story from beginning to end.

"An inquest followed which brought immediate results. All the details we gave, all the incidents just as they had happened before our eyes, were confirmed. . . . And the Scheffers did not deny a thing. They did not seem in the least phased by it. And yet there were several questions which might well have embarrassed them; but Scheffer had an answer to everything.

"For example, when the judge asked: 'What did the words Monsieur Chaulieu heard mean: "Which one shall we begin on?" ' he answered

(Continued on page 282)



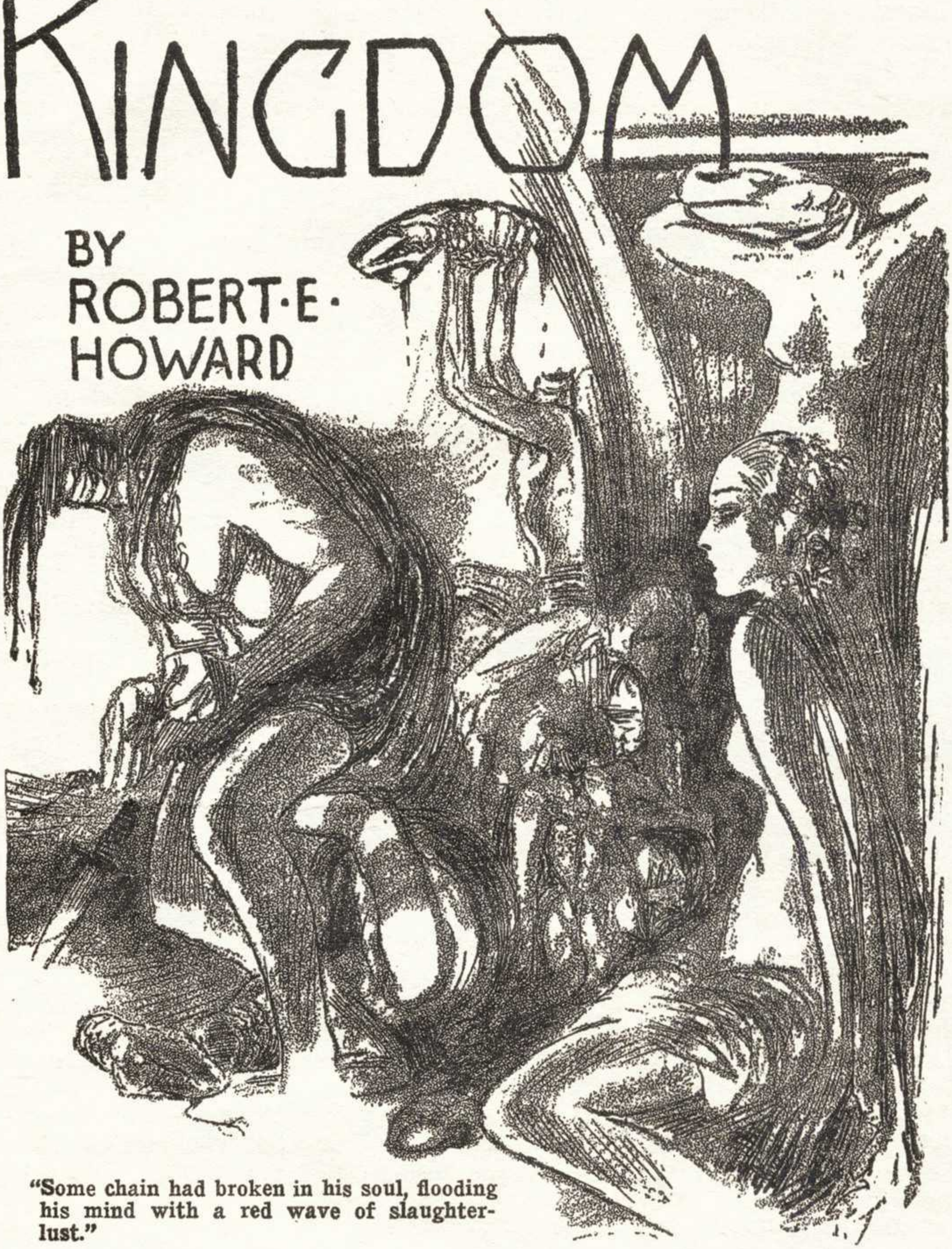
1. *A King Comes Riding*

THE blare of the trumpets grew louder, like a deep golden tide surge, like the soft booming of the evening tides against the silver beaches of Valusia. The throng shouted, women flung roses from the roofs as the rhythmic chiming of silver hoofs came clearer and the first of the mighty array swung into view in the broad white street that curved round the golden-spired Tower of Splendor.

First came the trumpeters, slim youths, clad in scarlet, riding with a flourish of long, slender golden trumpets; next the bowmen, tall men from the mountains; and behind these the heavily armed footmen, their broad shields clashing in unison, their long spears swaying in perfect rhythm to their stride. Behind them came the mightiest soldiery in all the world, the Red Slayers, horsemen, splendidly mounted, armed in red from helmet to spur. Proudly they sat their steeds, looking neither to right nor to left, but aware of the shouting for all that. Like bronze statues they were, and there was never a waver in the forest of spears that reared above them.

KINGDOM

BY ROBERT·E· HOWARD



"Some chain had broken in his soul, flooding his mind with a red wave of slaughter-lust."

Behind those proud and terrible ranks came the motley files of the mercenaries, fierce, wild-looking warriors, men of Mu and of Kaa-u and of the hills of the east and the isles of the west. They bore spears and heavy swords, and a compact group that marched somewhat apart were the bowmen of Lemuria. Then came the light foot of the nation, and more trumpeters brought up the rear.

A brave sight, and a sight which aroused a fierce thrill in the soul of Kull, king of Valusia. Not on the

Topaz Throne at the front of the regal Tower of Splendor sat Kull, but in the saddle, mounted on a great stallion, a true warrior king. His mighty arm swung up in reply to the salutes as the hosts passed. His fierce eyes passed the gorgeous trumpeters with a casual glance, rested longer on the following soldiery; they blazed with a ferocious light as the Red Slayers halted in front of him with a clang of arms and a rearing of steeds, and tendered him the crown salute. They narrowed slightly as the mercenaries strode by. They saluted no one, the mercenaries. They walked with shoulders flung back, eyeing Kull boldly and straightly, albeit with a certain appreciation; fierce eyes, unblinking; savage eyes, staring from beneath shaggy manes and heavy brows.

And Kull gave back a like stare. He granted much to brave men, and there were no braver in all the world, not even among the wild tribesmen who now disowned him. But Kull was too much the savage to have any great love for these. There were too many feuds. Many were age-old enemies of Kull's nation, and though the name of Kull was now a word accursed among the mountains and valleys of his people, and though Kull had put them from his mind, yet the old hates, the ancient passions still lingered. For Kull was no Valusian but an Atlantean.

The armies swung out of sight around the gem-blazing shoulders of the Tower of Splendor and Kull reined his stallion about and started toward the palace at an easy gait, discussing the review with the commanders that rode with him, using not many words, but saying much.

"The army is like a sword," said Kull, "and must not be allowed to rust." So down the street they rode, and Kull gave no heed to any of the whispers that reached his hearing from the throngs that still swarmed the streets.

"That is Kull, see! Valka! But what a king! And what a man! Look at his arms! His shoulders!"

And an undertone of more sinister whisperings: "Kull! Ha, accursed usurper from the pagan isles"—"Aye, shame to Valusia that a barbarian sits on the Throne of Kings." . . .

Little did Kull heed. Heavy-handed had he seized the decaying throne of ancient Valusia and with a heavier hand did he hold it, a man against a nation.

After the council chamber, the social palace where Kull replied to the formal and laudatory phrases of the lords and ladies, with carefully hidden, grim amusement at such frivolities; then the lords and ladies took their formal departure and Kull leaned back upon the ermine throne and contemplated matters of state until an attendant requested permission from the great king to speak, and announced an emissary from the Pictish embassy.

Kull brought his mind back from the dim mazes of Valusian statecraft where it had been wandering, and gazed upon the Pict with little favor. The man gave back the gaze of the king without flinching. He was a lean-hipped, massive-chested warrior of middle height, dark, like all his race, and strongly built. From strong, immobile features gazed dauntless and inscrutable eyes.

"The chief of the Councilors, Ka-nu of the tribe, right hand of the king of Pictdom, sends greetings and says: 'There is a throne at the feast of the rising moon for Kull, king of kings, lord of lords, emperor of Valusia.'"

"Good," answered Kull. "Say to Ka-nu the Ancient, ambassador of the western isles, that the king of Valusia will quaff wine with him when the moon floats over the hills of Zalgara."

Still the Pict lingered. "I have a word for the king, not"—with a con-

temptuons flirt of his hand—"for these slaves."

Kull dismissed the attendants with a word, watching the Pict warily.

The man stepped nearer, and lowered his voice: "Come alone to feast tonight, lord king. Such was the word of my chief."

The king's eyes narrowed, gleaming like gray sword steel, coldly.

"Alone?"

"Aye."

They eyed each other silently, their mutual tribal enmity seething beneath their cloak of formality. Their mouths spoke the cultured speech, the conventional court phrases of a highly polished race, a race not their own, but from their eyes gleamed the primal traditions of the elemental savage. Kull might be the king of Valusia and the Pict might be an emissary to her courts, but there in the throne hall of kings, two tribesmen glowered at each other, fierce and wary, while ghosts of wild wars and world-ancient feuds whispered to each.

To the king was the advantage and he enjoyed it to its fullest extent. Jaw resting on hand, he eyed the Pict, who stood like an image of bronze, head flung back, eyes unflinching.

Across Kull's lips stole a smile that was more a sneer.

"And so I am to come—alone?" Civilization had taught him to speak by innuendo and the Pict's dark eyes glittered, though he made no reply. "How am I to know that you come from Ka-nu?"

"I have spoken," was the sullen response.

"And when did a Pict speak truth?" sneered Kull, fully aware that the Picts never lied, but using this means to enrage the man.

"I see your plan, king," the Pict answered imperturbably. "You wish to anger me. By Valka, you need go no further! I am angry enough. And I challenge you to meet me in single battle, spear, sword or dagger, mounted or afoot. Are you king or man?"

Kull's eyes glinted with the grudging admiration a warrior must needs give a bold foeman, but he did not fail to use the chance of further annoying his antagonist.

"A king does not accept the challenge of a nameless savage," he sneered, "nor does the emperor of Valusia break the Truce of Ambassadors. You have leave to go. Say to Ka-nu I will come alone."

The Pict's eyes flashed murderously. He fairly shook in the grasp of the primitive blood-lust; then, turning his back squarely upon the king of Valusia, he strode across the Hall of Society and vanished through the great door.

Again Kull leaned back upon the ermine throne and meditated.

So the chief of the Council of Picts wished him to come alone? But for what reason? Treachery? Grimly Kull touched the hilt of his great sword. But scarcely. The Picts valued too greatly the alliance with Valusia to break it for any feudal reason. Kull might be a warrior of Atlantis and hereditary enemy of all Picts, but too, he was king of Valusia, the most potent ally of the Men of the West.

Kull reflected long upon the strange state of affairs that made him ally of ancient foes and foe of ancient friends. He rose and paced restlessly across the hall, with the quick, noiseless tread of a lion. Chains of friendship, tribe and tradition had he broken to satisfy his ambition. And, by Valka, god of the sea and the land, he had realized that ambition! He was king of Valusia—a fading, degenerate Valusia, a Valusia living mostly in dreams of bygone glory, but still a mighty land and the greatest of the Seven Empires. Valusia—Land of Dreams, the tribesmen named it, and sometimes it seemed to Kull that he moved in a dream. Strange to him

were the intrigues of court and palace, army and people. All was like a masquerade, where men and women hid their real thoughts with a smooth mask. Yet the seizing of the throne had been easy—a bold snatching of opportunity, the swift whirl of swords, the slaying of a tyrant of whom men had wearied unto death, short, crafty plotting with ambitious statesmen out of favor at court—and Kull, wandering adventurer, Atlantean exile, had swept up to the dizzy heights of his dreams: he was lord of Valusia, king of kings. Yet now it seemed that the seizing was far easier than the keeping. The sight of the Pict had brought back youthful associations to his mind, the free, wild savagery of his boyhood. And now a strange feeling of dim unrest, of unreality, stole over him as of late it had been doing. Who was he, a straightforward man of the seas and the mountain, to rule a race strangely and terribly wise with the mysticisms of antiquity? An ancient race——

"I am Kull!" said he, flinging back his head as a lion flings back his mane. "I am Kull!"

His falcon gaze swept the ancient hall. His self-confidence flowed back. . . . And in a dim nook of the hall a tapestry moved—slightly.

2. *Thus Spake the Silent Halls of Valusia*

THE moon had not risen, and the garden was lighted with torches aglow in silver cressets when Kull sat down in the throne before the table of Ka-nu, ambassador of the western isles. At his right hand sat the ancient Pict, as much unlike an emissary of that fierce race as a man could be. Ancient was Ka-nu and wise in statecraft, grown old in the game. There was no elemental hatred in the eyes that looked at Kull appraisingly; no tribal traditions hindered his judgments. Long associations with the statesmen of the civilized nations had swept away such cobwebs. Not: who and what is this man? was the question ever foremost in Ka-nu's mind, but: can I use this man, and how? Tribal prejudices he used only to further his own schemes.

And Kull watched Ka-nu, answering his conversation briefly, wondering if civilization would make of him a thing like the Pict. For Ka-nu was soft and paunchy. Many years had stridden across the sky-rim since Ka-nu had wielded a sword. True, he was old, but Kull had seen men older than he in the forefront of battle. The Picts were a long-lived race. A beautiful girl stood at Ka-nu's elbow, refilling his goblet, and she was kept busy. Meanwhile Ka-nu kept up a running fire of jests and comments, and Kull, secretly contemptuous of his garrulity, nevertheless missed none of his shrewd humor.

At the banquet were Pictish chiefs and statesmen, the latter jovial and easy in their manner, the warriors formally courteous, but plainly hampered by their tribal affinities. Yet Kull, with a tinge of envy, was cognizant of the freedom and ease of the affair as contrasted with like affairs of the Valusian court. Such freedom prevailed in the rude camps of Atlantis—Kull shrugged his shoulders. After all, doubtless Ka-nu, who had seemed to have forgotten he was a Pict as far as time-hoary custom and prejudice went, was right and he, Kull, would better become a Valusian in mind as in name.

At last when the moon had reached her zenith, Ka-nu, having eaten and drunk as much as any three men there, leaned back upon his divan with a comfortable sigh and said, "Now, get you gone, friends, for the king and I would converse on such matters as concerns not children. Yes, you too, my pretty; yet first let me kiss those ruby lips—so; now dance away, my rose-bloom."

Ka-nu's eyes twinkled above his white beard as he surveyed Kull, who sat erect, grim and uncompromising.

"You are thinking, Kull," said the old statesman, suddenly, "that Ka-nu is a useless old reprobate, fit for nothing except to guzzle wine and kiss wenches!"

In fact, this remark was so much in line with his actual thoughts, and so plainly put, that Kull was rather startled, though he gave no sign.

Ka-nu gurgled and his paunch shook with his mirth. "Wine is red and women are soft," he remarked tolerantly. "But—ha! ha!—think not old Ka-nu allows either to interfere with business."

Again he laughed, and Kull moved restlessly. This seemed much like being made sport of, and the king's scintillant eyes began to glow with a feline light.

Ka-nu reached for the wine-pitcher, filled his beaker and glanced questioningly at Kull, who shook his head irritably.

"Aye," said Ka-nu equably, "it takes an old head to stand strong drink. I am growing old, Kull, so why should you young men begrudge me such pleasures as we oldsters must find? Ah me, I grow ancient and withered, friendless and cheerless."

But his looks and expressions failed far of bearing out his words. His rubicund countenance fairly glowed, and his eyes sparkled, so that his white beard seemed incongruous. Indeed, he looked remarkably elfin, reflected Kull, who felt vaguely resentful. The old scoundrel had lost all of the primitive virtues of his race and of Kull's race, yet he seemed more pleased in his aged days than otherwise.

"Hark ye, Kull," said Ka-nu, raising an admonitory finger, " 'tis a chancy thing to laud a young man, yet I must speak my true thoughts to gain your confidence."

"If you think to gain it by flattery——"

"Tush. Who spake of flattery? I flatter only to disguard."

There was a keen sparkle in Ka-nu's eyes, a cold glimmer that did not match his lazy smile. He knew men, and he knew that to gain his end he must smite straight with this tigerish barbarian, who, like a wolf scenting a snare, would scent out unerringly any falseness in the skein of his word-web.

"You have power, Kull," said he, choosing his words with more care than he did in the council rooms of the nation, "to make yourself mightiest of all kings, and restore some of the lost glories of Valusia. So. I care little for Valusia—though the women and wine be excellent—save for the fact that the stronger Valusia is, the stronger is the Pict nation. More, with an Atlantean on the throne, eventually Atlantis will become united——"

Kull laughed in harsh mockery. Ka-nu had touched an old wound.

"Atlantis made my name accursed when I went to seek fame and fortune among the cities of the world. We—they—are age-old foes of the Seven Empires, greater foes of the allies of the Empires, as you should know."

Ka-nu tugged his beard and smiled enigmatically.

"Nay, nay. Let it pass. But I know whereof I speak. And then warfare will cease, wherein there is no gain; I see a world of peace and prosperity—man loving his fellow man—the good supreme. All this can you accomplish—*if you live!*"

"Ha!" Kull's lean hand closed on his hilt and he half rose, with a sudden movement of such dynamic speed that Ka-nu, who fancied men as some men fancy blooded horses, felt his old blood leap with a sudden thrill. Valka, what a warrior! Nerves and sinews of steel and fire, bound together with the perfect co-ordination, the fighting instinct, that makes the terrible warrior.

But none of Ka-nu's enthusiasm showed in his mildly sarcastic tone.

"Tush. Be seated. Look about you. The gardens are deserted, the seats empty, save for ourselves. You fear not *me?*"

Kull sank back, gazing about him warily.

"There speaks the savage," mused Ka-nu. "Think you if I planned treachery I would enact it here where suspicion would be sure to fall upon me? Tut. You young tribesmen have much to learn. There were my chiefs who were not at ease because you were born among the hills of Atlantis, and you despise me in your secret mind because I am a Pict. Tush. I see you as Kull, king of Valusia, not as Kull, the reckless Atlantean, leader of the raiders who harried the western isles. So you should see in me, not a Pict but an international man, a figure of the world. Now to that figure, hark! If you were slain tomorrow who would be king?"

"Kaanuub, baron of Blaal."

"Even so. I object to Kaanuub for many reasons, yet most of all for the fact that he is but a figurehead."

"How so? He was my greatest opponent, but I did not know that he championed any cause but his own."

"The night can hear," answered Ka-nu obliquely. "There are worlds within worlds. But you may trust me and you may trust Brule, the Spear-slayer. Look!" He drew from his robes a bracelet of gold representing a winged dragon coiled thrice, with three horns of ruby on the head.

"Examine it closely. Brule will wear it on his arm when he comes to you tomorrow night so that you may know him. Trust Brule as you trust yourself, and do what he tells you to. And in proof of trust, look ye!"

And with the speed of a striking hawk, the ancient snatched something from his robes, something that flung a weird green light over them, and which he replaced in an instant.

"The stolen gem!" exclaimed Kull recoiling. "The green jewel from the Temple of the Serpent! Valka! You! And why do you show it to me?"

"To save your life. To prove my trust. If I betray your trust, deal with me likewise. You hold my life in your hand. Now I could not be false to you if I would, for a word from you would be my doom."

Yet for all his words the old scoundrel beamed merrily and seemed vastly pleased with himself.

"But why do you give me this hold over you?" asked Kull, becoming more bewildered each second.

"As I told you. Now, you see that I do not intend to deal you false, and tomorrow night when Brule comes to you, you will follow his advice without fear of treachery. Enough. An escort waits outside to ride to the palace with you, lord."

Kull rose. "But you have told me nothing."

"Tush. How impatient are youths!" Ka-nu looked more like a mischievous elf than ever. "Go you and dream of thrones and power and kingdoms, while I dream of wine and soft women and roses. And fortune ride with you, King Kull."

As he left the garden, Kull glanced back to see Ka-nu still reclining lazily in his seat, a merry ancient, beaming on all the world with jovial fellowship.

A MOUNTED warrior waited for the king just without the garden and Kull was slightly surprized to see that it was the same that had brought Ka-nu's invitation. No word was spoken as Kull swung into the saddle nor as they clattered along the empty streets.

The color and the gayety of the day had given away to the eery stillness of night. The city's antiquity was more than ever apparent beneath the bent, silver moon. The huge pillars of the mansions and palaces towered up into the stars. The broad stair-

ways, silent and deserted, seemed to climb endlessly until they vanished in the shadowy darkness of the upper realms. Stairs to the stars, thought Kull, his imaginative mind inspired by the weird grandeur of the scene.

Clang! clang! clang! sounded the silver hoofs on the broad, moon-flooded streets, but otherwise there was no sound. The age of the city, its incredible antiquity, was almost oppressive to the king; it was as if the great silent buildings laughed at him, noiselessly, with unguessable mockery. And what secrets did they hold?

"You are young," said the palaces and the temples and the shrines, "but we are old. The world was wild with youth when we were reared. You and your tribe shall pass, but we are invincible, indestructible. We towered above a strange world, ere Atlantis and Lemuria rose from the sea; we still shall reign when the green waters sigh for many a restless fathom above the spires of Lemuria and the hills of Atlantis and when the isles of the Western Men are the mountains of a strange land.

"How many kings have we watched ride down these streets before Kull of Atlantis was even a dream in the mind of Ka, bird of Creation? Ride on, Kull of Atlantis; greater shall follow you; greater came before you. They are dust; they are forgotten; we stand; we know; we are. Ride, ride on, Kull of Atlantis; Kull the king, Kull the fool!"

And it seemed to Kull that the clashing hoofs took up the silent refrain to beat it into the night with hollow re-echoing mockery:

"Kull — the — king! Kull — the — fool!"

Glow, moon; you light a king's way! Gleam, stars; you are torches in the train of an emperor! And clang, silver-shod hoofs; you herald that Kull rides through Valusia.

Ho! Awake, Valusia! It is Kull that rides, Kull the king!

"We have known many kings," said the silent halls of Valusia.

And so in a brooding mood Kull came to the palace, where his bodyguard, men of the Red Slayers, came to take the rein of the great stallion and escort Kull to his rest. There the Pict, still sullenly speechless, wheeled his steed with a savage wrench of the rein and fled away in the dark like a phantom; Kull's heightened imagination pictured him speeding through the silent streets like a goblin out of the Elder World.

There was no sleep for Kull that night, for it was nearly dawn and he spent the rest of the night hours pacing the throneroom, and pondering over what had passed. Ka-nu had told him nothing, yet he had put himself in Kull's complete power. At what had he hinted when he had said the baron of Blaal was naught but a figurehead? And who was this Brule who was to come to him by night, wearing the mystic armlet of the dragon? And why? Above all, why had Ka-nu shown him the green gem of terror, stolen long ago from the temple of the Serpent, for which the world would rock in wars were it known to the weird and terrible keepers of that temple, and from whose vengeance not even Ka-nu's ferocious tribesmen might be able to save him? But Ka-nu knew he was safe, reflected Kull, for the statesman was too shrewd to expose himself to risk without profit. But was it to throw the king off his guard and pave the way to treachery? Would Ka-nu dare let him live now? Kull shrugged his shoulders.

3. *They That Walk the Night*

THE moon had not risen when Kull, hand to hilt, stepped to a window. The windows opened upon the great inner gardens of the royal palace, and the breezes of the night, bearing the scents of spice trees, blew the filmy curtains about. The king looked out.

The walks and groves were deserted; carefully trimmed trees were bulky shadows; fountains near by flung their slender sheen of silver in the starlight and distant fountains rippled steadily. No guards walked those gardens, for so closely were the outer walls guarded that it seemed impossible for any invader to gain access to them.

Vines curled up the walls of the palace, and even as Kull mused upon the ease with which they might be climbed, a segment of shadow detached itself from the darkness below the window and a bare, brown arm curved up over the sill. Kull's great sword hissed half-way from the sheath; then the king halted. Upon the muscular forearm gleamed the dragon armlet shown him by Ka-nu the night before.

The possessor of the arm pulled himself up over the sill and into the room with the swift, easy motion of a climbing leopard.

"You are Brule?" asked Kull, and then stopped in surprize not unmingled with annoyance and suspicion; for the man was he whom Kull had taunted in the hall of Society; the same who had escorted him from the Pictish embassy.

"I am Brule, the Spear-slayer," answered the Pict in a guarded voice; then swiftly, gazing closely in Kull's face, he said, barely above a whisper:

"*Ka nama kaa lajerama!*"

Kull started. "Ha! What mean you?"

"Know you not?"

"Nay, the words are unfamiliar; they are of no language I ever heard —and yet, by Valka!—somewhere— I have heard——"

"Aye," was the Pict's only comment. His eyes swept the room, the study room of the palace. Except for a few tables, a divan or two and great shelves of books of parchment, the room was barren compared to the grandeur of the rest of the palace.

"Tell me, king, who guards the door?"

"Eighteen of the Red Slayers. But how come you, stealing through the gardens by night and scaling the walls of the palace?"

Brule sneered. "The guards of Valusia are blind buffaloes. I could steal their girls from under their noses. I stole amid them and they saw me not nor heard me. And the walls—I could scale them without the aid of vines. I have hunted tigers on the foggy beaches when the sharp east breezes blew the mist in from seaward and I have climbed the steeps of the western sea mountain. But come—nay, touch this armlet."

He held out his arm and, as Kull complied wonderingly, gave an apparent sigh of relief.

"So. Now throw off those kingly robes; for there are ahead of you this night such deeds as no Atlantean ever dreamed of."

Brule himself was clad only in a scanty loin-cloth through which was thrust a short, curved sword.

"And who are you to give me orders?" asked Kull, slightly resentful.

"Did not Ka-nu bid you follow me in all things?" asked the Pict irritably, his eyes flashing momentarily. "I have no love for you, lord, but for the moment I have put the thought of feuds from my mind. Do you likewise. But come."

Walking noiselessly, he led the way across the room to the door. A slide in the door allowed a view of the outer corridor, unseen from without, and the Pict bade Kull look.

"What see you?"

"Naught but the eighteen guardsmen."

The Pict nodded, motioned Kull to follow him across the room. At a panel in the opposite wall Brule stopped and fumbled there a moment. Then with a light movement he stepped back, drawing his sword as he did so. Kull gave an exclamation as the panel swung silently open, revealing a dimly lighted passageway.

"A secret passage!" swore Kull

softly. "And I knew nothing of it! By Valka, someone shall dance for this!"

"Silence!" hissed the Pict.

Brule was standing like a bronze statue as if straining every nerve for the slightest sound; something about his attitude made Kull's hair prickle slightly, not from fear but from some eery anticipation. Then beckoning, Brule stepped through the secret doorway which stood open behind them. The passage was bare, but not dust-covered as should have been the case with an unused secret corridor. A vague, gray light filtered through somewhere, but the source of it was not apparent. Every few feet Kull saw doors, invisible, as he knew, from the outside, but easily apparent from within.

"The palace is a very honeycomb," he muttered.

"Aye. Night and day you are watched, king, by many eyes."

The king was impressed by Brule's manner. The Pict went forward slowly, warily, half crouching, blade held low and thrust forward. When he spoke it was in a whisper and he continually flung glances from side to side.

The corridor turned sharply and Brule warily gazed past the turn.

"Look!" he whispered. "But remember! No word! No sound—on your life!"

Kull cautiously gazed past him. The corridor changed just at the bend to a flight of steps. And then Kull recoiled. At the foot of those stairs lay the eighteen Red Slayers who were that night stationed to watch the king's study room. Brule's grip upon his mighty arm and Brule's fierce whisper at his shoulder alone kept Kull from leaping down those stairs.

"Silent, Kull! Silent, in Valka's name!" hissed the Pict. "These corridors are empty now, but I risked much in showing you, that you might then believe what I had to say. Back now to the room of study." And he retraced his steps, Kull following; his mind in a turmoil of bewilderment.

"This is treachery," muttered the king, his steel-gray eyes a-smolder, "foul and swift! Mere minutes have passed since those men stood at guard."

Again in the room of study Brule carefully closed the secret panel and motioned Kull to look again through the slit of the outer door. Kull gasped audibly. *For without stood the eighteen guardsmen!*

"This is sorcery!" he whispered, half-drawing his sword. "Do dead men guard the king?"

"*Aye!*" came Brule's scarcely audible reply; there was a strange expression in the Pict's scintillant eyes. They looked squarely into each other's eyes for an instant, Kull's brow wrinkled in a puzzled scowl as he strove to read the Pict's inscrutable face. Then Brule's lips, barely moving, formed the words:

"*The — snake — that — speaks!*"

"Silent!" whispered Kull, laying his hand over Brule's mouth. "That is death to speak! That is a name accursed!"

The Pict's fearless eyes regarded him steadily.

"Look again, King Kull. Perchance the guard was changed."

"Nay, those are the same men. In Valka's name, this is sorcery—this is insanity! I saw with my own eyes the bodies of those men, not eight minutes agone. Yet there they stand."

Brule stepped back, away from the door, Kull mechanically following.

"Kull, what know ye of the traditions of this race ye rule?"

"Much—and yet, little. Valusia is so old——"

"Aye," Brule's eyes lighted strangely, "we are but barbarians—infants compared to the Seven Empires. Not even they themselves know how old they are. Neither the memory of man nor the annals of the historians reach back far enough to tell us when the first men came up from the

sea and built cities on the shore. But Kull, *men were not always ruled by men!*"

The king started. Their eyes met.

"Aye, there is a legend of my people——"

"And mine!" broke in Brule. "That was before we of the isles were allied with Valusia. Aye, in the reign of Lion-fang, seventh war chief of the Picts, so many years ago no man remembers how many. Across the sea we came, from the isles of the sunset, skirting the shores of Atlantis, and falling upon the beaches of Valusia with fire and sword. Aye, the long white beaches resounded with the clash of spears, and the night was like day from the flame of the burning castles. And the king, the king of Valusia, who died on the red sea sands that dim day——" His voice trailed off; the two stared at each other, neither speaking; then each nodded.

"Ancient is Valusia!" whispered Kull. "The hills of Atlantis and Mu were isles of the sea when Valusia was young."

The night breeze whispered through the open window. Not the free, crisp sea air such as Brule and Kull knew and reveled in, in their land, but a breath like a whisper from the past, laden with musk, scents of forgotten things, breathing secrets that were hoary when the world was young.

The tapestries rustled, and suddenly Kull felt like a naked child before the inscrutable wisdom of the mystic past. Again the sense of unreality swept upon him. At the back of his soul stole dim, gigantic phantoms, whispering monstrous things. He sensed that Brule experienced similar thoughts. The Pict's eyes were fixed upon his face with a fierce intensity. Their glances met. Kull felt warmly a sense of comradeship with this member of an enemy tribe. Like rival leopards turning at bay against hunters, these two savages made common cause against the inhuman powers of antiquity.

BRULE again led the way back to the secret door. Silently they entered and silently they proceeded down the dim corridor, taking the opposite direction from that in which they had previously traversed it. After a while the Pict stopped and pressed close to one of the secret doors, bidding Kull look with him through the hidden slot.

"This opens upon a little-used stair which leads to a corridor running past the study-room door."

They gazed, and presently, mounting the stair silently, came a silent shape.

"Tu! Chief councilor!" exclaimed Kull. "By night and with bared dagger! How, what means this, Brule?"

"Murder! And foulest treachery!" hissed Brule. "Nay"—as Kull would have flung the door aside and leaped forth—"we are lost if you meet him here, for more lurk at the foot of those stairs. Come!"

Half running, they darted back along the passage. Back through the secret door Brule led, shutting it carefully behind them, then across the chamber to an opening into a room seldom used. There he swept aside some tapestries in a dim corner nook and, drawing Kull with him, stepped behind them. Minutes dragged. Kull could hear the breeze in the other room blowing the window curtains about, and it seemed to him like the murmur of ghosts. Then through the door, stealthily, came Tu, chief councilor of the king. Evidently he had come through the study room and, finding it empty, sought his victim where he was most likely to be.

He came with upraised dagger, walking silently. A moment he halted, gazing about the apparently empty room, which was lighted dimly by a single candle. Then he advanced cautiously, apparently at a loss to under-

stand the absence of the king. He stood before the hiding place—and—

"Slay!" hissed the Pict.

Kull with a single mighty leap hurled himself into the room. Tu spun, but the blinding, tigerish speed of the attack gave him no chance for defense or counter-attack. Sword steel flashed in the dim light and grated on bone as Tu toppled backward, Kull's sword standing out between his shoulders.

Kull leaned above him, teeth bared in the killer's snarl, heavy brows a-scowl above eyes that were like the gray ice of the cold sea. Then he released the hilt and recoiled, shaken, dizzy, the hand of death at his spine.

For as he watched, Tu's face became strangely dim and unreal; the features mingled and merged in a seemingly impossible manner. Then, like a fading mask of fog, the face suddenly vanished and in its stead gaped and leered *a monstrous serpent's head!*

"Valka!" gasped Kull, sweat beading his forehead, and again: "Valka!"

Brule leaned forward, face immobile. Yet his glittering eyes mirrored something of Kull's horror.

"Regain your sword, lord king," said he. "There are yet deeds to be done."

Hesitantly Kull set his hand to the hilt. His flesh crawled as he set his foot upon the terror which lay at their feet, and as some jerk of muscular reaction caused the frightful mouth to gape suddenly, he recoiled, weak with nausea. Then, wrathful at himself, he plucked forth his sword and gazed more closely at the nameless thing that had been known as Tu, chief councilor. Save for the reptilian head, the thing was the exact counterpart of a man.

"A man with the head of a snake!" Kull murmured. "This, then, is a priest of the serpent god?"

"Aye. Tu sleeps unknowing. These fiends can take any form they will. That is, they can, by a magic charm or the like, fling a web of sorcery about their faces, as an actor dons a mask, so that they resemble anyone they wish to."

"Then the old legends were true," mused the king; "the grim old tales few dare even whisper, lest they die as blasphemers, are no fantasies. By Valka, I had thought—I had guessed—but it seems beyond the bounds of reality. Ha! The guardsmen outside the door——"

"They too are snake-men. Hold! What would you do?"

"Slay them!" said Kull between his teeth.

"Strike at the skull if at all," said Brule. "Eighteen wait without the door and perhaps a score more in the corridors. Hark ye, king, Ka-nu learned of this plot. His spies have pierced the inmost fastnesses of the snake priests and they brought hints of a plot. Long ago he discovered the secret passageways of the palace, and at his command I studied the map thereof and came here by night to aid you, lest you die as other kings of Valusia have died. I came alone for the reason that to send more would have roused suspicion. Many could not steal into the palace as I did. Some of the foul conspiracy you have seen. Snake-men guard your door, and that one, as Tu, could pass anywhere else in the palace; in the morning, if the priests failed, the real guards would be holding their places again, nothing knowing, nothing remembering; there to take the blame if the priests succeeded. But stay you here while I dispose of this carrion."

So saying, the Pict shouldered the frightful thing stolidly and vanished with it through another secret panel. Kull stood alone, his mind a-whirl. Neophytes of the mighty serpent, how many lurked among his cities? How might he tell the false from the true? Aye, how many of his trusted coun-

cilors, his generals, were men? He could be certain—of whom?

THE secret panel swung inward and Brule entered.

"You were swift."

"Aye!" The warrior stepped forward, eyeing the floor. "There is gore upon the rug. See?"

Kull bent forward; from the corner of his eye he saw a blur of movement, a glint of steel. Like a loosened bow he whipped erect, thrusting upward. The warrior sagged upon the sword, his own clattering to the floor. Even at that instant Kull reflected grimly that it was appropriate that the traitor should meet his death upon the sliding, upward thrust used so much by his race. Then, as Brule slid from the sword to sprawl motionless on the floor, the face began to merge and fade, and as Kull caught his breath, his hair a-prickle, the human features vanished and there the jaws of a great snake gaped hideously, the terrible beady eyes venomous even in death.

"He was a snake priest all the time!" gasped the king. "Valka! what an elaborate plan to throw me off my guard! Ka-nu there, is he a man? Was it Ka-nu to whom I talked in the gardens? Almighty Valka!" as his flesh crawled with a horrid thought; "are the people of Valusia men or are they *all* serpents?"

Undecided he stood, idly seeing that the thing named Brule no longer wore the dragon armlet. A sound made him wheel.

Brule was coming through the secret door.

"Hold!" upon the arm upthrown to halt the king's hovering sword gleamed the dragon armlet. "Valka!" The Pict stopped short. Then a grim smile curled his lips.

"By the gods of the seas! These demons are crafty past reckoning. For it must be that that one lurked in the corridors, and seeing me go carrying the carcass of that other, took my appearance. So. I have another to do away with."

"Hold!" there was the menace of death in Kull's voice; "I have seen two men turn to serpents before my eyes. How may I know if you are a true man?"

Brule laughed. "For two reasons, King Kull. No snake-man wears this" —he indicated the dragon armlet— "nor can any say these words," and again Kull heard the strange phrase: "*Ka nama kaa lajerama.*"

"*Ka nama kaa lajerama,*" Kull repeated mechanically. "Now where, in Valka's name, have I heard that? I have not! And yet—and yet——"

"Aye, you remember, Kull," said Brule. "Through the dim corridors of memory those words lurk; though you never heard them in this life, yet in the bygone ages they were so terribly impressed upon the soul mind that never dies, that they will always strike dim chords in your memory, though you be reincarnated for a million years to come. For that phrase has come secretly down the grim and bloody eons, since when, uncounted centuries ago, those words were watchwords for the race of men who battled with the grisly beings of the Elder Universe. For none but a real man of men may speak them, whose jaws and mouth are shaped different from any other creature. Their meaning has been forgotten but not the words themselves."

"True," said Kull. "I remember the legends—Valka!" He stopped short, staring, for suddenly, like the silent swinging wide of a mystic door, misty, unfathomed reaches opened in the recesses of his consciousness and for an instant he seemed to gaze back through the vastnesses that spanned life and life; seeing through the vague and ghostly fogs dim shapes reliving dead centuries—men in combat with hideous monsters, vanquishing a planet of frightful terrors. Against

a gray, ever-shifting background moved strange nightmare forms, fantasies of lunacy and fear; and man, the jest of the gods, the blind, wisdomless striver from dust to dust, following the long bloody trail of his destiny, knowing not why, bestial, blundering, like a great murderous child, yet feeling somewhere a spark of divine fire. . . . Kull drew a hand across his brow, shaken; these sudden glimpses into the abysses of memory always startled him.

"They are gone," said Brule, as if scanning his secret mind; "the bird-women, the harpies, the bat-men, the flying fiends, the wolf-people, the demons, the goblins—all save such as this being that lies at our feet, and a few of the wolf-men. Long and terrible was the war, lasting through the bloody centuries, since first the first men, risen from the mire of apedom, turned upon those who then ruled the world. And at last mankind conquered, so long ago that naught but dim legends come to us through the ages. The snake-people were the last to go, yet at last men conquered even them and drove them forth into the waste lands of the world, there to mate with true snakes until some day, say the sages, the horrid breed shall vanish utterly. Yet the Things returned in crafty guise as men grew soft and degenerate, forgetting ancient wars. Ah, that was a grim and secret war! Among the men of the Younger Earth stole the frightful monsters of the Elder Planet, safeguarded by their horrid wisdom and mysticisms, taking all forms and shapes, doing deeds of horror secretly. No man knew who was true man and who false. No man could trust any man. Yet by means of their own craft they formed ways by which the false might be known from the true. Men took for a sign and a standard the figure of the flying dragon, the winged dinosaur, a monster of past ages, which was the greatest foe of the serpent. And men used those words which I spoke to you as a sign and symbol, for as I said, none but a true man can repeat them. So mankind triumphed. Yet again the fiends came after the years of forgetfulness had gone by—for man is still an ape in that he forgets what is not ever before his eyes. As priests they came; and for that men in their luxury and might had by then lost faith in the old religions and worships, the snake-men, in the guise of teachers of a new and truer cult, built a monstrous religion about the worship of the serpent god. Such is their power that it is now death to repeat the old legends of the snake-people, and people bow again to the serpent god in new form; and blind fools that they are, the great hosts of men see no connection between this power and the power men overthrew eons ago. As priests the snake-men are content to rule—and yet——" He stopped.

"Go on." Kull felt an unaccountable stirring of the short hair at the base of his scalp.

"Kings have reigned as true men in Valusia," the Pict whispered, "and yet, slain in battle, have died serpents—as died he who fell beneath the spear of Lion-fang on the red beaches when we of the isles harried the Seven Empires. And how can this be, Lord Kull? These kings were born of women and lived as men! This—the true kings died in secret—as you would have died tonight—and priests of the Serpent reigned in their stead, no man knowing."

Kull cursed between his teeth. "Aye, it must be. No one has ever seen a priest of the Serpent and lived, that is known. They live in utmost secrecy."

"The statecraft of the Seven Empires is a mazy, monstrous thing," said Brule. "There the true men know that among them glide the spies of the serpent, and the men who are the Serpent's allies—such as Kaanuub,

baron of Blaal—yet no man dares seek to unmask a suspect lest vengeance befall him. No man trusts his fellow and the true statesmen dare not speak to each other what is in the minds of all. Could they be sure, could a snake-man or plot be unmasked before them all, then would the power of the Serpent be more than half broken; for all would then ally and make common cause, sifting out the traitors. Ka-nu alone is of sufficient shrewdness and courage to cope with them, and even Ka-nu learned only enough of their plot to tell me what would happen—what has happened up to this time. Thus far I was prepared; from now on we must trust to our luck and our craft. Here and now I think we are safe; those snake-men without the door dare not leave their post lest true men come here unexpectedly. But tomorrow they will try something else, you may be sure. Just what they will do, none can say, not even Ka-nu; but we must stay at each other's sides, King Kull, until we conquer or both be dead. Now come with me while I take this carcass to the hiding-place where I took the other being."

KULL followed the Pict with his grisly burden through the secret panel and down the dim corridor. Their feet, trained to the silence of the wilderness, made no noise. Like phantoms they glided through the ghostly light, Kull wondering that the corridors should be deserted; at every turn he expected to run full upon some frightful apparition. Suspicion surged back upon him; was this Pict leading him into ambush? He fell back a pace or two behind Brule, his ready sword hovering at the Pict's unheeding back. Brule should die first if he meant treachery. But if the Pict was aware of the king's suspicion, he showed no sign. Stolidly he tramped along, until they came to a room, dusty and long unused, where moldy tapestries hung heavy. Brule drew aside some of these and concealed the corpse behind them.

Then they turned to retrace their steps, when suddenly Brule halted with such abruptness that he was closer to death than he knew; for Kull's nerves were on edge.

"Something moving in the corridor," hissed the Pict. "Ka-nu said these ways would be empty, yet——"

He drew his sword and stole into the corridor, Kull following warily.

A short way down the corridor a strange, vague glow appeared that came toward them. Nerves a-leap, they waited, backs to the corridor wall; for what they knew not, but Kull heard Brule's breath hiss through his teeth and was reassured as to Brule's loyalty.

The glow merged into a shadowy form. A shape vaguely like a man it was, but misty and illusive, like a wisp of fog, that grew more tangible as it approached, but never fully material. A face looked at them, a pair of luminous great eyes, that seemed to hold all the tortures of a million centuries. There was no menace in that face, with its dim, worn features, but only a great pity—and that face —that face——

"Almighty gods!" breathed Kull, an icy hand at his soul; "Eallal, king of Valusia, who died a thousand years ago!"

Brule shrank back as far as he could, his narrow eyes widened in a blaze of pure horror, the sword shaking in his grip, unnerved for the first time that weird night. Erect and defiant stood Kull, instinctively holding his useless sword at the ready; flesh a-crawl, hair a-prickle, yet still a king of kings, as ready to challenge the powers of the unknown dead as the powers of the living.

The phantom came straight on, giving them no heed; Kull shrank back as it passed them, feeling an icy breath like a breeze from the arctic

snow. Straight on went the shape with slow, silent footsteps, as if the chains of all the ages were upon those vague feet; vanishing about a bend of the corridor.

"Valka!" muttered the Pict, wiping the cold beads from his brow; "that was no man! That was a ghost!"

"Aye!" Kull shook his head wonderingly. "Did you not recognize the face? That was Eallal, who reigned in Valusia a thousand years ago and who was found hideously murdered in his throneroom—the room now known as the Accursed Room. Have you not seen his statue in the Fame Room of Kings?"

"Yes, I remember the tale now. Gods, Kull! that is another sign of the frightful and foul power of the snake priests—that king was slain by snake-people and thus his soul became their slave, to do their bidding throughout eternity! For the sages have ever maintained that if a man is slain by a snake-man his ghost becomes their slave."

A shudder shook Kull's gigantic frame. "Valka! But what a fate! Hark ye"—his fingers closed upon Brule's sinewy arm like steel—"hark ye! If I am wounded unto death by these foul monsters, swear that ye will smite your sword through my breast lest my soul be enslaved."

"I swear," answered Brule, his fierce eyes lighting. "And do ye the same by me, Kull."

Their strong right hands met in a silent sealing of their bloody bargain.

4. Masks

KULL sat upon his throne and gazed broodingly out upon the sea of faces turned toward him. A courtier was speaking in evenly modulated tones, but the king scarcely heard him. Close by, Tu, chief councilor, stood ready at Kull's command, and each time the king looked at him, Kull shuddered inwardly. The surface of court life was as the unrippled surface of the sea between tide and tide. To the musing king the affairs of the night before seemed as a dream, until his eyes dropped to the arm of his throne. A brown, sinewy hand rested there, upon the wrist of which gleamed a dragon armlet; Brule stood beside his throne and ever the Pict's fierce secret whisper brought him back from the realm of unreality in which he moved.

No, that was no dream, that monstrous interlude. As he sat upon his throne in the Hall of Society and gazed upon the courtiers, the ladies, the lords, the statesmen, he seemed to see their faces as things of illusion, things unreal, existent only as shadows and mockeries of substance. Always he had seen their faces as masks but before he had looked on them with contemptuous tolerance, thinking to see beneath the masks shallow, puny souls, avaricious, lustful, deceitful; now there was a grim undertone, a sinister meaning, a vague horror that lurked beneath the smooth masks. While he exchanged courtesies with some nobleman or councilor he seemed to see the smiling face fade like smoke and the frightful jaws of a serpent gaping there. How many of those he looked upon were horrid, inhuman monsters, plotting his death, beneath the smooth mesmeric illusion of a human face?

Valusia—land of dreams and nightmares—a kingdom of the shadows, ruled by phantoms who glided back and forth behind the painted curtains, mocking the futile king who sat upon the throne—himself a shadow.

And like a comrade shadow Brule stood by his side, dark eyes glittering from immobile face. A real man, Brule! And Kull felt his friendship for the savage become a thing of reality and sensed that Brule felt a friendship for him beyond the mere necessity of statecraft.

And what, mused Kull, were the realities of life? Ambition, power, pride? The friendship of man, the love of women—which Kull had never known—battle, plunder, what? Was it the real Kull who sat upon the throne or was it the real Kull who had scaled the hills of Atlantis, harried the far isles of the sunset, and laughed upon the green roaring tides of the Atlantean sea? How could a man be so many different men in a lifetime? For Kull knew that there were many Kulls and he wondered which was the real Kull. After all, the priests of the Serpent merely went a step further in their magic, for all men wore masks, and many a different mask with each different man or woman; and Kull wondered if a serpent did not lurk under every mask.

So he sat and brooded in strange, mazy thought ways, and the courtiers came and went and the minor affairs of the day were completed, until at last the king and Brule sat alone in the Hall of Society save for the drowsy attendants.

Kull felt a weariness. Neither he nor Brule had slept the night before, nor had Kull slept the night before that, when in the gardens of Ka-nu he had had his first hint of the weird things to be. Last night nothing further had occurred after they had returned to the study room from the secret corridors, but they had neither dared nor cared to sleep. Kull, with the incredible vitality of a wolf, had aforetime gone for days upon days without sleep, in his wild savage days, but now his mind was edged from constant thinking and from the nerve-breaking eeriness of the past night. He needed sleep, but sleep was furthest from his mind.

And he would not have dared sleep if he had thought of it. Another thing that had shaken him was the fact that though he and Brule had kept a close watch to see if, or when, the study-room guard was changed, yet it was changed without their knowledge; for the next morning those who stood on guard were able to repeat the magic words of Brule, but they remembered nothing out of the ordinary. They thought that they had stood at guard all night, as usual, and Kull said nothing to the contrary. He believed them true men, but Brule had advised absolute secrecy, and Kull also thought it best.

Now Brule leaned over the throne, lowering his voice so not even a lazy attendant could hear: "They will strike soon, I think, Kull. A while ago Ka-nu gave me a secret sign. The priests know that we know of their plot, of course, but they know not how much we know. We must be ready for any sort of action. Ka-nu and the Pictish chiefs will remain within hailing distance now until this is settled one way or another. Ha, Kull, if it comes to a pitched battle, the streets and the castles of Valusia will run red!"

Kull smiled grimly. He would greet any sort of action with a ferocious joy. This wandering in a labyrinth of illusion and magic was extremely irksome to his nature. He longed for the leap and clang of swords, for the joyous freedom of battle.

Then into the Hall of Society came Tu again, and the rest of the councilors.

"Lord king, the hour of the council is at hand and we stand ready to escort you to the council room."

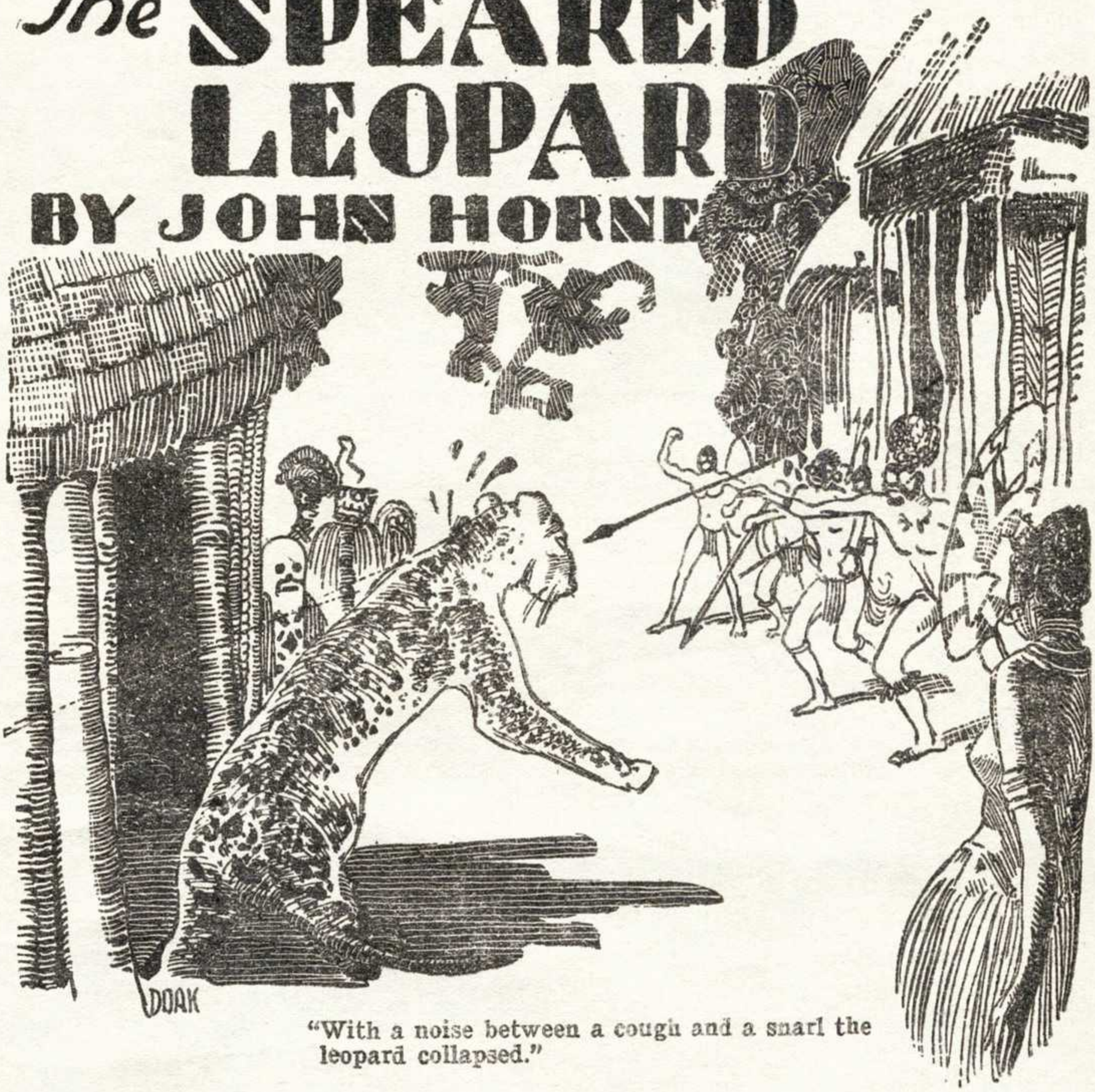
KULL rose, and the councilors bent the knee as he passed through the way opened by them for his passage, rising behind him and following. Eyebrows were raised as the Pict strode defiantly behind the king, but no one dissented. Brule's challenging gaze swept the smooth faces of the councilors with the defiance of an intruding savage.

The group passed through the halls

(Continued on page 284)

The SPEARED LEOPARD

BY JOHN HORNE



"With a noise between a cough and a snarl the leopard collapsed."

BRUCE FALKNER of the K. A. R. surveyed a group engaged in the sundown occupation of talk with drinks at the end of the club veranda. There was no mistaking the broad back of the district police commissioner—known to his intimates as "the Policeman"—flanked, as usual, by the rotund figure of "Fatty" Gordon, and the thin one of the airman. A trio of unfailing gayety, but tonight there was something repellent about the East Coast and all its works, and of course they would talk of nothing else. Falkner was about to pass on, but already they had seen him; or, to be precise, Gordon had.

"Hullo, Bruce," he called; "you're the very man we want."

Falkner hesitated. To anyone else he would have made an excuse, but he liked Gordon, who in spite of his bulk was a good sportsman and very efficient at his job, which job was "cloves." Besides, Gordon had worked with G. P.

"Come on," insisted the others; "we won't talk shop."

Falkner smiled unbelievingly, but moved toward them. "If that's a promise," he said, "I'll bet drinks all round that it will be broken within the next ten minutes."

"As a matter of fact, we were right

away from Africa,'' remarked the airman. ''Fatty tried to start about his precious island, but we sat on him mercilessly.''

''What do you think they wanted to talk about?'' asked Gordon in an aggrieved tone.

''No idea,'' said Falkner.

''A rotten film our highbrow airman dragged me to in London when we were on leave. He's mad about it. Wild animals in Burma or Siam, with a few natives running about—the whole thing faked, of course.''

''Pay no attention to him,'' laughed the airman. ''It's a unique film, and a perfectly straight one, with wonderful pictures of monkeys and bears and tigers, not to speak of a herd of elephants.''

''It sounds good enough,'' said Falkner, ''but to tell you the truth, when one has lived among wild animals as much as I have, they never seem quite right on the screen.''

Gordon burst out laughing: ''You infernal old big game hunter! Never content away from your beastly jungle! Now, what interested me——''

''You couldn't have been interested,'' interrupted the Policeman; ''there were no pictures of Pemba.''

But Gordon was not to be drawn. ''What interested me,'' he went on, ''was the leopard.''

Falkner looked at him curiously. ''Why the leopard?'' he asked..

''I don't know exactly,'' Gordon replied. ''There was only one picture of it padding through the long grass, but it made me feel uncomfortable—reminded me of the tales G. P. used to tell. He was with me in Pemba, you know—agent for Binney & Pomace, the Eastern trading people.''

''There he goes again,'' exclaimed the airman in jubilation. ''Arrant shop—and within three minutes; that's three and a third drinks!''

''I only saw G. P. once,'' said the Policeman when the laughter had subsided, ''and he seemed a very intelligent sort of fellow.''

Gordon nodded. ''Intelligent! I should think he was!—but the wrong kind of intelligence. I lived in the same bungalow with him, so I ought to know. He frightened me sometimes.''

''Poor old Fatty!'' said the airman. ''What did he do?''

''Things you'll never do if you live to be a thousand,'' retorted Gordon. ''In the first place he could drink a bottle of whisky most nights, and wake up in the morning as fresh as a daisy. I can see him now, standing outside my mosquito-net at the first streak of dawn and puffing away at his pipe with the face of a cherub, while I felt like nothing on earth.''

''Morning in Pemba!'' announced the irrepressible airman, but Falkner remained serious. ''What frightened you?'' he asked.

Gordon finished his drink, and when he spoke there was a change in his manner. ''It's hard to explain,'' he said. ''For one thing, although G. P. was very young—barely twenty-four, I think—and had only been three years in the country, he seemed to have forgotten that England ever existed, just like those queer old-stagers one hears about. He was a bit of a poet, too, with a way of describing things that held me spell-bound. Nothing very hair-raising about that, you'll say, but it was only the beginning. He got very keen about studying the natives. Those were his good days. With the whisky bottle beside him, and his eyes shining through the smoke of his old Dunhill, he would talk for hours about the different tribes and their languages—most of which he spoke fluently—and their customs and witchcraft and medicine men; and as to juju, there was nothing in the whole outfit he didn't know. Then there was his habit of going away for days at a time—disappearing clean off the map, nobody knew where—and returning without a word of explanation. Once he stayed away a week, and came

back absolutely exhausted. 'Thank goodness, I've got it to work at last!' was his only remark. And when I asked what he meant, he replied, 'The charm of invisibility, old man. It takes it out of you.' "

"Invisibility!" echoed the airman, "What nonsense!"

Gordon nodded. "That's what I tried to think, but G. P. wouldn't let me. He explained how he had made friends with a witch doctor—done him a good turn of some sort—and out of gratitude the fellow had been teaching him magic for months, increasing the dose till at last he knew how to make people believe they could not see him. Of course the natives do perform tricks of that sort, but G. P. declared that he had actually been able to attend a meeting of the most secret of their sects, where discovery would have meant certain death. It may be all nonsense, but it got on my nerves."

"Did you ever see him make use of the magic he had learned?" asked Falkner.

"Only once, to my knowledge. We had been discussing the native method of hypnotism, and G. P. declared he could put a man into a trance as well as any of them. According to him, it was easily done with such weak-minded people. I pointed to a coolie, and he looked at him and began to concentrate, or whatever one calls it. Well, at first nothing happened, but after a few minutes the man suddenly flopped down and went fast asleep. Nothing I could think of would wake him, and G. P. refused to give the show away by doing so himself. 'Leave it to the natives,' he said. So they fetched the women, and one of them covered the man's face with some white paste, and spat on his eyes till he came to."

"I've seen that," said the Policeman. "At Tabora one of my men went into a trance. The others said he was bewitched, and brought certain women who treated him in exactly the same way. It's curious what an important part the women seem to play."

The airman chuckled. "That fact isn't confined to African tribes. Why, in India I knew a woman——"

"Oh, shut up!" protested Gordon. "We've heard about her before. This is a different kind of tale. . . . Well, I was going to say that the only people G. P. seemed to fear were these witch women. He declared they used magic far beyond his knowledge and that some of them possessed the rare power of dual personality."

"The greatest of all their secrets," said the Policeman with growing interest, while even the airman grew grave.

"What is dual personality?" he asked.

Gordon hesitated. He did not care about theories, and felt that the discussion was getting beyond his depth. "I was never very clear about it," he said at last. G. P. used to talk by the hour, but he got so excited that I could hardly follow him. It appears, however, that some natives—especially the women I just mentioned—can turn themselves into animals. They take the form of a leopard for choice, and do a lot of damage among the livestock of neighboring tribes. Sometimes they even kill men, but more often women, though I don't know why that should be."

"I think I do," said the Policeman. "You see, the women continually go into the jungle or to the river to fetch wood and water."

"That's true enough," agreed Gordon, "but the curious part is that when the leopard has finished killing goats or people or whatever its victims may be, it becomes a woman again and returns innocently to the village."

This statement was too much for the airman's composure. "Cut it out, boy," he ordered derisively. "We're not in the dark ages—even on the East Coast — and anyhow, these extraordinary tales never seem to get beyond hearsay. Now, I want to *see*."

The Policeman raised his hand in protest. "You'll never do that up in the clouds," he declared. "In Africa you must walk on your flat feet if you want to see. Go on, Gordon."

"There's nothing more to tell," said Gordon, "but you must see that the whole thing got on my nerves. If not, try a few months in Pemba with a man who practises magic all day and drinks whisky all night. The marvel was that in spite of everything G. P. never neglected his firm's business. I'll give him full marks for that, though in other respects things were growing worse when I came away. His one idea was to find a leopard woman and learn her secret, and he talked of Nagomba, in the wild country this side of Tanganyika, as the place to try. If ever he gets there you'll hear something sensational. By the way, does anybody know where G. P. is now?"

During the discussion Falkner had remained silent. Magic! Witchcraft! In the tropics the border-line between reality and fantasy grew blurred more easily than most people cared to admit, and it was a bad business when a white man crossed it. He drew a bundle of letters from his pocket. Possibly their contents had been meant for him alone, but to reveal them might save other adventurers from disaster.

"I can enlighten you as to G. P's whereabouts," he said quietly. "At the present moment he is on his way to England."

"Home!" exclaimed Gordon in surprize. "That's news. I didn't know you had met G. P."

"I've known him since he was a boy," replied Falkner. "You mentioned Nagomba just now. Well, he wrote these letters from there. I'll read them if you like. As to being sensational, you must judge for yourselves, but they certainly carry on Gordon's story."

There was a murmur of assent, and Falkner unfolded the letters. "They start on June 30th," he said, "and follow each other like a diary:

"DEAR BRUCE—This is a God-forsaken place; in other words, I am the only white man within a hundred miles—and my supply of whisky has gone astray in the jungle. Pambu is with me. He's my boy, a wonderful factotum and absolutely devoted. You will wonder why on earth the firm sent me here, but as a matter of fact they didn't. I came on my own, for reasons — tremendous reasons — that the firm will certainly fail to understand. Gordon used to think me mad in Pemba, though he was too decent to say so. I wonder what he would think now? Leave is due in a month, but I doubt if I'll take it.

"P. S. The whisky has turned up.

"*July 1st.* Letters are a rotten means of communicating one's ideas, but I want you to have these, in case I don't come back. For one reason, though, I *am* glad to write. You and Gordon can not try to dissuade me, as you would do if you were on the spot, for I'm determined to discover the truth about this dual personality—zoomorphism is its highbrow name—the power of a human being to take the form of an animal and return to human form. I've mastered much of their infernal juju, but this is a mystery unfathomed by any white man. Think of what it means—for I'm convinced that it exists—the power of living the life of the jungle, of sharing its joys and dangers. Why, it's simply evolution, backward and then forward, doing in an instant what Darwin imagined to need millions of years. Can't you see the fascination of the problem—to know whether an animal can have a human mind—whether memories can come back from the other state?

"There are gruesome rumors, of course. One makes it essential to bring a still-born child to life, and when it opens its mouth, bite off its tongue. There's black magic for you!

But I do know that women are the greatest adepts. They are called leopard women, because that is the form they generally take, but nobody knows who they are; in fact, it is taboo even to discuss the matter.

"Pambu has just informed me that the Nagos are cannibals, periodically, you understand. He also said that there had been no victim for a long time, so I hope they won't take a sudden liking to me! Thank goodness, I can depend on Pambu if there is trouble.

"*July 10th.* There is an important juju house here, or rather it's a compound surrounded by a thorn hedge, with a sacred tree and a big hut in the center. None of the Nagos dare approach the place, except to bring gifts to the spirits who are supposed to inhabit the hut, guarded by a hideous old witch doctor and a priestess.

"Wandering outside the compound, I managed to catch sight of the lady as she took in some offerings. She's young, taller than most of the women, with regular features—rather of the Arab type—and wonderful gray eyes tinged with yellow. I've never seen a native—or European for that matter—with such eyes. In a moment she was gone, leaving me with a sense of attraction, not physical, but something I can't describe.

"Though the place often seems deserted, the witch doctor is always on the watch. He's the most malevolent-looking creature you can imagine, and very wide awake, but I shall find a way to speak to the priestess, whatever the risk. Good old Pambu! His announcement of the whisky's arrival has given me a brain wave. Tomorrow an offering of spirits goes to the spirit of the juju house, and then, unless I'm much mistaken, things will begin to happen.

"*July 12th.* I can hardly believe my luck. She is sitting in my hut, weaving flowers into her fuzzy hair and watching intently while I write. Her name is Ulana, which means 'the greatest witch', so it really looks as if I were on the right track at last. This is how it happened: With a bottle of whisky under my arm, I went to the sacred compound and struck the drum hanging at the entrance. Of course the chances were against Ulana's appearing alone, but she did, and—curiously enough—my presence seemed to cause her no surprize. For a moment her gaze pierced me through and through as if searching for something, then she asked very quietly what it was I needed. 'Knowledge,' I replied. 'I have traveled many days to seek you out.'

" 'The white man wishes to learn of my wisdom?' she said. 'It is well, but not here. When night falls I will come.'

"The eagerness of her consent didn't exactly please me. After all, she is high priestess in a cannibal village, and one never knows what treachery may be afoot; so I tried to explain that there would probably be trouble if she were seen going to my hut. At that she grew thoughtful and whispered, pointing in the direction of the juju house, 'All others I can make blind, but against M'Kulu no charms avail.'

"I guessed that M'Kulu must be her hideous opposite number, and took my opportunity at a run, with a blessing for the man who invented whisky. 'Make M'Kulu drink this,' I said, holding up the bottle, 'and for many hours he also will see nothing.' Once more her eyes met mine, and the gold in them danced as she turned away.

"Of course I realize that for a solitary white man to stand up against a cannibal witch doctor is a risky business, but so far everything has worked according to plan, and M'Kulu is blind to the world tonight, while Ulana sits here, never speaking and never taking her eyes off me. Being watched is usually an unpleasant sensation, but now I find it wonderfully soothing. And there is something else—I never saw her come

into the hut. Believe it or not, she made herself invisible to me. It's all the more strange, because at that moment I happened to be extra wide awake, with a feeling as if some wild animal were prowling round the hut —and then, suddenly, she was there. It's the brink of knowledge. The question is, shall I have the courage to go on?

"*July 18th.* Her eyes fascinate me. Their yellow glint is like powdered gold falling through water. In bright light the iris dwindles to a pinpoint—like a cat's—and the smaller it is the more it holds me. After the first visit she kept away for days, but she's here again this evening, and I know now that she has the power of zoomorphism.

"I'll tell you what happened. This morning the headman asked me to go out the next night of full moon after a leopard that has been causing trouble. It has carried off several goats and killed a girl at the edge of the jungle, and the people are panic-stricken, declaring it to be a leopard woman. You can imagine my feelings at that bit of news! Of course I accepted—it would have been impossible to do otherwise—though even then I didn't like the idea of shooting the leopard.

"The headman said that after watching for two nights in a tree, he had speared the beast, but the grass was very long and it got away with his spearhead in its left shoulder. Well, just now I was thinking drowsily about all these things and watching Ulana curled up at my feet, when suddenly something roused me into full consciousness. She had come in a sort of mantle of brightly colored grass cloth, which intrigued me because native women don't wear such things, and as I stared at it the mantle slipped down, showing a great wound, still fresh and bleeding, behind her left shoulder. For a moment I was too much surprized to think; then the headman's story — the tales I had heard of leopard women—my own suspicions about Ulana—came rushing to my brain, filling the blanks like the last pieces of a jig-saw puzzle.

"Instinctively I made myself devil's advocate, trying to use every argument against my own conviction. After all, the wound might be a knife wound. A priestess must certainly have enemies, or M'Kulu himself might have attacked her in a fit of jealousy. But no arguments would hold; this was a spear wound if ever there was one—a fresh spear wound in the left shoulder—and the leopard had been wounded in the left shoulder —*and escaped!*"

"'Ulana!' I cried, catching her by the arm, 'how did this happen?'

"She drew away and covered her shoulder, but I had seen enough. . . . I *knew* now. 'A thief came in the night,' she answered. 'His knife was sharp.'

"'A thief's knife?' I said. 'Say rather the headman's spear. Where were you two nights since, O Ulana?' My idea was to show that I had guessed her secret, but the question was useless, for she only smiled with her eyes fixed on mine.

"I don't know how long we had been looking at each other in silence—it seemed an eternity—when suddenly a deep-toned drum began to beat in the distance, and Ulana sprang to her feet in terror. 'The temple drum!' she whispered. 'M'Kulu seeks me in vain. . . . In the forest . . . I will come.' And before I could speak she was gone."

FALKNER paused for a moment and looked up. The expression on the faces round him showed neither conviction nor disbelief, but rather an expectant tolerance of the adventure of G. P. and his leopard woman. In Europe these would be considered the fantastic product of a mind unbalanced by climate, drink, and overstudy of the occult—with stress upon the second reason—but in Africa

people learn to respect what they can not understand, and so three Englishmen sat silent while Falkner took up the last of the letters.

"This one has no date," he said, "but it was written the evening before I reached Nagomba, that is to say on the 26th of July."

"The 26th!" exclaimed the airman. "Why, I flew over the place that very afternoon, a good deal lower than was safe, too, with nowhere to land within fifty miles. There was a great fuss going on, one of those big ceremonial dances — you know the kind of thing—an endless chain of men painted white and women with grass kilts like ballet skirts, twisting and turning in a mad sort of follow-the-leader. You must have been quite near."

"I wasn't far away," said Falkner, "fortunately . . . but you'll hear about that presently. First listen to G. P's letter."

He resumed reading:

"I'm making an effort to put everything on paper before—well, while I can. Last night was full moon, and I went into the forest with the headman and several others—and of course Pambu. As we left, the big drum in the juju compound began to boom slowly, just as it did on the night when Ulana was here—just as it is doing now. Will nothing stop the cursed thing? I think I'll go mad with its measured thud hammering into my brain. Mad! Why don't they try that drum in America? It would be a splendid idea for the third degree. . . .

"We went on and on—I don't know how far — till at last the headman stopped at the edge of a curved open space surrounded by dense undergrowth, and helped me up into the last tree of a group that stuck out from the rest like a cape. There was a platform among the branches, just big enough for me and my rifle, and so placed that it lay in shadow with bright moonlight on three sides. I wanted to keep Pambu, but the headman said it was the custom to watch alone, so I didn't insist. Then they all went away, leaving me with only the faint drum beats—you know what a distance they carry—for company.

"Suddenly the drum beats stopped. At first the silence seemed a relief, like a weight lifted from my brain, but soon I began to realize that silence in the jungle is far worse than any drumming. Of course I had read about it and been told how awful it was, but no description could come anywhere near the horror of reality, with its dead emptiness working on every nerve. Through what seemed ages of torture my only thought was of Ulana. Would she come, as she had promised? Would a leopard come—a leopard with a spear wound in its shoulder? In spite of all that had happened, the thing seemed incredible, yet something told me that it was true and that my own strength of mind—my absolute belief—must prove it.

"With throbbing brain I watched the moon move slowly across the open glade, touching new places with shafts of light that pierced the wall of foliage till at last, from a spot of darkness no moonbeam could penetrate, two eyes like great burning opals looked out. Mechanically I grasped my rifle, and as I did so the brightness of the eyes faded and a big leopard moved into the open.

"After that things happened so quickly that much is blotted out of my memory. I remember standing on the ground beneath the tree while the leopard came nearer and nearer, watching me with its yellow eyes—Ulana's eyes. I hadn't got my rifle —it must have been left in the tree—and somehow I didn't care. It was as if my mind had ceased to work, leaving my body incapable of movement or fear or any sensation. But when the beast was almost within reach, an irresistible impulse arose in me to feel its shoulder for the spear wound and

prove that Ulana had kept her word. For of course the leopard was Ulana. How, otherwise, could I be standing there unharmed? To need further proof seemed shameful, but I simply had to do it—want of faith—the old story. And now the game's up—for my hands were stretched out and had almost touched the silky coat, when suddenly M'Kulu ran out of the undergrowth and stood with his hunting-spear poised to throw.

"Like a fool I raised my arm to stop him, thinking that he wanted to save me from the leopard, but I paid the price of my foolishness, for in a second the shining spearhead had made a silver streak against the black wall of trees and buried itself in my side, while the shaft quivered and then dropped, tearing the twisted barbs upward in a great gash—like the one on Ulana's shoulder—like—well, it's no good worrying—I'll never know now. Perhaps—if I had kept my rifle—but, as a matter of fact I would never have used it, for at the very moment the spear struck me the leopard sprang at M'Kulu, and his scream of terror rang in my ears as I fainted.

"I'm not delirious, but everything is all muzzy—from my wound, I suppose. Oh, hell take that drum—and the stamping of the dancers! They have been at it all the afternoon, coming closer each time they pass round the hut. I know what that means—you'll never get this letter—but I must go on with it all the same.

"Pambu has disappeared. I haven't seen him for hours. Goodness knows how he got me back here, but he did, for when I woke up he was squatting by my bed. And now even he is gone—a rotten show, for I trusted Pambu. Perhaps they've done him in, as a sort of *hors d'œuvre*—pleasant idea!

"Something keeps prowling about outside. It makes no sound, but I know it's there. Bruce, old man, this is the end. When the thing comes I'm going to write down——"

FALKNER folded up the letters and replaced them in his pocket. "That's the end," he said, "so far as G. P.'s story is concerned. Now for mine.

"Pambu reached my camp on the evening of the 26th, in a state of abject fear, jabbering away incoherently, and, I think, on purpose, for as soon as my Nayassas and Wanyamwesis had been sent out of earshot, he suddenly calmed down and said that the Nagos were going to kill his master next morning. Then he shut up like an oyster, and neither threats nor promises could get another word out of him. Poor Pambu! As it turned out, he had good reason to be afraid, but I only realized that to reach G. P. in time I must be quick.

"Twelve miles through jungle at night takes some going, but just before dawn we were outside the village. For nearly two hours the drum had been throbbing in the distance, and I agree with every word G. P. says about it. That particular beat, I discovered afterward, is only used on occasions of human sacrifice, but even without that knowledge its effect on my nerves in the hot darkness was decidedly unpleasant.

"The huts at the edge of the jungle appeared to be deserted, and, fearing the worst, we hurried on to the big open space in the center of the village, where a silent crowd—the same white-painted man and grass-skirted woman the airman told us about just now, with the addition of a group of witch doctors with hideous masks—squatted on the ground with their backs to us, glistening like silver in the twilight. Beyond them a semicircle remained empty in front of one of the huts, to which Pambu, who had never left my side for an instant, pointed excitedly. I didn't need to be told that the hut was G. P.'s, and from the appearance of the crowd he was probably still inside it.

"The next few seconds were like a football scrum. I had just given the

order to get round and occupy the hut from behind, when the sun rose, and with it every man in Nagomba. Brandishing their spears the white-painted warriors rushed forward, while the witch doctors yelled like fury to the accompaniment of drumming that had doubled time at the same moment.

"To try and reach the back of the hut now seemed hopeless, so we charged with the rest, and—though it may sound incredible—they were so intent upon the business in hand that we were in the front line before they noticed us. And then it didn't matter, for suddenly the whole crowd stopped dead, and a drawn-out gasp rose from its ranks as a leopard stalked slowly out of the hut and stood facing us.

"I was as much taken aback as anyone, though in my case fear for G. P. soon swamped every other thought, while the witch doctors must have raged at the probable loss of their victim. However that may be, a shower of spears were on their way when I fired, but luckily my bullet got there first—through the neck and lung—a dead shot. With a noise between a cough and a snarl the leopard collapsed, lay absolutely still for perhaps ten seconds and then, to my intense amazement, rose with a supreme effort and disappeared in the doorway of the hut. Ordering my askaris to keep the crowd back at all costs, I dashed after it, expecting—goodness knows what I expected, but it certainly was not the sight that met my eyes.

"G. P. sprawled on a camp bed against the further wall, and, stretched on the floor beside him, head between paws like a great dog guarding its master, lay the leopard. So extraordinary was its position that I moved forward with caution, but it was dead right enough. At first I thought G. P. must be dead too, but found to my relief that he was breathing very faintly, with the sweat rolling off him as it does when fever is going down. There was a horrible wound in his side, so inflamed that poison seemed the only explanation; anyhow it sent me back to the doorway, shouting for my medicine chest.

"Then came the second shock of that eventful morning. With the exception of my men not a soul was to be seen. The crowd had vanished and the drum had ceased beating, leaving the place deserted and silent, with something in its steamy emptiness that made me want to get out of it quick.

"An askari came with my things, and as he put them on G. P.'s table I caught sight of the letters. You've heard what he wrote, so you can imagine my feelings, with him lying there unconscious, and his leopard—or was it his leopard woman?—taking her last guard at his feet. The whole thing seemed a mad brainstorm, and yet——

"Pulling myself together, I bent down and felt the animal's left shoulder, and there was a wound, a long jagged gash—healed over, but otherwise exactly as G. P. had seen it on Ulana's shoulder. It may sound absurd, but it was all I could do to conquer the fear creeping over me—fear of the place, of the silence, of dabbling in things white men should let alone. Action was the only remedy, and I clung to that like a drowning man.

"I sent for the headman and told him that he must produce M'Kulu, dead or alive. He said nothing, but led the way into the forest, with four of my men round him to see that there was no hanky-panky.

"After about two miles we came to the open glade, which I recognized at once from G. P.'s description. His rifle and cartridges were still on the platform in the tree, and when I had taken them the headman pointed to the half-devoured remains of a hideous old black lying at the edge of the scrub. 'M'Kulu,' he said, and I knew that he spoke the truth.

"'And Ulana?' I asked.

"Instantly every vestige of expression left the headman's face. 'Ulana?' he repeated, staring at me stonily. 'Ulana died . . . today . . . at sunrise.'

"The words were spoken deliberately, without the least feeling, but their effect upon me was to revive every doubt I had tried to stifle. You see, I killed the leopard at sunrise—and G. P.'s letters lay fresh in my pocket. Coincidence, of course, but mighty strange coincidence. For a moment I wanted to question further—to try and convince myself that the man was lying—but what was the use? The curtain separating black from white would only become more impenetrable than ever. No, I had to realize that my years of experience led no farther than G. P.'s daring, and that the mystery of the leopard woman must remain—for somebody else to fathom.

"The askaris could not understand why I refused to let them skin the leopard for me, and I don't blame them, for it was a perfect specimen and beautifully marked; anyhow, we left it where it lay.

"An hour later I got G. P. away in a litter—he was still unconscious—and had just reached the jungle when that damned drum started beating again, with frantic yells and shouting from the juju compound. Only then I noticed that Pambu was missing, and at once guessed what must have happened. It was a rotten situation. I knew that to go into the village a second time with my tiny force and G. P. on my hands would have been madness, and besides, it was too late to save the victim. The only thing was to carry on, which I did.

"Of course nothing was ever proved, but from evidence that reached me afterward, I'm sure the Nagos did get Pambu—spirited him away somehow during my absence with the headman. It's curious that I never missed him, nor could any of my men remember when he had last been seen. Poor wretch! He saved G. P.'s life and paid for it with his own."

"A NEAR thing," said the Policeman, after a pause. "Home is the only cure for a case like that—a long spell of home. I suppose he didn't tell you what came into the hut—after he had stopped writing?"

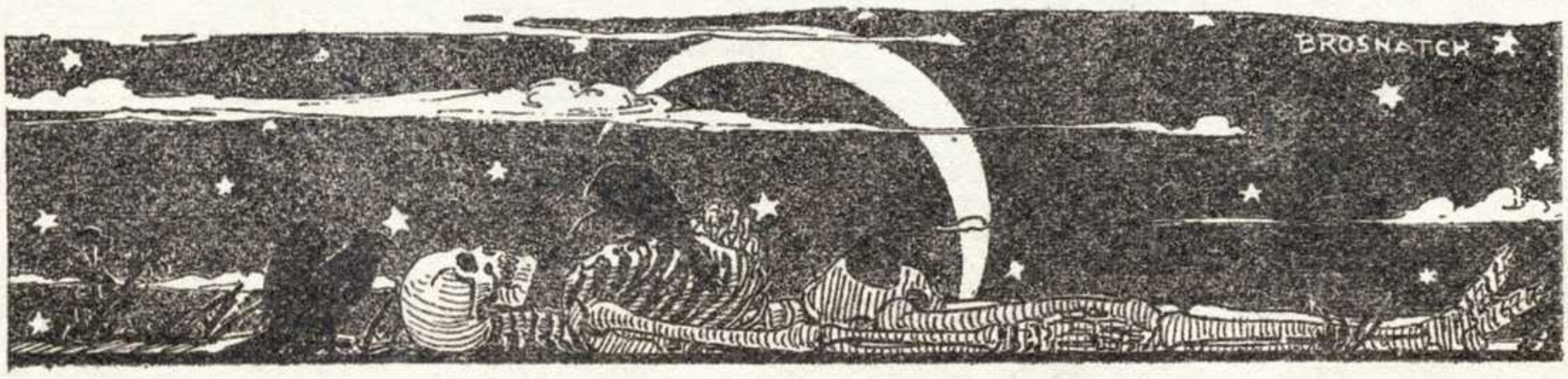
"No," replied Falkner. "He asked if I got the letters, and in his state of weakness I thought it best not to question further. By the way, there was no poison in his wound, and I think I know the reason. You see, poisoned meat would have been no good to the Nagos."

The Policeman nodded. "Everything seems to have worked to save G. P.'s life. Lucky devil!"

"Yes—if he keeps off juju," said Gordon. "It's an extraordinary adventure, though to my mind the evidence about the leopard woman seems far from conclusive."

For a moment there was silence. Then the man who flies above jungles—and juju—broke it.

"You amaze me, Fatty," he remarked profoundly. "Haven't you learned that in Africa nothing is conclusive? What about another drink?"



Demon Doom of N'Yeng Sen

by BASSETT·MORGAN.

"His senses reeled, when the ape dropped him."

THE cruise upon which the schooner *Annie Laurie* had embarked, a business of cloaking the rape of sanctified shrines under guise of procuring new materials for the manufacture of "Brigham's Beautiful Boots," had begun in the bath house of a Sourabaya hotel. A blinking toad squatted in one corner watching a fat white man stand in a tub and pour water over his paunch with an iron dipper, which is the method of bathing for white men in Sourabaya.

Captain McTeague, accustomed to the nonchalance of the tropic born and exiled toward nudity, was whistling cheerily when he sought a bath, and plunged in and out of that occupied hut, pursued by the clanking iron dipper and searing curses descriptive of his intrusion, ancestry and future. Later, apologetic, he met and talked with the clothed bather, learned that Brigham of Bristol wanted to hire a schooner and crew to obtain the skins of crocodile, cobra, and any other unusual hide that might be made into footgear for women. He wondered if tanned skin of natives would turn out well until Captain McTeague suggested his own hide as a fitting experiment—after which the shrine business cropped up casually because Captain McTeague suspected it from the first. For one thing, he had heard of Brigham of Bristol thieving sacred relics and misusing natives. In the Orient, news travels as magic works, without sight or sound or seeming reasonableness. It is whispered in bazars, purred in little jungle drum-voices, inscribed by brush ideograms and carved by craftsmen on objects of virtue as well as bargains of tourist trade. It is very difficult to escape the mute patient pursuance of vengeance which is earnestly laid on the laps of gods of the East.

Captain McTeague did not care greatly that Brigham of Bristol mis-

took him for a fool. The man was rich and generous. He had reason to be free with money, and at present the *Annie Laurie* was idle. The bargain was struck, Brigham installed with two beach-comber acquaintances who had an Oxford education and a large thirst and were diplomatic enough to flatter the shoe merchant to their personal aggrandizement, and the *Annie Laurie* steamed out with her deck cluttered with live pigs in wicker hampers, and a crew of brown men of much the same silent inscrutability of countenance but vastly differing ideas of personal adornment.

Two things happened quickly. Young Dr. Tai Hoong, for whom Captain McTeague had vast respect and a speaking acquaintance, had been hired by Brigham, and looked after his health with solicitude deserving a more worthy object. Captain McTeague was surprized that Tai Hoong accepted Brigham's wages. Certainly he did not need money. He was regarded with respect by Chinese savants and educators, with awe by the rest of his world. It was only after thought given to the matter that Captain McTeague connected the presence of Tai Hoong with Brigham's vague mention of a shrine of N'Yeng Sen and a string of jade bells. The *Annie Laurie* was not a half-day out when Tai Hoong busied himself at the crate of wicker-encased pigs, seeking for one whose squeal never ceased. Captain McTeague looked curiously on as a noted Chinese savant set the broken leg of a young porker that had been injured in packing and was destined anyway to be served on the mess table.

"So that's the sort of man you are," said Captain McTeague heartily, and Dr. Tai Hoong's smile was rarely pleasant at the implied compliment from a broad-beamed, rugged sea-adventurer whose fame on sea rims of such singing names as Java, Flores, Banda, Arapura, Molucca and Celebes was as far-reaching as the scholastic notability of Tai Hoong in other strata of life.

The next enlightening moment of Captain McTeague came when they plowed that dark stretch of sea which he mentioned as the location of the Little Paternosters, and Tai Hoong began softly to repeat in excellent English *The Cruise of the Mary Gloster:*

> By the heel of the Paternoster, there isn't a chance to mistake.

And Captain McTeague listened with a feeling of rare enjoyment, and his spine seemed to crinkle when the modulated voice of Tai Hoong reached the close of the poem:

> Churnin', chokin', chucklin', quiet and scummy and dark,
> Full to her lower hatches and risin' steady. Hark!
> That was her after bulkhead. She's flooded from stem to stern.
> Never seen death yet, Dickie? Well, now it's your time to learn.

It was a bit uncanny to hear a slant-eyed, yellow-skinned, long-queued Chinese recite that Britisher's pæan with such understanding. And in spite of many cruises hereabouts, Captain McTeague had never been able to shake off a presentiment of evil when he entered the mysteriously perilous waters of the Macassar.

He was glad of the company of Tai Hoong in time, for Brigham of Bristol and his companions drank constantly and bestially and were correspondingly seasick and brutal with the little brown seamen and kept McTeague constantly alert for trouble. Also McTeague liked the dignity of Tai Hoong in refusing to hold Brigham's head on occasion, and the Chinese doctor did not hesitate to tell him that drink would undoubtedly leave him a prey to jungle fever fatality.

The Malay crew were in vast awe of Tai Hoong, it was evident. They stepped aside lively when he appeared on deck, showed him a reverence of demeanor and glance that no white

potentate is granted from these men of sea-pirate stock. Even Brigham noticed it and cursed their deference, cursed the white lace jackets they wore, their fantastic millinery and baggy trousers. They constantly spat betel-juice from mouths like casualties. But when the *Annie Laurie* ran into a storm and was driven like a hunted thing through heaving black waters, the Malays shed their bodices and pants and without waiting for commands accomplished the tight-lashing of everything on board with incredible speed.

It was a bad storm. Brigham and his friends crept cursingly to their berths. Tai Hoong remained on deck, evidently enjoying the hurricane, the howling of wind devils between the islands. But McTeague was alarmed for his ship; his stout heart sank when, in spite of seamanship and expert piloting in darkness as tangible as black wool, the *Annie Laurie* was lifted on a boiling maelstrom and dropped on an out-jutting obstacle which the violence of the storm had uncovered. Simultaneously with the crash came the screech of engines running free and jangle of signal bells.

"Broken propeller," the lips of Tai Hoong shaped mutely.

Storm demons shrieked anathemas, called down murrains on puny humans daring to intrude their pallid faces in these islands of dark-blooded inconquerables. The blackness was profound. The anchors reached no ledge of sea-floor to which their flukes might cling. Brigham appeared under the cabin light, his rain-soaked pajamas quivering with fat fear until McTeague ordered him below and reinforced his command with two Malays stripped to loin-rags and shining oiled skins, to shut him in his berth.

A few rags of canvas and a sea-anchor were rigged to give steerage way. With their garments rain-molded to their bodies, McTeague and Tai Hoong worked with the crew to fight the *Annie Laurie* off those shores where in a sudden lightening of the torrential downpour a light flickered. The wind had somewhat abated. The gleam on shore wavered up and down, then rested.

"I'm going below for guns, Doctor," said McTeague. "Have you a reliable shooter, and can you use one?"

He was aware that his crew did not wish to be driven on those shores at any cost, and the sweep of wind and tide between islands invisible in darkness was carrying them toward that gleam of light. Also he was aware that high cliff walls broke the force of the wind and battering waves.

As he strapped on big navy revolvers, Captain McTeague saw by the clock in his berth that it was near dawn, although the storm clouds had prevented a rift of gray daybreak showing. A screech from the deck took him aloft three steps at a time, to a scene of confusion on which the deck lanterns shed lurid stabbing color splashed on heaving tumult of black men in frenzied slaughter.

A fusillade of shots warned him. His guns spat as he came from shelter. Then blackness struck as something crashed on his skull. Captain McTeague felt himself rolling and bumping, then slipping into deeper darkness than in the storm.

WHEN McTeague's eyes opened, Tai Hoong was bending over him with abstracted impersonal attention. He sat on the side of the berth to wrap lengths of white gauze about the captain's wrist. McTeague cursed, partly from pain, partly in recalling the fight on deck and his own elimination in the first of the fray.

"Natives boarded us," explained Tai Hoong, "for loot. They took all that was not fastened. Then they tried to cut the steam pipes. Your steam pressure, Captain McTeague, was excellent. If you had seen how they were cooked alive it would have repaid you for your hand. Not even a savage can fight steam."

"What happened to my hand?"

"They wanted an ornament on one finger and took it with the hand. I selected the shapeliest hand I could find, but of course it will not match your own hand. In a month you should have a serviceable substitute for the hand you lost. And you will observe later that your new hand belonged to a personage of importance whose body the remaining Malays viewed with marked respect."

McTeague swallowed hard and through gritting teeth remarked: "A Papuan chieftain welded on that ring red-hot, and because I didn't squeal I was saved from a New Guinea cooking-pot."

Then his eyes closed. More nauseating than ether fumes was the thought of wearing a native's hand in place of his own. He wanted to tear it off, but Tai Hoong gave him no opportunity. He was in attendance night and day, and later assisted Captain McTeague on deck to take command.

The *Annie Laurie* was beached on a sheltered shore and her crew were working on repairs to her hull. News of the shipwreck had traveled, and natives came looking for trade and straightway caught the interest of Brigham and his two drunken cronies. Captain McTeague paid no attention to Brigham those days. It was not until the schooner was repaired and they were ready to set out, under canvas (since there was no way of welding a propeller shaft in the jungle), that Brigham revealed what kept him sober, interested and busy during those weeks along shore.

The man was boastful, blatant, sickingly proud of the number of human skins nicely cured, pliant and soft as doeskins. At sight of them, McTeague swore large words, but Tai Hoong was interested, even to the point of drawing Brigham out on the source of supply.

"Native woman," announced Brigham. "And as nice a color now as when I saw her running into the jungle." He halted abruptly, aware that it was impolitic to confide the details of his selection and bargaining to anyone. Tai Hoong's shapely hands stroked the skin softly. His eyes did not lift; not so much as a flicker of more than casual interest was betrayed.

"Leather, like fur, must be taken from prime animals," said Brigham. "There ought to be a market for this stuff. Seems to me I heard of some woman making her will that her skin was to be cured to make the cover of a book of poems her lover had written to her. Nice little sentiment, that, though a Chinaman wouldn't appreciate the delicacy of it."

"No. Possibly not," agreed Tai Hoong. "The skin is fine of texture, finer than this one, for instance." He held up a second horridly suggestive dark skin.

"Huge giant of a fellow, that one—fought like a tiger before they slugged him. Did no end of damage. But they got even." And Brigham smiled. "Flayed him alive. It's a wonder you didn't hear him yell."

Tai Hoong straightened and rolled a brown paper cigarette deftly. His nostrils emitted streams of smoke. Then he strode forward to where Captain McTeague bent over charts and studied a neat sum of figures.

"I should be glad to confide in you, Captain McTeague, that my reason for coming with you and Mr. Brigham of Bristol was not alone the very high salary he paid me."

"It isn't news to me," agreed Captain McTeague.

"You know, of course, that Mr. Brigham has set his mind on visiting the shrine at N'Yeng Sen. I am interested enough to see that this goal is attempted, at least. And perhaps I could assist you in finding it."

McTeague studied the face of Tai Hoong.

"Something happened," he announced. "I had an idea you were on

board to prevent that booze-soaked fat-head from getting to the shrine. Now you've changed your mind. I'd like to know why."

"The ring on that hand which my poor surgery gave you, Captain McTeague, would enable us to gain entrance to the inner shrine. You may be surprized to know the sea-pirates were led by a man sworn to protect the goddess of N'Yeng Sen with his life. It is possible the hand may cause you embarrassment, but it may on the contrary protect your life. I am sincere in saying that had not my own hands been trained in surgery, which is my lifework, I should have attempted to replace one with that hand, so great and far-reaching is the power of N'Yeng Sen and the *jimat* on the finger of that hand you wear."

Captain McTeague looked at the ring, crude gold, carved in symbols he did not recognize, set with a carved blue translucent stone.

"Blue jade, Captain McTeague, rarer and more valuable than a first-water diamond of equal size."

Captain McTeague impulsively held out the brown hand which Tai Hoong clasped. Then his face changed.

"The damn thing don't shake hands right!" he exclaimed.

"For many years it has used the secret clasp of N'Yeng Sen," explained Tai Hoong. "Do not attempt to train it otherwise."

"Well . . . about this trip to N'Yeng Sen . . . " And for an hour Captain McTeague pored over his charts assisted by the Chinese, whose knowledge of hidden lagoons and dark places on the New Guinea shore was astounding even to McTeague, who had traded there for years.

ONCE at sea again, Brigham drank a great deal and held ribald conversation with Klein and Schartz, the two companions he had brought, in whose company he seemed to feel more natural than with McTeague or Tai Hoong. Captain McTeague ignored much. Since the business of taking cured human skins was done, there was little use grousing. But he was hoping that Brigham would unpack his tricks in company of a band of Papuan savages. He said as much.

"The New Guinea warriors have black skins, Brigham, sort of rich, brown-black skins. They'd make nice foot-gear.

"It's this way," stated Brigham, warming to shop-talk, "I've been figuring the cost of this skin, for instance, and how many pairs of slippers it would cut. Even dance slippers, which take very little material, would come high considering what I paid to take this leather. Gad, I could have bought that woman for a wife real cheap, but her skin came high. Seems to me the best way would be to take wives."

"Regular Bluebeard," suggested Schartz laughing. "Fat wives will make the most boots."

"Depends. If they're flabby fat, the skin is soft in places. Say, I need a name for this leather, something snappy and not a give-away. They'd probably get fussy about human skins."

"Something like Birds of Paradise, eh?" asked Klein. "By the way, they get paradise plumes from New Guinea where we're going. Why not get the real thing there?"

"Too delicate and small for profit," said Brigham. "What about this N'Yeng Sen name? We have fur names like Caracul paws and bellies of unborn lamb. Why not 'Breasts of Paradise'?"

Captain McTeague rose and moved away with a glance of black disgust at the ribaldry which came.

THE first sight of Papua crouched like a black panther on violet foaming seas seemed less menacing than these white men he carried. The fetid breaths of her dank river mouths was cleaner than his human cargo. And Papua, he remembered,

was savage, pagan, immoral and cruel, and for the first time he was glad. The hells of her torture traps could not avenge such deeds as the slaughter of this young Celebes woman in cold blood to make dance slippers for white women. Captain McTeague was all for finding the shrine of N'Yeng Sen speedily and getting shut of his bargain with Brigham of Bristol.

It took time to find the place on that wild northern shore of unconquered Papua where Tai Hoong had said the inland trail might begin. But they did make it and dropped anchor in a lagoon at flood tide, to have shore people presently dart out in black canoes like a flight of arrows from hidden bowmen. And the natives at the paddles, as Captain McTeague observed, were young men who carried a netted bag of feathers around their necks along with adornments of more sinister origin.

"The bag of feathers," explained McTeague, "is a crest of plumes they can wear only when they have killed men. They're friendly enough. Young folks usually are. But they're ripe for trouble."

"Why not kill each other?" asked Brigham.

"It isn't done. They kill strangers or enemies. And we are both. It's only fair to warn you. Nice black skins, eh?"

He beckoned a youth on board, ordered a fizz drink of harmless quality and allowed Brigham of Bristol to admire the oiled black skin to his heart's content. Turning away, Captain McTeague thought he saw the ghost of a smile twitch the lips of Tai Hoong. He hoped so. His own feeling of premonition boded trouble, and he needed a friend as never before.

The offshore wind brought that alluring sweetness of flower-breath transcended by jungle moisture that is the emanations of siren Papua, gripping as the memory of perfume on the hair of a woman beloved. The slumberous blue breasts of Papua were sunset-flamed and passionate. Loveliness reached out arms and twined fingers amorously in the hair of Captain McTeague. And in the lower shore darkness drums throbbed, pulses of desire, quick stealthy rustlings as the siren stirred to spring on these intruders.

Captain McTeague invited Tai Hoong to go ashore with him and carry gifts to the village chieftain. There was nothing to be gained by holding aloof now. In an hour or so the tide would be low and the schooner unable to escape until it flooded again. A bold front was the thing.

COOKING-POTS simmered over fires that made the night a spotted terror. Old women with flabby flesh moved to serve their lords with shells of turtle stew. Captain McTeague saluted the chief and wished he could secure the finest crest of Paradise plumes he had ever seen a chieftain wear. He remarked about it.

Tawauyo was rather spiritless for a savage, he thought. The whole tribe were lacking that suspiciousness and formidable resentment which must usually be overcome before trade begins. And only when McTeague mentioned that they would like to penetrate the hills to the shrine of N'Yeng Sen, did Tawauyo rouse from apathy. The sudden blaze of aged eyes showed a tender spot touched. McTeague gathered that Tawauyo greatly feared the god at N'Yeng Sen. Debbil-debbils sprang from his loins; they haunted river and jungle, thieved pearls for the goddess-wife in the shrine, and made life not worth living. If the white men were going to N'Yeng Sen, he, Tawauyo, would take their big canoe for his own, because never, never would they come forth to sail it away.

Sympathetic and unsmiling, Captain McTeague announced that he would make white magic and drive out the debbil-debbils. But his offer was met with a shrug of weariness.

Tawauyo had seen white magic which was very good for women and children. He had journeyed to a port and secured a box of it. That also had been stolen and at times the jungle flared with the magic lights and grew noisy with white magic worked by debbil-debbils. Possibly they were white-man debbil-debbils, since they acted strangely as white men did, and danced to the sound of tunes in a box which all white men carry. To the questions of McTeague in pidgin and Tai Hoong, who revealed his amazing knowledge of tribal jargon that night, Tawauyo said that life was scarcely worth living for his people. They dared not penetrate mazes of jungle rivers for terror of crocodiles that talked, or hunt on shore for fear of gray men of the woods who were half man anyway and acted as if only their strength was beast and in all else they were men.

The returning canoes, bearing Brigham and his cronies, put an end to the sorrowful complaint of Tawauyo. Drums purred and a dance was started: fermented palm juice added its potent fire to the lash of drums, beating, throbbing, purring into wild thongs of sound that seemed to leave weals on the flesh of McTeague. He saw black men leaping in demoniacal ecstasy, and Brigham of Bristol absorbing palm wine and ogling a young woman on the outer circle.

"Easy there," he cautioned. "We'd better be going, Chief," he apologized to Tawauyo; "a white man gets foolish on strong drink."

"Maybe buy wife," suggested Tawauyo. "Heap fine Mary make for wife catchem hut." A woman in the bleaching-hut, confined until her skin would be the color of smoky gold. And Brigham had heard.

"Trot her out," he demanded.

"None of that," roared Captain McTeague, but Brigham was striding after an old woman commanded to show him the bleaching beauty.

"Time to head for the schooner," McTeague announced, and enforced his command. In the boat Brigham ranted about the woman in the bleaching-hut until McTeague restrained an impulse to knock him overside for sharks to finish—for the lagoon held sharks. He mentioned his craving and Brigham laughed and began to howl a song—a maudlin music-hall ditty, but a fair baritone voice.

It was scarce ended when from the dark shroud of jungle gloom along shore, as if echoing Brigham, came a wide-throated roar of song, like a thunderous organ diapason gone mad:

"Maxwelton's ba-anks r-r-r boo-oney," it howled, then broke into speech: "Na-amin' a ship fer-r-r A-annie La-aurie. . . ."

Then McTeague knew that the nightmare of a sickness that had once plunged him near death's door had not been a fever dream after all. That voice belonged to Red Murphy, a waterfront bum who served time for murder. And he and Tai Hoong and Brigham of Bristol had blundered into a lagoon haunted by the most terribly punished criminals the world held.

Worse than Dante's Inferno was this sentence of doom passed on Red Murphy and his pal, Tricky Turner. And this was the debbil-debbil worrying Tawauyo. McTeague wondered if it would not be an act of mercy to end the doom of these two criminals. But he did not speak of it. For one thing, Tai Hoong was listening with alert interest; the other three white men were drunk, too far gone to question the leather quality of that jungle voice lifting a love song.

HE LAY awake in his berth for some time recalling vague memories of his sickness some years ago and the very bad dreams it brought. Then he decided it might be better to start at once for the open sea, give up this shrine business, and get out.

When sleep came it was heavy, dreamless, profound. He overslept,

wakened to find Tai Hoong in his stateroom for the first time since his hand healed.

"Something strange has happened, Captain McTeague. We are prisoners."

McTeague raced on deck in his pajamas. Then he cursed. The lagoon mouth, a narrow entrance between out-jutting coral reefs, was impassable. Jungle trees and brush, weighted by tinted coral newly brought from the sea-floor, effectively formed a barrier that would have to be cleared before the schooner could sail.

Long and earnest talk went back and forth between McTeague and Tai Hoong, and the Chinese at last prevailed.

"The weather is changing; the monsoons are just begun. A big storm would clear that barrier and we could sail away. Meanwhile I greatly desire to visit this shrine, and you would make it possible."

"How?" demanded McTeague. "How do I figure?"

"Your hand!"

McTeague looked at that shapely brown hand, slender beside his own, marked with the curiously carved blue jade in a ring of red and yellow gold.

"Sort of 'hand of fate,' eh?"

"A hand of destiny. Perhaps judgment. Or doom. One might invent many titles, Captain McTeague. I prefer to believe its power will rid the world of evil — a sort of demon's doom."

"Nice hand that," commented McTeague, flexing the fingers. "Why do you suppose those natives worked like sluggers all night to hold us in this lagoon?"

They were not to wonder long. Arrangements went forward to take jungle river trail to the shrine of N'Yeng Sen, and McTeague went ashore to obtain canoes and guides. The matted mangrove roots embedded in shoreless river banks prevented the use of the schooner's small power-boat. And they needed guides. Brigham and his cronies were still drinking, but they followed McTeague ashore and were invited to soak further in palm wine. The drums again pulsed forth their primal martial call to valorous impulse, but Tawauyo would not consent to lend guides or canoes to disturb the presiding demon of N'Yeng Sen. In fact, like an animal sensing storm long before a barometer begins its fall, Tawauyo was uneasy.

He kept on his feet, constantly peering into the jungle gloom, listening for sounds which the drums might deaden. And toward sunset, when the hills were smoldering in thunderous gory crimson, the avalanche swooped —rustling in the blackness beyond fire-flare and leaping dancers — a crashing that rushed at the circle.

McTeague's guns were knocked from his hands as they cracked. He was lifted bodily and swept through lacerating palm fronds and twisting lianas and thudded breathless over the crook of a tall tree branch to twist and recoil in horror from his captor.

A gray man of the woods, an orang-outang, clutched claws through his belt, lifted his two hundred pounds with little effort, grinned, then mouthed guttural semblance of human speech.

"Saw me afore, didn't ye? Tricky Turner's me name. An' I'm sick of bein' a monk."

McTeague's brain reeled. He was sick with fear and horror. Blackness floated him to semi-consciousness, but a vigorous shake of those powerful simian arms roused him to the fetid breath near his face, the great jaw fangs that could rend and tear his flesh, the paws that could split his body as a banana is peeled.

Then he was again lifted and swung through the air, turning, fighting, twisting vainly to free himself, and at last plumped down in a stinking stretch of river mud that reeked of the sickening odor of mugger walk-about grounds and putrid remains of

feed. Crashing through the trees came a second gray terror and down came Tai Hoong in the arms of a great she-ape. In ten minutes they were joined by other apes, each bearing a human burden, and the screams of Brigham of Bristol were silenced by a blow of an ape's double fist which drew blood from his blue-mottled lips. Thereafter, for the space of many minutes, silence reigned.

Sunset glow penetrated the clearing in flickering color. A strange company even for a tropic jungle stared at one another. Gray-faced white men, the yellow countenance of Tai Hoong a sickly green, the grinning circle of apes in charge, and along the river shore dark water split to reveal the long black snout and murderously fanged jaws of a crocodile.

"Ha-ail, ha-ail, the ga-ang's a-all he-ere," sang from the pink leathery throat. "R-re-mem-ber Po-o Su-ung tha-at ma-ade us wha-at we a-are. Here's whi-ite men tha-at ca-an do a-anything. Gi-ive us ba-ack o-our sha-apes."

Captain McTeague remembered. In his sickening fever dream the terrible Po Sung had glutted vengeance on humans, transplanted their brains to this saurian and some orang-outangs. Now, he knew the nightmare had taken flesh and blood, and caught him in its insane power. A maniacal fear lashed his blood to frenzy. He spoke as a man might who howls at nightmare fury to depart.

"Go on, kill us, only do it quick. We are not Po Sung. He is dead as hell. Why torture us? We didn't harm any of you."

"No. But ye'll do us go-ood. Ye'll fetch anoo-other like Po Sung an' gi-ive us ba-ack our sha-apes."

Half fainting for the first time in his life, McTeague glanced at Tai Hoong. The Chinese eyes flickered; the green skin had regained its normal yellow.

"I have studied under Po Sung," he said. "But you would not care to emerge in the body of a slant-eyed yellow-faced Chinese?"

"Na-aw," roared from the mugger's throat. "They's just two av us to bo-other abo-out. Tri-icky an' me-e. The gals is na-ative an' so's the o'other buck. Spe-eak up, Tri-icky, whi-ich wan'll ye cho-oose?"

"Not de Chink," howled from the throat of the ape which held Captain McTeague fast. "Dis bloke suits me."

"Captain McTeague is a guardian of N'Yeng Sen," said Tai Hoong. "Also I shall need help with this work. A third reason is that he is the only one capable of sailing his ship to a port. You will want to get away from the jungle, of course."

McTeague saw that Klein and Brigham lay limp, inert. And Schartz was in a stupor of fear. None of the three understood this terrible doom impending or the hell circle formed in the jungle, where powers of darkness loosed by a fiend in human form had gathered for vengeance too terrific to contemplate. There came a time when gathering darkness, the miasmic stench of swamps, the nauseating filth of the walk-about ground crowded McTeague until he was hardly aware of what went forward, except the voice of the mugger endlessly howling argument and the quiet, controlled speech of Tai Hoong, playing a desperate game for time, for life.

He knew only that presently he was lifted, swung through the jungle, with lianas clutching and dragging at his feet, and hunched in the circle of fires deserted by the natives, piled high by the jungle ghouls. There, a gourd of palm wine started his blood again and the icy clutch of fear about his heart retreated. Reason mounted its throne and he understood many things.

The mugger had left his river and lay basking on the heated coral and an ape poured wine down the great pink gullet. They were like trained servants for Red Murphy the mugger and Tricky Turner the man-ape, obeying commands, fetching, carrying, al-

most meekly subservient. And once in the silence as the mugger pondered something Tai Hoong had said, McTeague caught a moan. His head came up. The mugger's long black snout turned. The apes listened.

"Fetch ut he-ere," commanded the mugger, and an ape swung into the blackness beyond, then returned carrying something that mewed in agony, and laid it on the coral.

McTeague leaped to his feet. The hand of his guardian ape circled his throat and held him. Then he threw up an arm to shut out the sight of a girl who had once been pretty, skin bleached to color of gold ash, head like a feather duster, who had been staked down and was being flayed alive.

McTeague crowded back against the ape that held him, oblivious to the terrible proximity of the beast, and in one flood of rage that shut out all other fears, he turned on the rousing Brigham.

"Is this girl your work, Brigham?"

"Didn't have time to finish," muttered Brigham; "Klein and I just got started. Good taxidermist, Klein—lovely skin that girl——"

"Tai Hoong," roared Captain McTeague, "you once gave me a hand—a hand of doom, of demon's doom, you said. Give me one sign that there is justice in this world, or power in man to rid the race of its brutal fiends aborted from human shape. Give Red Murphy what he wants, and Tricky Turner, and this other ape!"

And somehow the form of Captain McTeague in his torn shirt and bloody scratches of flesh took on majesty and height and the strange hand was uplifted in that gesture which ancient gods of the East make in stone and bronze and golden effigy.

And across the circle of firelight Tai Hoong rose and became stately and terrible, as his hands clasped each other and he bowed from the waist as before god-head.

Then, in the jungle formed a procession of dreadful import such as the world has not seen since the armored apes of the simian city of Hanuman pranced forth to savage music that abused the senses, and jangled towers upthrust against the burning sky.

McTeague stalked forth, followed by his captor whose claws were hooked in his belt. Tai Hoong followed with head carried high and eyes ablaze. And swinging along came the miserable humans jerked like rag dolls in the clutch of the gray apes. Along the river bank they went, so that the mugger could more readily keep pace, and from his throat roared the sonorous sounds that called to mind a black-plumed hearse and following charger with saddle and stirrups reversed; the Dead March from *Saul*.

Swinging through trees overhead were a company of orang-outangs carrying gourds of palm wine and other things which McTeague could not make out. It seemed to Captain McTeague that his body was detached, separate, insensate. One burning furnace of wrath roared behind his eyes. For alongside, as if designed to flaunt the wickedness which white men did to natives, came a she-ape carrying as lightly as a woman carries her baby, the half-flayed body of the hut-bleached girl, still moaning, although her eyes were glazed and Tai Hoong had muttered the only comforting thing his lips uttered in that hour, that she was beyond feeling pain.

Deep into the jungle they plunged, and Captain McTeague saw the beauty of that pre-Adam period when survival depended on brawn, on fang and claw and stupendous strength. They could not have made that journey in weeks of hacking through jungle growth or paddling the trackless, shoreless rivers webbed with mangroves that sprout their seeds on the trees and send down roots to web the water with entangling death snares. But in the arms of the great apes they were carried high, swiftly, safely, and always within sound of that booming

Dead March roared from the throat of the mugger.

Paradise birds dancing on tall tree-tops in the early sun of dawn soared like living jewels. Lorries flashed furious color, squawking raucously as they winged from this procession. Captain McTeague looked down on river shores blazoned with profusion of monstrous scarlet flowers whose hot perfume seemed potent as chloroform. His senses reeled, his body was limp as a rag when the ape swung down and dropped him like a sack on a clearing walled by dense dark jungle. His breath rasped like dead husks, but he was aware that the gray ghouls had arrived with their human burdens and the swampy stream now ran limpid and green-shining through gardens, and was arched by red lacquered bridges that glowed in the moist heat like jewels. Against the hot blueness of a sky sailed by cloud argosies, towers stood like candles, dripping reflected light from plaques of porcelain and lacquer. Green bushes ablaze with bloom shielded its lower story.

A MOMENT later an exhausted, sweating Tai Hoong came from his ape captor to McTeague.

"N'Yeng Sen," he announced.

Gourds were passed, and McTeague swigged thirstily and knew the beneficence of wine dulling fear, rousing courage; and he needed courage. For a company of apes came from the direction of the temple, jacketed in shining metal tunics, swinging with the precision of soldiers, although they flew rather than marched, but their flight did not disarrange the long stream of ghouls that stretched from the surrounding gardens to the jungle edge where McTeague and his company waited.

"Now, Captain McTeague, you take command," said Tai Hoong. "Your hand——"

"Lord," breathed McTeague, involuntarily lifting the strange hand to have a look himself at this member which Tai Hoong had called "Demon's Doom." And the oncoming gray ghouls saw. A yelp from the leader and they halted, their stormy gray lines up-ended with the tail of the line swinging forward to enclose the jungle crowd.

Standing beside Captain McTeague, Tai Hoong spoke words that McTeague could not understand, and from the arms of one ape a figure dropped, toddled a feeble step nearer and disclosed under the limp skin of an orang-outang he wore as a cloak, an aged yellow man clad in jewel-embroidered robe. His eyes were on the uplifted hand of Jock McTeague on which the symbolic ring caught sunfire and glowed. He spoke, and Tai Hoong bowed from the waist.

McTeague did not learn what passed between these two men of the East, but between wheeling lines of the ape army of N'Yeng Sen they were escorted to the temple gates, guarded by apes who fell back at their approach, and Captain McTeague was aware that the ring on his strange hand opened these gates, and the shaven priest who met them at the lower step found in that hand-grip which McTeague could not change or control, some "Open Sesame" which cleared the way.

The next hour was one of such relief that McTeague neither knew nor cared whether he had fallen into a death trap or the trail of life. He was bathed, his body anointed and massaged. He was fed and clothed in robes of blue silk embroidered with designs of gold thread and gems. And he slept. The moon shone through the round windows of the room where he lay on a satin-padded floor mattress, and a white-robed attendant was setting sparks alight on incense, and offering him a cool drink.

Somewhere, there was murmuring sound pulsing like music. He ate curried chicken and rice, drank deeply of the tart, cool liquid offering in a gem-encrusted chalice, and was pres-

ently crowned with a gaudy headdress on which jewels quivered from gold wires. Then he was led through dark corridors lighted with smoky torches in wall sconces to a vast room where moon-silver poured through round wall apertures and wall torches lent lurid flares of flame. He wanted to shrink along one wall in his ridiculous robes and bonnet of jewels, but there was no choice. Through gray apes crouched on the floor in their metal jackets he was led to a distant dais that seemed a shimmering blaze of light. Coming closer he saw that the shining wall was made of dancing-girls in metal cloth dresses who stood motionless as statues, flanking a group of shaven priests in resplendent robes. To stools below the priests he was led, and Tai Hoong appeared from somewhere to sit beside him. Below was a couch draped with a white gauze pall under which lay something human. Tai Hoong spoke softly, whispered from unmoving lips.

"Judgment is taken from you; this white man has killed a woman destined to be a dancer of N'Yeng Sen, belonging to the gods. The Doom of N'Yeng Sen will fall."

The music he had heard came nearer, swelled, pealed through the hall, and the wall of dancers suddenly swooped into motion. For an endless time McTeague watched the posturing slow dance of the East until he grew drowsy-eyed and the light-footed woman creatures in their gleaming robes seemed butterflies wheeling drunkenly. Then a single gorgeous whirling flame of dancing flew down, spinning like a diamond top until it seemed that human strength could not keep such mad motion. McTeague closed his eyes.

When the music ceased with a crash of cymbals he looked again.

The priests descended. There was a stir forward, and before that covered couch came apes of the jungle, dragging three white men. The white pall was lifted and McTeague sickened at the sight on the white couch. Arms of smoky gold folded about a small red orchid of that genus along the river which poured forth its lethal breath. Her pretty face framed in dark curls as bushy as a feather crest lay the girl of the village bleaching-hut. And from her waist down was revealed the hellish cruelty of Brigham, the expert skill of flaying her golden skin.

It was Tai Hoong who acted as interpreter for the priests. McTeague realized that Brigham was either drunk or drugged, for he turned braggart again, threatening Tai Hoong with the authorities of the ports, casting the blame for the work on Klein, making the excuse that they had not killed her, and the jungle trip was to blame.

The pursuit of Eastern vengeance earnestly laid on the lap of gods is long and patient, but the judgment of N'Yeng Sen was swift. For the benefit of Brigham, Tai Hoong translated.

"Some time ago great surgeons made the successful experiment of transplanting brains of humans into the skulls of apes. Po Sung, who was once a power in this temple, used a river crocodile. We have seen them, heard them, and know they are unhappy in their present incarnation. It is the judgment of N'Yeng Sen that these men have expiated their sentences for deeds not as evil as the outrage of this girl destined for the goddance of N'Yeng Sen. It is the sentence of N'Yeng Sen that Brigham of Bristol and Klein the taxidermist change physical form with Red Murphy and Tricky Turner. I have spoken!"

And at that judgment of doom, McTeague leaped to his feet to protest, threw up his arms to silence the roar of ape throats that greeted the end of the audience and involuntarily added the finality of the upraised hand, displaying the symbol of N'Yeng Sen.

The hall leaped to life like gray, stormy seas, and as magically clear.

McTeague stood clutching the arm of Tai Hoong to keep his feet, and hearing the screams of Brigham and Klein. Suddenly he remembered Schartz and asked Tai Hoong in one word.

"The brain of the dying girl was transferred to the head of Schartz," said Tai Hoong. "He, or she, is recovering nicely."

Then Captain McTeague fainted.

He wakened in an ornate tiny building fashioned after the towers of the temple, with carved pillars supporting its spire. He was attended and waited upon, served with luxuries, cared for as never before in his life. And it was quiet there. He looked out at endless garden beauties and the far-away blue menace of the jungle wall. He lost count of days, and decided the wine was drugged, because nothing seemed to matter, nor did he care about his predicament or his schooner waiting in the lagoon.

Then one day Tai Hoong appeared, clad in dragon-embroidered black satin, sleek-skinned, suave, quiet-voiced.

"We are free to return, Captain McTeague," he said, "very much the same company in appearance as when we came. Do you feel equal to meeting your passengers for the return trip?"

CAPTAIN MCTEAGUE went with Tai Hoong and met Brigham and Klein and Schartz; a trio somewhat refined in appearance, thinner, paler, pathetically quiet and hesitant. And McTeague decided he had been stricken with jungle fever and imagined the great hall of N'Yeng Sen, the dancers, the judgment, the Demon's Doom, until Brigham spoke in that thick brogue of the river mugger, but a voice no more like the roaring thunder of the swamp night than a drawing-room voice resembles the howling magnified by a megaphone.

"Red Murphy's proud to shake yer hand, sor, and mighty thankful for meeting you widout makin' a meal of ye on sight—as I did many's the wan. Faith, ye don't know how hungry a mugger gits, and all. . . . "

"The same from me," said the man in the likeness of Klein. "And I'm a deal handsomer nor I was as Tricky Turner, sir, thanks be to you an' the Chink surgeon, sir."

Captain McTeague was mute, struck dumb by the transformation, unable at that moment to comprehend the enormity of joy that made these men tremble as they spoke. He looked at Schartz, who shrank timidly to one side and uttered native words, of which McTeague caught only one, "Marshter," as the woman in man shape dropped and bumped a forehead to the earth.

McTeague turned abruptly. From the temple doors came the ape army in their shining foolish jackets, long columns of gray men of the woods streaming from the great doors, swooping in that airy floating litheness that is the marvel of simian movement, catching up the men, swinging them along, flying high in the upper stratum of forest green, up with mountain beasts and birds over the steaming, perfumed flanks of the dark land.

Down they swooped to a village at noonday meal. Villagers scattered as if blown by the typhoon power and left the cooking-pots unattended. The fires were scattered, the pots overturned, the huts entered and searched for hidden pearls; then the ape army danced, silently, ghastly, grotesquely foolish, a wheeling chain of gray ghouls linked by paws and tails, and from the river swamps came a howling, roaring cry of despair:

"For God's sake, do-ont le-eave me li-ike thi-is!"

"Brigham of Bristol," said Tai Hoong.

"And me—in the name of heaven, shoot me, kill me!"

"Klein," muttered Captain McTeague. "Look, Tai Hoong, the for-

lorn ape in the tree. And his body going with us on the schooner, back to God knows what . . . and Brigham's body . . . to Bristol. Tai Hoong, they'd be better dead. What will Red Murphy do in Brigham's shoes?''

A ghost of a smile twitched the lips of Tai Hoong.

''An interesting experiment to watch, Captain McTeague—Red Murphy as the proprietor of Brigham's Beautiful Boots. I think one thing is certain; he will not inhumanly flay living natives for material for women's dance slippers. Perhaps—who knows?—the demon doom of N'Yeng Sen is wisdom of the gods, punishment that fits the crime.''

''Then by what justice was I made witness of these horrors?'' demanded McTeague. ''Prisoned in the lagoon, losing a season. . . . ''

It was the ape army that answered his question. They swung to the coral reefs, cleared the debris, working like Trojans, and Captain McTeague took the oars of a boat to pull his human cargo out.

The schooner's deck was empty of black men, who had vanished at sight of the apes. Captain McTeague went below to rout them from hiding in the hold, and the sight of a lantern clutched in the strange hand acted more quickly and effectively than a lash. He followed the Malays on deck, discarded his gorgeous robe, felt it drop heavily and lifted it to see what caused its weight. Then he gasped.

Those buttons he had not noticed before were pearls caught in claws of gold; there were embroideries of solid drilled pearls; there were pockets, pearl-filled. . . .

And on shore were the apes, standing like soldiers; and as he lifted the strange hand in farewell, their arms were flung high in silent salutation.

''There is an expression in your tongue, Captain McTeague,'' said Tai Hoong, ''about 'angels unaware,' perhaps too sentimental a term to apply to a sea captain. But 'scourge of the Lord' is also unseamanlike. The idea is that N'Yeng Sen has long been searching for Klein and Schartz and Brigham of Bristol. You have been the means of bringing them to the inner shrine and judgment. The Macassar pirates, sent long ago on their trail, blundered, fortunately for us, and gave us the hand of power. You feel that you are repaid somewhat, I hope.''

Pearls poured through the fingers of the strange hand as Captain McTeague pondered. On deck the Malays had spread canvas. The tide was flooding; the lagoon entrance clear. And one by one the brown men donned their baggy trousers, their lace jackets and fantastic twisted hats. It looked like fair weather, a good trip to Sourabaya.

The PURPLE SEDAN

by LOIS LANE

"It was gruesomely familiar, with its blood-marked brow and disheveled gray hair."

"CAN I interest you?"

I was standing supposedly alone in the darkest corner of the big storage room, and the question startled me, yet so absurd was the idea it carried that I laughed.

"Hardly," I answered. "Merely another case of a cat and a king. Still, I'm interested, at that. Anyone but a dead person would be, in such a car."

The manager of the Hobson Motor Company, for such I recognized the speaker to be, shot me a searching look, bit his lip, and dropped his eyes hastily to a resplendent front hub. "It's a great machine," he remarked.

"Why, what's the matter with it?" The listlessness of his voice stirred my curiosity.

"Not a thing—not a thing in the world!" But his assurance was not convincing.

"Comes at something like five thousand dollars, doesn't it?"

"And twelve hundred more, new."

"New? Isn't it new?"

The man shook his head and shifted his gaze to the fender. "Been out about three months, though it's only been run around five hundred miles."

"Somebody couldn't meet his payments?"

"No. Wanted a lighter car. Besides, the color is a little odd, too, you'll notice."

"A little," I agreed, amusedly. "At least it isn't every day that one sees a purple car with lilac upholstery. But then, a good finisher and upholsterer could remedy all that."

He caught at my remark. "Better let me sell it to you."

I laughed again. "I couldn't buy a set of tires for a car like that, to say nothing of the car itself."

"You wouldn't need to, for a long time. It carries two spares, you'll notice, and neither of them has ever been on. As to the price, we're prepared to make that right." He was eager now.

"You don't know how ridiculously right it would have to be to come within my reach," I told him and started to turn away.

He stopped me. "But you could at least make us an offer. What could you give?"

"My old bus the mechanic is working on out in the repair room," I answered, joking, of course.

"Oh, now! Surely you can do a little better than that. Make it a hundred besides."

"Can't do it."

"But your old car—why, we'd be practically making you a gift of the sedan."

"You would be, anyway, for that matter, but I simply can't afford the hundred."

"But listen, lady——" Suddenly he stopped, clenched his hands and endeavored to look off across the dim storeroom. Slowly and reluctantly, however, as if some unseen power were compelling him, he brought his head around, not to face me, but to stare into the lilac depths of the purple sedan. His eyes were bulging, his chin hanging down.

"Man!" I cried, seizing his arm and shaking him; "are you ill? Here, sit down on the running-board. Merciful heavens, you mustn't look like that!"

Whatever the spell that was upon him, my action seemed to restore his self-possession. He turned squarely about and addressed me in a voice but slightly shaken. "You can have the car on your own terms. Drive it out."

My eyes, in turn, must have bulged. "Say," I demanded, "what's the matter here? Is this stolen property, or is the engine gone, or what?"

"We're guaranteeing both the title and the mechanical condition, if that means anything."

"But, man, what's the idea? You haven't even seen my car. It's four years old and looks every bit of it, and besides has all the internal ailments a car can possibly be heir to. Only a little while ago it had to be towed in, and right now the mechanic isn't sure it will ever run again."

"No matter about all that—that is, if you care to trade."

"Oh, I'll trade all right, only I'd like to know what is back of it all."

"Wouldn't it be enough to know that, should you be displeased with your bargain, you may have your old car back—and keep this one, too?"

I stared in astonishment. Finally I got hold of my voice. "I won't say it would be enough, still it would be a great deal."

"Then suppose we let it go at that."

TEN minutes later I had nosed the purple sedan out of its gloomy corner and headed it toward home. I live ten miles out, and since the afternoon was already well advanced and I proved to be rather awkward in handling a strange car, early dusk had fallen by the time I turned off the main highway and entered the strip of woods that gives privacy to my bit of property. The road here is a sand one, and the tracks deep enough to preclude all danger of a car's going astray; furthermore, there would still be considerable light once I had cleared the timber, consequently I did not turn on the lights as I slid into the deeper darkness.

It had been a warm day for February, even in Florida, and the evening that followed was delightfully balmy, but scarcely had I entered the woods before I drew my light coat closely about my throat against the sudden chill that seemed to envelop

the car. My action was futile, however, for the feeling of coldness continued. It crept up along my spine, concentrating with such intensity at the back of my neck that the hair there seemed to bristle, and I had the conviction that a pair of eyes were boring into it. In addition to this unpleasant sensation, or perhaps as a result of it, I was seized with an uncontrollable desire to look behind, and, regardless of my obligation to the car, I did.

I did not start at what I saw, nor cry out. Indeed I was powerless to do so, as one is in a dream. A woman was on the back seat, a gray, shadowy, disheveled woman, the signs of a terrible struggle fresh upon her—hatless, torn, and blood-marked under wisps of tumbling gray hair. At a glance, and despite her battered and disarranged appearance, there was discernible about her, in the quiet elegance of her clothes and the simplicity of her bearing, a certain well-bred inconspicuousness that marked her as a member of a class rather than as an individual. Yet, definite as this impression was, her form and features, searched, had that vague indistinctness that ordinarily belongs to objects in a dream; that is, all except her eyes, which were bright and black and steady and burned into mine with a probing, searching fire.

How long the vision held me I do not know, but suddenly I became aware of light and warmth, and the car was emerging into the comparative brightness of my little home clearing.

IT WAS not until I was out of the purple sedan and inside my tiny cottage that I was able to think clearly once more. Then, strange to say, my first thoughts were of amusement rather than of fear or wonder. How my grandmother would have doted on my recent experience! How smoothly it would have fitted with her well-worn repertoire of Old-World ghost stories and supernatural demonstrations! How joyously she would have seized upon it as a weapon with which to rout my youthful doubts; for despite her persistent teachings I had always been an obnoxiously practical and hard-headed youngster, refusing stubbornly to believe anything that I had no particular occasion to believe. But the curious part was that, now that I had that occasion, I still did not believe. Or did I have it? Were there such things as optical illusions, hallucinations, imaginary visions due to overwrought nerves? True, I am not a nervous person, but mightn't my recent transaction have excited me the least bit? Besides, there are likely to be shadows where there are woods, and maybe I had even dozed a little.

As for the manager's anxiety to dispose of the purple sedan, that was a different matter. That *was* hard to explain. Perhaps, though, if I looked into things a little I could see a reason for even that; therefore with all haste I delved into the small sheaf of papers I had acquired along with the car. There were but two of them of any value so far as my purpose was concerned, the original certificate of ownership and the transfer issued to the Hobson Motor Company. From these documents I was surprized to learn that the motor company had owned the machine almost exactly two months, the original purchaser barely one, his title dating from the fifth of December. I fell to studying the man's name. Drennan — Drennan — Jasper H. Drennan. Where had I heard that name before? Not among my flesh-and-blood acquaintances, I was sure, nor those I had come to know through the pages of fiction; yet the name so persisted in tantalizing me with its familiarity that I could not rest until I had made an effort toward solving the mystery of its appeal.

There was but one avenue of enquiry open to me; consequently I turned to it eagerly. From a closet I brought out stacks of old newspapers, saved against house-cleaning time, and these I searched far into the night for any mention of the disturbing name. Finally I found it and the reason for its strange familiarity. For nearly a week it had graced the front pages of most of the state's leading dailies in connection with one of those sensational disappearance cases with which the reading public has been deluged the last few years. I had merely read the headlines before, but now, fired by a sort of personal interest, I followed the affair through all the editions, hoping against hope that every next line would have something to say about a purple sedan. But in this I was disappointed, although I did gather up some interesting, if more or less indirect, information regarding the man to whom the sedan originally belonged.

According to the papers, Mrs. Felicia Washburn Drennan, wealthy Northern woman and owner of considerable property in and about the city of Miami, had disappeared from her berth on a north-bound train sometime during the night of December fifth, or the morning following. Early in the evening friends of the woman had called for her at her suburban home and driven her to the railroad station, where she had boarded a train for Sanford, a little town well up the state. There she was to meet her husband, Jasper H. Drennan, who was returning next day from a business trip to Jacksonville. Those who had accompanied the woman to the train saw her enter her Pullman, and the conductor later reported that a ticket corresponding to the number of the berth she was known to have had was extended to him through the curtains of the compartment, but there all trace of her had ended. The porter had not been on hand when she had entered the coach, and she had at no time required his services; consequently the man had never seen her, and, since there had been passengers alighting at the different stations, could not say when or where she had left the train. When, however, he began to make up the berths beyond Sanford he was certain that the one bearing her number had been empty. When she did not meet her husband as planned, the latter, thinking she had missed her train, set himself to wait for her. She did not arrive on the next train, either, so that he became anxious and, late in the afternoon, telephoned their home. Learning from the servants of her departure the evening before, he immediately caught a train home, notified the police department and started an investigation. Days of exhaustive search followed, but at last even the official body was forced to admit failure, for neither clue nor motive could be found to throw any light on the woman's disappearance.

The Drennans, the papers explained, were newcomers in the South, having come from Ohio, where they had been recently married. Mrs. Drennan was formerly the widow of John H. Washburn, the soap manufacturer, and Drennan a clerk in the Washburn office. The former Mrs. Washburn, sole heir to her husband's large estate, had disposed of the soap factory and, after coming South, had invested heavily in grove and city property, over which she had established her new husband as manager. She had no other relatives anywhere and, so far as was known, no enemies. Moreover, according to her husband, there was no domestic trouble, and the servants bore him out in this.

It was not an especially interesting story, and by no means an enlightening one so far as my desires were concerned; consequently I was finally forced to go to bed in disappointment.

IF I HAD been pleased with my transaction the day before, I was even more so when I saw the machine by the light of the morning sun. Perhaps its color was a little more pronounced than I had thought in the mellowness of the waning light, but if it was, so was its unmarred newness, its gracefulness of line, its richness of equipment.

On close inspection, however, there were apparent two minor defects that I had not noticed before, though these were so slight as to be practically negligible. They were merely that the mate to the elaborately cut glass vase behind the driver's seat was missing and the upholstery back of the wheel was crushed and packed as if it had been pressed by wet garments and not brushed afterward. But I did not let these small matters worry me. Another vase could be found somewhere, and a good brush and the tea-kettle would take care of the upholstery whenever I had the time and the inclination to apply them. I must admit that at that particular moment it was the latter that was lacking. So eager was I to see the astonishment on the faces of my friends and neighbors when they saw my new car that I could not bear to lose any time in starting the show. I could steam upholstery while the community was recovering from its surprize.

Despite my impatience, it was some little time before I was ready to start on my tour of display. In the first place, I had some important letters to write, and in the second, I had to look the place half over for the papers belonging to the old car, for I had decided that after I had shown off before my acquaintances in the neighboring village I would go on to town and consummate my part of the trade by handing over the necessary documents. My numerous preparations completed, I finally backed the purple sedan into the road and headed for the village a mile away. That is, it is a mile if one goes the direct way, but at the corner of my clearing an unpleasant memory of the night before assailed me, so that I turned aside on a more circuitous road, one that avoided the strip of woods that had been the scene of my unusual experience.

It was noontime as I drove into the little settlement, a brilliant Southern noon, with the air like balm and the entire population out enjoying it. Children played by the wayside, men loafed about the streets, women visited in dooryards, or called to one another across bits of lawn.

Suddenly, in the midst of all this light and life, I felt myself grow deathly cold, and sensed that I was no longer driving the car, but that it was taking its way along the busy street of its own volition. At almost the same moment some magnetic power drew my eyes to the reflector above the windshield. There, instead of a reverse picture of the road I had just traveled, I saw a pair of burning eyes and a blood-stained, hair-bedraggled brow. In another instant the car was turning out for the ice-truck, and the vision had vanished.

Having lost all zest for my errand to the village, I drove straight into town and to the office of the Hobson Motor Company. As the manager recognized me, a hard look came over his face.

"What have you come for?" he demanded somewhat belligerently.

"To give you these papers—and to ask some questions."

He dropped his head and waited.

"Who is she?"

He straightened at my words. "Then you have seen, too?"

"Yes, last night and again a few minutes ago. What does it mean?"

"God knows."

"Did the man who sold the car know?"

"He must have, or he wouldn't have been so anxious to get rid of it."

"Why not tell me about it?"

"There isn't much to tell—and yet, a great deal. It was the sixth of December—I remember the date because of the unusually heavy rainstorm that swept over this section that afternoon. Along about ten o'clock at night, while the rain was still pouring, a man drove into the garage and wanted to leave his car for the night. Ordinarily I wouldn't have been here at that hour, but we were putting on a new night man and I had stayed to help him get started. Usually, too, I don't pay any attention to our storage patrons, since an assistant has them in charge, but on this occasion, watching to see that the helper performed his duties properly and, above all, that he insisted on the car's being parked in a remote corner so as to leave as much space as possible for later machines, I couldn't help noticing the stranger, first because of the magnificent car he was driving, and second, because of the extremely soaked condition of his clothes. How he could have gotten so wet in such a machine was entirely beyond my comprehension, especially since he did not look like the type of man who attends to his own tire trouble.

"All of this being none of my business, however, I soon forgot about it in the bustle of starting home. Indeed I doubt if I would ever have thought of the incident again if the assistant hadn't come to me a week later and asked what he was to do about the purple sedan, since it hadn't been called for yet and was more or less in the way. There wasn't anything he could do about it, of course, and since the owner had looked amply able to pay as large a storage bill as he felt like running up, and the car was good for it anyway, I told the man we wouldn't worry, but would just let the matter rest. We did, for an entire month; then to our surprize, we received a letter from the owner, saying he was dissatisfied with the car and wanted to trade it —even—for one of our sport sixes, his only condition being that we were to deliver the latter. Our car stands at only sixteen hundred, fully equipped, so you can imagine we were completely knocked off the Christmas tree by his offer. It seemed too good to be safe, so we immediately started an investigation. To our surprize, everything proved to be perfectly regular; consequently we lost no time in closing the deal for fear the fellow would change his mind.

"The car being now our own I sent a man to polish it up, preparatory to placing it in the salesroom for display. I was present when he went to begin work. He had approached the machine with the intention of running it into a part of the room where the light was better. His hand on the door, he was about to pull it open when he suddenly sprang back with the most horrified exclamation I have ever heard a man utter. When I got to him his hands were over his face, and he was trembling like a leaf.

"'What on earth is the matter?' I asked, thinking he had suffered a stroke.

"'A woman! A woman in there!' he chattered.

"'Nonsense, man!' I began, and turned to prove the absurdity of his statement. Half-way in my gesture I stopped, frozen with horror and surprize. There on the velvet cushions sat a woman, so horribly battered and bloody that involuntarily I closed my eyes to shut out the sight. When I got control of myself and looked again I had serious doubts of my own sanity, for the car was absolutely empty.

"From that day we never touched the purple sedan again. My man left that night, and I got other help, but as often as I sent someone to move the car the woman offered her silent interference, so that I finally concluded the big machine was not to be tampered with. Twice I sent prospective customers to look at it—

men from out of town who I thought would not do us much damage by talking. One of them ran out of the place screaming, and both thereafter took their patronage elsewhere. I tell you, that accursed car has all but wrecked our business. During the last month we've had ten men in the storage room, and besides have lost two of our best salesmen and the bookkeeper. A sinister influence is bound to spread, you know.

"I might as well admit right here that you looked like an answer to prayer to me yesterday when I saw you inspecting the purple sedan at close range without suffering any shock from it. Do you know, I would actually have paid you to take that magnificent elephant off our hands rather than let you go away without it!"

"Still you asked me a hundred boot."

"Yes, the business instinct is strong in most of us. I thought for a moment, though, that I had spoiled everything. If I had I suppose it would have served me right; still, surely a poor man is excusable for trying to save something out of a cool sixteen hundred dollars."

"At the expense of innocence?"

The manager shook his head. "Evidently not."

I laughed mirthlessly. "I'm afraid that didn't have anything to do with it. You see, I really didn't have the hundred."

He stared at me blankly.

As I was rising to leave he made out to ask, "What are you going to do with the car?"

"The only thing there is to do," I told him, "keep it." Again he stared —stupidly.

I MUST confess that I was in no happy state of mind as I reentered the purple sedan. Most of us, I suppose, have our responsibilities thrust upon us, and of course I had no right to expect to be an exception, but to be servant of a ghost! And I, of all people, who didn't believe in ghosts! Yet, didn't I? True, my mind, influenced by its own scientific training and the leadership of a scoffing world, laughed at the idea of supernatural things, but deep down in the innermost regions of my heart, hadn't I always known they existed? Why else that early absorption of even the smallest detail of my grandmother's spirit lore, that unconscious retentiveness that made every light and shadow of it stand out distinctly after all these years? And why else, also, my election to own a haunted car? Of what use would an unbeliever be to a spirit in distress? For that matter, under such circumstances, what use would a believer be, unless he was equipped with a deep insight into the ways of the supernatural? There was the rub—the reason why I, rather than someone else, must bear the weight of this unwelcome burden—the education my grandmother had instilled into me so many years ago. I, probably alone of all who had come in contact with the haunted car, knew that, once it has laid aside its physical form, only a soul in torment lingers upon this earthly sphere, and that its purpose in so doing is not to terrorize or appall its former kind, but to find one among them who will relieve it of its burden by performing the urgent task or mission that itself, in its unsubstantial state, is helpless to accomplish. Until it finds such a person and attains its desires, it may not take the rest for which it longs. To one who understands, it is an unthinkable thing to leave a soul in anguish without making the utmost effort to set it free.

As to the nature of the burden that was oppressing my ghostly suppliant I did not speculate. There was but one way I could learn that. I must ask, and ask properly. When I should ask must depend on the spirit itself, on the time of its next appear-

ance. If it should be that very afternoon, I must somehow steel myself to my duty, for there was nothing to be gained by delay.

But I was allowed to finish my drive alone, though I derived very little comfort from the fact, for I knew that sooner or later the hour would come for my interview with the specter, and the physical part of me dreaded it—dreaded it more than I liked to admit; for day after day I gave myself a perfectly good reason for declining to drive the purple sedan, even though my cupboard was growing unpleasantly empty, and I knew that important mail was awaiting me at the post-office.

But the matter was not left to my own initiative. One night, an exact week after I had come into possession of the haunted car, I awoke from a deep sleep with the feeling that something unwonted was astir about the premises. I raised myself from my pillow and peered through the window into the dim night. At first nothing unusual rewarded my search, only the shadowy outline of the fence, the shrubs, and the few outbuildings. Then close in front of the garage doors something moved, something tall and draped and only distinguishable from the rest of the night by its increased shadowiness. Where the doors joined it paused and stood as if waiting.

A cold sweat enveloped my body, for I knew that the ordeal I had dreaded was at hand. I slipped out of bed, however, and in the darkness began to don my clothes. The luminous hands of the clock on the dresser pointed slightly past one.

Having arrayed myself the best I could for a journey concerning the nature and destination of which I had no idea, I stepped resolutely forth into the shadowy night. As I rounded the corner of the garage the dim form melted away into the shade of the shrubbery.

I HAD barely touched the gear lever when the big car began backing out of the garage, and a minute later we were upon the public road. Except that the car moved as if guided by magic, there was no further sign of my ghostly companion until we were well beyond the borders of my little clearing. Then I suddenly became aware of a familiar sensation at the back of my neck. No need to turn around now. In fact I had no inclination to do so, but looking straight ahead, asked in a voice that I myself barely recognized, "In the name of the Lord, what do you want?"

A sort of sigh went through the car, and a voice that had no earthly quality answered, "Peace."

"Can I help you to find it?"

"You alone can help me."

"How?"

"Cause my body to be taken from its unhallowed grave and buried in consecrated ground."

"How am I to do this?"

"Obey."

Already we were approaching the point where the woods road joins the main highway. Without any guidance on my part the big car swung to the left and shot like a bullet along the deserted thoroughfare.

It seemed but a moment from the time the village fell behind until the larger town appeared, and another until we reached the corner where a half-dozen trails converge. A white blur of signboards marked the place, but as we flashed past, one of them stood out distinctly. It pointed straight ahead and was marked "Miami".

On through the night we rushed, over roads I had never traveled, through towns I had never seen. Eventually a thick fog settled, but the car bore resolutely on, sweeping the mist-veiled road like the wind, threading with uncanny deftness the turns and curves that sprang out of the night to confound it. At last a

gradual thinning of the darkness proclaimed that morning was at hand, but the fog continued to hold it in leash. Town after town we passed without distinguishing more than occasional early-lit windows. Even the shoulders of the pavement were indiscernible through the mist.

Suddenly I felt a change in the behavior of the car. Its bumping and heaving warned me that something was wrong. I struggled to get control, but my arms, curled inertly around the wheel for so long, were slow about functioning, so that the machine had jumped and reeled quite a distance before I could bring it to a stop. When I did I discovered that we had left the pavement and were now on an old, unused road. The rich tangle of grass that carpeted it told me that we were in low country, probably near a swamp, so that I did not dare to turn the big machine for fear of what might be lurking just beyond the fog. Then I noticed that a golden glow had begun to brighten the mist and knew that the sun was struggling to burst through. While I watched, it gradually prevailed, dissolving the dense curtain, now here, now there, until it finally left disclosed a half-fallen trapper's cabin encircled at a little distance by huge magnolia trees and cypresses enrobed with Spanish moss.

It was a small neck of land on which I had stopped, so narrow at that particular spot that the stagnant swamp waters almost reached the wheels, but expanding just beyond into an area large enough for a car to turn upon, though with no great space to spare.

Revolted by my position, I shifted into low gear and began cautiously to circle the ancient shanty, keeping as close to it as I dared out of fear of the swamp on the right. Suddenly I discovered that I had hugged the cabin too closely, that I could not complete the turn without backing up. Going into reverse, I let the car back an inch at a time. I had gone but a few feet when there was a sort of drop, and the car stopped. I leaned out to see what the trouble was and noticed that the left rear wheel had sunk rather deeply into the sod and in doing so had acted like a lever on a piece of board imbedded there. I tried to go ahead, but the machine refused to move. Then I climbed out and studied the situation. Perhaps if I could swing the board around in line with the wheel, I could make a track sufficiently firm to pull out on. With that idea in mind, I kicked the trash from the slightly elevated end, and, seizing it with both hands, gave it a sharp jerk. It let go with a snap, and uttering a scream of horror, I fell back against the car. There, in a cavity that the board had concealed, was visible the upper part of a human body, the face earth-strewn and discolored, but still gruesomely familiar with its blood-marked brow and disheveled gray hair.

Somehow I got the car free, somehow made my way over the bumpy, unused road to the main highway. The pavement lay straight as an arrow's path ahead, though just before me it made an abrupt turn to the left. Which way should I go? Ahead was the road I had come. Should I take that now? I tried to consider, but before I could arrive at any conclusion, something above the tree line over at the left attracted my attention. It was a slender white cross. I turned the car quickly in that direction, and a few minutes later entered a little town with a church close by the highway.

A priest, carrying a bag and an extra coat, was coming down the steps. I hailed him. "Come with me—quick!" I cried before the brakes had stopped screeching. "I have just found a dead body!"

The man hesitated. "Better get an officer. You see I'm——"

"No, you must come yourself—and call an officer also."

At that he turned and ran toward a near-by house. A few minutes later he climbed breathlessly in beside me, and we were leading a sizable procession back to the falling cabin.

MY COMPANION was the first to reach the open grave. One glance, and he turned a horror-stricken face to the rest of us.

"Merciful heaven!" he cried. "This is Mrs. Drennan!"

In the midst of the excitement that immediately burst forth someone suggested, "Better tell Drennan," and a man went to perform the doleful task.

While the others were milling about the crude grave, the churchman turned to me. "I'm glad," he said, "glad that you caught me when you did. The woman was one of my flock, and in another five minutes I should have been gone for a three months' absence. I had a very urgent telegram at one o'clock this morning."

By and by the messenger returned and the crowd made silent way for his companion.

I studied Drennan curiously in the brief moment of his approach. He was a youngish man, with more than an average share of good looks, stalwart of figure, and expensively arrayed. Distorted as his face was with emotion, it was difficult to read anything of the man's character there, but some of his minor traits were unmistakably recorded in the gorgeous coloring of his hose and tie.

Except for the heaving of his shoulders and an occasional dry sob, the man stood quietly looking into the grave until the priest took his arm and drew him gently away.

I spoke to the churchman. "We'll take him back with us," I suggested and fell in behind them.

Arrived at the purple sedan, the priest was on the point of ushering his companion inside, when, for the first time, the latter raised his head. He gave a sort of gasp, and his face, already pale, went blue-white. He dropped his eyes quickly and made as if to turn round. I would have stopped him, but the sheriff, rushing up excitedly, interfered.

"Sorry, Drennan, but of course you ought to know. Here's the instrument that did the deed—a flower vase apparently. We found it buried with her."

"See if it matches the one in my car," I interposed quickly.

The officer stared at me a moment, then, reaching inside the sedan, secured my solitary vase. He held the two side by side while he studied them.

"A dead match!" he finally pronounced. Then sternly, to me, "What do you know about this?"

"Everything of importance, it seems."

"What, for instance?"

"Briefly, that some time during the afternoon of December sixth Jasper Drennan killed his wife with a flower vase, and not later than five o'clock of the same day buried her here behind the cabin."

"But that is impossible." In the dead silence that followed my statement only the priest found his voice.

"According to the newspapers, yes. But in reality Mr. Drennan met his wife at Sanford that morning three months ago just as they had planned; though, because of the earliness of the hour—the train reaches Sanford at five-thirty as I happen to know—and the woman's inconspicuous appearance, it is likely that no one noticed them, a probability that the man seized upon when he was later faced with the necessity of making explanations. Then, too, the woman's unobtrusiveness while traveling, a habit with which the husband was doubtless familiar, helped a great deal to lend plausibility to his story. As for the murder itself, it is not likely that the idea ever occurred to him until, in a burst of anger, the crime was committed — we have noticed that he doesn't have any great control over

his emotions. At least no premeditation is apparent relative to his wife's money; for as her manager and eventual heir he was already sitting pretty there. But be that as it may, the killing in all probability didn't take place until some time in the afternoon when the heavy downpour of rain made the road practically deserted, and it is reasonable to suppose that it occurred not far from this spot, for a murderer would hardly dare to carry his victim's body any great distance on a public highway in broad daylight, even in a rainstorm. And he must have made the burial in the rain, for he was wringing wet when he stored his car in a West Park garage at ten o'clock that night—you can see the prints of his wet clothes on the upholstery yet. As it takes at least six hours of the wildest kind of driving to cover the distance between here and West Park, his gruesome work must have been done by four o'clock, especially as he had to lose a little time when he stopped to telephone his pretended inquiry concerning his wife. That was 'late in the afternoon,' according to the papers, and it isn't likely he risked it before ridding himself of the body——"

"See here, woman, that is all guesswork. You can't charge a man with a crime on such grounds." It was the priest who cut in.

"Is the vase guesswork? It was missing from the car, it fits the woman's wounds, it was found buried with her——"

"But it's your car it belongs in. What has this man to do with your car?" the sheriff demanded.

"It was his car on the sixth of December, the day his wife disappeared. He bought it the day before in Jacksonville." I opened my bag and offered the documents in proof of my words. The sheriff stared at the uppermost paper; then he turned abruptly to Drennan. "How about it, Drennan?" he asked.

The man seemed remarkably calm now, but his voice was tense. "I did own the car on that date, but while I was waiting for my wife somebody drove it away."

"And you knew exactly where to find it a month later when you wanted to trade it for a light sport roadster. But never mind about that. We're all interested in another point. Would you mind telling us what the quarrel was about that caused you to kill your wife—and throw her body into the tonneau of the car? Could it by any chance have been that she objected to the color scheme of the purple sedan?"

The man's nerves suddenly let go. "You devil! You fiend!" he screamed, "She told you that!"

"No," I told him, "I merely deduced it from your clothes."

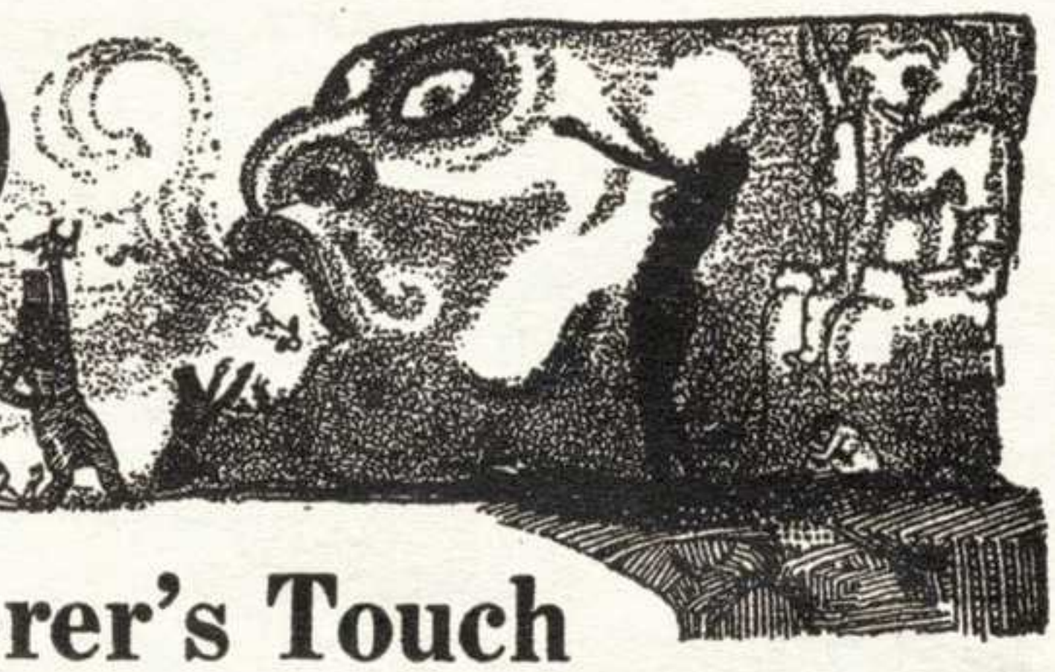
As the sheriff led his prisoner away, I turned to the shaken priest. "Father," I said, just to make sure, "I suppose you'll take charge of the body?"

He nodded sadly. "When the time comes."

"Thanks."

A feeling of peace descended upon me as I entered the purple sedan, and I have driven the car in peace ever since.

Folks Used to Believe



by ALVIN F. HARLOW

The Murderer's Touch

ONE of the most fixed of all beliefs in centuries past was that the corpse of a murdered man would bleed if his assassin came near him or touched him. A famous instance of a trial by this practise is found in Denmark in the Sixteenth Century. A number of gentlemen who were in an inn together one evening fell into a quarrel, and from words came to blows. The candles were overturned and in the darkness a man was stabbed to death. Several of the party accused an equerry of the king as the murderer, but he stoutly denied it.

Christian II, the king, to discover the murderer, caused them all to be assembled in a room around the dead body as it lay on a bier; and he ordered that one after another they should lay their right hands on the dead man's naked breast and swear their innocence. The gentlemen did so, and no sign appeared as witness against them; but the equerry, holding off until the last, and pretending great grief, first kissed the dead man's feet; then, as he laid his hand on the breast, the blood gushed forth in abundance, not only from the dagger-wound but also from the nostrils of the corpse. With a great cry of fear, the guilty man fell on his knees and confessed his crime.

"Hereupon," says an old chronicler, "arose that practise (which is now ordinary in many places) of finding out unknown murderers, which, by the admirable power of God, are for the most part revealed, either by the bleeding of the corpse or the opening of its eyes, or some other extraordinary sign, as daily experience teaches."

On another occasion a traveler was found murdered on the highway in Denmark; and, the murderer being unknown, the magistrates caused one hand of the victim to be cut off and hung by a string to the ceiling of the office of the town prison, where as months and years passed, it dried and shriveled.

Ten years had gone by when one day a well-known citizen entered the prison on business. As he spoke to the jailor, those in the room heard a dripping sound, and looking up, saw to their horror that drops of blood were falling from the withered hand to the table beneath it.

For a moment they all gazed, breathless with stupefaction. Then the jailor sprang to his feet and seized the visitor by the collar.

"You are my prisoner!" he said, hoarsely. Limp with terror, the man's legs sagged beneath him. He was dragged before a magistrate, where he sobbed out a confession of his crime, and a few days later he was sent to the gallows.

Outside the Universe

by Edmond Hamilton

"We were weaponless and outnumbered ten to one."

The Story Thus Far

THE Interstellar Patrol, under command of Dur Nal, meets a vast fleet manned by serpent-people from a dying universe, who attack and destroy the fleet of the Galaxy. Dur Nal and his crew alone escape, in a captured ship of the serpent-people. The invaders establish themselves on the worlds in the Cancer cluster. Dur Nal and his crew speed out through the void to ask help from the Andromeda universe, which has already repulsed the first invasion of the serpent-people.

6. Into the Infinite

STANDING at the controls, his tireless metal figure erect as he gazed out into the vast blackness of cosmic space that lay before us, Korus Kan turned from that gaze toward me as I stepped inside the pilot room. Silently I stepped over beside him, and silently, as was our wont, we contemplated the great panorama before us. A stupendous vault of sheer utter darkness it stretched about us, darkness broken only by the misty light of the great universes of thronging suns that floated here and there in this vast void through which we were racing. Behind us our own galaxy lay, just another of those dim glows; for hours had passed since we had launched out into outer space from its edge, and in those hours our awful speed had carried us on through the void through thousands of light-years of space.

But though in those hours of flight our own universe had dwindled to a mere mist of light, those other misty patches that were the universes ahead had hardly grown at all in size or intensity of light, making us realize that even the vast expanse of space through which our ship had already flashed was but a fraction of the gulf that lay between us and the great Andromeda universe. Before us the soft glow that was that universe seemed a little brighter, a little larger, but even so I knew that more than a score of days must elapse be-

fore even our ship's tremendous velocity would bring us to it. And even were we able to secure the help we needed, it would still be many days before we could flash back to our own galaxy, and in those days, I well knew, the serpent-invaders would be completing their last plans, tightening their grip on all the suns and worlds of the Cancer cluster, and preparing the way for the vast hordes that soon would cross the void to pour down on that cluster, spreading resistlessly from it across all our galaxy.

It was with heavy heart that I gazed ahead, knowing these things, but my gloomy thoughts were suddenly interrupted by an exclamation from Korus Kan, who had been peering intently forward into the tenebrous void, and who now pointed ahead, toward the right.

"That flicker of light," he said: "you see it?"

I bent forward, gazing to where he was pointing in the heavens before us, and then at last made out in the blackness, not far to the right of the glowing Andromeda universe, another patch of light of equal size, but one whose light was so dim as only to be seen with straining eyes. A mere dim flicker of light it was, in that crowding darkness, but as I gazed at it the nature of it suddenly came clearly to my mind, and I uttered a low exclamation myself.

"The universe of the serpent-creatures!" I said. "It's the dying universe from which they came to invade our own!"

He nodded. "Yes. It's nearer the Andromeda universe than our own, too."

I saw that he was right, and that the two universes, that of Andromeda and this dim, dying one, lay comparatively close to each other, and at almost equal distances from our own, the two forming the base of a long, narrow triangle of which our own universe was the apex. Together we gazed toward that dim flicker of light, in a thoughtful silence. We knew, even as we gazed, what great preparations were going on in that dying universe for the conquest of our own galaxy, what mighty efforts the serpent-races there were making, to complete their vast fleet and the strange, huge weapon which the records we had captured had mentioned, so that they could flash through the void to pour down on our galaxy. The knowledge held us wrapped in thought as our great ship raced on, still holding to its tremendous utmost velocity, rocking and swaying a little as it plunged through the vast ether-currents which swirled about us here in outer space.

Gradually, as we two stood in silence with our great craft speeding on, I became aware that during the last few minutes the air inside the pilot room had become perceptibly warmer, and that its warmth was still increasing. I glanced at the dial that registered the output of our heat-generators, but it was steady at its accustomed position; yet with each moment the warmth was increasing, until within a few minutes more the heat about us had become decidedly uncomfortable. Korus Kan, too, had noticed it, and had now swung backward the control of the heat-generators; yet still the warmth increased, the heated air in the pilot room rapidly becoming unbearable. I turned to the Antarian, fully alarmed now, but as I did so the door snapped open and Jhul Din burst up into the pilot room.

"What's happening to the ship?" he cried. "Its inner walls are getting almost too hot to touch!"

In stunned surprize we gazed at each other, our heating-mechanisms turned completely off now, yet the inside-temperature dial's arrow was still moving steadily forward! The thing was beyond all reason, we knew, and for an instant we stood in amazement, the heat increasing still about us.

Then suddenly Jhul Din pointed upward toward the massed dials above the controls, his arm quivering.

"Look!" he cried. "The outside-temperature dial!"

Swiftly we raised our own eyes toward it, the dial upon which was shown the temperature outside the ship. It should have shown absolute zero, we knew, as always in the infinite cold of empty space. But now it did not, and our eyes widened as we stared at it, in utter astonishment and fear. *For it registered a temperature of thousands of degrees in the empty void about us!*

"Heat!" I cried. "Heat in empty outer space! It's unthinkable!"

Unthinkable it was; yet, even as we stood and stared, the arrow on the outside-temperature was still creeping steadily forward, showing a swiftly increasing heat outside, while the air inside had become all but unbreathable, parching to the lungs. At the same moment a faint light began to appear about us, a dim red glow that was intensifying with each moment that we raced onward, and as we wheeled toward the windows we saw, in the blackness of space before us, a great, faintly glowing region of red light ahead, stretching across the heaven before us. Ever stronger that crimson glow was growing as we raced on, the heat about us mounting with it, and from beneath came the cries of fear of our crew as they too glimpsed the awful region of heat and light through which we now were racing.

I knew that not much longer could the heat about us increase thus if our ship and ourselves were to survive, yet steadily the arrows on the temperature-dials were moving forward, and as more and more of the awful heat outside penetrated through the insulation of our heat-resistant walls I felt my brain turning dizzily, saw big Jhul Din stagger and sway against the wall, and saw Korus Kan, the heat penetrating through his metal body even more than through our own, slumping sidewise across the controls as he was overcome by it, only half conscious. I sprang to his side, despite my own dizziness and parching throat and lungs, grasped the controls and held our ship straight onward, since all about us the vast glow of crimson light and heat stretched, encircling us and beating upon us as we flashed onward. No flame there was, nor incandescent gas, nor solid burning matter of any kind, nothing but a titanic region of brilliant crimson light, without visible source of any kind, glowing with terrific heat there in the emptiness of outer space.

THE glow about us was becoming more brilliant with each moment that we raced on, and as the heat outside and inside increased still more I saw Jhul Din fling open the pilot room's door in a vain search for cooler air; heard from beneath a rumbling, ominous thumping and cracking, as our heat-seared walls began to warp in the terrrible temperature to which they were being subjected. Far ahead in the awful region of heat and light through which we were speeding I glimpsed now a deeper spot of crimson light in the great red glow, and as we raced on toward it I saw that it was the center of all the great outpouring of red light and of heat, since it was all but blinding in its brilliance, while our dials showed a temperature mounting each moment that we neared it.

"It's the center of the whole thing!" cried Jhul Din, staggering toward me and then slumping down to the floor, overcome. "Keep the ship clear of it!" he shouted, collapsing as he did so, while beside me I saw Korus Kan, completely unconscious, neither the great crustacean Spican nor the metal-bodied Antarian possessing my own resistance to the heat that now was smothering us, though I too knew that not much longer could I hold to the controls.

Hold to them I did, though, but half conscious now myself; then as

there flamed dead ahead the heart of the whole great inferno, a blazing area of brilliant crimson light that dazzled me, its terrific heat pouring full down upon our plunging ship, I swung the controls sidewise, swerving our craft to the left and around the great heat-region's fiery heart. Along its side we flashed, our ship plunging and reeling now as it shot through ether-currents that must have been of unparalleled size and speed, but even in that darkness that was stealing over my senses I could see that in that hell of light and heat to our right there was still no core of matter, nothing but light and heat and space. Full beside us it flamed as we shot past it, our rocking ship's sides still grating and cracking terribly beneath the heat that beat upon them, racing past that awful glare of crimson light and heat that was like a colossal forge at which some mighty workman beat out flaming suns, blazing in terrific intensity and dimensions there in the void between universes.

On we raced, while I strove with all my waning strength to hold the ship, bucking and swaying as it was, clear of the fiery inferno to our right, and then it was dropping behind, the brilliant crimson light and terrible heat about us lessening a little as we shot by it. Moments more and it had dwindled to a deeper spot of light in the great red-glowing region to our rear, and then as we flashed still onward at our utmost speed the last of the light and heat about us were passing; so that a moment later, with heat-mechanisms again switched on, we were flashing again through the cold black void as before. With the passing of the overpowering heat the cracking of the ship's sides had ceased, and Korus Kan and Jhul Din were staggering to their feet, consciousness returning with the cooler air. Together we stared back, to where only a swiftly vanishing little glow of faint red light in the darkness behind gave evidence of the hell of heat and light through which we had just come.

"Heat and light in the void of outer space!" I cried. "The thing's impossible—and yet we came through it!"

Korus Kan had been gazing back with us, but now he turned at my exclamation, shook his head. "Not impossible," he said quickly. "That heat and that light we came through were not generated like the usual heat and light of burning suns—they were generated in empty space by the ether itself!" And as we stared blankly at him he quickly explained himself. "You know that heat and light are but vibrations of the ether of various frequencies, just as are radio-active or chemical rays, and the electro-magnetic waves we use for speech and signaling. Highest of all in frequency are those electro-magnetic waves; next in order of frequency come heat waves; next the red light vibrations, and down the various colors of light to the lower-frequency violet light vibrations; and below these, lowest of all, the radio-active or chemical rays. Well, our scientists have long known that various of these ether-vibrations have been set up in the ether of outside space by the collision of great ether-currents. By those collisions are formed sometimes electro-magnetic vibrations, interfering with our speech-vibrations as static, or sometimes light-vibrations, glowing without visible source in the heavens and known to us as the zodiacal light. Here in the void, though, where mighty currents of size and speed inconceivable must collide, the vibrations set up were in the frequency-range of heat and of the lower adjoining frequency, that of red light; so that that region we came through is one where the immense ether-currents that we plunged through collide and set up a ceaseless outpouring of heat and light waves there in the ether, in empty space itself."

I shook my head. "It seems plausible," I said, "yet the reality of it—that titanic region of awful heat and light——"

"It seems strange enough," he admitted, "but it's really no stranger than if it had been a great region of static, or——"

A sharp cry from the Spican stabbed through our talk. "The walls!" he shouted. "They're beginning to glow—look——!"

Startled, we swung about, and then the blood drove from my heart at the strangeness and awfulness of what we saw; for, engrossed in our talk, we had not noticed that all in the pilot room about us, walls and floor and mechanism and controls, was beginning to shine out with a strange, flickering luminosity, a misty, fluorescent light that with each moment was waxing in intensity, a quivering, unfamiliar light that seemed to glow from all in our ship, as it raced swaying on, though outside was nothing but the same blackness of space as before! Even as we stared about us, astounded, our own bodies, and especially the metal body of Korus Kan, had begun to radiate the same lambent light, and then, with a sudden great leap of my heart, I saw that the edges and corners of the walls about us were smoothing and rounding a little, crumbling and disappearing a little as though slowly disintegrating. At the same moment a strange tingling shook through every atom of my body, a quivering force that flooded through me with increasing intensity.

Horror-stricken we stood, until from one of the levers beside me an inch of the handle fell off, a little piece of metal that rattled to the floor and that was crumbling slowly, disintegrating, even as did the lever from which it had crumbled off. Then Korus Kan was leaping toward me, across the glowing pilot room.

"Swerve the ship's course!" he cried, wildly. "*We've run into another great region of vibrations—radio-active vibrations that will crumble the ship and all in it to pieces in a few more moments!*"

I grasped the shining levers, swung them sharply sidewise, sent our craft flashing off at a broad angle to its previous course, but still about us the glowing light waxed and deepened, and I felt an infinite nausea overcoming me as through my body surged the floods of radio-active vibrations from the ether about us that had caused all matter in our ship to radiate that misty light. With each moment the shining walls about us seemed crumbling faster, and I knew that moments more would see the ship's end unless soon we escaped from the great trap of disintegrating death into which we had ventured. I felt, too, that not for long could we ourselves stand the impact of these disintegrating vibrations, felt the tingling that shook my own glowing flesh increasing in intensity, while all about us, now, tiny bits of metal were falling from crumbling walls and ceiling and machinery.

Still grasping the controls, though, I held the ship to a course aslant from our previous one, while my two companions tensed with me over them, gazing ahead, while from beneath again came wild cries of alarm as those of our crew, who had already run the gantlet of the enemies' death-beams and of the great heat-region, saw the new peril that encompassed us. There came, too, from somewhere in the ship, a great thump and clang of metal as some one of our mechanisms there broke loose from its crumbling base, but still we flung onward through the void, rocking and twisting, and in a moment the terrible tenseness that gripped us lessened a little as we saw that the glowing of the walls about us, and of our own bodies, was beginning to wane, as we drew out of the zone of deadly force. A few more moments of onward flight and they had vanished altogether, and then I brought the ship back to its course, heading once more toward the

misty light-patch of the Andromeda universe, while I drew a long breath of relief.

THERE was a silence of moments before Jhul Din, first of us, found his voice. "Heat regions and radio-active force regions!" he exclaimed. "If more of them lie between us and the Andromeda universe, what's our chance of getting there?"

Korus Kan shook his head. "We'll get there," he said, "but we'll have to keep close watch every moment of our flight—there's no way of telling how thickly scattered these great vibration-regions may lie in space about us."

A moment more and Jhul Din left us, passing down into the ship's body to ascertain what damage had been wrought by the great zone of radio-active force, though we knew that we had escaped from it before it could seriously damage the ship. And as I now relinquished the controls to Korus Kan, pausing with him a moment to look out again with some fearfulness into the black void through which we were racing, it was with a full realization, at last, of the tremendous perils and unguessed circumstances that might lie in the vast spaces through which we must yet flash. Yet as my eyes fell again on the misty-glowing circle of the Andromeda universe, and the sinister, dimly flickering mass of the dying universe of the serpent-people, to its right, I felt my determination steeling again within me.

It was the sight of those two far patches of light ahead, I think, that held us all to our purpose in the hours, the days, that followed. Long, strange days they were, when with no sun whatever near us we could measure time only by the great abysses of space through which our ship was steadily flashing, computing from those distances and from our unvarying velocity the passing of the hours. But with each day, with each hour, we were racing countless billions of miles nearer toward the Andromeda universe, and toward the goal of our tremendous journey. On and on we plunged, our prow turned ever toward that misty circle of light ahead, that was largening and brightening with each hour that we sped toward it.

Thrice, in those following days, we glimpsed great regions of heat and crimson light like that through which we first had plunged, and each time we were able to swerve away from them and detour around them in time, and so escaped a renewal of our first dread experience of them. More than once, too, our instruments gave us warning of zones of radio-active or electrical force near us, and these we gave even a wider berth than the heat-regions, for these we feared most of all, I think. Ether-currents and vast ether-maelstroms were about us, too, we knew, but the tremendous speed of our craft brought us flashing through those where a slower-moving ship would have perished.

As it was, one danger that had menaced us always in navigation inside the galaxy, the presence of meteors and meteor-swarms, was lacking in our flight. Yet I think that almost we would have welcomed their presence about us, for all their danger, if only for the knowledge that some other matter besides our ship moved and existed in the mighty void around us. It was our ship's isolation, the knowledge that all about it for countless billions upon billions of miles, thousands upon tens of thousands of light-years, there stretched only the awful regions of empty space, an ocean of lightless space in which the galaxies of flaring suns here and there were but tiny islands, that oppressed us most. Far behind lay our own galaxy, and far ahead the Andromeda universe; and between universe and universe, an infinitesimally tiny speck there in the mighty void, our ship raced on and on.

But as we added day after measured day to our flight, as we flashed nearer and nearer toward the Andromeda universe, it slowly began to change before us, to wax from a little patch of glowing light to a larger and brighter patch, and then to a great oval of light that flamed brilliant in the blackness of space before us, and finally to a vast disk-shaped mass of stars like our own universe. The disk mass lay in space with edge toward us, and seen thus, the light of its countless thronging stars was fused almost into a single waxing glow, but as we swept nearer and nearer that glow began to resolve itself into the light of the myriad massed suns of which it was composed. So brightly flamed those gathering suns in the heavens before us that only with an effort could we make out, far toward the right, the still faint glow of the dying universe of the serpent-people, as near to us almost as that of Andromeda, yet infinitely dim and dead in comparison with it.

STEADILY we flashed on, day following day, until when a score of them had passed we computed ourselves as having traversed two-thirds of our journey, and could see that ever more swiftly the great universe of stars ahead was widening across the heavens. On that twentieth day I spent hours with Jhul Din in our regular inspection of the ship's mechanism, passing with him through the long room where our engineers, depleted in number by the death-beam that had sliced through our ship, tended carefully the mighty generators. Then the Spican and I passed out of the room, and were proceeding down the long corridor that led toward the pilot room when there came suddenly from it, ahead of us, a sharp cry.

We stopped short a moment, then raced down the corridor and burst up into the pilot room, where Korus Kan turned swiftly from the controls toward us.

"Ships are approaching from ahead!" he cried, pointing up toward the big space-chart.

We looked, and saw that even as he had said there moved upon that chart a half-hundred black dots, in close formation, creeping steadily downward across the blank chart to meet the upward-creeping dot that was our ship. In silent amazement we watched, as our craft raced on, and then saw that as we neared them the fifty ships ahead were slowly halting, and then beginning to move back toward the Andromeda universe in the same direction as ourselves. They were allowing us to slowly overtake them, obviously intending to race beside us at the same speed as ourselves, toward the Andromeda universe. And as they made that move Jhul Din uttered an exclamation.

"They must be ships from the Andromeda universe itself!" he cried. "They've learned of our approach by space-charts of some kind—have come out to meet us!"

My heart leapt at the thought, for if it were so it would mean the first success of our mission across the void. Silently we watched, as our ship's single dot on the chart raced closer and closer toward the half-hundred dots above it, they moving now at a speed almost equal to our own. Within moments we would be able to glimpse them, we knew, and gazed tensely into the blackness of space ahead, toward the Andromeda universe's flaring suns, as our craft raced on. Moments were passing, tense moments of silence and watchfulness, and then far ahead we glimpsed in the void, hardly to be seen against the great glow of the Andromeda universe, a little mass of light-points that steadily were largening as we gradually overtook them.

A full fifty of them in sight, they were flashing on in a close formation,

allowing us to overhaul them, changing from mere light-points into dark, vaguely glimpsed shapes as we drove nearer toward them. Then at last we had reached them, were driving in among them as they moved now at the same speed as ourselves, could see their shapes more clearly as long and *oval,* their front ends white-lit transparent-walled rooms like our own. Nearer we were flashing to those before us and about us, and then in those white-lit control rooms I glimpsed their occupants, slender, writhing pale shapes at sight of which I cried aloud.

"Serpent-ships!" I cried. "Serpent-ships from the dying universe ahead! Those back in our galaxy from whom we escaped have warned them of our coming, by the means of etheric communication their records mentioned—they know our mission and they've come out to intercept us here in space!"

Even as I cried out, Korus Kan's hands flashed out to the controls, but he was an instant too late. For at that same moment the ships just before us had turned and circled in one swift movement, and were rushing straight back toward us. I had a flashing glimpse of their white-lit prows racing toward us through the intense darkness, and saw with photographic clearness the slender serpent-shapes in those brilliantly lit pilot rooms, and then the foremost ship loomed suddenly enormous as it flashed straight toward us. With a sharp cry Korus Kan drove the controls sidewise to swerve our ship, but before we could avoid the onrushing craft ahead it was upon us and with a terrific, thunderous shock had crashed straight into our own racing ship!

7. *The Gates of a Universe*

I THINK now that it was only that last jerking aside of the controls by Korus Kan that saved us from utter annihilation in that moment. For as he moved them our ship swerved sidewise, not enough to avoid the collision but enough to cause the onrushing ship to strike our own obliquely along the side instead of head on, and it was that alone that saved us. The crash shook our great craft like a leaf in a gale, trembling and reeling there in the black gulf of space and flinging us all to the pilot room's floor, and for a moment it seemed to us that our ship had been riven apart. Then, as it steadied, we scrambled to our feet, just in time to see the ship that had crashed into us reeling away to the side, a shattered mass of metal, while down upon us from above and all about the other serpent-ships were swooping.

As Korus Kan sprang back to the controls I leapt to the order-tube, was on the point of shouting a command to our crew beneath, when down from the hovering ships above us there dropped around us a dozen or more of great flexible ropes or loops of gleaming metal, that encircled our ship like great snares. Within another instant our craft had been drawn upward by them until it lay securely lashed between two of the enemy ships, our ray-tubes useless now; since to loose them was but to perish with the ships that held us. Then another ship was slanting down above us, and as it hung over us there projected downward from its lower space-door toward our own upper space-door a hollow tube of metal of the same diameter as the two space-doors, that attached itself with a click to our own upper door, forming a hermetically sealed gangway there between our two ships in space.

Until that moment we had stood motionless in amazement, somewhat stunned by the suddenness of our ship's capture; then as the space-door of our ship clanged open above I uttered a cry, sprang out into the corridor that ran the ship's length, and saw the members of our crew

bursting into that corridor in answer to my cry, even as from the space-door chamber beside it there writhed out a horde of scores of the serpent-creatures! Jhul Din and Korus Kan were beside me, now, and with shouts of fierce anger we rushed upon the masses of serpent-creatures who still were pouring down from the ship above through the hollow gangway.

The mêlée that followed was wilder than when we ourselves had captured this same ship; since though we and all our crew flung ourselves forward upon the things without hesitation, we were weaponless and outnumbered by ten to one. As it was, I struck out with all my power at the hideous, writhing beings, feeling some of them collapse beneath my wild blows even as they strove to coil about me; saw Korus Kan, with his triple powerful metal arms, crushing the life from those who leapt upon him, cool and silent as ever even in that wild din of battle; glimpsed the great Spican grasping those about him in his tremendous arms and literally tearing them into fragments as we battled on. But rapidly the members of our crew who battled about us were going down, the life crushed from them by the coiling bodies that overwhelmed us, and then as I strode on I too was gripped from beneath, by a serpent-creature that had wound itself about my feet, and now pulled me down.

Struggling in the grip of a half-dozen of the alien creatures, I heard Jhul Din shouting hoarsely, saw him finally pulled from his feet also by a great mass of the writhing things, and then Korus Kan and the remainder of our crew were overcome too, and within another moment all was over. Scores of the serpent-creatures lay dead about us, but with them lay many of our own crew; not more than a bare score were left to us now of all our party. Gripped tightly still by the serpent-creatures, we were thrust down a narrow stair and into an empty little storeroom beneath the pilot room, in its metal walls but a single space-window giving a view forward. The door snapped shut as the last of us were thrust inside, and then our captors had left us, the lashings that had snared our ship were cast loose by the ships on either side, and as the humming of the generators waxed loud again our ship and those about it began to move once more through space.

"They're heading now toward the dying universe!" exclaimed Korus Kan, gazing through the single window into the black gulf outside. They're going to take us there as prisoners!"

But I too, gazing through the window at his side, had seen that our ship's prow was turning now toward the right, so that ahead now instead of the great glowing mass of the Andromeda universe there lay the dim, faintly glowing patch of light that was the serpent-peoples' waning universe. Toward it now our ship and the ships about us were flashing at greater and greater speed, and as they hummed on the despair that had already gripped me deepened. It was not the peril in which we ourselves lay that affected me, for well I knew that from the moment of our capture our fate had been sealed, and that our temporary reprieve from death meant only that some more horrible fate awaited us in the dying universe. It was that the last chance of our own universe had vanished with our capture, the last hope to summon from the Andromeda universe the help that could save our galaxy gone now forever.

In a silence of utter despair I gazed ahead as our ship and those about it hummed on, while Jhul Din and Korus Kan and all the survivors of our crew prisoned with us maintained the same despairing silence. There was no plan for escape, no suggestion of it, even, for well we knew the impossibility of even win-

ning clear of the room that was our prison, not to speak of overcoming the hordes of serpent-creatures who now operated our ship. In a strange apathy of spirit we sat and stood, hour after hour, speaking little. Our eyes and minds turned only to the window through which we could see, in the black abyss of space ahead, the faintly glowing universe of the serpent-people broadening slowly ahead as our ships raced on at full speed toward it.

A DAY passed, and that dying universe had grown across a full third of the vault of space before us, a great, dim-glowing region of flickering luminescence utterly different from the radiance of the shining Andromeda universe, that lay now far to our left. On and on the serpent-ships raced, unceasingly, hour upon hour, until at last on the third day of our imprisonment their speed began to slacken, the drone of the great generators falling a little in pitch as they drew near at last to their galaxy, that had expanded outward now until it seemed to fill all the heavens before us, so strange a spectacle to our eyes that almost we forgot our own predicament and despair in contemplation of it.

Full in the heavens before us it lay, a mighty galaxy fully as large as our own, as the Andromeda universe, but infinitely different, a galaxy not of life but of death. In all its mighty mass were no flaming white or blue or yellow suns like those of our own galaxy, no brilliant young stars surrounded by circling, sun-warmed worlds. Here was only a vast forest of dead and dying suns, stretched across the heavens, huge throngs of dark, burned-out stars, cold and black and barren, that crowded thick upon one another, with here and there a few dying suns of dark, smoky red, somber crimson stars in the last stages of stellar evolution. It was with the light of these few alone that the great mass faintly glowed, an expiring universe in which all light and life were sinking into darkness and death.

Silent with awe and wonder we watched as our ships drove in toward this darkening galaxy, and then I began to make out, between us and it, a strange, constant flicker of blue light that seemed to extend all about the faint-glowing universe before us. Stronger that flicker was growing as we sped on toward it, though through it there shone clearly as ever the light of the crimson suns beyond it. At last we seemed racing straight into it, and now I saw that it was a colossal globular shell of flickering blue light, almost invisible, that enclosed within itself all the mighty, circular mass of the dying universe before us. Our ships seemed about to flash straight into it, but now turned sharply to the left, speeding along the great light-barrier's edge. A ship beside us, though, had turned a little too late and had struck the light-wall while turning, and as it did so I saw it rebounding back with terrific force as though in collision with a solid wall, its whole prow crumpled by the impact. Then, at last, I comprehended the nature of this vast shell of flickering blue light that enclosed the dying universe.

"It's a vibration-wall!" I cried to my companions. "A great wall of etheric vibrations enclosing all this universe!"

For I saw now that that was the great barrier's nature. It was a mighty shell of perpetual vibrations in the ether itself, extending all about the universe before us, allowing light and electro-magnetic communication waves to pass through it, unchanged, but excluding and holding out the vibrations of matter, by meeting them, as I knew must be the case, with a vibration of equal frequency which opposed them, reflected them back, forming a barrier more impenetrable than any of solid matter, yet

one all but invisible, extending about all this mighty universe, excluding from it for all time all matter from outside. Too, as I was later to learn, the great vibration-wall was impenetrable to the heat-vibrations, reflecting those of its dying suns that struck it back into the universe inside. It was for this purpose that the vast barrier had been erected, as the suns of the serpent-people failed, to prevent the escape of any of the precious heat-radiations of their few living suns, and also to place about all their universe a wall impenetrable to all invaders. Set in the ether about their universe eons before, the vibrations that made up the great barrier were perpetual and undying, a vast wall of defense about the serpent-universe.

We were flashing close along the mighty, flickering barrier's edge, now, and the speed of our ships slackened swiftly as there loomed far ahead in space two great, dark bulks starred here and there with points of white light. Moments more and they had grown to immense size as we neared them, and now we saw that these were mighty, square-walled structures of gleaming metal, each a full five thousand feet in length along each of its four sides, and half again that much in height: two colossal metal forts that floated motionless there in space, set directly in the great wall of flickering blue vibrations, and between which there was a great opening in that wall, a clear space in which was no flickering barrier, and which I divined was the single opening in all the great wall. And flanking that opening on either side hung the massive metal structures, upheld there in the void, as I guessed, by mighty generators like those of our own ships, castles of metal whose countless deadly death-beam tubes commanded the opening between them and from whose white-lit windows the serpent-garrisons of them gazed out upon us, great space-forts hung there at the vibration-wall's one opening, guarding the gates of a universe!

In toward the narrow opening between the great forts swept our ships, and as they moved slowly inward there flashed a challenging signal of lights from those forts, answered at once by similar signals from our ships. Then we were driving inward, between the towering metal castles on either side, flashing in through the great vibration-wall and into the dying galaxy itself. With generators again humming at high speed our half-hundred ships swept on, into the thronging thousands of dead and dying suns that swarmed before us, inside the colossal protecting shell of the great vibration-wall.

All about us now were great hordes of swarming dark-stars that we could but dimly glimpse, as our ships flashed between them, vast throngs of black and burned-out suns that outnumbered the few still flaming stars by hundreds to one. Here and there about us, though, as we swept on, we could make out a red sun or two, some comparatively brilliant and others so dark and far gone that they seemed only like giant cooling embers in the black heavens. Clusters there were, too, of which all but one or two suns would be black and dead, and as we flashed on into the depths of this universe we began to realize at last what tremendous necessity it had been that had sent the serpent-peoples driving out through the limitless void in search of a new universe.

Far ahead, though, there loomed before us as we sped on a trio of giant crimson suns more brilliant than any we had yet seen in this dying universe, and which hung at its center, each of them as large as great Canopus itself in our own galaxy. In a great triangle they hung there, two of them much brighter than the other, a mighty triplet of titanic waning suns that seemed like the dying monarchs of the vast and dying

realm about them. It was down toward these three great suns that our ships were slanting now, down toward the space at the center of their great triangle, and now we saw that in that space there swung a single mighty world, a dark, immense planet of size inconceivable, almost as large as the three great suns at whose center it turned, and whose light and heat fell perpetually upon it.

BROADER and broader the great turning world was growing as we slanted down toward it, until it lay like a tremendous dark shield beneath us, filling all the heavens below. As our ships sank still lower toward it, speed swiftly slackening, we began to make out details on its surface, to make out what seemed to be a vast mass of palely shining structures, towers and walls and vast, terraced buildings that glowed all with pale blue light, indescribably ghostly in appearance as they soared into the dusky, crimson light of the three encircling suns. Here and there through the masses of these blue-shining structures ran streets, narrow openings in which swarmed great masses of the writhing serpent-people. And as I gazed down upon this tremendous city, upon the countless glowing structures of pale blue light that made it up, my astonishment at what I saw broke from me in a startled cry.

"This city!" I exclaimed. "Its buildings are of vibrations like the great wall around their universe!"

A city of vibrations! A mighty city that covered apparently all this giant planet, and yet whose every structure was built, not of matter but of etheric-vibrations that were matter-resistant like the great wall, vibrations infinitely more lasting and impenetrable than any matter, and projected upward at will into buildings of any shape or size. Here and there in the mighty city, even as we sped down over it, we could see buildings vanishing instantaneously, could see other mighty buildings springing as instantly into being, all of the same pale blue light, reared or destroyed instantly by snapping on or off the vibrations that were projected upward to form them!

Now, as our ships slanted down over the vast mass of pale-glowing structures that stretched from horizon to horizon, I saw that ahead and beneath there lay amid those structures a mighty circular clearing, scores of miles in diameter and paved smoothly with the same pale blue force as the city's buildings and streets. In this vast circle, ranged regularly in long rows, rested thousands upon countless thousands of gleaming oval space-ships, in all stages of completion. Over and among them, swarming ceaselessly through them and toiling to complete them, moved mighty hordes of the serpent-creatures, armed with great tools of strange design, the thunderous clamor of their work coming up to us through the great planet's air. It was the immense workshop of the serpent-races that lay beneath us, I knew, in which their hordes labored ceaselessly to complete the mighty fleet that was to carry them through the void to our universe!

It was not the ranks of half-built ships, though, nor the toiling throngs among them, that held our gaze in the vast circular clearing over which we were racing. It was the colossal shape that loomed at that clearing's center and that occupied fully half the area of its vast circle, a stupendous metal cone-structure that rose in the air before us for fully a score of miles, the diameter of its base almost as great, a gigantic, smooth-sided mountain of metal towering there above the countless ships and workers in the great clearing around it, and above the far-stretching city about that clearing. Past its side our ships were speeding, and we could see now that about it and upon it there

labored other great masses of serpent-creatures, swarming in and out of the heavy doors that swung open in its sides at various levels, and laboring upon the great masses of machinery that we could glimpse inside. Some of these, we saw, were great generators like those of our ships, making it clear that the vast cone was intended to race through space. Then, as Korus Kan's keen eyes peered toward and into its interior as we flashed past, he turned toward us, startled.

"It's a colossal death-beam projector!" he exclaimed. "One that can move through space like their ships—and that can stab forth a death-beam of unthinkable size! With that, when they complete it, they can wipe out all life on a whole world with a single flash of the stupendous beam!"

Stunned, we gazed toward it as our ships flashed past. The tremendous cone itself was apparently complete, from vast base to the truncated, flattened tip. The generators that were to move it through space were apparently all installed, and the great hordes of serpent-workers who swarmed in it now were beginning to place in it the massed mechanisms for the production of the colossal death-beam, which would be projected up through a tremendous, hollow tube or tunnel running up from the great cone's interior to the great, round opening at its truncated tip. The terrific beam, generated in that interior, would flash out of that opening at the top in whatever direction the vast cone itself was headed in space, would flash through space with its tremendous power for immense distances, spreading out fanwise and expanding in every direction as it flashed on, until it struck the planet at which it was aimed, enveloping all that planet in its ghostly glow and wiping out instantly all life upon it! This, then, was the great weapon of irresistible power which the captured records of the serpent-creatures had mentioned! And irresistible it was, I saw now; for with it, when completed, the serpent-creatures could sally forth and with one sweep of the colossal beam destroy all fleets of space-ships opposing them by annihilating their crews, could descend upon our universe and with that same great beam wipe out all life upon world after world of our galaxy, swiftly, resistlessly, until in all our universe was left no living thing except themselves!

But now, even as we stared in horror and amazement at the vast cone, our ships were driving past it, still over the great clearing filled with close-ranked masses of the half-built ships, until before and beneath us lay the mighty circle's edge. And now we saw that beyond it, touching it, there lay another smaller circle of clear space, amid the vast city's crowding structures of blue light, a circle from which throngs of space-ships were constantly rising and upon which others were descending, it being obviously one of the points of departure and arrival for all ships. Down toward it our own ships were speeding, slower with every moment, until at last they had landed at this smaller circle's edge, our own closest to that edge, the pale-glowing mighty buildings towering up just beside us.

Then the space-doors of our ships were clanging open, and their occupants were writhing forth from them. A moment and the door of our prison snapped open; then, herded forward by a half-dozen of serpent-creatures armed with small death-beam tubes, we were marched out of the ship and onto the smooth pavement of blue force that covered this circle also. There, massed together, we were halted for a moment, and took the opportunity to stare about. From the ships behind us, just landed, the last of the serpent-crews had writhed forth, passing across to a narrow street that opened through

the mass of towering, shimmering buildings before us, from the circular clearing's edge. We ourselves were being marched toward that street, now, the great oval ships lying empty and deserted behind us, and at sight of their open doors I turned and twitched the arm of Jhul Din, walking beside me.

"It's a chance in a million to get away!" I whispered, to him and to Korus Kan. "If we can overpower these guards and get back inside our ship——"

They turned toward me, startled, and then as they glanced back toward the deserted ships their eyes lit with excitement. A moment more and I had whispered my plan, glancing toward the half-dozen guards behind us, and then the next moment we put it into effect, Jhul Din suddenly slumping to the blue-force pavement and lying motionless, sprawled as though suddenly stricken down. It was the most primitive of ruses, and I could only hope in that moment that our guards might not have had experience of it. The next moment, though, they had seen the motionless form of the big Spican, and with a natural perplexity had writhed forward toward it, holding their beam-tubes, though, gripped in the coils of their strange bodies, alertly toward ourselves. Beside the big crustacean they halted, tubes trained still upon us as they inspected him. Then the next moment the Spican had reached out his great arms with inconceivable swiftness and suddenness, grasping the serpent-guards beside him before they could turn their tubes down upon him, threshing with them in sudden fierce battle as we rushed forward to aid him.

The next moment we were all struggling there with those guards in a wild mêlée, their deadly tubes knocked from their grasp by Jhul Din in his leap upon them. With the strength and fury of despair we flung ourselves upon them, rending their writhing bodies to fragments as they sought to coil about us, our hoarse shouts rising above their own hissing cries of fear and alarm. In but a moment, it seemed, we were crushing the last of them beneath us, Jhul Din and one or two of our crew leaping already toward the open door of our ship, while we staggered up to follow. But as we did so there came from behind us other hissing cries, and we whirled about, then stopped short. For back from the street into which they had just gone were rushing the serpent-crews of the ships behind us, a resistless horde that was flashing upon us with the ghostly death-beams of their tubes stabbing full toward us!

8. *The Hall of the Living Dead*

RACING forward as they were, the serpent-creatures rushing upon us could only loose their death-beams at chance upon us, and it was that alone that saved us, the deadly rays going wide except for one that struck and annihilated two of our party in its wild whirling. Then, before they could loose the beams again upon us, we had rushed forward to meet them and were among them; while at the same moment I shouted hoarsely over my shoulder to Jhul Din, who with his three followers had reached now the open door of our ship, behind us, and who now had hesitated for an instant as he saw our new foes rush down upon us.

"Go on, Jhul Din!" I cried. "Get away in the ship—we'll hold them till you get clear——!"

Then we were meeting the serpent-creatures before us, and the next few moments we seemed surrounded, weighed down, by a solid mass of writhing bodies at which we struck crazily with the last of our strength. Even as we struggled wildly, though, I heard above the shouts and hissing cries about me the clang of the ship's space-doors, the swift humming of its generators; then as I staggered clear

of my opponents for a moment I saw the great craft, with Jhul Din at the controls in its pilot room, lifting suddenly from the clearing, slanting steeply upward at immense speed, vanishing almost instantly in the crimson sunlight above. I yelled with exultation at the sight, and then was pulled down once more by my opponents, held tightly with Korus Kan and the others, as with wild hissing cries the greater part of the serpent-creatures rushed to their ships.

A moment more and two score of their craft were shooting sharply upward in hot pursuit of Jhul Din and his fleeing ship. Held tightly by our serpent-captors, we waited with them the return of the pursuing ships. Would they catch the big Spican? Slowly the minutes dragged past, while in the gulf of space above us, we knew, Jhul Din and his three followers were racing, twisting, fighting against that remorseless pursuit that would track him by the space-charts. Then at last, after a wait that seemed eternities in length, the dark, long shapes of the ships that had pursued him drove down from above and landed beside us, their serpent-crews emerging, but without trace of Jhul Din or his ship. Whether he had managed to elude them and drive out between the great space-forts into open space and escape, or whether he had met his end beneath their death-beams, we could not say nor guess.

I knew, though, that they would hardly have given up the pursuit unsuccessfully so soon, and it was with doubt and fear in my heart that I rose now in response to the motioned commands of our captors. Guarding us now with a score or more of death-beam tubes they marched us across the circle toward the street that opened from it, and then down that street's length, between the mighty structures of blue force on either side. Half-transparent as were those buildings of pale blue light, we could see in them all the various floors and levels, as though in buildings of blue glass, and on those levels great ranks of half-glimpsed mechanisms tended by moving, writhing throngs of serpent-beings. Other throngs of them moved about us in the narrow street, from building to building, passing and repassing around us as we marched along.

To these, though, and to the buildings about us we paid but small attention; for at the end of the narrow street down which we were marching there loomed a great blue-shining structure of the same vibration as the others, but which dwarfed them by its tremendous size. Its vast, terraced sides slanted up for level upon mighty level, and as we neared it we saw that the street itself ended in it, passing through the high, great doorway before us into the shining structure's interior. In and out of it were pouring hordes of the serpent-creatures, and into it we were marched by our guards, through the great hall inside and on through a succession of other corridors in which writhed serpent-throngs. Through the open doors of the rooms along those corridors, as we passed by them, I could see serpent-creatures grouped about low, desklike platforms, could see massed rows of great mechanisms that seemed tabulating or recording machines of some sort, saw other great rooms filled with flexible metal rolls like those we had captured with our oval ship, great collections of written records, and realized that this huge building must hold within itself the central controlling government of all the races of the serpent-creatures, on this great central world and on the worlds that revolved about the few living suns in the universe about us.

Our captors halted us, at last, before a door heavily guarded by serpent-creatures with ray-tubes, and while one of our own guards passed through the door into the great rooms

we could glimpse inside, the remainder kept close watch upon us. I sensed that our own fate was being decided in those rooms beside us, and a few moments later saw that my guess had been right, for there came out the serpent-creature who had gone in, giving to our guards brief hissing orders. At once they marched us onward, emerging again into the great central hall that ran through the vast, blue-shimmering building, and progressing with us down that great, crowded corridor, until they turned us sharply to the right, through a big open door into a mighty hall or room, the nature and purpose of which we could not grasp for the moment.

It was filled with great, transparent cases, ranged in long, regular rows, extending from flickering blue-light wall to wall of the vast hall. In those cases there were shapes and figures, rigid and unmoving, that had apparently once been living things, and that were of a strangeness inconceivable. In hundreds, in thousands, they were grouped there in the protecting cases, beasts and beings all but indescribable in appearance, so strange were they even to our eyes, which had seen all the countless forms of life of our own galaxy. There was, in a case near us, a vast flat thing of white flesh, disklike and scores of feet in diameter, with a single staring eye at its center. In another case was a great, many-legged cylinder of flesh without discernible features whatever. In still another, just before us, a black, powerful-looking insect-shape that was apparently double-headed, with two sets of black, beady eyes. All down the great hall's length stretched the rows of cases, filled with beings of which the sight of some alone was a creeping horror, and as we gazed at that incredible collection of alien forms in amazement, its significance rushed upon me.

"It's a museum!" I exclaimed. "A great collection of the living forms that have existed in this dying universe—preserved here for countless ages, perhaps, out of the past!"

As I spoke, though, there were coming down toward us from the far end of the great hall two serpent-creatures who seemed the custodians of this strange collection. Our guards addressed to them a few hissing commands, and the two turned, seemed to survey the cases about them, while we stared in perplexity. Then one turned toward a niche inset in the wall, in which rested two transparent containers or tubes of liquid, one of bright red and the other of green, and a long, slender metal needle that was apparently a hypodermic of some sort. Thrusting the needle into the red liquid, the serpent-creature holding it advanced to the case nearest us, which contained only the double-headed insect-creature. He swung the side of the case open, and then, with a swift jab, inserted the needle in the body of the thing inside.

There was a moment of silence, and then, to our amazement and horror, the insect-thing moved, its eyes roving from side to side, its limbs twitching. The thing was alive! The two serpent-creatures stepped toward the case, as it came to life, holding death-beam tubes toward it and addressing it in hissing tones. Apparently it was of some intelligence, for in response to those orders it stepped outside the case, down the hall toward another case which was all but filled by other strange shapes. Into this it stepped, at the command of the two, and then the one with the needle filled it with the green fluid, and inserted this in turn into the thing's body. At once that body stiffened, ceased to move, the thing becoming as rigid and unlifelike in appearance as before, its eyes staring stonily ahead in all the appearance of death.

Horror filled me at the sight, horror that sickened me, for I saw now that the things about us, the countless strange shapes in these rows of

cases, were all as alive and conscious as ourselves, their life and intelligence unharmed but their bodies thrown into a state of rigid suspended animation by the insertion of the green fluid into them, a fluid that must be like the poisons with which some insects are able to keep their captured prey alive and unmoving indefinitely, a fluid that suspended all animation instantly and that could only be neutralized by the injection of the opposing red fluid, though always the victim remained conscious and alive. *Alive!* These myriad alien shapes about us—rigid and motionless, yet living and conscious, living perhaps for ages in that living death—my brain reeled at the thought. I turned to Korus Kan, sick with horror, but then stopped short, stiffened. For now the serpent-creature grasping the metal needle and the tube of green fluid was coming toward us!

All the horror of the fate intended for us burst across my brain in one flash of awful comprehension, then, and a strangled cry broke from me. "They're going to keep us here too!" I cried, pointing with trembling hand. "Keep us here as strange beings—in living death in this museum of strange beings!"

A MOMENT we stood, in horror-stricken silence, and then as the full awfulness of the thing reserved for us penetrated the brains of my companions they uttered a medley of hoarse shouts of rage and horror and as one leapt forward upon the serpent-creatures with the fluid-tubes and upon our guards.

I think that we expected no better than death in that moment, for the death-beam tubes of the guards were full upon us, but I think too that we all preferred a swift, clean death to the horror of living death that awaited us in this museum of hell. But the very motive that made us desire death prevented the guards from loosing it upon us, preferring to follow their orders and place us in the collection about us rather than annihilate us. For instead of loosing the rays, as we sprang, they leapt to meet us, at the same time giving utterance to loud, hissing cries of alarm.

Our guards outnumbered us, and though we leapt upon them with all the energy of horror and despair, striving to wrest the death-tubes from their grasp, they coiled about and held us, while into the great hall from the big corridor outside there rushed in answer to their alarm other scores of serpent-creatures, leaping likewise upon us. Wearied as we were and outnumbered by five to one, our struggle, though fierce, was of short duration, and then we were held completely by the creatures about us, while toward us again came the two serpent-creatures with the metal needle and two liquid-tubes. First toward me they came, dipping the needle into the green liquid and then stabbing it into my arm.

I shrank deeply as the sharp needle pierced my skin, but the next moment ceased to shrink, as through me there ran a wave of cold, a flood of utter iciness that held me motionless, unable to move. No muscle of mine, down to the smallest, could I control, lying there staring straight ahead, unmoving, unwinking, unbreathing even. My lungs, my heart, my blood, all had stopped moving in the instant that the poison flooded through me, yet my brain was as clear or clearer than ever, coldly clear, as though attached to it was no body whatever. My senses, though, still functioned, and though all power of motion had left me I could still see and hear as clearly as ever. It was as though my brain had been suddenly lifted from the mass of flesh that was my body, and endowed with a strange, lifeless life of its own.

Now the guards rose from me, leaving me lying motionless and rigid,

and turned toward Korus Kan, who was being held down by others. His metal body seemed to puzzle them for an instant, and then they solved the problem by injecting the needle of green fluid into the nerve-tissues at the edge of his eyes, from which it would spread instantly to the other living organs cased by his metal body. Another moment and he too lay like me, rigid and powerless to move, our eyes meeting in an unchanging, stony stare. Within minutes more the green fluid had been injected into the last of our score of followers, and we had all become but rigid living statues, our consciousness and senses alone unaffected. Then by the serpent-creatures we were set into the transparent case from which the double-headed insect-thing had been moved to make way for us, were placed in a sitting position with backs against the case's sides, and then it was closed and the guards passed out of the big hall, leaving in it only the two serpent-creatures who were its custodians.

Rigid, unmoving, unbreathing, yet with consciousness, mind and senses as clear as ever, living brains cased in bodies that were helpless and motionless, I think that no position of any in all time could have been more terrible than ours. Had consciousness been suspended also, with the powers of our bodies, the captivity we suffered would have been but a dreamless sleep, at least; but to allow our consciousness and intelligence to remain, our bodies severed from our control—that was a torture that surely none other could ever equal. Statuelike we sat there, while hour followed hour, gazing always in the same direction with unmoving and unwinking eyes. Certainly no wonder would it have been had we gone mad in the first hours of that ghastly, terrible imprisonment.

As the hours, the days, dragged past, though, I bent all my mental efforts toward the keeping of my sanity, and though at times my brain reeled beneath our terrible predicament, I desperately forced my thoughts into other channels. From where I sat I could gaze out into the great corridor outside the room, and that at least gave me something moving to contemplate, as through it swept the never-ceasing hordes of the serpent-people, a rush of activity that dwindled never until the rising of the darkest of the three suns marked the coming of the night, the sleep-period of the serpent-people. The light of that darker sun was so far dimmer than that of the other two that as this world turned between the three one-third of each day was spent in a dusky red darkness, a strange night in which all activity in the vast serpent-city about us seemed to cease, only our room's two serpent-guards and some others here and there outside remaining alert, our two room-guards being replaced at the beginning of each night by two others who alternated with them in their duties.

It was these things alone, though, the coming of night and the changing of our guards, the cessation and recommencement of the activity in the corridor outside, the waning and waxing of the crimson light that fell through the great building's flickering blue vibration-walls, that alone marked for us the passage of time. Day was following day while we sat on there in living death, unmoving as stones, and I knew that with each day the great fleet of the serpent-creatures I had glimpsed in the clearing would be approaching nearer to completion, as would the colossal death-beam cone with which they meant to wipe out all the races of all the galaxy's worlds. And we, on whom had rested the one chance of our universe, had failed—we were prisoners. I could not believe that Jhul Din, with his two or three followers, had managed to get through the great vibration-wall about this universe and speed to the Andromeda universe for help. Our last hope

was gone, and the last hope of our galaxy with it, prisoned as we were in the helpless flesh of our own bodies, from which there could be no escape, lacking even the power to destroy ourselves and end our endless torture.

THE passing days became blurred and confused in my mind, as we sat on there, and I felt that my brain was beginning to give at last beneath the awful strain. Time still I could roughly measure, though, by the waning of activity in the corridor outside, by the darkening of the crimson light that slanted through the pale blue walls. I think that it was on the tenth day of our imprisonment that I watched that light darkening, as always, wondering for how many times I was to see it thus, for how many days, years, ages, we were to lie in this living death, in the serpent-creatures' museum. As I watched, the passing throngs in the corridor outside were thinning, disappearing, with the coming of the dusky night, and soon there was almost complete silence about us, only the low hissing of the two serpent-guards, near the room's door, as they conversed there, breaking the stillness. Then suddenly my brooding thoughts were broken into by sharp surprize as I glimpsed a big, stealthy shape that showed itself for a moment in the corridor outside, and then dodged swiftly back.

With a sudden flame of excitement leaping in me for the first time since our imprisonment, I gazed toward the door, eyes unmoving as always. A moment more and the dark, erect shape that I had glimpsed outside came slowly into view once more, peering around the door's edge at the two serpent-guards, who for the moment were turned away from it. Seeing this, the lurking shape came slowly into the room, through the door from the shadows of the corridor, and as it did so I saw it clearly, and well it was for me that I could not speak or surely I would have shouted aloud. For it was Jhul Din!

A great wave of hope flooded through my brain as I saw the big Spican move stealthily inside, a thick metal bar in his grasp, his eyes roving about the dusky-lit great room. Then, as they fell upon our own case, upon us sitting motionless, I saw him gasp. A moment he surveyed us, my eyes staring stonily straight into his own as we sat still rigid and unmoving, and then he had turned, was moving silently toward the two unsuspecting guards. Closer he crept toward them, while I watched in an agony of suspense, and then as he reached them, raised his great bar above his head, the two creatures, warned by some slight sound, whirled suddenly around and confronted him!

Instantly the death-tubes they held came up, but in the moment that they did so Jhul Din's bar had smashed down upon them in a great, crushing blow that laid both lifeless on the blue force-floor. Then the Spican sprang to our case, opening its side and lifting us out, seeking with rough restorative measures to revive us. Yet we lay as silent and rigid as ever, and I saw despair creep into his eyes, could have shouted to him in my agony of mind had not my muscles been as far-severed from my brain's control as ever. Then the Spican raised from his fruitless efforts, gazed despairingly about, until his eyes fell upon the niche in the wall that held the tubes of red and green fluid. With a leap he was upon them, bringing them and the needle back toward us.

A moment he studied them, in doubt, then inserted the needle in the green fluid and pierced my forearm with it. I could have screamed to him his mistake had I had power of speech, for the green fluid injected into me had no effect upon me whatever, since I lay already beneath its force. Seeing this he swiftly made trial of the red fluid, injecting this in the same manner into my body, and then, as he

gazed anxiously down upon my rigid figure, I felt a sudden warmth flooding through me, and for the first time in all those days became *aware* of my body, felt muscles and limbs moving in answer to my will's commands, felt heart and breathing starting after their long cessation. Then I was staggering up to my feet, the Spican's great arm about me, reeling upward with muscles utterly strange and cramped after those days of living death.

"Jhul Din!" I cried, my voice strange to my own ears after that time of speechlessness, and he gripped my arm reassuringly.

"Steady, Dur Nal," he said. "You're out of that now, and we'll win clear of this hellish city yet."

As he spoke he was dropping to the floor, injecting swiftly into the bodies of the rest the red fluid, beginning with Korus Kan, and as he did so he explained to me swiftly how he and his three followers had managed to elude the ships that had pursued him by fleeing from them into a near-by cluster of dead and dying suns, and pretending to have perished by crashing into a great dark star, landing his ship upon its barren, burned-out surface and escaping the scrutiny of the pursuing ships, who returned in the belief that he and his ship had met annihilation. In that hiding-place, upon that black and airless and lightless star, he had remained for days, not daring to venture forth amid the swarms of serpent-ships that filled the space-lanes about him, yet resolved to return and ascertain our fate. When at last, days later, he had been able to venture out, back to this vast world and down upon it through the dusky night, he had boldly landed the ship where it would excite no suspicion, in the landing-circle from which he had first escaped in it. Then, leaving his little crew of three in it and stealing through the shadows of the silent streets toward the great central building where he hoped against hope to find some trace of us, he had made his way through the darkened corridors of the huge structure until he had stumbled upon the strange museum of the serpent-people where we were prisoned.

While he swiftly explained this to me Korus Kan and our followers were staggering up beside me as the injections of red fluid revived them, one by one, and I turned toward the door, then uttered a horror-stricken exclamation. For in the corridor outside a single serpent-creature faced us, attracted perhaps by the sound of our voices, its glassy eyes full upon us! Even in the instant that I saw it, before ever I could leap upon it, it had turned with incredible quickness and was flashing back down the corridor, farther into the great building, uttering as it did so a high, hissing cry. And in an instant that cry was taken up and re-echoed in all the great structure about us, by the roused serpent-creatures who were rushing in answer to it!

"The alarm!" I cried. "Out of the building and to the ship!"

With lightning swiftness now Jhul Din was injecting in the last of our followers the restorative red fluid, and then as those last ones stumbled up into consciousness beside us, we raced toward the door, out into the corridor. There, abruptly, we stopped short, our last wild hopes of escape in that instant blasted. For less than a thousand feet down the great corridor from us, pouring out into it from every quarter of the vast building's interior in answer to the hissing cries of alarm, there was racing down upon us a great mass of hundreds upon hundreds of the writhing serpent-creatures!

9. A Dash for Freedom

DOOM stared at us in that instant as the serpent-creatures rushed down the great corridor toward us, for well we knew that never could we win

our way down the long street to our waiting ship with that pursuit behind us. For a flashing moment as we stood there, stunned, it seemed that recapture was inevitable, and then as a sudden thought flared across my brain I cried out to my companions.

"Get out of the building!" I cried. "I can hold them here——!"

They hesitated, and then sprang down the corridor toward the street, while at the same instant I leapt into the great museum-hall from which we had just emerged. With a single bound I had grasped the needle and tube of restorative red fluid and was at the great transparent cases, ripping the sides open frantically and stabbing the needle with lightning swiftness into their occupants. Those in a dozen or more cases I had swiftly treated thus before I dropped the tube and needle and leapt back to the door, into the corridor. As I did so I had seen the first of the strange, terrible shapes I had touched with the needle beginning to stir, to move from their cases.

As I sprang back out into the corridor, though, the racing masses of the serpent-creatures were but a scant hundred feet behind me, my own companions racing out of the building ahead of me, now. The serpent-things loosed no rays upon us, desiring, I knew, to return us to that hell of living death from which we had escaped, but as I sprang down the corridor they were so close behind that another moment, I knew, would see my capture and that of my friends ahead. Then, just as the serpent-creatures, racing behind me, reached the door of the museum, they halted, recoiled. For out into the corridor from that museum-hall had flopped a great, terrible shape, the mighty disk of pale flesh with a single central eye that my needle had been first to revive!

Instantly it had moved upon the serpent-creatures upon whom its glaring eye fell, and before they could escape had thrown its vast disk of flesh about a mass of scores of them, bunching its body swiftly together then with terrific power and crushing them within it. At another mass of them it leapt, ravening with terrific fury after its prisonment of untold ages of living death, while out of the museum there came after it the other shapes I had revived, awful insect-beings that leapt upon the serpent-creatures with terrible claws and fangs, heedless of the death-beams that flashed toward them, many-limbed things of flesh that whirled forward as fiercely to the attack, grotesque, terrible monsters of a dozen different sorts that leapt now upon the serpent-creatures who had prisoned them for ages with inconceivable raging power, heaping about them great masses of crushed and mangled serpent-dead.

Only in a glance over my shoulder did I glimpse that massacre of the serpent-creatures behind me, for I was racing on down the corridor and out of the building into the narrow street, where my friends awaited me. With a word I explained to them what had happened, and instantly we set off down the street, between the great, towering buildings of beaming blue force that lay silent and dead now in the dusky darkness, only their own flickering light and that of the vast, dim-red sun that swung in the black heavens above lighting us forward as we raced on. Behind, though, in the great building from which we had fled, were rising appalling cries, the hissing utterances of the serpent-creatures and the strange and awful cries of the things with which they battled.

Now about us were rising other cries as the serpent-creatures across all the city began to rouse beneath the terrific din of the wild fight in the central building. Behind us, as we raced on down the narrow street, we saw them emerging from the buildings, gazing about, and then as we

were glimpsed, fleeing toward the landing-circle where lay the ships, other cries went up and after us leapt the serpent-things from all along the street, pouring into that street from its buildings and from adjacent streets and racing after us.

But a few hundred yards ahead lay the landing-circle, and as we ran on we could make out the gleaming, great shapes of the oval ships lying upon it, could discern the shape of our own awaiting ship, at the circle's edge, its door open before us. Toward that black opening, as toward some tremendous magnet, we stumbled on with the last of our strength, but close behind came the serpent-creatures in ever-increasing masses, the alarm spreading now over all the gigantic city about us, and there lay still a distance that seemed infinite between us and that open door. Then, when we were but a scant hundred feet from it, the serpent-creatures hardly more than that behind us, Korus Kan slipped, stumbled and went down.

We wheeled around, reaching down to help him up, but halted even as we did so. For the serpent-creatures behind us were within yards of us now, hissing cries of triumph rising from them as they writhed toward us. Then, in the next moment, from the great, looming bulk of our ship ahead there stabbed down and over us a shaft of blinding crimson light, a narrow, deadly ray that struck the writhing masses of our pursuers and swept through them in a great, slicing curve, sending them into annihilation in dazzling bursts of light as it touched them. Those farther behind came racing on, nevertheless, but before they could reach us we had stumbled on and into the ship, and with space-doors clanging and generators suddenly droning loud, our ship shot up into the darkness just in time to escape a dozen pale death-beams that sprang toward us from the mass of our pursuers.

Up into the darkness above the vast, blue-glowing city we flashed, Jhul Din and Korus Kan and I bursting up into the pilot room and replacing our follower there whose timely action had saved us. Beneath us the whole city was rising as the alarm spread, lights flashing out here and there among its buildings, serpent-hordes pouring into the streets, while from the landing-circle from which we had just risen there shot up after us a dozen long gleaming oval ships, in close pursuit. So swiftly were they after us that before we had fully realized their nearness, their death-beams were sweeping and slicing through the darkness about us. I shouted a swift order, Korus Kan whirled the controls about and sent our ship flashing straight back into the mass of our dozen pursuers, and then we had leapt through them, our red rays striking right and left as we did so, and two of their great craft had flared there in the darkness above the great city in blinding crimson light, and we were racing up into the darkness again with the ten remaining ships farther behind, but still speeding on our track.

Upward we shot with terrific speed, and in a moment the vast, turning world beneath, covered with the masses of blue force-structures, had contracted and dwindled to a mere point beneath us as we fled up and outward into space. As we flashed up from it, though, I had glimpsed rising from it a full five hundred serpent-ships, with a score of the great disk attraction-ships, and as these lifted to follow the ten that leapt close behind us, I saw that the serpent-creatures were taking no slightest chance of our escape. I turned to Korus Kan, swiftly, as our craft leapt upward, shouting to him above the droning roar of the generators that filled our craft now.

"Head straight out toward the great vibration-wall—toward the opening in it!" I cried.

"We'll never get through that open-

ing—between the space-forts!" Jhul Din exclaimed. "They'll have received word of our escape, and will be waiting for us!"

I shook my head. "We'll have to run between them and take our chance!" I yelled. "It's our one chance of escape from this universe!"

Now the giant central world beneath was no longer visible, as we raced upward and outward from it at terrific speed, and ahead loomed one of the three giant suns that lay about that world. We were leaping forward straight toward it, and in an instant it had broadened across the heavens to a stupendous disk of raging crimson fire, a thunderous, titanic sun into which we seemed inevitably doomed to plunge, but as it flared across the firmament before us Korus Kan swerved the controls, and we were flashing by it, past the red star's edge and on outward through the dying universe. Traveling at a speed that was all but suicidal to use inside any universe, thrumming on at all but our utmost velocity, we reeled outward through the throngs of dead and dying stars about us, while behind us at a speed that matched our own our ten pursuers came relentlessly on, with the five hundred-odd ships that we had seen rising from the serpent-city following us in turn.

Out—out—the minutes of that mad outward flight through the dying universe are but a confused, strange memory of a wild, awful race through the massed dead and dying stars that thronged thick about us, and between which we drove with such terrific swiftness that hardly could we glimpse them in passing save on our space-chart. On that chart I saw a close-massed cluster of dark suns full before us, saw the Antarian swing the ship lightninglike sidewise to avoid it, then sharply drive the controls back again as before us a crimson-flaming star about which turned countless worlds of the serpent-people loomed before us. Out—out—flashing crazily on past crimson sun and thundering dark-star, through the massed suns of great dead and dying clusters and past far-swinging planets, with the ten long ships behind clinging remorselessly to us—out—out—until far ahead there became visible across all the heavens before us the wavering pale blue light of the great vibration-wall that encircled this universe.

Out between the last of the dying universe's dark and dying suns we were racing, toward that mighty wall, and as we leapt forward I pointed toward it. "The space-forts!" I exclaimed. "Make for the opening between them, Korus Kan—and slacken speed a little!"

Straight toward the two great metal structures set in the pale blue-shining wall we leapt, two huge fortresses of gleaming metal from whose narrow openings came brilliant white light, whose mighty death-beam tubes swung threateningly out toward the space between them, the single vibrationless opening in the vast and impenetrable vibration-wall. They had been warned, were ready for us, we knew, and knew too that not even by a miracle could our ship run between those towering forts without coming under the deadly beams, yet still toward them we leapt, at a speed slackened a little, now, while after us like leaping things of prey came the ten ships, rapidly overhauling us, flashing closer each moment.

We had almost reached the great opening in the wall, now, the ten ships behind almost upon us, and as we flashed through space the whole scene was like one from some weird dream—the thronging dark and dying suns of the great universe behind us, the tremendous, all but invisible, pale blue wall of light that enclosed it, the single opening in that wall full before us, guarded on either side by the mighty metal space-forts, the great ships leaping after us just behind.

We were flashing into the narrow opening—from the great space-forts to right and left the deadly death-beams were stabbing out toward us in scores, in hundreds—the ships behind were almost upon us, their own death-beams stabbing toward us—and then I cried a single word to Korus Kan. He thrust the controls suddenly forward with a lightninglike move, and just as our ship was flashing into the narrow opening it dipped sharply downward instead and plummeted down through space while the ships just behind, before they could dip with us, had rushed into the opening and into the hell of death-beams that crossed and recrossed in it from the space-forts on each side!

The next instant, while we curved swiftly upward again, we saw the ten ships that had rushed into that opening whirling blindly about as the death-beams from their own space-forts seared through them and wiped out all life inside them. Those in the great space-forts, realizing those ten to be their own ships, had turned off the beams in the next moment but were an instant too late, since in the narrow opening the ten ships were whirling crazily to that side and this, without guiding intelligence inside them, smashing into each other and into the space-forts on each side as they rushed insanely in all directions. And even as that wild confusion inside the opening was at its height our own ship had curved up and was flashing at full speed into the opening, between the space-forts!

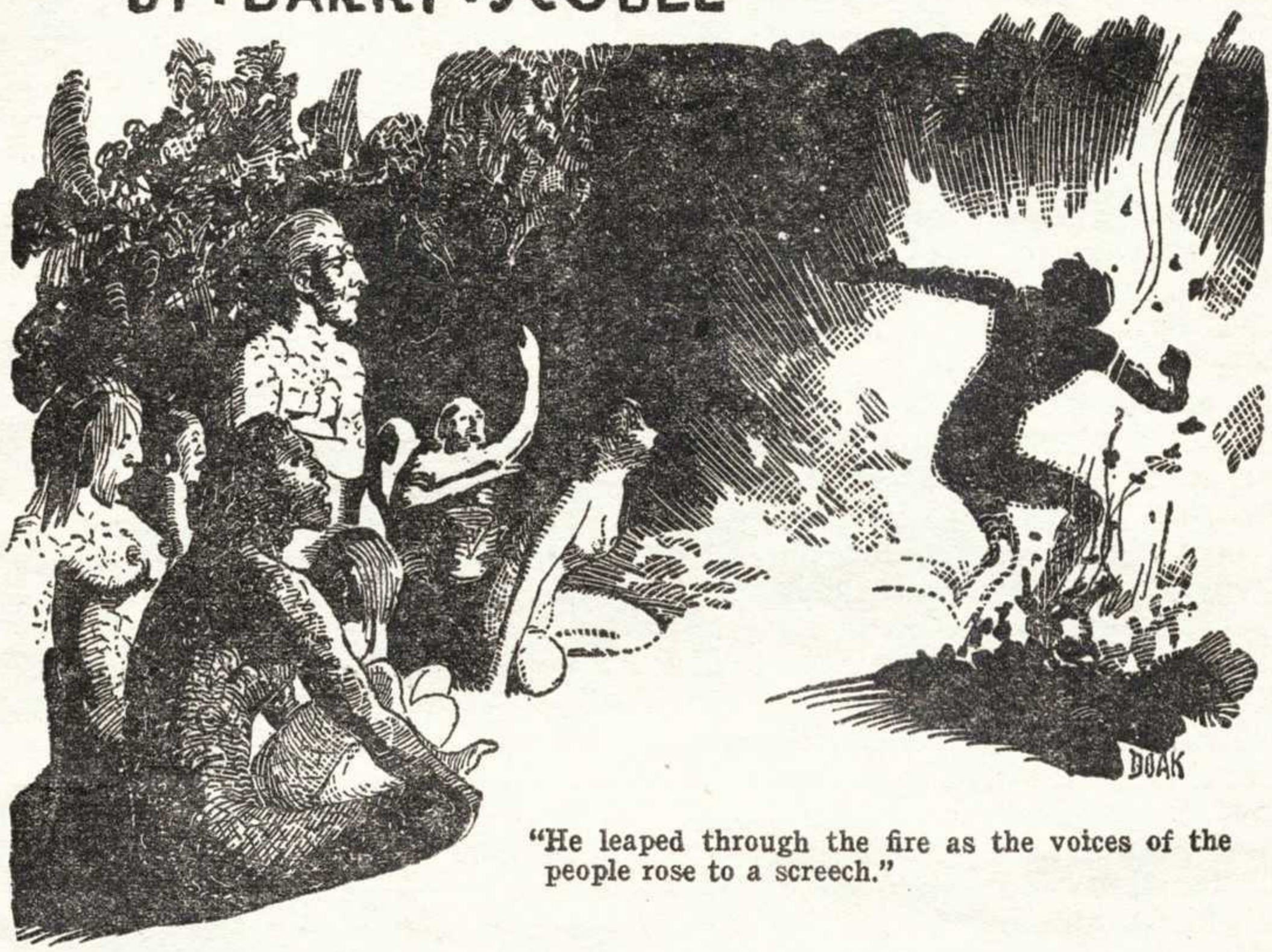
For an instant, in that wild chaos of whirling ships, those in the space-forts did not glimpse our own flying ship and in that instant we were half through the great opening between them. Then they had seen us, had loosed their beams upon us in scores, and in the next instant all about us seemed a single tremendous mêlée of aimlessly whirling ships, and gigantic space-forts, and pale death-beams that sliced and swept about us. Thick about us flashed those ghostly fingers of death, and full before us two of the whirling ships collided and smashed with terrific force, then Korus Kan had dodged them by a swift shifting of the controls, our generators roared suddenly louder as he turned on our utmost speed, and the crazy chaos of ships and beams and forts about us had suddenly vanished, replaced by darkness and silence unutterable.

We were *through*, were racing out into the void again with the great vibration-wall and the dying universe it enclosed and the pursuing serpent-ships inside it dropping farther behind each moment! In the blackness that encircled us the dying universe was a far-flung, dwindling glow behind us, and our own a far patch of misty light to the left, but there shone in the darknes far ahead a misty disk of radiant light, and it was toward this that our ship was heading. For we were flashing out again upon our interrupted mission, were flying out through the awful gulf of outer space once more toward the Andromeda universe!

The thrilling events that occurred in the Andromeda universe will be narrated in next month's chapters of this story

THE IDOL-CHASER

BY · BARRY · SCOBEE



"He leaped through the fire as the voices of the people rose to a screech."

YOU are right, *señor*, I comprehend them perfectly. I have led no fewer than three on the long journey into the jungles. They are very strange. Each male—I know nothing of the women — has in his heart one great passion, an idol that he bows down to and worships and slaves for and makes sacrifices to, even to the sacrificing of his family, or his life, or his own happiness.

I am told that every day in North America—in your country, sir—the natives rush about hither and thither in the wildest confusion, each bent upon serving that special passion which is in his heart, so that they collide, vehicles smash, the weak are trampled upon. Is that true, *señor?* But pardon, it is perhaps not the discreet inquiry.

Have you a match? Thanks. Yes, I will accept a cigarette, since you offer it. But it was only that I desired a match to whittle down for a toothpick.

Those three Yankees—la-la! Each with the hard thing in his heart. John Axe, he was for gold. He *must* have it. But what he brought from the jungles, sir, was an arrow wound and a fever.

And the man Thripp, hunter of bugs. Yes. Given to it day and night to the exclusion of mercy for those who served him.

And the man that named himself Professor Eric Lincoln Dobro. What do you think, *señor*, was his idol? The strangest of all. The seeking of the Ultimate Sanctuary, the Law of Happiness, the Point of Eternal Serenity. Yes. Ha-ha-ha!

The moment the news reached the

plaza that a stranger from North America was in town I hurried to his hotel with a collection of curios that I had gathered on the trip with the bug-hunter. To a room like this, *señor*, where you and I sit beside this table. But he did not invite me to sit comfortably. He was a tall, lean man with hard and cutting eyes, very impatient.

"What have you?" he sang out the instant I pushed the door open. "I do not wish to buy fruit, or curios, or statues of the saints. Finish quickly and depart."

I am not alert to take offense, sir. I hastily dumped the contents of my wicker on his table—a savage priest's feather head-dress, a withered hand, a condor's talon, a dart-blower, a necklace or two of teeth, a little dried human head of the Jivaros that had come my way in trade, such odds and ends.

A stale wild jungle fragrance—a stench, sir, that had been accumulating since the case was last open, puffed up into our faces.

"Smell it!" Dobro squeaked, plunging his long beak into the thick of it. "You have brought the jungle to me in a bag."

A green fire lit his sharp, cold eyes.

He clawed among my offerings, brushing them aside contemptuously, muttering that they would not interest a third-rate museum, until he hit upon the most insignificant object of all—a crude little human figure on a pedestal molded in clay and roughly burnt. He seized it up in both hands and gaped at it.

That figure, sir, was a curious thing. The pedestal was shaped like a basin. It represented a mud-puddle. And knee-deep in the puddle stood the little figure. It was as if a human being had risen up out of that puddle into the world. Mud ran down the body, dripped from the ends of the hands. Black mud that stuck on like clabber milk. Mud was on the head, and mud covered the face. It was an ugly thing, a revolting thing, sir. But a work of art — savage, degrading jungle art.

"Where did this come from?" that Dobro demanded hoarsely—he spoke and understood Spanish with the same fluency that I perceive is yours, sir. "What sort of people made this?" he flung. "Speak, you stupid chunk!"

I am not a slave to be bawled at—la-la! My deliberate answer was to pluck that object from his fingers and set it up on my own palm and hold it out, tantalizing him.

That man stared, sir, and paled. He leaned toward it, and at the same time he pulled away from it. He was like a man tempted by perdition.

"God!" he cried out; "what an obscenity!"

"Obscenity?" I protested, thinking he was preparing to offer me a low price. "*Señor,*" I said with dignity, "its value lies in that it is a consummate depiction of stupidity."

He did not heed me. His eyes were fastened upon that thing, and they were so hot with a green cold fire that I stared at it too, trying to see what he saw, wondering if its value might be more than I had suspected.

I regarded it a long time with the thoughts of a man of mature experiences, but I could make out nothing of consequence. It did not express anything at all except a human being as low as a river animal rising up out of its bed of mud.

That was what I saw then, and it was all that I was ever able to perceive afterward, though that Dobro saw other things—la-la! Amazing, astounding, *incredible* things, sir.

"God!" said Dobro again, looking at the figure filling my palms so neatly. "God, it *is* the essence of stupidity. It is a symbol of mankind rising from mindlessness. It is emerging from the door that I have long sought to go back through."

He snatched it from me and hugged

it to his breast like a fierce and hungry beast.

"Where did you get this?" he thundered suddenly. "Where did it come from? Speak up, man! Don't stand there like a gaping yokel."

To calm him I told him how an *indio* of the jungles had given it to the bug-hunter, who threw it away into the wet mold of the deep forest, and how I, recognizing its value and interest, had retrieved it and carried it all that long journey back across the mountains to civilization. Which was the positive truth, sir.

"But who made it?" Dobro insisted. "Who was the artist?"

"One of the tribe," I answered.

"Ah, you know that?" His words gouged like a stiff finger. "You know that?"

"Yes," I said.

"You can furnish proof?"

"Yes."

"What proof?" he spat at me.

"I saw one of the tribe rise from the mud like that," I told him.

His steely eyes that had no compassion whatever penetrated me, sir, for a full minute.

"If you are lying," he said at last like the hiss of a viper, "I will kill you!"

He jerked his chair over against the door and sat down in it, so that I could not have escaped even had I been alarmed and disposed to run away from there and get out into the blessed sunlight of the plaza.

"Now, my man," he said, "you and I are going to make a contract right here and now for you to guide me across the mountains and into the selfsame wilderness where you got that image and saw that emergence from the mud."

I protested that my health had been ruined by the other two journeys, that I was a sick man, that my family was poor and needed my constant presence. Which was, and is, the absolute truth, sir. But he was very liberal in his offers. An admirable trait of the Yankees, no? So we arranged for me to conduct him.

And you would go to study the trees, *señor?* Is it the lumber that you are interested in? Or rubber? But you need not answer. I am not of the inquisitive sort. It is none of my affair.

WHEW! That was a terrific journey with Dobro. I mop my forehead, thus, when I think of it. Only a great deal of money could persuade me again. After many hardships, in which I bore the burdens of all, we at last arrived in the steaming valleys of those headwater tributaries of the Amazon.

From the very first this Professor Eric Lincoln Dobro—he said the Eric stood for Scandinavian blood in his veins, the Lincoln for Anglo-Saxon, and the Dobro for Southern European. I do not know. That was too much for me. But I do swear he had the look of a long-faced Spaniard. As I started to say, from the first this man kept prattling at my ear about the Tribe of the Mud—did they do this and did they do that? Which was but natural, considering that I was the only educated man with him. The others were but *indios* who deserted us every day or two, so that we were continually employing new ones.

When we at last began to find the wild and flitting tribes in those sweating jungles, this Dobro's curiosity knew no appeasing. He spoke with many of the chiefs and wizards—through me, of course, for I make fluent use of many dialects—beseeching them always for the secrets of their mystic tribal rites, and inquiring constantly where the Tribe of the Mud was to be found.

Those Indians were very timorous and would run away. But twice by gifts we persuaded a handful or two to put on their ritualistic ceremonies. Once we arrived at a village where a dance was beginning. Dobro danced

with them. Yes. He stripped to a breech-rag, hung about his neck the hot entrails of a fowl that he killed with his own hands, as the savages were doing, and danced till he fell exhausted.

I was revolted, sir. That is the absolute truth. I expostulated with him as one gentleman to another. He pushed me away with his bloody hands and flew into a rage.

"Leave off!" he shouted with a mad look in his eyes. "Stop your interfering. I will not be hindered. I, I who search for the Law of Happiness, the Ultimate Sanctuary, the Place of Eternal Serenity. I, I who have eschewed the common means—women and war, the ordinary sciences, commerce, and utopias, and religion. Bah! I explore the unexplored. Stand aside. I will not be blocked by the brother of an ox."

Brother of an ox—to me, *señor!* But I did not take offense. He did not truly mean me. He did not look at me when he said it. His darting eyes were upon his own thoughts. He was never a man to hold conversation with. He could not hold to a subject. He could not hear other men's talk. He would break into the middle of your conversation, or stop in the middle of his own and forget to go on. But he was forever prattling his phrases to the air. Flighty as the wind.

The Law of Happiness—was not that amusing, sir? I could have told him what it was: A bit of money, an industrious wife, a moderate number of children—eight or ten—a recent shriving, a comfortable bench in the plaza—and a few other things—a few—other things—la-la, it is best perhaps not to pursue that, sir. Money, wife, children, priest's benediction, bench in the sun, and stop.

La-la—the Ultimate Sanctuary. . . .

"And what if you find it?" I asked him once.

His eyes burned green and fierce and unseeing, up through the treetops.

"I shall be the greatest scientist in the world!" he cried out like an orator. "I shall have served humanity."

"If you don't find it?" I persisted, just to hear what he would say, for I am not inquisitive.

His countenance fell. He looked at the ground a long time before he spoke.

"If I don't find it—the integrity of science must be carried on." He was very meek. "If I don't—I shall nevertheless give to the world what I do find. That is the integrity of science."

My heart went out to him, sir, in that moment of meekness, though I did not understand him clearly. Not that I am not highly intelligent. But he talked in riddles. Yet his meekness soon vanished, and he kept on with his mercilessness, worshiping that passion, that hard idol that was in his heart.

He knew no rest. He would lie on his belly close beside the light of a smudge fire by night and write endless reams of fine script and mutter. By day he drove himself, and me, and those *indios*, through the twilight paths of those ever-growing, ever-perishing jungles. Of the little handfuls of flitting people that we found he made continual inquiry for the Tribe of the Mud, and the more he saw of low and stupid and revolting humanity the more obsessed he became.

He was like men who become slaves of the opium, who ever need more and more to satisfy their flesh until their appetite outstrips their capacity and can no longer be satisfied. That is the way of flesh, sir. It can not be satisfied. Only reason can be satisfied.

I did not think this out so philosophically in the jungle. No. We were too busy fighting the mosquito, the jaguar, and the vampire bat that sucks the blood. I arrived at these weighty conclusions here in the ease

of the plaza weeks afterward when I brought all my intelligence to bear—and talked somewhat with scientific friends, and the priest.

We went hither and thither in search of those people of the mud. One river was the replica of another. And at last he began childishly to chide me with an inability to find the tribe we had set out to see. He was a madman, sir.

However, in due time, by God's—you need not start, *señor*. I often cross myself when I mention His name. My elbow striking the edge of the table and the tiny cigarette end was merely an accident. Eh—another cigarette? I do not object, since you offer it.

As I was saying, in due time, by God's gift to me of a surpassing skill in junglecraft, I was able to penetrate the mazes of that sweating wilderness and arrive in triumph at the Tribe of the Ultimate Secret.

WE CAME upon them without warning in a dusky glade. Two or three stood in a pool of mud laving their naked bodies with slow motions. A dozen, a score of others, wallowed in the black mess or lay along the rim of the basin in sluggish lassitude.

How shall I make you see that picture, *señor?* They did not flee. They were not startled. They watched us with lazy eyes, stupid eyes. They were like crocodiles. They were—Dobro used a phrase—ah, "like prehistoric amphibians that had not acquired sufficient life to crawl out from under the clumsy feet of the mammoths."

We watched them throughout the afternoon. The finding of them was like a sedative to Dobro—in one way. His madness vanished. He became quiet and studious. But inside him, it was plain to see, a great tenseness and expectation were at work. He approached them by slow degrees. Finally he was close enough to squat and touch one. It squeaked like a toad when you punch it with your finger, and wriggled barely out of reach, and lay still with eyes blinking sluggishly.

As the afternoon wore on I knew that Dobro was up to something, sir. He was too subdued outwardly, too excited within. Toward night he placed all his written notes in the rubber bag and sealed it, and put the bag into the leather case and stuffed it into my knapsack. Then he turned on me.

"You!" he said. "Rub the sleep out of your eyes and listen to me. D'you hear? See these written pages of mine? You are to take them in the packet just as they are to the American consul, if something happens to me—if I do not come back. Do you understand?"

"If you do not come back!" I repeated in astonishment. "You are quite somewhere now, in this trackless jungle. Whither else can you go?"

He tossed his head angrily. He sat down on the ground before me in exaggerated patience.

"O admirable comrade," he said, seething inside, "I perceive that I must explain the unexplainable to a brother of the ox, lest you spill the beans this night. Try, try, I prithee, try once to comprehend."

You see, sir, he was of a madness. We had no beans. But not too mad to marshal his thoughts and presently proceed.

"The Law of Happiness," he began in a restrained tone, "the Ultimate Sanctuary, is not to be found in anything that humanity knows. All that humanity conceives of is but broken dishes from which to eat. I scorn its every phase. The Law and the Sanctuary may lie in the next world, if such a world there be, but I can not go forward into it and return with a message. The Law and the Sanctuary may lie back in the world from which mankind emerged. It may lie just back of that point where mind first

flickered in flesh. I intend—I intend to go back—to see!''

His voice broke, sir, and rose shrilly. He bit his lip and strove to hold his enforced calmness.

''These people,'' he continued, ''are the low ebb of humanity. It is plain to see they are in the midst of some remarkable ritual or undertaking. They appear to be withdrawing their minds from the flesh—appear now to be almost mindless.''

Again his voice flew up. And this time he went on without bringing it under submission, flinging words into my face.

''I mean to join them! I mean to do what they do. I mean to think what they think. I mean to go with them to the very point of flesh-without-mind. Mayhap for a moment on beyond that port into the other world —and find the Ultimate Sanctuary in —some static condition——''

He could keep calm no longer, sir. He sprang up. He paced back and forth. His hands opened and clenched. He flung a command at me.

''You, whatever happens tonight, do you not interfere! This is the opportunity I have long sought. These people are the Path and the Door and the Key. Keep you off your meddling hands.''

Then again in a moment:

''Do you comprehend, brother of the ox, do you comprehend all that I have said?''

''Oh, certainly,'' I assured him. ''Yes, indeed. And I shall retain every word in my incomparable memory and repeat them to civilization.''

''Do precisely that,'' he said.

In these last moments the swift tropic night had fallen like a weight. We were in a sea of darkness through which we might not swim up to any surface. As if it were a signal Dobro stripped off his ragged garments, what few were left to us. I could see his white body vaguely in the blackness. Suddenly he flung his arm out and whispered:

''What is that behind you?''

I jerked around. Nothing was there. I turned back. Dobro was gone. He had used that ancient ruse to vanish from my sight.

I searched twice around that pool of mud for him, being careful not to step on those things. I shouted thrice into the jungle, but the walls of the glade only threw my voice back at me like shattered stones.

I was distraught, sir. I sat down with my back to a tree. I was very weary also. I had not slept since daybreak. I must have inadvertently dozed off; for the next thing that I knew Dobro was shaking me and gouging me painfully with the tines of our eating-fork and hissing in my ear.

''Wake up, pig!'' Thus he addressed me in his mad fashion. ''Make an outcry and I will impale your tongue. Listen with care. The *indios* are departing. Assemble our packs and follow. But have a care that you do not alarm them.''

I leaped alertly to my feet. The moon had risen high up. It lighted the glade. That Dobro, sir, was like a black ghost, mud from head to foot. He gave me a start, I tell you! With a final gouge Dobro disappeared.

I proceeded to put our belongings into the bags, including his discarded garments. In the midst of this there came a sudden and inexplicable sound from the jungle. It was like nothing that I had ever heard in all my wide experience. It was a hollow sound, or many sounds, without definite location. For one mad moment, sir, I thought it came from the man in the moon.

I am a courageous man, sir. There is none braver. But in that moment I fell upon my knees beseeching God and the blessed Virgin and several of the saints to preserve me whole for my family's sake. While I was thus engaged in holy fervor that Dobro approached me from the rear, and set

his muddy foot midway of my shoulders and tumbled me over on my face.

"Knock off with that howling superstition," he ordered briskly, "and bring those packs."

It is not good luck to kick over a man at prayer. It is sacrilegious. But I hold no animosity against Señor Dobro, seeing what happened to him.

By the time I was up and had the packs on my back those savages and Dobro himself had passed through a black spot in the jungle wall. I followed and found myself in the usual narrow wilderness path, hard-packed and moist, with roots and vines to trip the unwary feet, and leaves to scratch one's ears. Once my hand closed upon a serpent and it licked my cheek with its forked tongue. A bad sign. Another time Dobro came looking for me back along the trail, groping with a stick like a blind man. He punched me in the face with it, sir, cutting my lip. Behold the slight puckering scar that remains to this day. Ordinarily I conceal it with a cigarette.

Thanks. I will. The entire packet? What beneficence! The sort that I myself admire and practise.

The inexplicable sound that I had heard went on far ahead of the procession. As we advanced it became drowned in the drone of a waterfall that we had heard throughout the day and that now became louder and louder as I progressed.

After quite a while I saw a fire gleaming through the interstices of the jungle. I judged the *indios* had arrived at their destination, and proceeded with caution. At the last I crawled on my hands and knees. Thus it was that I came to another glade and was able to see, lying flat on my stomach behind a spray of leaves, the whole scene before me.

And what a scene, sir. La-la! The huge branches of vast trees formed a canopy through which no gleam of the stars was visible. In the middle of the open space was a great basin of thin mud. Beside the basin a huge fire burned. And ringing the glade around was a line of savages sitting on the ground and hugging their knees —old men and women and children and babes in arms. The glade was at the very brink of the cataract that had been roaring in my ears. A mist rose from it, lighted weirdly by that fire and rising into the canopy of leaves and black branches like steam from a witch's cauldron.

At one point in the ring were grouped the mud-covered savages that we had first seen. I perceived now that they were the strong and hardy ones of the tribe, men and women. The great crackling fire was between them and the pool of glistening mud. They sat motionless, stupid. I made out Dobro among them, in the rear rank. He was distinguishable by his superior height and size. He sat like the others, hugging his knees—though I could see his mud-caked head lift now and then and turn this way and that. No doubt those green and cutting eyes of his were taking in the sights.

Presently I became conscious of a new sound over the roar of the waterfall—and that inexplicable sound that had alarmed me was explained. It was made by men grunting and chanting into the open ends of some sort of bamboo contrivances — a hollow, booming sound, as vague and strange, sir, as anything that ever I heard.

As this grew in rising volume the old men began to beat on tom-toms. At first this was barely audible, but gradually it grew louder and louder. Then I noticed that the lips of all the people, save the mud-covered ones, were moving. Slowly, gradually, their volume rose and chimed in with the booming and the tom-tom beating—a chanting, wailing, thumping, booming diapason ever swelling louder and higher and wilder.

Sir, to me this savage music was the very voice of the jungle. The voice of mystery. The voice of savagery. It

stirred in me an emotion that I could not express in words, could not express even in my own thoughts. Fear, lonely longing, ecstasy—a sad ecstacy from the throbbing, sobbing pulse of a confused and wondering world.

The pulsing and sobbing and wailing rose to their height. My flesh crept. My heart seemed about to break. Then from out of that knot of mud-caked savages a man rose up. His eyes were strangely upon that fire and the glistening smooth surface of the mud beyond. He sprang forward. He leaped through the fire as the voices of the people rose in a screech. He plunged feet first into the black pool. He sank from sight. He did not come up. He did not appear again.

While I drew my panting breaths, sir, another mud-caked figure arose. He stared at the fire fanatically. He ran and leaped through the flames, and shot straight down into the mud. The surface had not settled when another arose and followed. And others, one after another, eager, fanatical. And all the while the tom-toms beat, the bamboos boomed, and the people wailed.

I am always alert, sir, but I had forgotten that I was in charge of that madman Dobro. When I remembered, only a handful of the mud-caked savages were left. I made haste, I tell you, to save him. I crawled through the vines and foliage of the jungle to seize him from behind and drag him to safety. But that jungle was dense and held me like hands. When at last, by my superior strength and determination, I came up behind the point where he sat and was ready to reach out, all the others were gone and Dobro was just rising to his feet. In a step he was beyond my grasp.

I think, sir, those savages in the pool where we first came upon them had not told the other tribespeople about Dobro's and my presence. Perhaps they did not speak in the course of their ritual. When that ring of people saw the huge height of Dobro and perceived that a stranger was among them, their music and their wailing stumbled, and then rose again.

Dobro hesitated. I suspect he was wondering what was beneath that glistening surface. I felt pity for that lone, slightly stooped figure standing there, a supreme fool. But he was a man of courage, sir! Only a second did he pause; then he too sprang forward, leaped through the fire, and plunged out of sight in the black pool.

The music and the wailing stopped off short. The night seemed so still that it was a moment before I caught again the roar of the cataract. The musicians gathered up their tom-toms and hooting instruments, stuck them under their arms, and started away, for all the world like musicians at the close of a concert in the city plaza. The women took their children, and the whole tribe filed away down a path along the brink of the waterfall, disappearing downward into the black jungle.

THE instant the glade was empty I rushed from my hiding-place to the pool. Its surface was calm. I looked about. Its farther side mingled with the great snaky roots of one of those huge trees. It was dark among those roots. I got a torch from the fire and held it down in those muddy claws of that tree.

I found a trench, sir, that had been dug from the brink of the pool among the roots to the waterfall—nothing less than a slideway that dropped steeply down into the cataract. I applied my alert mind to the problem. I realized that those people, diving feet first into the pool, could easily have thrust their bodies forward beneath the surface and come up within two or three seconds in the darkness among the roots. From there, with a twist of their bodies, they could have slid over the brink and shot down the

slideway into the fuming cataract. For a fact the brim of the pool showed slick where naked bodies had slid over. Convinced of this, and hopeful again for Dobro, I got the knapsacks and started down the path where I had seen the tribe go.

I made my way a quarter of a mile downstream, and retraced my steps part-way back. I shouted, but my voice was absorbed in the roar of the waterfall. I heard no one. I saw nothing but the stars twinkling above the stream where the tree-tops did not come together. I gave up for the night. It was useless to search in that darkness. Lest I be robbed of the knapsacks, I used them for a pillow. I believe it is good policy for men on an expedition to get what sleep they can.

When I awakened it was day. Those natives, sir, who had gone through the mud were wading along in the shallow rapids of the stream. Their bodies were wet and gleaming. They were washed clean. They had the look of a man who has just been shrived by the priest.

And then I saw that Dobro. He was sitting on a flat rock in the rapids, without clothing, hugging his knees, a patch of morning sunlight shining through the tree-tops upon him. You can imagine my relief at finding him still among us.

But that which he was doing, sir, was in a sense remarkable. He was looking at those washed natives with an expression—la-la!

Once here in the city a stranger from a ship came among us selling for a coin or two a little box that said upon it in print, "Raise the lid and see the biggest fool in the world." We bought them with alacrity and waste of good money. When we opened the lids we beheld our own faces in a mirror. You can imagine our feelings.

Sir, this Dobro had just such an expression on his face as he looked at those shrived natives. Like a man who had been fooled.

The *indios* came up the bank of the river, the men taking one path and the women another, and disappeared into the jungle. When they were gone that Dobro's expression altered. It changed to a kind of solemn amazement and utter incredulity. His lips began to move, and to hear what he was saying I arose and moved quietly nearer. And what words, sir!

"Well, I'll be damned! I, even I did it. *Even I!*"

He was not profane, sir. He was incredulous. He stared blankly into space, and with each word he nodded his head in short jerks.

"Even I did it. Well, I'll be damned!"

I stepped nearer and addressed him.

"No doubt you are right, sir," I said. "But why be so astonished about it?" He looked up at me.

"Did you wake up at last?" he asked.

"Did you find your Ultimate Sanctuary?" I retorted.

"Yes," he said, and regarded me as if defying me to contradict him.

He solemnly raised his bare arm and pointed up the purling river to where the cataract boiled and the mist arose.

"Yes," he repeated. "When those waters were whirling me and holding me down, when they were smothering me and making my struggle futile, when there was nowhere else to turn in my extremity, I turned to God like any common yokel and prayed to Him to deliver me."

He spat vehemently. He spat so vehemently, sir, that his spittle crackled on the surface of the water.

"Get the knapsacks!" he ordered like a sergeant. "Make haste. We go."

"Go?" I cried. "What next? Where now?"

"Back to civilization," he answered "Back to tell the world what *I* did, what I *did*."

Sir, he had but exchanged one idol

for another. His idol had been to find the Ultimate Sanctuary. Now it was to tell the world what he had done. La-la! And the last was worse than the first, for he gave me no rest, showed no mercy, in that long race back over the mountains.

So you see, sir, I comprehend the North Americans. I will make a valuable guide for you into the jungles if we can make satisfactory financial arrangements. . . . Yes, I comprehend them thoroughly Except for one little thing, sir, a mere trifle. Why did that Dobro take that little idol-figure of roughly burnt clay, for which he had paid me four dollars, and twist it in his strong hands and break it up and throw the pieces into the river?

Ballad of Winds

By PAUL FRANCIS SUTTON

Over the roof-tops and through the streets
Dances and shouts the black north wind,
Rushes and whirls, advances, retreats,
Then chuckles in glee at the bloody rind
Of a dying moon fleshless and blind;
While strangling fast in the grip of the night
Scintillant stars struggle to find
A logical cause for the wind's delight.

But the wind whoops on o'er the rotting slime
Of bones on an alley's garbage heap,
And the wind wails on down the caves of Time,
Disturbing the dust o'er the shades asleep;
Till out from their ebon bodies creep
Whispering things by the sane forgot,
Phantom things o' the pits sunk deep
In the charnel mush of the world's black rot.

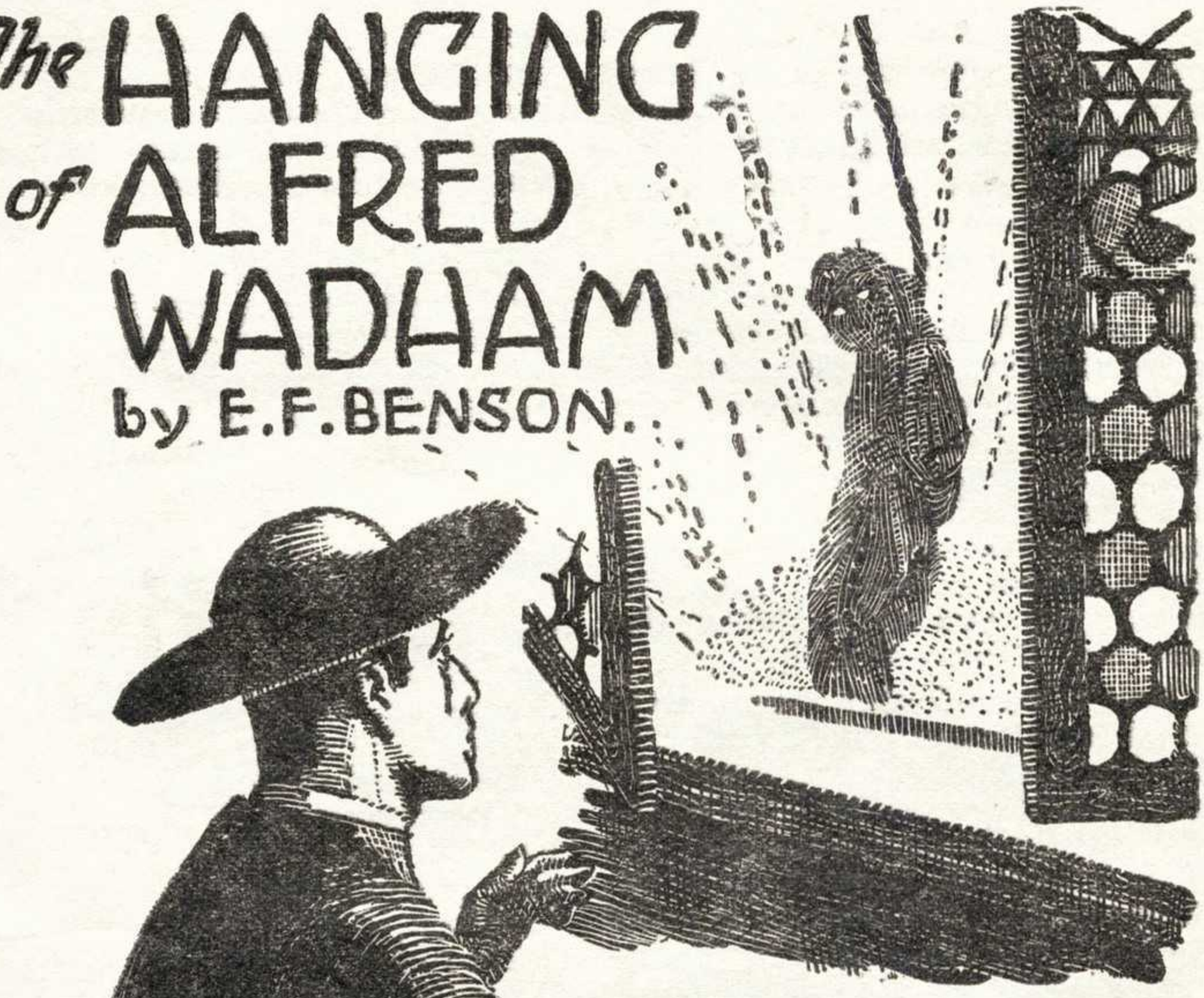
Ho! the night screams in the bellowing wind,
While down the dark sweep of a star-paven trail
Dance crystalline shadows of breezes designed
And formed by the mad demon god of the gale;
Swept high o'er the roof-tops gibber and wail
Like imbecile children, like maniac's spawn,
Dark memories laughing, till skies turning pale
Command all the phantoms to death in the dawn.

L'ENVOI

Ho, Prince, you laugh at my songs of the night;
Indulgent you smile and perchance praise their tune,
Then turn to sweet singers who drool of delight,
For, Prince, you're afraid of the winds and the moon.

The HANGING of ALFRED WADHAM

by E.F.BENSON..



DOAK

"The head covered by the death-cap, it swung in the window against the sunset."

I HAD been telling Father Denys Hanbury about a very extraordinary séance which I had attended a few days before. The medium, in trance, had said a whole series of things which were unknown to anybody but myself and a friend of mine who had lately died, and who, so she said, was present or was speaking to me through her. Naturally, from the strictly scientific point of view in which alone we ought to approach such phenomena, such information was not really evidence that the spirit of my friend was in touch with her, for all this was already known to me, and might by some process of telepathy have been communicated to her from my brain and not through the agency of my friend. She spoke, too, not in her own ordinary voice, but in a voice which certainly was very like his. Then again, however, his voice was known to me: it was in my memory even as were the things she had been saying. All this therefore, as I was remarking to Father Denys, must be ruled out as positive evidence that communications had been coming from the other side of death.

"A telepathic explanation was possible," I said, "and we have to accept any known explanation which covers the facts before we conclude that the dead have come back into touch with the material world."

The room was quite warm, but I saw that he shivered slightly, and hitching his chair a little nearer the fire he spread out his hands to the blaze. Such hands they were: beau-

tiful and expressive of him, and so like the praying hands of Albert Dürer: the blaze shone through them as through rose-red alabaster.

He shook his head. "It's a terribly dangerous thing to attempt to get into communication with the dead," he said. "If you seem to get into touch with them, you run the risk of establishing connection not with them but with awful and perilous intelligences. Study telepathy by all means, for that is one of the marvels of the mind which we are meant to investigate like any other of the wonderful secrets of nature. But I interrupt you: you said something else occurred. Tell me about it."

Now I knew Father Denys' creed about such things, and deplored it. He holds, as his church commands him, that intercourse with the spirits of the dead is impossible, and that when it appears to occur, as it undoubtedly does, the enquirer is really in touch with some species of dramatic demon, who is impersonating the spirit of the dead. Such a theory has always seemed to me as monstrous as it is without foundation, and there is nothing I can discover in the recognized sources of Christian doctrine which justifies such a view.

"Yes: now comes the queer part," I said. "For, still speaking in the voice of my friend, the medium told me something which instantly I believed to be untrue. It could not therefore have been drawn telepathically from me. After that the séance came to an end, and in order to convince myself that this could not have come from him, I looked up the diary of my friend, which had been left me at his death, and which had just been sent me by his executors, and was still unpacked. There I found an entry which proved that what the medium had said was absolutely correct. A certain thing—I needn't go into it—had occurred precisely as she had stated, though I should have been willing to swear to the contrary. That can not have come into her mind from mine, and there is no source that I can see from which she could have obtained it except from my friend. What do you say to that?"

He shook his head.

"I don't alter my position at all," he said. "That information, given it did not come from your mind, which certainly seems to be impossible, came from some discarnate agency. But it didn't come from the spirit of your friend: it came from some evil and awful intelligence."

"But isn't that pure assumption?" I asked. "It is surely much simpler to say that the dead can, under certain conditions, communicate with us. Why drag in the devil?"

He glanced at the clock.

"It's not very late," he said. "Unless you want to go to bed, give me your attention for half an hour, and I will try to show you."

The rest of my story is what Father Denys told me, and what happened immediately afterward.

"THOUGH you are not a Catholic," he said, "I think you would agree with me about an institution which plays a very large part in our ministry, namely, confession, as regards the sacredness and the inviolability of it. A soul laden with sin comes to his confessor knowing that he is speaking to one who has the power to pronounce or withhold forgiveness, but who will never, for any conceivable reason, repeat or hint at what has been told him. If there was the slightest chance of the penitent's confession being made known to anyone, unless he himself, for purposes of expiation or of righting some wrong, chooses to repeat it, no one would ever come to confession at all. The Church would lose the greatest hold it possesses over the souls of men, and the souls of men would lose that inestimable comfort of knowing (not hoping merely but knowing)

that their sins were forgiven them. Of course the priest may withhold absolution, if he is not convinced that he is dealing with a true penitent, and before he gives it, he will insist that the penitent makes such reparation as is in his power for the wrong he has done. If he has profited by his dishonesty he must make good: whatever crime he has committed he must give warrant that his penitence is sincere. But I think you would agree that in any case the priest can not, whatever the result of his silence may be, repeat what has been told him. By doing so he might right or avert some hideous wrong, but it is impossible for him to do so. What he has heard, he has heard under the seal of confession, concerning the sacredness of which no argument is conceivable."

"It is possible to imagine awful consequences resulting from it," I said. "But I agree."

"Before now awful consequences have come of it," he said, "but they don't touch the principle. And now I am going to tell you of a certain confession that was once made to me."

"But how can you?" I said. "That's impossible, surely."

"For a certain reason, which we shall come to later," he said, "you will see that secrecy is no longer incumbent on me. But the point of my story is not that: it is to warn you about attempting to establish communication with the dead. Signs and tokens, voices and apparitions appear to come through to us from them, but who sends them? You will see what I mean."

I settled myself down to listen.

"You will probably not remember with any distinctness, if at all, a murder committed a year ago, when a man called Gerald Selfe met his death. There was no enticing mystery about it, no romantic accessories, and it aroused no public interest. Selfe was a man of loose life, but he held a respectable position, and it would have been disastrous for him if his private irregularities had come to light. For some time before his death he had been receiving blackmailing letters regarding his relations with a certain married woman, and, very properly, he had put the matter into the hands of the police. They had been pursuing certain clues, and on the afternoon before Selfe's death one of the officers of the criminal investigation department had written to him that everything pointed to his manservant, who certainly knew of his intrigue, being the culprit. This was a young man named Alfred Wadham: he had only lately entered Selfe's service, and his past history was of the most unsavory sort. They had baited a trap for him, of which details were given, and suggested that Selfe should display it, which within an hour or two he successfully did. This information and these instructions were conveyed in a letter which after Selfe's death was found in a drawer of his writing-table, of which the lock had been tampered with. Only Wadham and his master slept in his flat, and a woman came in every morning to cook breakfast and do the house-work, and Selfe lunched and dined at his club, or in the restaurant on the ground-floor of this house of flats, and here he dined that night. When the woman came in next morning she found the outer door of the flat open, and Selfe lying dead on the floor of his sitting-room with his throat cut. Wadham had disappeared, but in the slop-pail of his bedroom was water which was stained with human blood. He was caught two days afterward and at his trial elected to give evidence. His story was that he suspected he had fallen into a trap, and that while Mr. Selfe was at dinner he searched his drawers and found the letter sent by the police, which proved that this was the case. He therefore decided to bolt, and he left the flat that evening before his master came back to it

after dinner. Being in the witness-box, he was of course subjected to a searching cross-examination, and contradicted himself in several particulars. Then there was that incriminating evidence in his room, and the motive for the crime was clear enough. After a very long deliberation the jury found him guilty, and he was sentenced to death. His appeal, which followed, was dismissed.

"Wadham was a Catholic, and since it is my office to minister to Catholic prisoners at the jail where he was lying under sentence of death, I had many talks with him, and entreated him for the sake of his immortal soul to confess his guilt. But though he was even eager to confess other misdeeds of his, some of which it was ugly work to speak of, he maintained his innocence on this charge of murder. Nothing shook him, and though as far as I could judge he was sincerely penitent for other misdeeds he swore to me that the story he told in court was, in spite of that contradiction in which he had involved himself, essentially true, and that if he was hanged, he died unjustly. Up till the last afternoon of his life, when I sat with him for two hours, praying and pleading with him, he stuck to that. Why he should do that, unless indeed he was innocent, when he was eager to search his heart for the confession of other gross wickednesses, was curious; the more I pondered it, the more inexplicable I found it, and during that afternoon doubt as to his guilt began to grow in me. A terrible thought it was, for he had lived in sin and error and tomorrow his life was to be broken like a snapped stick. I was to be at the prison again before six in the morning, and I still had to determine whether I should give him the Sacrament. If he went to his death guilty of murder, but refusing to confess, I had no right to give it him, but if he was innocent my withholding of it was as terrible as any miscarriage of justice. Then on my way out I had a word with one of the warders, which brought my doubt closer to me.

"'What do you make of Wadham?' I asked.

"He drew aside to let a man pass, who nodded to him; somehow I knew that he was the hangman.

"'I don't like to think of it, sir,' he said. 'I know he was found guilty and that his appeal failed. But if you ask me whether I believe him to be a murderer, why no, I don't.'

"I SPENT the evening alone: about ten o'clock as I was on the point of going to bed, I was told that a man called Horace Kennion was below, and wanted to see me. He was a Catholic, and though I had been friends with him at one time, certain things had come to my knowledge which made it impossible for me to have anything more to do with him, and I had told him so. He was wicked—oh, don't misunderstand me; we all do wicked things constantly: the life of us all is a tissue of misdeeds; but he alone of all men I had ever met seemed to me to love wickedness for its own sake. I said I could not see him, but the message came back that his need was urgent, and up he came. He wanted, he told me, to make his confession, not tomorrow, but now, and his confessor was away. I could not, as a priest, resist that appeal. And his confession was that he had killed Gerald Selfe.

"For a moment I thought this was some impious joke, but he swore he was speaking the truth, and still under the seal of confession gave me a detailed account. He had dined with Selfe that night, and had gone up afterward to his flat for a game of piquet. Selfe told him with a grin that he was going to lay his servant by the heels tomorrow for blackmail. 'A smart, spry young man today,' he said. 'Perhaps a bit off color tomorrow at this time.' He rang the bell for him to put out the card-table:

then saw it was ready, and he forgot that his summons remained unanswered. They played high points and both had drunk a good deal. Selfe lost partie after partie, and eventually accused Kennion of cheating. Words ran high, boiled over into blows, and Kennion, in some rough and tumble of wrestling and hitting, picked up a knife from the table, and stabbed Selfe in the throat, through jugular vein and carotid artery. In a few minutes he had bled to death. . . . Then Kennion remembered that unanswered bell, and went tiptoe to Wadham's room. He found it empty; empty, too, were the other rooms in the flat. Had there been anyone there, his idea was to say he had come up at Selfe's invitation, and found him dead. But this was better yet: there was no more than a few spots of blood on him, and he washed them in Wadham's room, emptying the water into his slop-pail. Then leaving the door of the flat open, he went downstairs and out.

"He told me this in quite a few sentences, even as I have told it you, and looked up at me with a smiling face.

" 'So what's to be done next, venerable Father?' he said gayly.

" 'Ah, thank God, you've confessed!' I said. 'There is time yet to save an innocent man. You must give yourself up to the police at once.' But even as I spoke my heart misgave me.

"He rose, dusting the knees of his trousers.

" 'What a quaint notion!' he said. 'But there's nothing farther from my thoughts.'

"I jumped up.

" 'I shall go myself, then,' I said.

"He laughed outright at that.

" 'Oh, no, indeed you won't,' he said. 'What about the seal of confession? Indeed, I rather fancy it's a deadly sin for a priest even to think of violating it. Really I'm ashamed of you, my dear Denys. Naughty fellow! But perhaps it was only a joke: you didn't mean it.'

" 'I do mean it,' I said. 'You shall see if I mean it.' But even as I spoke, I knew I did not. 'Anything is allowable to save an innocent man from death.'

"He laughed again.

" 'Pardon me: you know perfectly well that it isn't,' he said. 'There's one thing in our creed far worse than death, and that is the damnation of the soul. You've got no intention of damning yours. I took no risk at all when I confessed to you.'

" 'But it will be murder if you don't save this man,' I said.

" 'Oh, certainly, but I've got murder on my conscience already,' he said. 'One gets used to it very quickly. And having got used to it, another murder doesn't seem to matter an atom. Poor young Wadham: tomorrow, isn't it? I'm not sure it won't be a sort of rough justice. Blackmail is a disgusting offense.'

"I went to the telephone and took off the receiver.

" 'Really this is most interesting,' he said. 'Walton Street is the nearest police station. You don't need the number: just say "Walton Street police." But you can't. You can't say, "I have a man with me now, Horace Kennion, who has confessed to me that he murdered Selfe." So why bluff? Besides, if you could do any such thing, I shall merely say that I had done nothing of the kind. Your word, the word of a priest who has broken the most sacred vow, against mine. Childish!'

" 'Kennion,' I said, 'for the love of God, as for the fear of hell, give yourself up! What does it matter whether you or I live a few years less, if at the end we pass into the vast infinite with our sins confessed and forgiven. Day and night I will pray for you.'

" 'Charming of you,' said he. 'But I've no doubt that now you will give Wadham full absolution. So what does it matter if he goes into—into

the vast infinite at eight o'clock tomorrow morning?'

"'Why did you confess to me then,' I asked, 'if you had no intention of saving him, and making atonement?'

"'Well, not long ago you were very nasty to me,' he said. 'You told me no decent man would consult with me. So it struck me, quite suddenly, only Friday, that it would be pleasant to see you in the most awful hole. I daresay I've got Sadic tastes, too, and they are being wonderfully indulged. You're in torment, you know: you would choose any physical agony rather than to be in such a torture-chamber of the soul. It's entrancing: I adore it. Thank you very much, Denys.'

"He got up.

"'I kept my taxi waiting,' he said. 'No doubt you'll be busy tonight. Can I give you a lift anywhere? Pentonville?'

"There are no words to describe certain darknesses and ecstasies that come to the soul, and I can only tell you that I can imagine no hell of remorse that could equal the hell that I was in. For in the bitterness of remorse we can see that our suffering is a needful and salutary experience: only through it can our sin be burned away. But here was a torture blank and meaningless. And then my brain stirred a little and I began to wonder whether without breaking the seal of confession, I might not be able to effect something. I saw from my window that the light was burning in the clock-tower at Westminster: the House therefore was sitting, and it seemed possible that without violation, I might tell the Home Secretary that a confession had been made me, whereby I knew that Wadham was innocent. He would ask me for any details I could give him, and I could tell him. And then I saw that I could tell him nothing: I could not say that the murderer had gone up with Selfe to his room, for through that information it might be found that Kennion had dined with him. But before I did anything, I must have guidance, and I went to the Cardinal's house by our cathedral. He had gone to bed, for it was now after midnight, but in answer to the urgency of my request, he came down to see me. I told him, without giving any clue, what had happened, and his verdict was what in my heart I knew it would be. Certainly I might see the Home Secretary and tell him that such a confession had been made me, but no word or hint must escape me which could lead to identification. Personally, he did not see how the execution could be postponed on such information as I could give.

"'And whatever you suffer, my son,' he said, 'be sure that you are suffering not from having done wrong, but from having done right. Placed as you are, your temptation to save an innocent man comes from the devil, and whatever you may be called upon to endure for not yielding to it is of that origin also.'

"I saw the Home Secretary in his room at the House within the hour. But unless I told him more—and he realized that I could not—he was powerless to move.

"'He was found guilty at his trial,' he said, 'and his appeal was dismissed. Without further evidence I can do nothing——'

"He sat thinking a moment: then jumped up.

"'Good God, it's ghastly,' he said. 'I entirely believe, I needn't tell you, that you've heard this confession, but that doesn't prove it's true. Can't you see the man again? Can't you put the fear of God into him? If you can do anything at all, which gives me any justification for acting, up till the moment the drop falls, I will give a reprieve at once. There's my telephone number: ring me up here or at my house at any hour.'

"I was back at the prison before

six in the morning. I told Wadham that I believed in his innocence, and I gave him absolution for all else. He received the Holy and Blessed Sacrament with me, and went without flinching to his death.'

"Father Denys paused.

"I have been a long time coming to that point in my story," he said, "which concerns that séance you spoke of, but it was necessary for your understanding of what I am going to tell you now, that you should know all this. I said that those messages and communications from the dead came not from them but from some evil and awful power impersonating them. You answered, I remember, 'Why drag in the devil?' I will tell you.

"WHEN it was over, when the drop on which he stood yawned open, and the rope creaked and jumped, I went home. It was a dark winter morning, still barely light, and in spite of the tragic scene I had just witnessed, I felt serene and peaceful. I did not think of Kennion at all, only of the boy—he was little more—who had suffered unjustly, and that it seemed a pitiful mistake, but no more. It did not touch him, his essential living soul; it was as if he had suffered the sacred expiation of martyrdom. And I was humbly thankful that I had been enabled to act rightly, and had Kennion now, through my agency, been in the hands of the police and Wadham alive, I should have been branded with the most terrible crime a priest can commit. I had been up all night, and after I had said my office, I lay down on my sofa to get a little sleep. And I dreamed that I was in the cell with Wadham and that he knew I had proof of his innocence. It was within a few minutes of the hour of his death, and I heard along the stone-flagged corridor outside the steps of those who were coming for him. He heard them, too, and stood up, pointing at me.

"'You're letting an innocent man die, when you could save him,' he said. 'You can't do it, Father Denys. Father Denys!' he shrieked, and the shriek broke off in a gulp and a gasp as the door opened.

"I woke, knowing that what had roused me was my own name, screamed out from somewhere close at hand, and I knew whose voice it was. But there I was alone in my quiet, empty room, with the dim day peering in. I had been asleep, I saw, for only a few minutes, but now all thought or power of sleep had fled, for somewhere by me, invisible but awfully present, was the spirit of the man whom I had allowed to perish. And he called me.

"But presently I convinced myself that this voice coming to me in sleep was no more than a dream, natural enough in the circumstances, and some days passed tranquilly enough. And then one day when I was walking down a sunny crowded street, I felt some definite and dreadful change in what I may call the psychic atmosphere which surrounds us all, and my soul grew black with fear and with evil imaginings. And there was Wadham coming toward me along the pavement, gay and debonair. He looked at me, and his face became a mask of hate. 'We shall meet often, I hope, Father Denys,' he said as he passed. Another day I returned home in the twilight and suddenly I heard the creak and strain of a rope, and his body, with head covered by the death-cap, swung in the window against the sunset. And sometimes when I was at my books, the door opened quietly and closed again, and I knew he was there. The apparition or the token of it did not come often or perhaps my resistance would have been quickened, for I knew it was devilish in origin. But it came when I was off my guard, at long intervals,

so that I thought I had vanquished it, and then sometimes I felt my faith to reel. But always it was preceded by this sense of evil power bearing down on me, and I made haste to seek the shelter of the House of Defense which is set very high. And then last Sunday only——''

He broke off, covering his eyes with his hand, as if shutting out some appalling spectacle.

"I had been preaching," he resumed, "for one of our missions. The church was full, and I do not think there was another thought or desire in my soul, but to further the holy cause for which I was speaking. It was a morning service, and the sun poured in through the stained windows in glow of colored light. But in the middle of my sermon some bank of cloud drove up, and with it this horrible forewarning of the approach of a tempest of evil. So dark it got that, as I was drawing near the end of my sermon, the lights in the church were switched on, and it leaped into brightness. There was a lamp on the desk in the pulpit, where I had placed my notes, and now when it was kindled it shone full on the pew just below. And there with his head turned upward toward me, with his face purple and eyes protruding and with the strangling noose round his neck, sat Wadham.

"My voice faltered and ceased and I clutched at the pulpit-rail as he stared at me and I at him. A horror of the spirit, black as the eternal night of the lost, closed round me, for I had let him go innocent to his death, and my punishment was just. . . . And then like a star shining out through some merciful rent in this soul-storm came again that ray of conviction that as a priest I could not have done otherwise, and with it the sure knowledge that this apparition could not be of God, but of the devil, to be resisted and defied even as we defy with contempt some sweet and insidious temptation. It could not therefore be the spirit of the man at which I gazed, but some diabolical counterfeit. And I looked back from him to my notes, and went on with my sermon, for that alone was my business. That pause had seemed to me eternal, it had the quality of timelessness, but I learned afterward that it had been barely perceptible. And from my own heart I learned that it was no punishment that I was undergoing, but the strengthening of a faith that had faltered."

SUDDENLY he broke off. There came into his eyes as he fixed them on the door, a look not of fear at all but of savage relentless antagonism.

"It's coming," he said to me, "and now if you hear or see anything despise it, for it is evil."

The door swung open and closed again and though nothing visible entered, I knew that there was now in the room a living intelligence, other than Father Denys' and mine, and it affected my being, my self, just as some horrible odor of putrefaction affects one physically: my soul sickened in it. Then, still seeing nothing, I perceived that the room, warm and comfortable just now, with a fire of coal prospering in the grate, was growing cold, and that some strange eclipse was veiling the light. Close to me on the table stood an electric lamp; the shade of it fluttered in the icy draft that stirred in the air, and the illuminant wire was no longer incandescent, but red and dull like the embers in the grate.

I scrutinized the dimness, but as yet no material form manifested itself. Father Denys was sitting very upright in his chair, his eyes fixed and focused on something invisible to me. His lips were moving and muttering; his hands grasped the crucifix he was wearing. And then I saw what I knew he was seeing, too: a face was outlining itself on the air in

front of him, a face swollen and purple, with tongue lolling from the mouth, and as it hung there it oscillated to and fro. Clearer and clearer it grew, suspended there by the rope that now became visible to me, and though the apparition was of a man hanged by the neck, it was not dead but active and alive, and the spirit that awfully animated it was no human one, but something diabolical. Suddenly Father Denys rose to his feet, and his face was within an inch or two of that suspended horror. He raised his hands which held the sacred emblem.

"Begone to your torment," he cried, "until the days of it are over, and the mercy of God grants you eternal death."

THERE rose a wailing in the air: some blast shook the room so that the corners of it quaked, and then the light and the warmth were restored to it, and there was no one there but our two selves. Father Denys' face was haggard and dripping with the struggle he had been through, but there shone on it such radiance as I have never seen on human countenance.

"It's over," he said. "I saw it shrivel and wither before the power of His presence. . . . And your eyes tell me you saw it, too, and you know now that what wore the semblance of humanity was pure evil."

We talked a little longer, and he rose to go.

"Ah, I forgot," he said. "You wanted to know how I could reveal to you what was told me in confession. Horace Kennion died this morning by his own hand. He left with his lawyer a packet to be opened on his death, with instructions that it should be published in the daily press. I saw it in an evening paper, and it was a detailed account of how he killed Gerald Selfe. He wished it to have all possible publicity."

"But why?" I asked.

Father Denys paused.

"He gloried in his wickedness, I think," he said. "He loved it, as I told you, for its own sake, and he wanted everyone to know of it, as soon as he was safely away."

THE SORCERESS

***By* C. NOIR**

"What do you see, my elfin daughter,
In your crystal that shines like green sea-water?"
"A gallant lad, and a gallant steed,
And three white hounds that race in the mead."

"Where goeth he, my sprig of the heather?"
"High in the wood, where the trees go together,
Green leaves are over and brown leaves are nether.
May the good God keep him safe from my mother!"

"What doeth she, my sweet, half-mortal treasure?"
"She sits in her well that is deep beyond measure,
And watches with eyes that speak always of pleasure;
Windows of Hell they are, though they be azure."

A Ghost-Tale of Soviet Russia

AN EXAMINATION IN DIPLOMACY

By EDITH M. ALMEDINGEN

HE HAD not enough daring to tell them he did not want to be assigned to that particular post. They would have laughed at him had he ventured to give an outlet to his vague fears; a trusted tool of the Tcheka, afraid to spend a few nights on duty at the Paul Castle, just because he had happened to hear some old woman's tales about its being haunted! Glebov realized that his bold hopes of rapid promotion would have been dashed to the ground had the chief but caught one glimpse of the almost animal terror in his heart. So he merely bit his lips and lashed himself into a sham attitude of glad readiness. "So good of the chief to think so highly of him, Glebov; certainly he'd try and do his utmost." And he added a few more similar commonplaces, before leaving the grim Tcheka house, a fateful mandate to the commandant of the castle in his pocket.

Glebov's duty did not begin till a few hours later. These he spent in breathless feverish activities, carefully abstaining from drink during the day. "One's mind had to be clear before an emergency," he thought. And, following an unaccountable trend of reasoning, he had his pockets well stuffed with numbers of *The Atheist*. Its pages gave one food for thinking on "the right lines," convinced one that things supernatural were impotent to frighten, because they did not exist. "I have not been attending all those anti-religious lectures for nothing," Glebov tried to comfort himself, and, by dint of heroic efforts, he well-nigh managed to conquer his fears, when it was time for him to go up to the castle.

But no sooner had he crossed the sinister drawbridge, no sooner had the castle gates slammed to behind him, than he became aware that, if anything, his fears were as mighty as ever before. His very tread, sharp against the worn flagstones of the dark, deserted courtyard, was expressive of those fears. He cast an upward look at the gloomy, lightless walls around him, and all at once his treacherous mind remembered the details of the ghastly tragedy enacted within those very same walls more than one hundred years ago. Yes, that was why even the bravest of the brave men held the castle to be haunted. For the Emperor Paul met here with a most violent death, and his son and successor shunned the place like a plague-cemetery of old, and none of the later sovereigns even dreamt of living here. And the Tchekist shuddered, as though visualizing the loathsome details of that scene on the eleventh of March, 1801. He had read all about it in some old book or other. He now wished he had not, because the pictures rose in his

mind, suddenly, unwantedly, and he could not clear his vision from its blood-curdling details. The emperor, cornered in a back study of his, madly spinning round and round the table to evade the murderous touch of his enemies, and finally captured, pinned down to the floor, four cruelly determined hands clasping at his throat, clasping tighter, tighter, tighter, till all life went out of the small, wizened body and the curse of a foul crime descended upon the castle to darken it for the generations that were to come.

Yes, the Tchekist remembered all that. And half-way down the yard he stopped, as though struck by lightning. The eleventh of March! And was not this very day the eleventh of March also?

His blood ran cold. His forehead was bathed in clammy sweat. His reason alone, the reason of a well-trained and hardened communist, urged him to go on. After all, these things had their existence only in the befogged minds of those poor, deranged folk who would not be persuaded to cease from believing in that strange God of theirs. He, Ivan Glebov, was gloriously free from all such prejudices. The party would scarcely have trusted him so much if it were proved that he, too, was tainted with these puerile superstitions. But, for all his reasoning, his hands felt unpleasantly clammy and his heart beat terrifically fast as he crossed the threshold of the commandant's lodge.

THE commandant was glad to see him. Vodka and cigarettes were produced at once, but Glebov stoically resisted the temptation.

"I have work to do, comrade," he explained somewhat lamely. "See, I have brought all these papers with me. So I must keep my mind clear."

"As you like," acquiesced the stout, pig-faced commandant. "Of course, you know this is hardly an enviable job, taken all around. The Tcheka must send us their bravest men."

Glebov pricked his ears.

"Why not exactly an enviable job?" he asked, making an almost superhuman effort to remain quiet. "Surely, the responsibility——"

The commandant waved his fat hand impatiently.

"Oh, the responsibility is all right. Rather too much of it. You see, we have reasons to believe that those accursed counter-revolutionaries are keen on making their headquarters in this old castle. We have not been able to trace them as yet—too many unexplored cellars and rooms underground," he added almost apologetically.

True diplomatic sense prompted Glebov to pass no comment on these remarks; he was not going to wander about the unexplored regions of the castle, thank you!

The commandant went on: "And there are all sorts of queer stories running about the place, you know"—deftly he shifted his viewpoint—"no use talking about them to a Tchekist, is there?"

"I think not." Glebov forced a short laugh. "Grandmother's tales about its being haunted and all that rot, eh?"

"Quite, comrade." The man joined in the laugh. "Things unfit for enlightened citizens, like ourselves, to listen to."

GLEBOV duly took over the night charge of the castle from the commandant, made a careful round of the premises (without descending underground, however), looked over the numerous sentry posts, and, half certain that things seemed all right, went to his own particular den, a spacious, well-heated, well-furnished room on the second floor, with a bal-

cony overlooking the quiet, slumbering courtyard.

He lit the candles on the big empire table in the middle of the room and switched off the electric light. The latter always gave a funny nervous pain to his eyes, and he really wanted to work that night—to read and reread those precious atheistic pamphlets, which stuffed his pockets, and thus to force his mind to turn to sane rational thinking, such as befitted a true servant of the Soviet Republic.

A filled decanter, some glasses and an invitingly open box of choice cigarettes were placed on a tray on the writing-table. Glebov looked at them longingly for a moment, then pushed them aside, a stern expression on his usually expressionless face. Drink would be perilous and smoking was likely to fog his mind.

He settled himself very comfortably in the velvet-covered armchair, stretched out his rather tired legs and began delving through articles in *The Atheist*. Yes, that was the one he specially wanted to find, *The Impossibility of Ghostly Happenings*.

The crudely violent, unlearned language of the paper was familiar to him. He had heard these things time and again shouted from various platforms, urged by wild-eyed, fanatical individuals, whose sole objective in this life seemed to be the raising of an insurmountable barrier between its course and the possibility of any further immaterial existence.

Glebov's parched tongue flicked over his lips as he read on. Of course, he must have been utterly insane even to allow such stupid ideas the right of entering his mind at all! Here he was all alone, in the middle of the night, in that same old dreaded castle, and nothing was happening, and nothing was likely to happen. These things could not exist. Supernatural, indeed! Supernatural rubbish! Really, he might indulge in just one tiny drink.

He filled his glass slowly and deliberately, and held it against the light. They knew how to provide for their best workers, did the Tcheka chiefs. He sniffed the amber contents. Golly, if it was not real British whisky! Glebov chuckled, as he noisily gulped it down. Most likely the happy result of a raid on some dirty Englishman's house! Well, it served a much better purpose now! Glebov smacked his lips and helped himself to a cigarette.

"Wonderful chaps to write so clearly and helpfully!" he muttered, scanning over a virulent paper on *Christian Mythology*. "Such things should be translated into all languages."

He laid down the paper, leant back luxuriously and puffed at his cigarette. It was really wonderful what two short hours of sane reading had done to him. Gone were his imbecile anxieties, his vague disturbing fears. He was a fully fledged Tcheka communist, who feared neither God nor the Devil, because he denied both.

Glebov looked at his expensive gold watch. Nearly twenty-five minutes to 12. He would make another round at midnight. Would it not be lucky if he caught some real counter-revolutionists? And red-handed, too? Rosy-tinted thoughts of amazingly quick promotion sped through his mind.

The one and only door, at the farthest end of the room, gave a gentle squeak. Glebov started. . . . No, how silly of him! Of course, he had not locked the door and the wind was gently blowing from the half-opened window. Why, he wondered, should the window be opened? Suddenly he felt chilly—because it was March—and the eleventh of March as well. Ominous recollections, at-

tached to the date, again crowded into his mind.

He would ring for the sentry presently. He did not feel like getting up and shutting the door himself. After all, if these things were nonexistent (as they most certainly were, he hastened to assure himself), still one had to mind one's nerves just a little.

He shivered again. The wind was getting decidedly chilly. But he knew it would be unwise to ring for the sentry before midnight. The chiefs were known to lend their ears to quite unfounded stories, and it might then be said of him that he was actually scared.

GLEBOV held out his hand toward the decanter. Just another drink would help steady his nerves. His eyes fell on the hideously blasphemous cartoon on the paper's page lying open in front of him. Somehow he did not like the cartoon. "Really a bit too thick," he thought, and turned the page over.

Then he refilled the glass, which was never meant to reach his lips; for at that moment the door gave another gentle squeak, opened wider, and a dark-cloaked, middle-sized figure stepped into the room.

From the table where Glebov sat, he could just face the door. His blood turned to ice. He wanted to scream, but his lips were frozen into silence. The only sound heard was the crash of the glass and the steady drip-drip of the spilt whisky.

For a terribly long moment the strange figure stood immobile. Then it moved slowly toward the table—slowly, just one step at a time. The fitful candle-light lent a grotesque uncertainty to its outline, but Glebov's terror-stricken mind could still register a few definite details. The man was of middle height, wore a loose, dark cloak, and, as he made another step nearer the table, the hapless Tchekist's terror increased hundredfold; the stranger had that peculiar tricorne hat, so common in the period of the Emperor Paul. Glebov knew it. He had seen some pictures. His hands clutched at the table. His eyes stared ahead, frozen in their look of utter terror.

Because it was *he*, the victim of that foul crime committed in these very walls. . . .

Glebov's brain battled for a scream, but his lips were too inert to obey. And the cloaked figure, all the more terrible because of his silence, was advancing, one step at a time, slowly, revengefully. . . . Yes, revengefully. One sovereign about to settle the score for another. . . .

Glebov would not look at the face. . . . He would not see it. . . . The bell was out of reach, he could not move a muscle. . . . What was there to do except——

He remembered, and the swift recollection prompted him to stagger to his shaking feet. Yes, *they* did exist, then! Was there not a prayer against all evil ghosts his grandmother had taught him to say when, as a boy, he was fearful of going to sleep in a dark room? What was it? Oh, curse it, he could not remember a word, and he *knew* that unless he uttered it, the strange cloaked figure would be upon him and seize him by the throat and strangle him, even as *he* had been strangled more than one hundred years ago.

The figure made another step. The world turned black for Glebov. Wildly he stretched out his trembling arms, as though pushing the stranger away from him, and then, with the vilest of vile oaths, fell down in a limp heap.

EARLY the next morning the little, stout commandant trotted to the Tcheka headquarters. The thin, scarred-face chief received him in a

private sanctum, but their conversation was amazingly brief.

"Not a detail was forgotten, comrade," hurried the obsequious commandant. "Not even the tricorne hat, though it was hard to get it."

"We shan't forget it," snapped the chief. "Run away, and not a word to anyone! We'd suspected the fellow to be unfit for a long time. Glad the little test didn't prove a washout! Eh, what? Oh, yes, send a line to his widow—make it heart failure or something."

A Strange Elemental Menaced the Archeologist

OLD MARK

By AUGUST W. DERLETH

THE city of Newport, Wales, looms on the horizon of Caerleon-on-Usk, threatening to crush the ancient city of Isca Silurum, dating back to Nero, sixth of the Cæsars, once the headquarters of the second Augustan legion under Hadrian. The tentacles of industrialism are reaching out toward Caerleon-on-Usk, ancient capital of Britannia Secunda, standing upon the ground once trod by Hadrian and his legions.

Had it not been for Hadrian and his great wall, Mr. Carson Fielding would never have attracted my attention. Mr. Carson Fielding had established for himself an enviable reputation as archeologist—every library in Britain contained copies of his papers on the Roman occupation.

The archeologist arrived at Caerleon-on-Usk early in April, and for almost a month he pursued his explorations unheard from. Then suddenly, in May, the English press began to give frequent columns to the opposition of the archeologist to the English government, which had justly forbidden him to excavate the Roman camp, on the ground that it had already been thoroughly gone over by men in the employ of the government itself. Mr. Carson Fielding had, it appeared, written a fiery letter to the press concerning the injustice of the government. The letter had attracted considerable attention, and after a decent interval, Sir Arthur Morley wrote a full page article on "the eccentric Mr. Fielding." Whatever Mr. Carson Fielding had to say about this article is not known; for it is certain that nothing appeared in the papers. For several months nothing more was heard of the activities of the archeologist at Caerleon-on-Usk.

He was again brought to the attention of the public by a fourth-page advertisement announcing the publication of a posthumous volume of papers "by the late Mr. Carson Fielding, by the house of Mead & Howells, Ltd." It developed that the late Fielding had died at his temporary home at Caerleon-on-Usk under circumstances that were being investigated by relatives of the dead man. Nothing was ever discovered, and for

the public, the last heard of the archeologist was the suppression of his posthumous volume of papers because of several wildly impossible essays on ancient Roman and Druidistic magic, which the government deemed better unprinted.

It was Mr. Carson Fielding who had written a very interesting paper in my possession on the subject of Marcus Vibius Galacinus, legendary Roman-Celtic wizard of Caerleon-on-Usk. It was popularly believed that this ancient person had held the countryside in a terrorizing grasp, due to his control of black magic. Even today mothers can be heard warning their children not to loiter after dark, telling them that if they do Old Mark will get them. There are innumerable legends current about him, but perhaps the best and most widely known of them is the legend of Old Mark's familiar, who, it was averred by several, had been drawn in part from the earth, in part from the waters of the world, and finished from the air of the universe. It was told in the best houses of how this creature from another world did the bidding of Old Mark; of how the wizard's enemies were visited by fire and flood; and of how many of them were found dead, their heads crushed as if by some hideous, gigantic hand.

It is told that one day this hideous monstrosity turned against its master and killed him; and of how Old Mark, stronger than his familiar even after death, rose up against the thing to send it back to the place whence it came; and of how the wizard sent his lifeless body shambling across the fields toward the Roman villas, bearing under his arm an hidebound bag, some say a casket, in which he had imprisoned the creature from outside. He was never after seen, nor was any trace of him ever discovered.

Later in the same month of October that had witnessed the death of the archeologist, I had occasion to visit the rector of the church at Caerleon-on-Usk. It was because I required the assistance of this venerable pastor on a paper of mine that I called upon him. I had not intended to make any sort of stay, but it developed, to my pleasure, that he was able to aid me in a number of ways, and I was constrained upon to stay with him for a week.

The rector's home stood just across a picturesque street from the church, a rather recent building in the Gothic style. Beyond its spires one could see the open country, and off to the left, on a hill, stood all that was left of the ancient seat of the Second Augustan legion, one of the spots under government supervision. The entire country impressed me most favorably; it was like a personification of beauty. I remember looking out toward the ruins on the hill, trying to imagine the corpse of Old Mark moving toward it over the fields.

"I hope, sir," said the rector, showing me to my room, "that you have no objection to staying in a room in which a man was supposed to have been murdered."

"None at all!" I said, and laughed. "How long ago was he murdered?"

"Only this month, Mr. Sinclair."

He opened the door of the room. It was a small room, containing only a narrow bed, a heavy oak desk, two chairs, and a seven-armed candelabrum. A worn rug covered the floor, and the one window was hidden by the folds of a faded curtain, through which I could see the limbs of a yew. The room, however, had an appearance of comfort.

"Perhaps you remember Mr. Carson Fielding?" asked the rector.

"Of course! Was he actually murdered?"

"No one has proved it." He laughed. "But his death was a bit queer. That heavy candelabrum had evidently fallen and struck him on

the head. It looked as if he had been killed at once; I know, because I found him. There was a most peculiar expression of terror on his face —positively unnerving, Mr. Sinclair, positively unnerving!''

''Odd! The papers said nothing of it.''

''Oh! there's a lot the papers won't get. Everybody seems to think that it was perfectly natural for that candelabrum to fall and kill Mr. Fielding, and no one thought it at all important that it had never fallen before—nor after, for that matter. It isn't very easy to knock over, either.''

''He could have knocked it over though, couldn't he?''

''Confidentially, Mr. Sinclair, he could not. Mr. Fielding was found dead at his desk. His head had fallen forward; there was a horrible gash in the back of it. Both his arms hung at his sides. The candelabrum was on the mantel seven feet behind him before his death; after, it was found on the floor about two feet from the desk. He couldn't conceivably have placed it in its holder, which, incidentally, is just above his head.''

''Why not? And why couldn't it have slipped out? The theory would work.''

''That's what the coroner thought, and what his relatives were persuaded into believing. But examine the holder yourself, Mr. Sinclair. You'll see that, in order to have slipped out, the iron circle or loop at the bottom would have had to be opened. It wasn't, and besides, even if it had opened, who closed it again? For it was closed when I found Mr. Fielding. The coroner said it slipped shut again—a most remarkable mind that man had! He didn't try to prove it, though.''

I walked to the window and drew aside the curtain. I looked out at the yew tree. The rector must have guessed my thoughts, for he spoke again.

''Yes,'' he said, ''the window was open, Mr. Sinclair. But you can easily see that the yew is too far away for anyone to have entered that way. This rectory is a three-story building, and as this room is on the second floor, the distances from both roof and ground are about equal, and both rather of a risk. I had the roof examined; in fact, I examined it myself, and the ground also. There wasn't a trace of anything. Besides, Mr. Fielding sat facing the window; he'd have noticed if anything came in through the window. After all, he was struck down from behind.''

''Couldn't one of your own servants, or perhaps someone that got into the house——'' I began.

''That was the very first theory to be discarded, Mr. Sinclair. The door was locked on the inside. We had to break it in. There's a new lock on it now.''

''You don't seem to offer any solution, do you?'' I laughed.

''I don't pretend to. I don't believe there is any—at least, not one that I could understand.'' For a moment he was silent. ''Do you know very much about your Mr. Carson Fielding, Mr. Sinclair?''

''Well, no, I don't, except that he was an extraordinarily good archeologist.''

''I'd always thought that, too, Mr. Sinclair, but it seemed to me that the man was a bit—well, you know, a bit balmy. He was rather a frightened man at the last; afraid, I suppose, of the government, for he had been making secret excavations here and there.''

''I don't think that the government was aware of that.''

''Nor do I. But what else could he have been frightened of? He didn't impress me as the sort of man that could easily be frightened. He wasn't, either! By the way, I observed the other day that his latest work had been barred from the public. Have you read of it at all?''

"Nothing beyond a notice of its publication and suppression. Why do you ask?"

"I've a copy somewhere about the house—one of Mr. Fielding's proof copies that he let me keep. If you care to read it, you may. There are some mighty queer passages in the essays in the last half of the book; some of them sound almost as if they had been written by a madman. I've never read the like before, and I've studied witchcraft and the occult."

IN THE morning I found the book on my desk. I glanced hastily through it, and put it down again to read when I returned from the Roman ruins, whither I was bound. The rector had indicated to me the spots where the archeologist had excavated, and I was determined to examine them, possibly with the thought of becoming famed through some discovery of importance.

I went over one place after another, and came at last to a series of flat tiles, somewhat overgrown by moss, one of which Fielding had pulled away. I remember that I had no difficulty in discovering it at the moment. Beneath it I found a small silver urn, the seals of which had been broken. On the side was a Latin inscription, which I had some little difficulty in reading. It ran half-way round the urn and read:

INTERITVS. EXTRA. SI. NON. INTRA.

The seals of the urn had been broken, and that recently. I wondered not a little why Fielding had not taken this obviously Roman relic away to his room, to study at his leisure. I was sure that it was Fielding who had broken the seals. I smuggled the urn under my coat, and went directly to my room, intending to return on the morrow and resume my investigations.

I examined the urn intently. There was nothing extraordinary about it, except perhaps the puzzling inscription. It was of plain silver. The seals were those of Hadrian. It was, I knew, a common practise to cremate the dead in Rome, and to bury them in urns such as this. Consequently I was considerably astonished to find no trace whatsoever of ashes on the inside of the urn; though I examined it with my reading-glass, there was nothing to indicate that there had ever been ashes in the urn. I assumed that Fielding had removed the ashes—though for what reason I could not conjecture—and then washed the urn and replaced it. The theory is ridiculous, I know, but at the time it did not occur to me that the urn might never have been occupied by ashes of some dead Roman. I recall, now, that the urn was peculiarly warm to the touch.

I put the urn safely away, and turned my attention to the work of Fielding's. The first half of the book dealt almost entirely with the Roman occupation; the last half of it was composed of a collection of papers on weird rites of old Roman and Briton wizards. The last paper in the volume was very disconnected, and had about it an air of great haste, as if the author somehow realized that this would be the last thing he would ever write and was in haste to finish it. One passage in it attracted my attention at once. It was a paragraph, and it began with the same Latin inscription that I had found on the silver urn:

. . . . This inscription is supposed to have been found on numerous containers of all kinds—urns, bottles, jars; also on wood carvings, stones, and in some cases trees. Very little proof is at hand, however, and what there is can be questioned. There are many things we know not of—many things that were never meant for human eye. It is said that if the seals of these urns, jars, or bottles are broken, or if the stones are cracked open, or if the trees are chopped down, incredible things will happen to the perpetrator. What are these things, and what will bring them about? Is it possible that there are living entities that no eye has seen—no ear has heard—no hand has

touched? There is a story of Solomon and the genii of evil.

It was this paragraph that first gave me an inkling of the real meaning behind the Latin inscription. Unfortunately, I did not act at once, or perhaps I could have prevented what happened three days afterward. But I am going ahead of my story.

THAT night, as I undressed for bed, I noticed on my right breast a brownish discoloration of the skin which bore a remarkable resemblance to a burn. It did not hurt when I touched it, nor could I remove any part of it. It was curiously like an X-ray burn, and I had no idea where it could have come from. I examined it for some moments in silence, before it occurred to me that the mark was somewhat like the outline of the urn. I reflected immediately that it was just above this burn that I had smuggled the urn under my coat. There was, I was certain, some connection. Perhaps the Romans had treated this silver with some sort of acid. Yet there was no mark upon my clothes. I gave it up after a while, and tumbled into bed.

Somewhat after midnight I awoke the first time, after having had troubled dreams of the urn and its Latin words, which I seemed to see written in great letters of flame upon a lurid red sky, and before which countless people were fleeing. The thought of the urn bothered me, and I got up to see whether it was safe. It was still where I had placed it before retiring—in the chest opposite my bed. I went back to bed, and lay for some time simulating sleep. But I could not sleep. I stared out of the open window. It was a calm night, without a breath of air. I looked back into the room, a vague sense of uneasiness stealing over me. Then at last I sank into a light sleep.

I woke up the second time at about 2 o'clock. There was a peculiar feeling of cold in the room, and the curtains at the window were swaying to and fro under the impetus of a wind that had arisen. I was absurdly frightened at something, though at what, I could not tell. I looked sleepily around. My eye caught sight of something vaguely suggestive a little to one side of the chest. I sat up, startled. But there was nothing, though I could have taken an oath that I had seen evil eyes glaring at me. I was by now thoroughly awake, and I slipped on my dressing-gown and put on the light. The room was as I had left it at retiring, and the wind from outside had quieted down —strangely soon, I reflected.

I sat up the rest of the night and read.

FOR the next three days I labored with the rector on my paper, but for some reason I could not concentrate, and I found myself constantly revising portion after portion. I confess that the thought of the urn, and of the strange Latin words, bothered me not a little. Why this should disturb me I could not say, nor do I now make any attempt to explain my disquieted feelings.

On the third night the final scene of what was destined to be one of the most remarkable occurrences of my life began. It was, as before, soon after midnight when I awoke from a sleep fully as troubled as that of the first night. I had dreamed again of the urn, and of the Latin words, which had, by this time, grown to enormous proportions in my mind. I dreamed, too, of an unthought-of monster, a great, loathsome creature, who sought his way through Caerleon-on-Usk, striking down victim after victim. I dreamed that he caught sight of me, pursued me, and took me in one of his gigantic paws and leered at me. I screamed aloud. It was then that I awoke, shuddering.

When I opened my eyes, I lay facing the chest. Judge my horror, if

you can, when I saw hovering above the chest the same malevolent face of my dream. I lay immobile, frozen with terror. There was an undulating black cloud about the chest, and in the midst of it I could faintly see a jumble of fiery Latin words, five of which stood out plainly:

INTERITVS. EXTRA. SI. NON. INTRA.

For a moment I thought that I imagined it. Then I screamed again, and drew my head beneath the covers. The last I saw was the cloud of black moving toward the window. The curtains seemed to open to meet it.

When I looked again, all was normal in the room. I got up, horribly shaken, turned on the light and made my way downstairs for a glass of water. I had scarcely turned the tap, when a chilling scream of fright echoed from outside.

I ran to the door and flung it wide. On the stairs behind me I could hear the rector. The moon was out, and, half in the shadow cast by the church across its stone steps, and half out, lay the body of a man. Together, the rector and I ran over to him. It was the sexton, and he was dead, a horrible gash in his crushed head still spilling blood. Close by, in the shadow, lay the weapon the crime had been committed with. The rector moved over toward it.

"My God!" he cried sharply; "how did this get here?"

He pointed a shaking finger at the weapon. I took a step forward and recognized it. *It was the seven-armed candelabrum from my room!*

For a moment we stood in stupefied amazement before the weapon, but only for a moment; for suddenly the solution of all that had been happening for the last few days—all that had started with the murder of Fielding and had culminated with the death of the sexton—burst upon me. And with that knowledge came the knowledge that I had been chosen to nip in the bud such a scourge as had never yet threatened any civilized city.

I looked cautiously around, to assure myself that no one was in sight. Then I bent down, snatched up the weapon, and with the rector, ran back toward the house, leaving the dead man to be discovered by someone else. I replaced the candelabrum. Then I sought out the last of Fielding's works, and again read the last essay, which by now had assumed an altogether different meaning. I discovered, too, penciled notes in the back of the volume, which I had not seen before. Had it not been for these, perhaps the evil thing that had been loosed upon Caerleon-on-Usk would still be at large.

"Listen," I said, and read to the rector:

> Born before man out of fire, these dæmons inhabit the domain of humanity. They can, it is said, be exorcised, and this simply. A blessed crucifix burnt in the urn. . . . There is, too, a wind that blows evil things at night. Things we know not of. . . . Picture to yourself the spectacle of an old man's corpse loping across the fields, carrying under his dead arm an urn, in which is one of these things.

"Have you a blessed crucifix anywhere?" I asked the rector.

"Yes, yes," he answered quickly, "I will get it."

He left the room, and I read on through the notes scattered all over the unlettered pages in the back of the volume. "It must be done by one man, alone!" I read, and when the rector returned with the crucifix, I read it aloud to him, signifying that I was the one to do the thing. Still somewhat shaken, the rector left the room, and immediately I set myself to the task.

I TOOK the urn, placed it in the center of the floor, and put into it the crucifix. I put out the light, then tried for some moments to ignite the cross. At last I succeeded, thrust it back into the urn, and moved some

distance away to await developments. As yet I was not wholly satisfied with the connection of the urn to the dead man on the church steps.

But what doubts I still retained were soon dispersed, for suddenly a terrific burst of wind blew wide the curtains on the windows. After it came a cloud of black, like smoke, that swirled in impotent fury above the urn. The swirling motion resolved at last into a gentle undulating sway. The walls of the room became invisible, and instead there was a sort of greenish glow. A panorama opened out before my astonished eyes—opened onto the Roman ruins on the hill behind the church! I saw an old man, garbed in a black toga, bending over the tiles of the flooring, lifting one of them, and thrusting beneath it an urn. Then suddenly the scene changed, but flashed back again, with a different figure on the landscape. It was none other than Mr. Carson Fielding! I saw him go over the tiles, coming at last to that identical one I myself had lifted not so long ago. He stooped and removed it, and drew from it the urn. He looked around him; then broke the seals. Unnoticed by him, a great black thing emerged and vanished into the sky. Disappointed, he replaced the urn, and moved away. Then abruptly the scene vanished, and the black cloud began to swirl about the room. I caught a vivid glimpse of the fire in the urn.

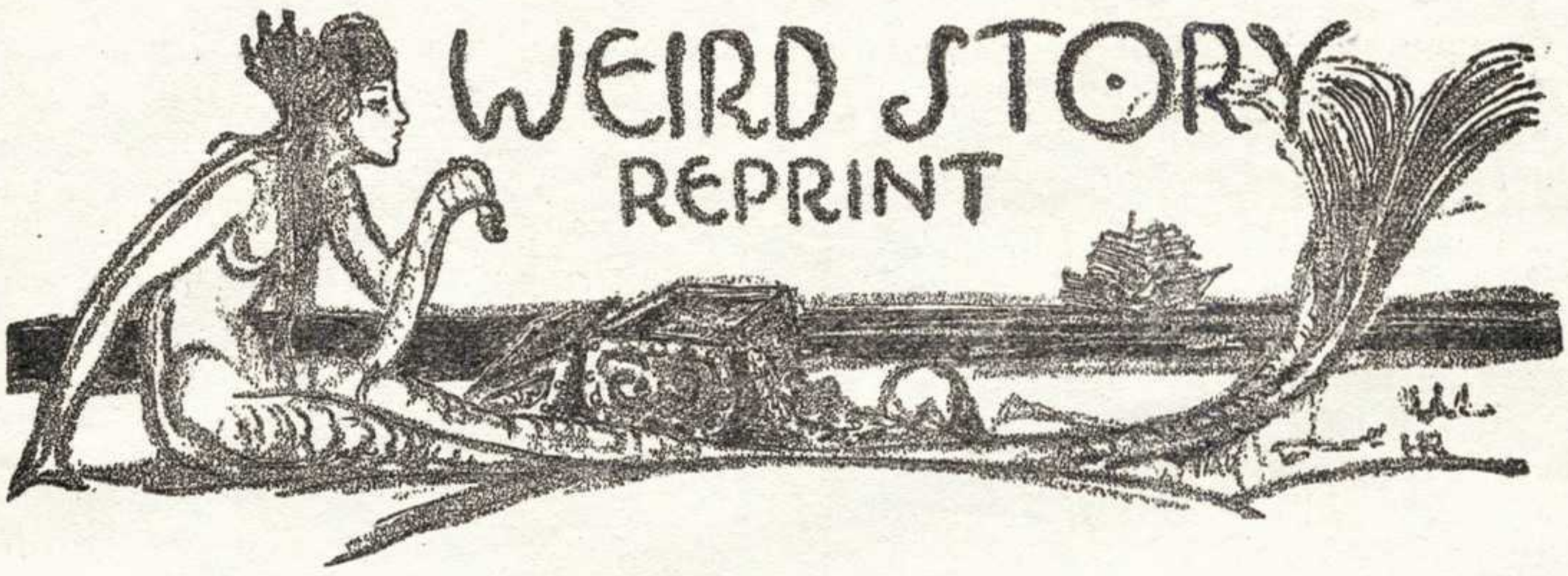
I felt now that the thing was in the room, hidden by the blackness. Of a sudden I caught sight of long, grotesque arms, waving to and fro, and of a maniacal face, twisted into horrible fury. Abruptly I felt the full current of its malefic power directed straight at me. Out of the pit of blackness that had taken form shot a stream of fire. A red glow suffused the black cloud, and in a moment I felt a terrific heat. The stream of fire from the cloud was taking visible form—it was dividing and redividing—forming the words of the Latin inscription! Behind this fiery warning appeared the most awful face that I have ever seen, or ever imagined in the depths of slumber. I was numb with fright.

All at once the words formed a sort of cone shape; the leering mouth of the dæmon opened wide and closed; and the face, now brightly red, preceded by those fiery words, came directly at me.

That is all that I remember. I awoke to find the anxious rector bending over me. I was all right. The rector said that he had heard me scream; then a terrific noise as of a thunderclap had shaken the house. When he entered, he found me on the floor. The urn had utterly vanished, but on the floor, where it had been, lay a fine, faint sifting of ashes, formed into the words:

INTERITVS. EXTRA. SI. NON. INTRA.

And on the following day, an old woman who lived on the outskirts of the town came to the rector with a story of having seen Old Mark running across the fields to the ruins; at his side a lean black shape, like that of a dog.



His Unconquerable Enemy

By W. C. MORROW

I WAS summoned from Calcutta to the heart of India to perform a difficult surgical operation on one of the women of a great raja's household. I found the raja a man of a noble character, but possessed, as I afterward discovered, of a sense of cruelty purely Oriental and in contrast to the indolence of his disposition. He was so grateful for the success that attended my mission that he urged me to remain a guest at the palace as long as it might please me to stay, and I thankfully accepted the invitation.

One of the male servants early attracted my notice for his marvelous capacity of malice. His name was Neranya, and I am certain that there must have been a large proportion of Malay blood in his veins, for, unlike the Indians (from whom he differed also in complexion), he was extremely alert, active, nervous, and sensitive. A redeeming circumstance was his love for his master. Once his violent temper led him to the commission of an atrocious crime—the fatal stabbing of a dwarf. In punishment for this the raja ordered that Neranya's right arm (the offending one) be severed from his body. The sentence was executed in a bungling fashion by a stupid fellow armed with an ax, and I, being a surgeon, was compelled, in order to save Neranya's life, to perform an amputation of the stump, leaving not a vestige of the limb remaining.

After this he developed an augmented fiendishness. His love for the raja was changed to hate, and in his mad anger he flung discretion to the winds. Driven once to frenzy by the raja's scornful treatment, he sprang upon the raja with a knife, but, fortunately, was seized and disarmed. To his unspeakable dismay the raja sentenced him for this offense to suffer amputation of the remaining arm. It was done as in the former instance. This had the effect of putting a temporary curb on Neranya's spirit, or, rather, of changing the outward manifestations of his diabolism. Being armless, he was at first largely at the mercy of those who ministered to his needs—a duty which I undertook to see was properly discharged, for I felt an interest in this strangely distorted nature. His sense of helplessness, combined with a damnable scheme for revenge which he had secretly formed, caused Neranya to change his fierce, impetuous, and unruly conduct into a smooth, quiet, insinuating bear-

ing, which he carried so artfully as to deceive those with whom he was brought in contact, including the raja himself.

Neranya, being exceedingly quick, intelligent, and dexterous, and having an unconquerable will, turned his attention to the cultivating of an enlarged usefulness of his legs, feet, and toes, with so excellent effect that in time he was able to perform wonderful feats with those members. Thus his capability, especially for destructive mischief, was considerably restored.

One morning the raja's only son, a young man of an uncommonly amiable and noble disposition, was found dead in bed. His murder was a most atrocious one, his body being mutilated in a shocking manner, but in my eyes the most significant of all the mutilations was the entire removal and disappearance of the young prince's arms.

The death of the young man nearly brought the raja to the grave. It was not, therefore, until I had nursed him back to health that I began a systematic inquiry into the murder. I said nothing of my own discoveries and conclusions until after the raja and his officers had failed and my work had been done; then I submitted to him a written report, making a close analysis of all the circumstances and closing by charging the crime to Neranya. The raja, convinced by my proof and argument, at once ordered Neranya to be put to death, this to be accomplished slowly and with frightful tortures. The sentence was so cruel and revolting that it filled me with horror, and I implored that the wretch be shot. Finally, through a sense of gratitude to me, the raja relaxed. When Neranya was charged with the crime he denied it, of course, but, seeing that the raja was convinced, he threw aside all restraint, and, dancing, laughing, and shrieking in the most horrible manner, confessed his guilt, gloated over it, and reviled the raja to his teeth—this, knowing that some fearful death awaited him.

The raja decided upon the details of the matter that night, and in the morning he informed me of his decision. It was that Neranya's life should be spared, but that both of his legs should be broken with hammers, and that then I should amputate the limbs at the trunk! Appended to this horrible sentence was a provision that the maimed wretch should be kept and tortured at regular intervals by such means as afterward might be devised.

Sickened to the heart by the awful duty set out for me, I nevertheless performed it with success, and I care to say nothing more about that part of the tragedy. Neranya escaped death very narrowly and was a long time in recovering his wonted vitality. During all these weeks the raja neither saw him nor made inquiries concerning him, but when, as in duty bound, I made official report that the man had recovered his strength, the raja's eyes brightened, and he emerged with deadly activity from the stupor into which he so long had been plunged.

THE raja's palace was a noble structure, but it is necessary here to describe only the grand hall. It was an immense chamber, with a floor of polished, inlaid stone and a lofty, arched ceiling. A soft light stole into it through stained glass set in the roof and in high windows on one side. In the middle of the room was a rich fountain, which threw up a tall, slender column of water, with smaller and shorter jets grouped around it. Across one end of the hall, half-way to the ceiling, was a balcony, which communicated with the upper story of a wing, and from which a flight of stone stairs descended to the floor of the hall. During the hot summers this room was delightfully cool; it was the raja's favorite lounging-place, and when the nights were hot he had his cot taken thither, and there he slept.

This hall was chosen for Neranya's permanent prison; here was he to stay so long as he might live, with never a glimpse of the shining world or the glorious heavens. To one of his nervous, discontented nature such confinement was worse than death. At the raja's order there was constructed for him a small pen of open iron-work, circular, and about four feet in diameter, elevated on four slender iron posts, ten feet above the floor, and placed between the balcony and the fountain. Such was Neranya's prison. The pen was about four feet in depth, and the pen-top was left open for the convenience of the servants whose duty it should be to care for him. These precautions for his safe confinement were taken at my suggestion, for, although the man was now deprived of all four of his limbs, I still feared that he might develop some extraordinary, unheard-of power for mischief. It was provided that the attendants should reach his cage by means of a movable ladder.

All these arrangements having been made and Neranya hoisted into his cage, the raja emerged upon the balcony to see him for the first time since the last amputation. Neranya had been lying panting and helpless on the floor of his cage, but when his quick ear caught the sound of the raja's footfall he squirmed about until he had brought the back of his head against the railing, elevating his eyes above his chest, and enabling him to peer through the open-work of the cage. Thus the two deadly enemies faced each other. The raja's stern face paled at sight of the hideous, shapeless thing which met his gaze; but he soon recovered, and the old hard, cruel, sinister look returned. Neranya's black hair and beard had grown long, and they added to the natural ferocity of his aspect. His eyes blazed upon the raja with a terrible light, his lips parted, and he gasped for breath; his face was ashen with rage and despair, and his thin, distended nostrils quivered.

The raja folded his arms and gazed down from the balcony upon the frightful wreck that he had made. Oh, the dreadful pathos of that picture; the inhumanity of it; the deep and dismal tragedy of it! Who might look into the wild, despairing heart of the prisoner and see and understand the frightful turmoil there; the surging, choking passion; unbridled but impotent ferocity; frantic thirst for a vengeance that should be deeper than hell! Neranya gazed, his shapeless body heaving, his eyes aflame; and then, in a strong, clear voice, which rang throughout the great hall, with rapid speech he hurled at the raja the most insulting defiance, the most awful curses. He cursed the womb that had conceived him, the food that should nourish him, the wealth that had brought him power; cursed him in the name of Buddha and all the wise men; cursed by the sun, the moon, and the stars; by the continents, mountains, oceans, and rivers; by all things living; cursed his head, his heart, his entrails; cursed in a whirlwind of unmentionable words; heaped unimaginable insults and contumely upon him; called him a knave, a beast, a fool, a liar, an infamous and unspeakable coward.

The raja heard it all camly, without the movement of a muscle, without the slightest change of countenance; and when the poor wretch had exhausted his strength and fallen helpless and silent to the floor, the raja, with a grim, cold smile, turned and strode away.

The days passed. The raja, not deterred by Neranya's curses often heaped upon him, spent even more time than formerly in the great hall, and slept there oftener at night; and finally Neranya wearied of cursing and defying him, and fell into a sullen silence. The man was a study for me, and I observed every change in

his fleeting moods. Generally his condition was that of miserable despair, which he attempted bravely to conceal. Even the boon of suicide had been denied him, for when he would wriggle into an erect position the rail of his pen was a foot above his head, so that he could not clamber over and break his skull on the stone floor beneath; and when he had tried to starve himself the attendants forced food down his throat; so that he abandoned such attempts. At times his eyes would blaze and his breath would come in gasps, for imaginary vengeance was working within him; but steadily he became quieter and more tractable, and was pleasant and responsive when I would converse with him. Whatever might have been the tortures which the raja had decided on, none as yet had been ordered; and although Neranya knew that they were in contemplation, he never referred to them or complained of his lot.

The awful climax of this situation was reached one night, and even after this lapse of years I can not approach its description without a shudder.

IT WAS a hot night, and the raja had gone to sleep in the great hall, lying on a high cot placed on the main floor just underneath the edge of the balcony. I had been unable to sleep in my own apartment, and so I had stolen into the great hall through the heavily curtained entrance at the end farthest from the balcony. As I entered I heard a peculiar, soft sound above the patter of the fountain. Neranya's cage was partly concealed from my view by the spraying water, but I suspected that the unusual sound came from him. Stealing a little to one side, and crouching against the dark hangings of the wall, I could see him in the faint light which dimly illuminated the hall, and then I discovered that my surmise was correct —Neranya was quietly at work. Curious to learn more, and knowing that only mischief could have been inspiring him, I sank into a thick robe on the floor and watched him.

To my great astonishment Neranya was tearing off with his teeth the bag which served as his outer garment. He did it cautiously, casting sharp glances frequently at the raja, who, sleeping soundly on his cot below, breathed heavily. After starting a strip with his teeth, Neranya, by the same means, would attach it to the railing of his cage and then wriggle away, much after the manner of a caterpillar's crawling, and this would cause the strip to be torn out the full length of his garment. He repeated this operation with incredible patience and skill until his entire garment had been torn into strips. Two or three of these he tied end to end with his teeth, lips, and tongue, tightening the knots by placing one end of the strip under his body and drawing the other taut with his teeth. In this way he made a line several feet long, one end of which he made fast to the rail with his mouth. It then began to dawn upon me that he was going to make an insane attempt — impossible of achievement without hands, feet, arms, or legs—to escape from his cage! For what purpose? The raja was asleep in the hall—ah! I caught my breath. Oh, the desperate, insane thirst for revenge which could have unhinged so clear and firm a mind! Even though he should accomplish the impossible feat of climbing over the railing of his cage that he might fall to the floor below (for how could he slide down the rope?), he would be in all probability killed or stunned; and even if he should escape these dangers it would be impossible for him to clamber upon the cot without rousing the raja, and impossible even though the raja were dead! Amazed at the man's daring, and convinced that his sufferings and brooding had destroyed his reason, nevertheless I watched him with breathless interest.

With other strips tied together he

made a short swing across one side of his cage. He caught the long line in his teeth at a point not far from the rail; then, wriggling with great effort to an upright position, his back braced against the rail, he put his chin over the swing and worked toward one end. He tightened the grasp of his chin on the swing, and with tremendous exertion, working the lower end of his spine against the railing, he began gradually to ascend the side of his cage. The labor was so great that he was compelled to pause at intervals, and his breathing was hard and painful; and even while thus resting he was in a position of terrible strain, and his pushing against the swing caused it to press hard against his windpipe and nearly strangle him.

After amazing effort he had elevated the lower end of his body until it protruded above the railing, the top of which was now across the lower end of his abdomen. Gradually he worked his body over, going backward, until there was sufficient excess of weight on the outer side of the rail; and then, with a quick lurch, he raised his head and shoulders and swung into a horizontal position on top of the rail. Of course, he would have fallen to the floor below had it not been for the line which he held in his teeth. With so great nicety had he estimated the distance between his mouth and the point where the rope was fastened to the rail, that the line tightened and checked him just as he reached the horizontal position on the rail. If one had told me beforehand that such a feat as I had just seen this man accomplish was possible, I should have thought him a fool.

Neranya was now balanced on his stomach across the top of the rail, and he eased his position by bending his spine and hanging down on either side as much as possible. Having rested thus for some minutes, he began cautiously to slide off backward, slowly paying out the line through his teeth, finding almost a fatal difficulty in passing the knots. Now, it is quite possible that the line would have escaped altogether from his teeth laterally when he would slightly relax his hold to let it slip, had it not been for a very ingenious plan to which he had resorted. This consisted in his having made a turn of the line around his neck before he attacked the swing, thus securing a threefold control of the line,—one by his teeth, another by friction against his neck, and a third by his ability to compress it between his cheek and shoulder. It was quite evident now that the minutest details of a most elaborate plan had been carefully worked out by him before beginning the task, and that possibly weeks of difficult theoretical study had been consumed in the mental preparation. As I observed him I was reminded of certain hitherto unaccountable things which he had been doing for some weeks past—going through certain hitherto inexplicable motions, undoubtedly for the purpose of training his muscles for the immeasurably arduous labor which he was now performing.

A stupendous and seemingly impossible part of his task had been accomplished. Could he reach the floor in safety? Gradually he worked himself backward over the rail, in imminent danger of falling; but his nerve never wavered, and I could see a wonderful light in his eyes. With something of a lurch, his body fell against the outer side of the railing, to which he was hanging by his chin, the line still held firmly in his teeth. Slowly he slipped his chin from the rail, and then hung suspended by the line in his teeth. By almost imperceptible degrees, with infinite caution, he descended the line, and, finally, his unwieldy body rolled upon the floor, safe and unhurt!

What miracle would this superhuman monster next accomplish? I was quick and strong, and was ready and

able to intercept any dangerous act; but not until danger appeared would I interfere with this extraordinary scene.

I must confess to astonishment upon having observed that Neranya, instead of proceeding directly toward the sleeping raja, took quite another direction. Then it was only escape, after all, that the wretch contemplated, and not the murder of the raja. But how could he escape? The only possible way to reach the outer air without great risk was by ascending the stairs to the balcony and leaving by the corridor which opened upon it, and thus fall into the hands of some British soldiers quartered thereabout, who might conceive the idea of hiding him; but surely it was impossible for Neranya to ascend that long flight of stairs! Nevertheless, he made directly for them, his method of progression this: He lay upon his back, with the lower end of his body toward the stairs; then bowed his spine upward, thus drawing his head and shoulders a little forward; straightened, and then pushed the lower end of his body forward a space equal to that through which he had drawn his head; repeating this again and again, each time, while bending his spine, preventing his head from slipping by pressing it against the floor. His progress was laborious and slow, but sensible; and, finally, he arrived at the foot of the stairs.

It was manifest that his insane purpose was to ascend them. The desire for freedom must have been strong within him! Wriggling to an upright position against the newel-post, he looked up at the great height which he had to climb and sighed; but there was no dimming of the light in his eyes. How could he accomplish the impossible task?

His solution of the problem was very simple, though daring and perilous as all the rest. While leaning against the newel-post he let himself fall diagonally upon the bottom step, where he lay partly hanging over, but safe, on his side. Turning upon his back, he wriggled forward along the step to the rail and raised himself to an upright position against it as he had against the newel-post, fell as before, and landed on the second step. In this manner, with inconceivable labor, he accomplished the ascent of the entire flight of stairs.

It being apparent to me that the raja was not the object of Neranya's movements, the anxiety which I had felt on that account was now entirely dissipated. The things which already he had accomplished were entirely beyond the nimblest imagination. The sympathy which I had always felt for the wretched man was now greatly quickened; and as infinitesimally small as I knew his chances for escape to be, I nevertheless hoped that he would succeed. Any assistance from me, however, was out of the question; and it never should be known that I had witnessed the escape.

Neranya was now upon the balcony, and I could dimly see him wriggling along toward the door which led out upon the balcony. Finally he stopped and wriggled to an upright position against the rail, which had wide openings between the balusters. His back was toward me, but he slowly turned and faced me and the hall. At that great distance I could not distinguish his features, but the slowness with which he had worked, even before he had fully accomplished the ascent of the stairs, was evidence all too eloquent of his extreme exhaustion. Nothing but a most desperate resolution could have sustained him thus far, but he had drawn upon the last remnant of his strength. He looked around the hall with a sweeping glance, and then down upon the raja, who was sleeping immediately beneath him, over twenty feet below. He looked long and earnestly, sinking lower, and lower, and

(Continued on page 288)

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The Eyrie

(Continued from page 150)

severe, obscene (as the conspiracy in *The House of Golden Masks* was termed), detailed or many, for us readers. Here's hoping for some more real good tales along these lines."

Philip Kowalski, of Syracuse, New York, writes to the Eyrie: "*The Abysmal Invaders*, by Edmond Hamilton, in my estimation was the best story in your June issue. I agree with A. V. Pershing that the best would be a *weird* WEIRD TALES. I have been on the lookout for a magazine that contains stories just such as you have in your magazine. I like the stories to be weird, horrible, filled with terror, uncanny, grotesque, in short, the tales that make you afraid to go to bed. I note with interest that forthcoming issues will contain stories by the master of terror, Gaston Leroux, author of *The Phantom of the Opera*, which made such a good motion picture."

Mrs. Lilla Price Savino, of Portsmouth, Virginia, writes: "We have enjoyed the last few copies of W. T. immensely. That was a great serial, *The Vengeance of the Dead*, and there were some fine short stories too (I shivered over *The Dunwich Horror*), and we are all disappointed when Dr. de Grandin fails to appear. However, I agree with those who object to torture tales; give us occult mysteries, fourth dimensions, and ghost tales a-plenty, but spare us the torture."

Readers, what is your favorite story in this issue? The most popular story in the June issue, as shown by your votes, was *The House of Golden Masks*, by Seabury Quinn.

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The Inn of Terror

(Continued from page 165)

quite naturally: 'How do I know? How do you expect me to remember what I said that evening any more than any other evening? My words were of no importance except to the two who thought I was going to murder them. What stupidity! Perhaps they had something to do with the next day's work. I couldn't say....'

"But the judge insisted: 'How was it that you and your wife weren't astonished when only two people came down the next morning? Why were you silent about that? We would never have known a thing about all this if Monsieur and Madame Chaulieu had not come themselves to tell us that they fled in the night!'

"'Why should I be astonished?' Scheffer answered. 'You know the little show we gave and still continue to give for amateurs. It had frightened the little lady, and she can tell you herself that several times during the evening she said: "The whole place frightens me!" No, I was not surprized, and I must admit that we had a good laugh over it when the two Italians told us the next morning, before leaving, that Monsieur and Madame had been frightened to death and had escaped by the attic window. . . . Besides, we found the rope there. . . . As for the Italians, after the abrupt departure of Monsieur and Madame, they had carried their bedding into the other room and had passed an excellent night there.'

"'Still, if the incident was as funny as that, you had no reason to keep still about it!'

"'But who told you I did? On the contrary, I've told it scores of times to travelers stopping for a drink . . . But to find them now——'

"'You might have said something to the stage-driver.'

"'Oh, when he stops at the inn he has other things to do: he is busy with his horses. Besides, he may have heard my tale, at that.'

"'No, he has never heard it. . . . He never suspected a thing.'

"'That is quite possible. What should he suspect? . . . That story is a trivial matter. You surprize me with all this fuss.'

"'The Italians didn't tell you that they frightened Monsieur and Madame in order to obtain possession of the room?'

"'Good heavens, no.'

"The answer was a serious one, because after all, if the whole thing had only been a joke it was strange that the Italians had not boasted of it before their departure.

"'I am the only victim in the whole affair,' Scheffer went on, 'because I have not been paid for the bill yet. And that is probably why the Italians did not confess that they were responsible for the flight of the other two: they did not want to be asked to pay for the bill.'

"As you see, he had an answer ready for everything.

"Nevertheless, the judge was perplexed and the inquest continued for some time. They made new searches, but they found nothing and the matter was finally dropped. It was not until three years later, a year after Maria-Luce's death, that the affair came to light again, and this time the papers were full of wild tales.

"Antonio Ferretti and Olivia Orsino had never been heard of again, and you must admit that it was strange. I know that Antonio Ferretti was married and that he may have gone to some far corner of the earth to enjoy his happiness under an assumed name, but, after all, he was just becoming famous, and to give up such a splendid career forever! . . . I grew more and more convinced that they had been murdered, and even to-

day after a lapse of over twenty years I am positive of the fact.

"But I was saying that three years later something new occurred. In excavating not far from the inn, some new bones were found, and you can well picture the stir that it caused. The Weisbachs were on everyone's tongue again. And the Scheffers had become famous overnight, as famous as the Weisbachs had been! The experts, however, did not agree on the age of the bones.

"In the meantime, first one, then two, and then three families who had had disappearances among their relations, claimed that they might quite possibly have been victims of the Scheffers, because they had taken a trip through French Switzerland. They went even so far as to establish the fact that a young man from Linz, who had abducted a girl of good family, had slept one night at the 'Inn of Blood.' At that, the Scheffers and their servants were arrested and I was called as one of the witnesses.

"Their guilt seemed established and there was no doubt that they would be sentenced, when we suddenly learned that the young man in question had married the young girl of good family in America, and that they were farmers in Minnesota! The Scheffers were acquitted. . . . And now my story is done."

"And nothing more was ever heard of the Italians?" Dorat demanded.

"Never."

"And the Scheffers are still going strong?" Captain Michel asked, and this time he was not joking.

"Yes, they are still there making money. I heard of them quite recently from a friend who passed through Soleure. The 'Inn of Blood' has become historical. People come from far and near to see it; only no one ever asks to spend the night in the 'travelers' room'!"

Another vivid story by Gaston Leroux, "The Woman With the Velvet Collar," will be published soon.

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The Shadow Kingdom

(Continued from page 182)

and came at last to the council chamber. The door was closed, as usual, and the councilors arranged themselves in the order of their rank before the dais upon which stood the king. Like a bronze statue Brule took up his stand behind Kull.

Kull swept the room with a swift stare. Surely no chance of treachery here. Seventeen councilors there were, all known to him; all of them had espoused his cause when he ascended the throne.

"Men of Valusia——" he began in the conventional manner, then halted, perplexed. The councilors had risen as a man and were moving toward him. There was no hostility in their looks, but their actions were strange for a council room. The foremost was close to him when Brule sprang forward, crouched like a leopard.

"*Ka nama kaa lajerama!*" his voice crackled through the sinister silence of the room and the foremost councilor recoiled, hand flashing to his robes; and like a spring released Brule moved and the man pitched headlong to the glint of his sword—headlong he pitched and lay still while his face faded and became the head of a mighty snake.

"Slay, Kull!" rasped the Pict's voice. "They be all serpent men!"

The rest was a scarlet maze. Kull saw the familiar faces dim like fading fog and in their places gaped horrid reptilian visages as the whole band rushed forward. His mind was dazed but his giant body faltered not.

The singing of his sword filled the room, and the onrushing flood broke in a red wave. But they surged forward again, seemingly willing to fling their lives away in order to drag down the king. Hideous jaws gaped at him; terrible eyes blazed into his unblinkingly; a frightful fetid scent pervaded the atmosphere—the serpent scent that Kull had known in southern jungles. Swords and daggers leaped at him and he was dimly aware that they wounded him. But Kull was in his element; never before had he faced such grim foes but it mattered little; they lived, their veins held blood that could be spilt and they died when his great sword cleft their skulls or drove through their bodies. Slash, thrust, thrust and swing. Yet had Kull died there but for the man who crouched at his side, parrying and thrusting. For the king was clear berserk, fighting in the terrible Atlantean way, that seeks death to deal death; he made no effort to avoid thrusts and slashes, standing straight up and ever plunging forward, no thought in his frenzied mind but to slay. Not often did Kull forget his fighting craft in his primitive fury, but now some chain had broken in his soul, flooding his mind with a red wave of slaughter-lust. He slew a foe at each blow, but they surged about him, and time and again Brule turned a thrust that would have slain, as he crouched beside Kull, parrying and warding with cold skill, slaying not as Kull slew with long slashes and plunges, but with short overhand blows and upward thrusts.

Kull laughed, a laugh of insanity. The frightful faces swirled about him in a scarlet blaze. He felt steel sink into his arm and dropped his sword in a flashing arc that cleft his foe to the breast-bone. Then the mists faded and the king saw that he and Brule stood alone above a sprawl of hideous crimson figures who lay still upon the floor.

"Valka! what a killing!" said Brule, shaking the blood from his eyes. "Kull, had these been warriors who knew how to use the steel, we had

died here. These serpent priests know naught of swordcraft and die easier than any men I ever slew. Yet had there been a few more, I think the matter had ended otherwise."

Kull nodded. The wild berserker blaze had passed, leaving a mazed feeling of great weariness. Blood seeped from wounds on breast, shoulder, arm and leg. Brule, himself bleeding from a score of flesh wounds, glanced at him in some concern.

"Lord Kull, let us hasten to have your wounds dressed by the women."

Kull thrust him aside with a drunken sweep of his mighty arm.

"Nay, we'll see this through ere we cease. Go you, though, and have your wounds seen to—I command it."

The Pict laughed grimly. "Your wounds are more than mine, lord king——" he began, then stopped as a sudden thought struck him. "By Valka, Kull, this is not the council room!"

Kull looked about and suddenly other fogs seemed to fade. "Nay, this is the room where Eallal died a thousand years ago—since unused and named 'Accursed'."

"Then by the gods, they tricked us after all!" exclaimed Brule in a fury, kicking the corpses at their feet. "They caused us to walk like fools into their ambush! By their magic they changed the appearance of all——"

"Then there is further deviltry afoot," said Kull, "for if there be true men in the councils of Valusia they should be in the real council room now. Come swiftly."

And leaving the room with its ghastly keepers they hastened through halls that seemed deserted until they came to the real council room. Then Kull halted with a ghastly shudder. *From the council room sounded a voice speaking, and the voice was his!*

WITH a hand that shook he parted the tapestries and gazed into the room. There sat the councilors, coun-

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terparts of the men he and Brule had just slain, and upon the dais stood Kull, king of Valusia.

He stepped back, his mind reeling.

"This is insanity!" he whispered. "Am I Kull? Do I stand here or is that Kull yonder in very truth and am I but a shadow, a figment of thought?"

Brule's hand clutching his shoulder, shaking him fiercely, brought him to his senses.

"Valka's name, be not a fool! Can you yet be astounded after all we have seen? See you not that those are true men bewitched by a snake-man who has taken your form, as those others took their forms? By now you should have been slain and yon monster reigning in your stead, unknown by those who bowed to you. Leap and slay swiftly or else we are undone. The Red Slayers, true men, stand close on each hand and none but you can reach and slay him. Be swift!"

Kull shook off the onrushing dizziness, flung back his head in the old, defiant gesture. He took a long, deep breath as does a strong swimmer before diving into the sea; then, sweeping back the tapestries, made the dais in a single lionlike bound. Brule had spoken truly. There stood men of the Red Slayers, guardsmen trained to move quick as the striking leopard; any but Kull had died ere he could reach the usurper. But the sight of Kull, identical with the man upon the dais, held them in their tracks, their minds stunned for an instant, and that was long enough. He upon the dais snatched for his sword, but even as his fingers closed upon the hilt, Kull's sword stood out behind his shoulders and the thing that men had thought the king pitched forward from the dais to lie silent upon the floor.

"Hold!" Kull's lifted hand and kingly voice stopped the rush that had started, and while they stood astounded he pointed to the thing which lay before them—whose face was fading into that of a snake. They recoiled, and from one door came Brule and from another came Ka-nu.

These grasped the king's bloody hand and Ka-nu spoke: "Men of Valusia, you have seen with your own eyes. This is the true Kull, the mightiest king to whom Valusia has ever bowed. The power of the Serpent is broken and ye be all true men. King Kull, have you commands?"

"Lift that carrion," said Kull, and men of the guard took up the thing.

"Now follow me," said the king, and he made his way to the Accursed Room. Brule, with a look of concern, offered the support of his arm but Kull shook him off.

The distance seemed endless to the bleeding king, but at last he stood at the door and laughed fiercely and grimly when he heard the horrified ejaculations of the councilors.

At his orders the guardsmen flung the corpse they carried beside the others, and motioning all from the room Kull stepped out last and closed the door.

A wave of dizziness left him shaken. The faces turned to him, pallid and wonderingly, swirled and mingled in a ghostly fog. He felt the blood from his wound trickling down his limbs and he knew that what he was to do, he must do quickly or not at all.

His sword rasped from its sheath.

"Brule, are you there?"

"Aye!" Brule's face looked at him through the mist, close to his shoulder, but Brule's voice sounded leagues and eons away.

"Remember our vow, Brule. And now, bid them stand back."

His left arm cleared a space as he flung up his sword. Then with all his waning power he drove it through the door into the jamb, driving the great sword to the hilt and sealing the room forever.

Legs braced wide, he swayed drunk-

enly, facing the horrified councilors. "Let this room be doubly accursed. And let those rotting skeletons lie there forever as a sign of the dying might of the serpent. Here I swear that I shall hunt the serpent-men from land to land, from sea to sea, giving no rest until all be slain, that good triumph and the power of Hell be broken. This thing I swear—I—Kull—king—of—Valusia."

His knees buckled as the faces swayed and swirled. The councilors leaped forward, but ere they could reach him, Kull slumped to the floor, and lay still, face upward.

The councilors surged about the fallen king, chattering and shrieking. Ka-nu beat them back with his clenched fists, cursing savagely.

"Back, you fools! Would you stifle the little life that is yet in him? How, Brule, is he dead or will he live?"—to the warrior who bent above the prostrate Kull.

"Dead?" sneered Brule irritably. "Such a man as this is not so easily killed. Lack of sleep and loss of blood have weakened him—by Valka, he has a score of deep wounds, but none of them mortal. Yet have those gibbering fools bring the court women here at once."

Brule's eyes lighted with a fierce, proud light.

"Valka, Ka-nu, but here is such a man as I knew not existed in these degenerate days. He will be in the saddle in a few scant days and then may the serpent-men of the world beware of Kull of Valusia. Valka! but that will be a rare hunt! Ah, I see long years of prosperity for the world with such a king upon the throne of Valusia."

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The Unconquerable Enemy

(Continued from page 278)

lower upon the rail. Suddenly, to my inconceivable astonishment and dismay, he toppled through and shot downward from his lofty height! I held my breath, expecting to see him crushed upon the stone floor beneath; but instead of that he fell full upon the raja's breast, driving him through the cot to the floor. I sprang forward with a loud cry for help, and was instantly at the scene of the catastrophe. With indescribable horror I saw that Neranya's teeth were buried in the raja's throat! I tore the wretch away, but the blood was pouring from the raja's arteries, his chest was crushed in, and he was gasping in the agony of death.

People came running in, terrified. I turned to Neranya. He lay upon his back, his face hideously smeared with blood. Murder, and not escape, had been his intention from the beginning; and he had employed the only method by which there was ever a possibility of accomplishing it. I knelt beside him, and saw that he too was dying; his back had been broken by the fall. He smiled sweetly into my face, and a triumphant look of accomplished revenge sat upon his face even in death.

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