Weird Tales

AUG. 1931

The Unique Magazine

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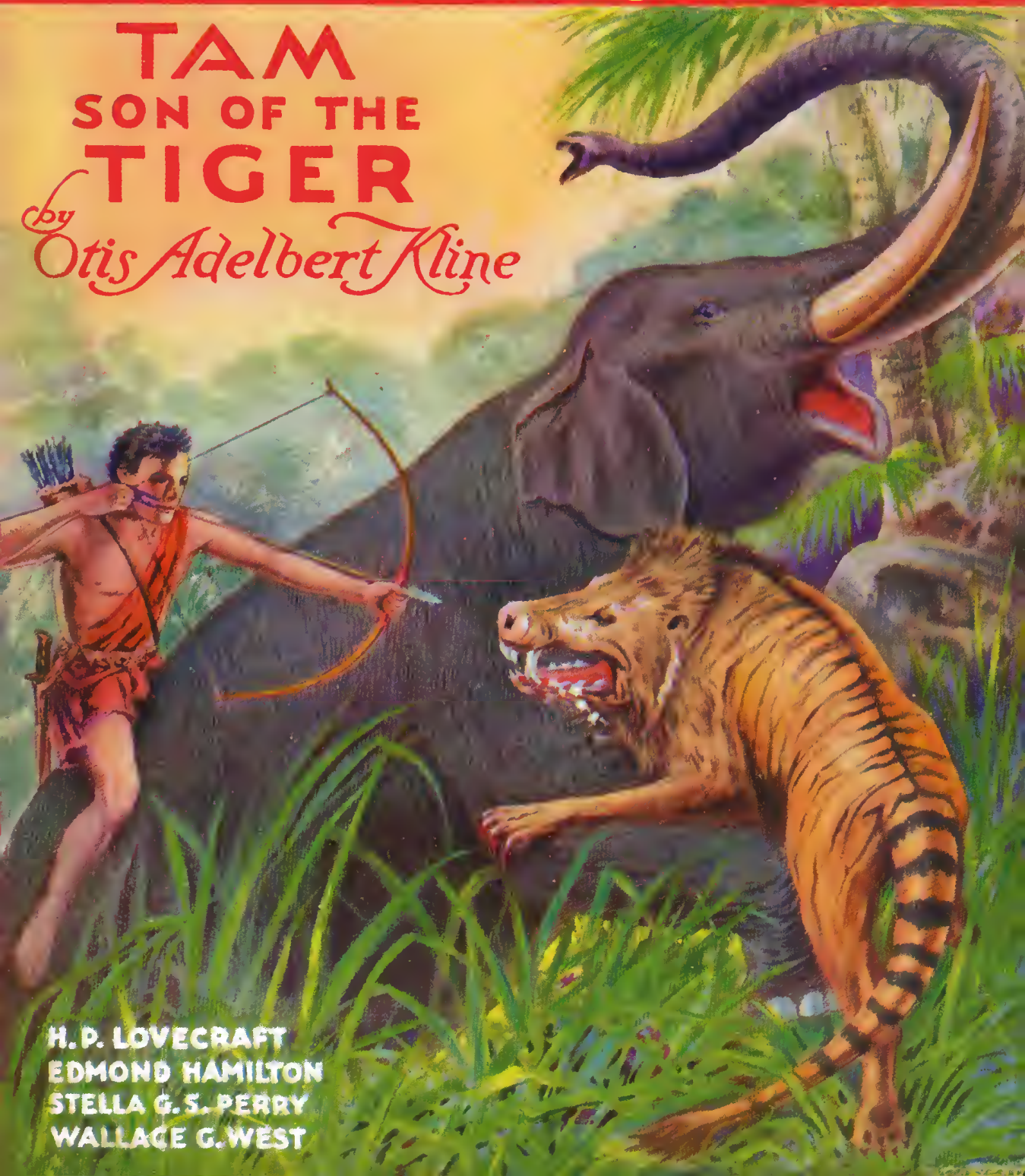
TAM SON OF THE TIGER

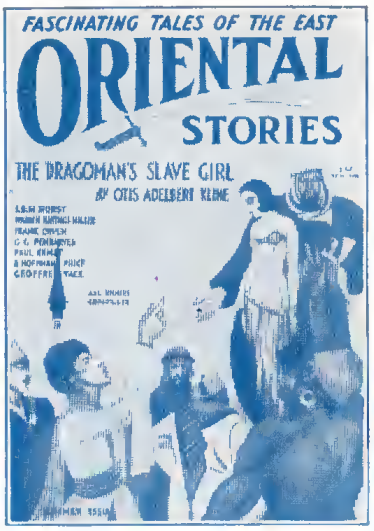
by Otis Adelbert Kline



H. P. LOVECRAFT
EDMOND HAMILTON
STELLA G. S. PERRY
WALLACE G. WEST

The Dragoman's Slave Girl

By Otis Adelbert Kline



I STOOD there in the slave mart, idly looking on while they auctioned off girls and women, tall and short, young and old, fat and thin, willing and unwilling. There were slant-eyed, golden-skinned girls from Cathay, supple, brown-skinned nautch-girls from Hind, Nubian maids and matrons whose bodies were like polished ebony, and Abyssinians of the color of coffee. Then came the Circassians, Armenians, Persians, Nestorians and Yezidees, some quite good to look upon. But none interested me.

I turned to go, when suddenly I heard a chorus of "Oh's!" and "Ah's!" from the entire assembly. Looking back toward the auction block, I was smitten with admiration for the witching vision of feminine loveliness that stood thereon. Then scarcely knowing what impelled me to do so, I elbowed and jostled my way to a position just in front of the platform, and stood like the others, gaping up at the wondrous frail creature who, standing there beside her auctioneer was as a gazelle beside an overgrown wart hog. Nor had Almighty Allah ever before vouchsafed me the privilege of beholding such grace and beauty.

Her eyes were large and brown, and their sleepy lids and lashes were kohled with Babylonian witchery. Her mouth was like the red seal of Suleiman Baalshem, Lord of the Name, on whom be peace, and her smile revealed teeth that were matched pearls. The rondure of her firm young breasts, strutting from her white bosom beneath the glittering beaded shields, was as that of twin pomegranates. And her slender waist swayed with the grace of a branchlet of basil, above her rounded hips.

The flat-nosed, red-bearded auctioneer, after clumsily describing the charms of her whose beauty defied description, called for bids. I had but a hundred sequins, but this girl was worth thousands—

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Weird Tales

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A MAGAZINE of the BIZARRE and UNUSUAL

VOLUME XVIII NUMBER 1

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FARNSWORTH WRIGHT, Editor.

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Contents for August, 1931

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THE return of WEIRD TALES to a monthly publication basis has been hailed with enthusiasm by you, the readers. The letters of congratulation that have poured in to the editorial offices have expressed uniform satisfaction with the change.

A letter from Henry Masterson, of Florence, Alabama, says: "It would have been a great catastrophe if you had carried out your plan of just publishing WEIRD TALES once every two months. You ought to have known that your readers would not have stood for it. Please print more stories of the Interstellar Patrol by Edmond Hamilton. Seabury Quinn is also a wonderful writer. I am surely glad to hear that Robert E. Howard is writing some more Solomon Kane stories. They are about the best I ever read. This is my first time to write to the Eyrie although I have been a reader of WEIRD TALES for several years. I think that WEIRD TALES is absolutely the best magazine published. It is everything you could want it to be."

"Allow me to enter the family circle," requests Anthony Amato, of Ridgeley, West Virginia. "This is my first time in attempting to voice my opinion, although I have been a reader of our beloved magazine for several years. Please see if something can be done to have the magazine out before June 1, for I simply can not wait that long before I get my next copy. Last month it was the same way, waiting two months before the next issue was out, and I thought that it was cruel on your part to cause a faithful army of readers to go without WEIRD TALES. I like the April-May issue very much. *The Dead-Alive* was very convincing. Congratulations for the two authors, Nat Schachner and Arthur L. Zagat. *A Rendezvous in Averoigne,* Smith's vampire story, was my favorite for this issue. But *The Dust of Death* I did not like at all. It was too dull for me."

Henry S. Whitehead writes from Florida: "I am writing to express my really profound admiration for a WEIRD TALES story. I refer to *The Horror from the Hills,* by Frank Belknap Long, Jr. This story is, as I see it, one of the finest pieces of work in its class that I have, so far, been privileged to read. I have read it several times, always with a mounting fund of pure admiration. It is a big picture, cosmically conceived, and spread upon a canvas of commensurate size and breadth. It is dignified. It is fully done. It thrills. It satisfies the reader's love of suspenseful adventure, nicks him in his horror-feeling capacities, is competently composed, of just the right length, and does not sacrifice *anything* in its properly ponderous move-

(Please turn to page 6)

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(Continued from page 4)

ment to its logical ending. I congratulate you and the author on this splendid piece of work.

Writes A. V. Pershing, of Kenova, West Virginia: "I note with pleasure that the magazine will again be published monthly. However, I was not a little surprized to find that *The Horror from the Hills,* by Mr. Frank B. Long, Jr., did not receive more praise from readers of WEIRD TALES. The story, taking it all in all, was I thought by far the highest expression of art since Lovecraft's last story was published. The recital of Doctor Roger Little, the mad scientist, was absolutely remarkable in my estimation, and Long's use of descriptive adjectives is equally remarkable. In addition I wish to say that I thoroughly appreciate all of Clark Ashton Smith's artistic word-pictures. His stories seem to be getting better and better and are surely a treat to those who like fine literature. There is one somewhat recent story by Mr. Smith that I will remember a long time to come, I am sure: namely, the marvelous *The Uncharted Isle.* C. C. Senf's new cover design is a very prominent, artistic, and commanding one. All due thanks to him also." [It will interest Mr. Pershing to know that *The Horror from the Hills* has now taken a commanding lead in popularity among all the stories in the February-March issue, although it was behind when the last Eyrie was printed. The votes are still pouring in for this unusual story, although the issue containing the last installment went off sale April 1.—THE EDITORS.]

A letter from Edith Whittington, of Coronado, California, says: "I am only seventeen but I am a great reader and I want to tell you people that I like you. Although I have had delicious chills in reading many of your unique stories, there have been two tales by your unequalled author, Mr. Quinn, that I set apart from all the rest as the last word in furnishing a young girl with real delight—*The House of Golden Masks* and *The Lost Lady.* Please have Mr. Quinn give us girls some more like those! I liked *The Dunwich Horror, The Horror from the Hills, The Uncharted Isle,* Gaston Leroux's stories and many others too, but Mr. Quinn beats them all. I join with some of your other correspondents in voting to keep WEIRD TALES weird, and, as one of your men correspondents says, let us have stories of the 'dark Middle Ages'—with all their rude ways!"

Wilford Allen, of Sanger, California, writes to the editor: "Just a note to say I am glad that W. T. is to be a monthly again, and in particular, to tell you how much better the cover is this month. I simply must have W. T. each month, but I admit that in the past there have been times when on getting it at the news stand I have folded it over quickly to hide the cover from the view of people who might be passing and know me, in the manner of a henpecked husband sneaking off with *Paris Nights.* Now, if the covers continue like the present one, I will be proud to let any one—not just the few who judge a magazine by contents—know that I read W. T. I also want to say that Howard's *Children of the Night* is splendid."

"I have just purchased my thirty-sixth consecutive copy of your splendid magazine," writes Laurence Merrifield, of Batavia, New York. "I have read all the so-called scientific magazines, and always, like Coco Cola's trademark, yours leaves

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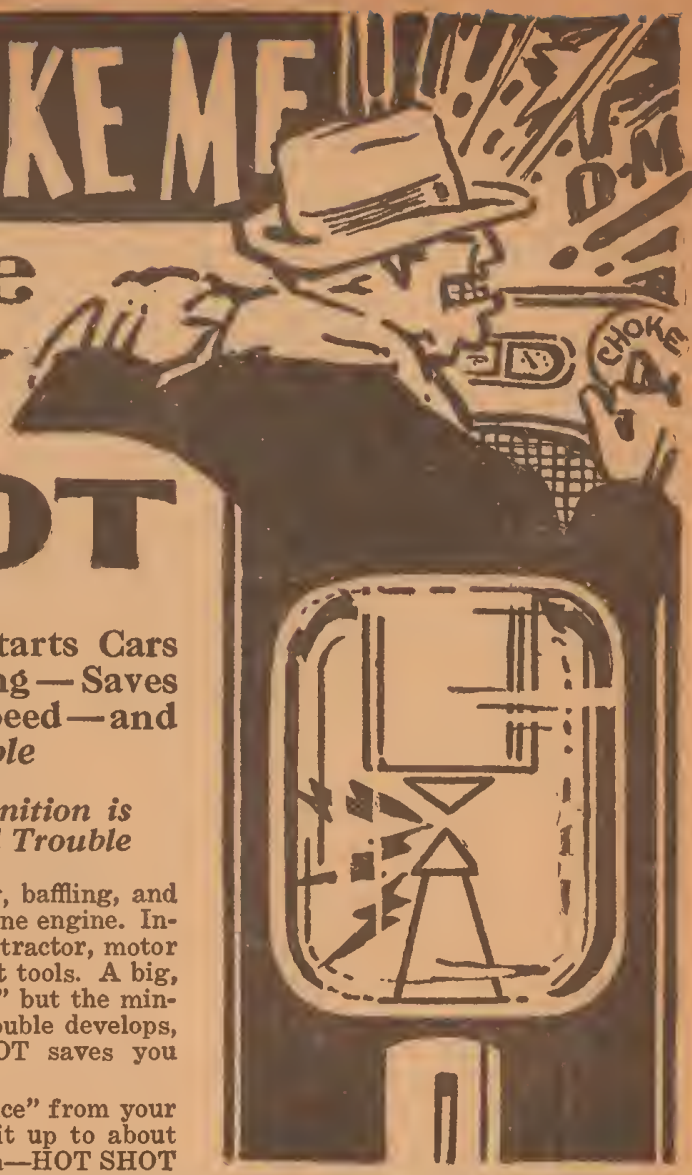
DON'T CHOKE ME!!



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"The ship, appearing like a black ghost out of nothingness, plunged into the water."

MOON MADNESS

By WALLACE G. WEST

The story of the frightful catastrophe that befell the occupants of a rocket that was shot to the moon

IT WAS at Ali Hamud's dive in Aleppo that I first saw Henry Weatherford. His harassed face, peering through the clotted smoke like one who sees ghosts, riveted my attention. It was plain to be seen he used drugs, and was, in fact, in a bad way from them.

I questioned Ali about him, for it is my business to be curious about all queer customers who drift about on the outskirts of the East, though God knows if I did my duty I'd have no time for eating or sleeping.

Ali was expansive but his information seemed of little value.

"He is here for years," the Turk ex-

plained, spreading his fat hands. "He drink, smoke opium, hashish, Allah knows what. But he pay his bills. Why should I question?"

"His name?" I hinted.

"It is Henry Weatherford," beamed my greasy informant. "He take all the London papers, but he receive no other mail."

Ali departed hurriedly to welcome a party of white-clad tourists that had come slumming into this den of iniquity through some blunder of their guide, and I turned my attention again to the strange figure sitting hunched over a water pipe at the corner table.

As the English party entered he had crouched still farther and sat staring at them with haunted eyes like those of a frightened dog.

I drifted over and, in the excitement which occurred when a new group of fat dancing-girls appeared in the center of the crowded room, sat down in a vacant chair beside him.

"Mr. Henry Weatherford, I believe," I asked casually.

I thought he would faint.

"Oh God," he babbled, "have they found me at last?"

I tried to reassure him, explaining mendaciously that I was a stranger in town and wished to talk with someone of my own race. In the back of my brain was revolving the memory of a chemical engineer named Weatherford who had disappeared from London ten years before after some kind of disaster or scandal, but I couldn't place it.

He still crouched over the table, but as I explained that Ali casually had mentioned his name he relaxed, ordered a quart of the house's best whisky—which was terrible enough in all truth—and expanded a bit.

And as the drink warmed him he began to talk of London with that nostalgia which all true Britishers show in exile.

"Let's get out of here and go to my hotel," I suggested after we had talked intermittently for an hour. "The smoke here is stifling."

He flinched as though I had struck him.

"Oh no," he cried, looking at me with those tragic blue eyes. "The moon is full. I don't dare go till it sets."

He evidently saw my look of amazement, for he braced himself squarely, gulped a full glass of whisky, and, with the queer directness which drug addicts have at times, began his story.

"I thought," he said, "that you had come from François Marden, but I see now that it is as you say, for otherwise you would not have been surprized at my fear of the moon.

"I must talk," he continued, gripping my hand. "I am going mad soon, I know, but before I do so I must tell somebody.

"You see," he continued, pursing his slack lips in savage determination, "I have been hiding for ten years—ever since they brought Marden and the others back from the moon."

I sighed, my interest slackening. A mere madman after all! Syria was full of them. Then I remembered what had been puzzling me. There had been some sort of crazy effort to send a rocket to the moon back in 1931. Shortly after that Weatherford had disappeared, deserting a prospering chemical plant without a word. His partner and two of his friends were in a hospital at the time suffering from some strange malady, if my memory served.

But Weatherford was talking again in a low, hopeless voice:

"It was my idea, that trip," he said. "Then I turned coward and let them go alone, God pity me! If Marden is released he will come and kill me—tie me to a rocket, he said."

"What trip?" I queried gently as to a child.

"Why, have you forgotten already?" he cried. "Don't you remember the Weatherford Rocket? I induced them to take a trip to the moon in it—Marden, my war buddy and partner at the factory; George Hayworth and Hayworth's sister, Mary. George was completely sold on the idea when I suggested it. He had more money than he knew what to do with and a yen for strange adventures. So had Mary. They had prowled through the Amazon and the Himalayas together and were looking for new worlds to conquer.

"And François and I were both in love with Mary," he mumbled, staring at his pipe.

"But the trip?" I suggested.

"Oh, the trip. Pardon me. Why, it was simple. We used Von Opel's compressed hydrogen rockets, you know. Marden and I built the ship at our chemical plant at Folkestone. Steel, you know, with portholes of thick glass, air machines, and so on. I won't bother you with details.

"We constructed a perpendicular runway that could be tilted like the mounting of an anti-aircraft gun.

"The idea was for one of us to stay behind and aim the ship like a projectile so it would leave the ground at just the right angle, travel to the moon, be caught by lunar gravitation, spin round as a comet does round the sun and return to earth, landing in some deep body of water.

"Oh, there was a lot of mathematics to it, you can be sure. How I toiled night and day, checking and rechecking the figures, for a change of a thousandth of a degree meant death!

"It took us a year to complete the work. Von Opel came from Germany to help us. Newspapers gave us pages of publicity.

"Then, at the last moment, I lost my nerve, poor craven that I was. Mary, of course, insisted on going, and since she had braved all other dangers George refused to dissuade her. But I pretended I was the only one able to sight the ship properly, and, since Marden was all for the journey, they left me behind."

Again that haunted look came into his eyes, but he swallowed another glass of whisky and continued:

"It was at noon, July 25, 1931, that the voyage began. We made a final inspection, loaded the ship with cameras, recording-instruments and food, tested the air-purifying machines and the heating plant and said good-bye.

"I remember George Hayworth's shock of tousled yellow hair as he stood in the circular door and shook hands. He looked like a Viking. I knew he could trace his ancestry back to those daring adventurers who first discovered America.

"Next Mary stepped forward and kissed me on the lips. Oh, the glory of her beauty, her finely poised head and dancing eyes! I remember she was dressed in a simple white cotton frock that set off her little-girlishness. Then I was ashamed of my cowardice. I begged her to stay in my place, but she only laughed and assured me there could be no danger 'with such a great engineer as you designing our ship.'

"Last came François—straight as a rapier, with aristocratic thin face and olive skin. He alone divined that I had feared to go, but he said nothing and gripped my hand fiercely.

"Then the round door clanged shut and was slowly screwed tight. I stood outside with Von Opel and waved at the three who appeared smiling at the portholes. It was their last smiles, poor devils. Oh, why did I not prevent that mad journey? Why did I not wreck the propulsive mechanism?

"Instead I stepped to the base of the runway with the German and once more checked the trajectory. Then we made a last electrical connection and hurried to the control tower half a mile away, out of danger from the exploding rockets.

"At the tower we set the electric chronometer so that a switch would be thrown at 12:05:03.5, setting off the first of a series of one hundred rockets which would jerk the ship out of the earth's gravitation.

"The minutes seemed like eternities. I held my breath. Von Opel gnawed his finger tips.

"Then, like the crash of a siege gun, the first rocket exploded. The ship rose

like a huge shell and with the next explosion vanished into the heavens.

"THE next week was hell unutterable for me. We had contrived a device by which black gas was emitted from the ship. With this help the observatory telescopes picked her up easily enough. All seemed going well. She reached the moon, spun round it at an altitude of five hundred miles and started on the return journey.

"I chartered a seaplane and headed for the spot on the Atlantic where we had planned for the ship to fall. Radio reports told us the path was almost exactly as we had plotted it.

"On the tenth day as we rode the swells of a glassy sea we heard a faint screaming which increased instantly into a roar. The ship, appearing like a black ghost out of nothingness, plunged into the water not half a mile away. It must have been white-hot, for the ocean boiled like a geyser.

"But we had provided for that by insulating the ship's interior so that heat could not penetrate before it was cooled by the water. There also were mechanisms to eliminate the landing shock.

"After what seemed hours we saw the huge cylinder reappear. Quickly we taxied forward and lowered a boat. Working like madmen, three of us unscrewed the calcined entrance and entered.

"Everything was as I last had seen it. My friends had strapped themselves in front of portholes. All were unconscious but alive.

"A doctor whom I had brought along examined them, then shook his head wonderingly.

" 'I don't understand,' he muttered. 'They appear to have been burned. Get them to a hospital at once.'

"We unstrapped the trio and ferried them to the plane. Except for a strange, almost luminous whiteness about their faces, all appeared unharmed. A little care, I thought in my folly, and they would be hale and hearty and boasting of their adventures.

"But now I come to the true horror of my story. Oh, don't be afraid I'll get drunk from all this whisky. I never have been able to do that since that day. Would to God I could!

"For months hospital attendants refused me permission to see the voyagers. Newspapers clamored in vain for interviews. Except for a few photographs taken shortly after the ship left the earth, the plates of the cameras we took from the cabin were blank. The delicate mechanisms of the instruments for recording temperatures, distance, speed, etc., had been wrecked by the landing shock. The world could find out nothing from them and began to lose interest. Some branded the whole thing as a hoax.

"At last I was summoned to the hospital. I could visit my friends, but they all were mad and maimed. There was no hope for recovery, although they might live indefinitely.

"The doctor who had aided in rescuing the space-travelers welcomed me.

" 'A strange case,' he said. 'Their brains have been affected by some great shock and their motor muscles are partly or wholly paralyzed. Be prepared for the worst.'

"He led me to a private ward. In it a twisted old man sat in a wheel-chair playing with a cane.

" 'That,' said the doctor, 'is Hayworth. He is blind.'

"I stared in disbelief. That pitiful, twisted creature my Viking friend? Impossible!

"Suddenly the Thing looked up. I screamed in horror, for I recognized a caricature of George.

"Have you ever seen a man who was terribly burned? That glassy texture of skin, like polished marble? Such was the face of my friend—shiny, slick, like some poisonous fish. He opened his eyes, and I stared into brimming pools of horror. They were not the eyes of a person gone naturally blind. They looked as if they had been drilled with a red-hot poker. The whites were gone. Simply a black, burning depth remained. And yet, you understand, the eyeball was not destroyed.

" 'George,' I cried. 'It is Henry. Don't you know me?'

"I approached.

"Suddenly the creature drew back withered lips from yellow fangs. Staggering to its feet, it swung the heavy cane with the strength of a madman. I ducked just in time. As it was, he knocked me senseless. See that streak of white in my hair? That is where the cane struck me.

"I CAME to myself in the doctor's office. He had taken seven stitches in my head.

" 'Do you want to see the others?' he asked. 'I advise against it. I didn't think Hayworth was violent. Marden may be worse.'

" 'Yes,' I replied. 'I must find the reason for this ghastly thing. Take me to Mary. She will know me.'

"Shaking his head sadly, the doctor led me into another room.

"There a witch-woman lay in bed. Her face also was of that strange slickness. Her eyes also were burned-out pools of horror. Her hands and arms were twisted into claws like those of one who has suffered the tortures of rheumatism for years. Her hair was snow-white as it lay across the pillows.

" 'Mary,' I sobbed. 'It's Henry. Don't you know me? Speak!'

"I tell you I went sick as the creature mewed and spat at me in a paroxysm of hatred. I stumbled away.

"God! Give me that whisky!

"There remained only François. Shaken to the very soul, I nevertheless was determined to find out if possible a key to this mystery. I insisted on going to him.

"He was locked in a padded cell. A burly guard entered with me.

"This face also was of that unearthly marbled slickness, but the eyes were alive, although death lurked in their depths. He sat in a wheel chair also, but somehow he had escaped better than the others. His body was a mere skeleton. His hands were claws, but they were not so twisted and helpless as those of Mary. In one of them he clutched a whisky glass. I noticed a bottle of liquor on a table near by.

" 'We let him have it to quiet him,' whispered the doctor. 'Nothing else seems to take effect. Speak to him. We can not get him to talk.'

"I advanced cautiously.

" 'François,' I said. "What in God's name has happened? Don't you know me? Tell me what happened on the voyage.'

"He blinked at me for what semed hours.

" 'No,' he said at last in a voice like the creaking of a rusty hinge, 'I do not know you. My eyes, you know. I suppose you're from the papers. I'll tell you of our magnificent journey. 'Twill make all the front pages on earth.'

"Suddenly he threw back his head and howled with wolfish laughter. For a moment I thought he would leap upon me.

"Instead he emptied the whisky glass and plunged into the middle of his story as madmen do.

" 'We got off all right,' he said, 'although as we lay on the cabin floor the pressure of acceleration almost cracked our ribs and squeezed the breath from our

bodies. But this lightened after the ship was under way, and we were able to move about normally.

" 'We stared out at the black sky—we already had left the atmosphere—took some photographs of the moon which now appeared over the limb of the earth, and, for want of something better to do, sat down to play bridge, all unaware of the damnation which was creeping upon us.

" 'It was next day—by our watches—before we noticed anything peculiar. First it was a slight numbness in my hands and feet. I told the others of it. Both reported the same symptoms.

" 'This numbness grew, along with an inability to make properly concerted movements. That is, our hands would reach for objects but pass several inches to one side of them, like those of drunken men.

" 'We were all a little frightened, I know, but we made a joke of the whole affair, and it was not until George noticed that our infirmities grew as the force of gravitation lessened that we became really worried.

" 'Mary voiced the prevailing fear when she said: "Has it occurred to either of you that perhaps the human mechanism won't function if there is no gravitational force for it to operate against?"

" 'I know my face paled. George tried to laugh, but it was a shaky tremolo instead of his usual thundering bass.

" ' "Meaning," continued Mary ruthlessly, "that long before we pass outside the earth's attraction we shall be helpless as babies, and that in all probability the muscles which operate our breathing and heart action also will cease to function and we'll die."

" 'We tried to argue against it, but hour by hour the certainty was borne upon us. We moved in erratic jumps. Our fingers refused to operate the cameras. We talked in queer falsetto or deep bass, or merely mumbled, our lips refusing to form words.

" 'The situation became acute within the next twenty-four hours. That was shortly before we passed out of the earth's attraction. We were almost helpless by that time. We sat on the floor and tried to keep our heavy eyelids open so that we could smile encouragement at one another.

" 'It was Mary who spoke at last, in a queer lisping tone that rang dimly to ears which were losing their faculty for hearing.

" ' "I think," she said, articulating each word slowly like a drunken woman, "that we are going to die soon. But after c-coming this f-far I want to see the moon at close range before I go w-west. Let's strap ourselves in front of the portholes, for I f-foresee that otherwise within a few hours we'll be lying on the floor like jelly-fish. That way we'll be able to see until—until we die."

" 'Moving slowly, like dead men floating in the depths of the sea—for you understand the gravitational pull was almost nil — we dragged ourselves to the straps which hung near the portholes.

" 'With dead fingers we struggled to buckle ourselves into position. I remember how sweat trickled down my nose as for what seemed hours I worked at a task which the day before would have taken but a moment.

" 'At last we succeeded, and each hung suspended in his harness with his face in front of the six-inch-thick porthole.

" ' "You O. K., George and François?" whispered Mary at my right.

" ' "Yes," I gasped. George made a similar answer.

" 'Shortly afterward we slipped out of the earth's attraction and Mary's prediction came true. Our muscular reactions, both conscious and unconscious, ceased.

That meant our bodies were reduced to a sort of cataleptic state, I suppose.

" 'I fainted. How long I dangled there like a sack of meal I do not know.

"'I WAS brought back to a sort of consciousness by an unbearable agony. Into my glazed, open eyes was burning an intense white light. We had entered the moon's gravitation by this time and had returned to life in a fashion. That is, we could breathe and see, but due to the weakness of the attraction our conscious muscles still remained paralyzed.

" 'The light was from the moon, now only a few thousand miles away. I could look into its monstrous craters and mile-deep valleys. Every detail was clear at first.

" 'And up from it beat that unbearable light. Have you ever tried to stare into the beam of a searchlight or into the sun at midday? It was like that, only worse. I had heard of people going blind from looking at the moon through a telescope, but this was a light which bored through the eyes and into the very brain itself.

" 'I heard Mary begin screaming—a high-pitched wail that set me fighting this lethargy which bound me. But try as I might I could not move even a little finger —could not turn my face away from that fearful brightness. Even the blessing of unconsciousness was denied me. Now I heard the gasping sobs of George. He was mouthing horrible gibberish without meaning.

" 'And all the while the light! I felt it shriveling my brain. Have you ever cracked a walnut, expecting to find firm kernel and instead come upon a crinkled, dry husk? That's what was happening to our brains, I knew. I had long lost the faculty of sight. The vast plain of the moon was only an unbroken, pulsating whiteness.

" 'I remembered stories of persons who went mad in the tropics by sleeping in the light of the full moon and forever after chattered with the monkeys in the trees, or hurled themselves into the sea and drowned in an ecstasy of delirium.

" 'But this moonlight was a thousand times more powerful—and cold, belching up at us like the glare from that most awful region in Dante's inferno. Had he seen this? I wondered crazily.

" 'Only one hope remained. I must close my eyes and shut out that brilliance which was making me insane.

" 'I willed them to close. It was like moving circus tents. At first there was no response. It was as though I were trying to animate a dead body. After hours of tormenting effort I felt my left eyelid drop a trifle! The other followed. Time without end I struggled. At last my eyelids closed.

" 'Still that white light beating into my brain softened only a trifle and still that unbearable coldness seared my face and congealed my soul. The feeling was similar to that which follows injection of a local anesthetic. But who ever has felt the jab of a hypodermic needle into the very spirit rather than the body?

" 'The others were not, I think, able to do what I had accomplished. I heard their weakening screams continue until, after an eternity of agony, we completed the circuit of the moon and plunged back toward the earth.'

"THE twisted creature in the wheel chair ended his story, gulped another glass of whisky as I am gulping this one, my friend, then burst again into that soul-chilling laughter.

"When the paroxysm had passed he looked up and said simply: 'When I get

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Creeping Fingers

By LORETTA G. BURROUGH

A mystery-tale of the thing that slithered through the bathroom door and flopped into the tub—a thrill-tale of shuddery horror

I WAS so dead tired that the snow swirling about my face, and the cold wind blowing in chill gusts down the side streets, were the only things that kept me from falling asleep on my feet. Had it not been for the storm, I could have cheerfully leaned against a wall and closed my eyes, but its fierce violence drove me onward through the snow drifting high, and the fierce blasts of the midwestern blizzard. I kept saying to myself, "Not much farther now, and then a bath, and bed," but it was queer how the few blocks from the station to the hotel stretched themselves. An Olympic runner at the end of a long race could not have been more tired than I when at last I crawled through the revolving doors into the hot, glaring warmth of the foyer of the Hoffman House, Benton's hotel.

I wanted only one thing, room and bath, and said as much to the drowsy night clerk, stodgily on duty at the desk.

"Room and bath, sir?" he said, conserving his words with the economy of the weary. " 'Fraid not."

"What do you mean, 'fraid not?" I demanded.

"Convention here at Benton, no room."

"No room! Well, where the devil do you expect me to sleep? In the station? I've been travelling two days and nights, and a bath and room I will have!"

I was angry, with the sudden heat of the worn-out. We stood at an impasse, I glaring heatedly at the clerk, and he staring dazedly at me, quite unable in his experience to find any solution for the problem.

"What's this, Kennedy? Being insolent to a guest?" A large robust gentleman stood at my elbow.

The clerk shuffled into an alert attitude.

"No, sir. Mr. Hardy, this gentleman wants a room and bath, and I was telling him on account of the convention we haven't any."

"You see," I explained, "I'm dog-tired. I've been on the road for weeks; I've just made a long sleeper jump, and I want a room and bath. This is the only decent hotel in town, so I came here."

"I see, sir," the manager was very deferential. "Well, we'll see if we can't possibly fix you up. Are *all* the rooms occupied?" he asked, turning to the clerk.

"Yes, Mr. Hardy."

"Um. This convention . . . well, how about 317?"

"That's empty, of course."

"Um."

"Well," I said, breaking in as the prospect of a haven began to show through the murk, "if 317's unoccupied, I shall take it!"

The manager stood there a moment, saying nothing.

"You see," he began, "317's not occupied much. People complain of the location or something; they say it's too cold. I shouldn't advise you to take the room, sir. People don't like it. However, it *is* the only unoccupied one tonight. It has a bath attached."

"I don't care anything about the location. If there isn't any objection. I shall take it. Particularly, since it has a bath attached."

"Well, perhaps I should suggest, if you took just the room, and didn't use the

"In that long moment before I switched on the light I fancied I saw some one lying supine in the bottom of the tub."

bath? The bath isn't opened much, it's rather damp. People don't like it."

I stood staring at him, wondering what could ail this manager who could find so few good points about his rooms. He had been anxious enough to find a place for me before. But I could not but pause to wonder about his vagaries. With all its drawbacks, real or imaginary, 317 had begun to appear to me a haven of rest.

"I shall take it, damp, bad location, too chilly, everything, *with* bath attached."

The manager stood there a moment longer, then, with a shrug, said, "Certainly, sir," and called, "Front."

THE boy took my bags, which by now I thought had begun to wear through the muscles of my shoulders, and led me to a gusty elevator that creaked its way upward for two stories, then along hot and carpeted corridors, past closed doors through which I could hear blasts of merrymaking from the convention, into a long and narrow passage, remote and quiet, and noticeably chill and drafty. He paused before a door at one end of the corridor, and began to fumble with the key in the lock. I stood beside him, noticing the quiet of the passage as compared with the robust noise of the other corridors. "Very quiet here, isn't it?" I said.

"Yes, sir," the boy looked up. "You see, this is the only bedroom on the gallery. The others," he gestured to other dark brown doors opening out onto the worn, red-carpeted hall, "are just storerooms, for odds and ends, and linen, and things like that. This room ain't used much, it ain't used at all, that is to say. Not lately, that is. It's sort of damp and chilly, people say."

"Damp and chilly? Why should it be damp and chilly? This isn't the seashore."

"I dunno, sir." The boy had the key in the lock, and the door opened. A gust

of swamp-like chill rushed out to meet us, as palpable as a rush of wind.

"Shut the windows in here," I said, advancing into the room behind him. "It's damned cold."

"They're shut, sir," he muttered, slipping the electric switch, and letting a flood of chill white glare over the room.

I went over to the flaky radiator immediately, and bent to turn on the heat. The steam immediately hissed through the pipes loudly. "It's funny," I said, looking at the boy, who stood near the door, "this room's as cold as the inside of a tomb."

"Yes, sir, people complain about it, and don't stay."

"Well, I don't care," I looked about me once more; "all I want is a bath and a bed to sleep in."

"Yes, sir." I handed him his tip, and he hurried out, his footsteps beating a rapid retreat down the corridor, toward warmth, I fancied.

THE cheerless room was still as cold as the inside of a refrigerator car although the heat was now dancing through the pipes and quivering above the radiator. "It'll have to warm up soon," I said to myself, and began to take off my clothes. When I had gotten half-way undressed to the tune of the noisy pipes and the battering of the wind and the sleet, I went to the bathroom to turn on the hot water for my bath.

When I entered the room, I was startled. It was almost as large as an old-fashioned kitchen; it was cold, and damp, and dark, and the huge old tub had high sides. It looked like one of those old monstrosities that had been current in the early day of plumbing, and the whole room had the air of being out of place. It was hideous, and cheerless.

I shivered and went back into the cold bedroom, well understanding the state of mind that could prompt people to give up the barren, unpleasant room. I sat on the edge of the bed, half awake, and listened to the monotonous sound of the bath filling. It was the only noise I could hear, although I listened carefully. No sound of distant revelry reached me, no noises from the street. I got up and moved to the window, pulling aside the skimpy curtain. I looked down upon a cheerless row of empty stables around a dark alley, utterly lonely and abandoned-looking, under the faint light of a feeble arc. Over everything the snow eddied about in drifting gusts.

"God," I said, "what a prospect! That and the cold combined must have discouraged the tenants."

I turned back into the room, wondering why a hotel could be such an incredibly dreary place, particularly a country hotel. After a while, when the bath began to sound as if it were full, I picked up my fresh pajamas, and opened the bathroom door. I stared a moment, gasped, and pulled on the electric light switch. The light from the high white globe streaked out over the bare room and the deep shadow cast by the basin, into the bottom of the tub, filled with green water swirling and steaming, sending up hot smoke into the cold air.

I gazed a long moment into the bottom of the tub, and laid my pajamas over the side of the stool, shivering and feeling decidedly ill. For, in that long moment before I had switched on the light, I had fancied I had seen some one lying supine in the bottom of the tub. I went over to it and stared down into its depths, between the chill, grayish-looking marble sides to the bottom where the hot water was steaming and gurgling and bubbling as the cascade from the pipe fell fountain-like, downward. It was empty; the faint shadow that I stooped down to touch was

my own, cast by the ceiling light, like a small sun, that hung obliquely above my head. I shivered a bit in the damp air; despite the hot vapor of the steam that was now filling the room the air was still chill and faintly redolent of the earth, the odor of a necropolis in the rain. I looked about me, and wondered where the odor could be coming from, and what made these two rooms so cheerless, and repulsive, and, I fancied, so malignant. And what was it I fancied I had seen prostrate in the bottom of the tub?

I went back to the doorway and stared again into the room, at the tub, after switching off the light. The little oblong of yellow light from the bedroom streamed in upon the grayish marble of the floor, and my shadow stood before me, long and inquiring, with distorted head turned questioningly toward the high bulk in the corner of the room, but that was all. There was nothing lying, long and horribly supine and limp, in the bottom of the high white tub.

I grunted, whether in satisfaction or in annoyance at myself, I could not tell, turned on the light, slipped off my bathrobe, and stood testing the heat of the water with my finger. I let a little cold water out of the faucet, and then got into the tub. I had realized how high the thing was when I stood looking at it, but when I lay down in it, the white sides seemed to come suddenly together over my head, and I sat up, startled. The depth of it was extraordinary, and I decided that it must certainly have originated in some bygone age of plumbing, for such monstrosities were not tolerated today. Sitting upright as I was, the top of the tub was on a level with my eyes, and lying down, I could see nothing but its sides and the high, cold-looking globe of the ceiling light which shed its sickly glow over the room.

But I was tired, worn-out, and the water that gurgled loudly from the pipes, in the silence, was hot and soothing to my weary body and fatigued nerves. Hideous though the room was, hard the storm that banged at the window, and cold and repulsive the tub, at least I could build for myself, with hot water and soap, a little haven against the harshness of my surroundings.

I lay down in the bottom, and again experienced the sudden sensation that the sides were closing around me, but this time I did not sit up, for I was growing warm, and sleep, like a hot blanket, was closing around my nerves and brain. I lay still, and may have dozed, thinking of home and the happy fact that I would soon be there.

Then, slowly, I began to grow conscious again, dully, sleepily, with my brain functioning as if in a dream. I grew aware of the fact, as if beneath a layer of wool that was gently numbing my faculties, that somewhere near at hand a door had very softly closed. I lay there a while softly mulling it over, drawing from it no meaning, foggily arguing with myself, wondering. One of the servants, perhaps, had closed a door along the corridor. No, it had sounded nearer than that, much nearer. I didn't know, I couldn't bother. I was growing drowsy again, sinking easily along pleasant paths down to a blissful know-nothingness when a voice within my brain shouted violently, "Wake up! Save yourself!"

My eyes jerked open as if by cords that had suddenly contracted, and the sweat of sudden fright stood out on my forehead. Convulsively, every muscle in my body jerked and stiffened, and my hands closed into fists. What was it, that sudden voice that shocked me into alertness, what was it that had startled me out of the mists of weariness and sleep, what was there to be

afraid of? I stared about me and sat up. Nothing was changed in the room, nothing was out of order. The cheerless cracked sink still stood in the corner, and one of its taps still drearily dripped; over the peeling yellow stool were thrown my clean pajamas and a towel, and my toothbrush and the red tube of paste still lay upon the basin. Whence, then, came that extraordinary impression that something was different? Nothing was different; the air was still as funereally cold, the storm still sucked about the windows, and yet change there was; something had changed that subconsciously I did not like. I stared at the sides of the tub, turned away, then violently turned back. What were they, those pools of mist?

On a level with my eyes, upon the chill surface of the marble edge were five little circles of mist, fluctuating, moving, and ominous. I couldn't understand them, and I stared again. Five pools of mist spaced unevenly apart, four close together, and one a little distance of a few inches away from the others. Suddenly they lifted and dissolved away, then again they reappeared, a little nearer to me, at a different place. Stupidly I put out my hand and laid it on the side of the marble to brace myself, lifted it off again, and stared at the impression of five circles of rapidly dissolving mist that it had left. What was it then, whose five fingers made those little pools of mist—just like the fading spots left by my fingers—what was it then, that had its hand on the side of the tub?

I crowded back against the far wall and watched that marble expanse where the five imprints moved. An instant, and suddenly, with a pounce, the impression of five fingers was not alone. A foot away, and as clearly and distinctly as warm fingers print on ice, the imprint of another hand stood out, and immediately I became conscious of the change in the room that had bothered me before. I looked breathlessly toward the door, and saw, instead of the lamp with its circle of light on the bedroom table, only the closed dark brown panels of the bathroom door. It was shut, and I had left it open. What then was it that had come through the door, softly shutting it behind it, when I was half asleep? What then was it that was shut up with me in the room, and had its invisible hands on the side of the tub? I looked at the pools of mist, not calmly, but with a choking sensation that I had become tangled in a web of madness, that it was a horrible nightmare and could not last. I could not move; my starting eyes were fixed on those melting and moving impressions on the marble. Another moment, and I could find my voice and cry out, but not now. Suddenly, I could almost see the marble spurned; the fingerprints were gone; malignantly, the hands were free. Something that I could not see was coming at me over the side of the tub.

I turned my head away, and cried out in a voice that terror lent power to. I felt myself slipping darkly into the water, sensation ebbing away into a chill blackness that was quiet and cold and burned with light that dashed across darkness.

"Now," a voice was speaking very far away, "when he wakes up give him something very light, Miss Daly, nothing heavy, not even if he asks for it. And remember, absolutely no conversation. If he wants to talk, if he starts asking questions, simply refuse to speak to him. I'll be in first thing in the morning."

The voices moved away, and I opened my eyes, painfully. I was warmly heaped with blankets, and the fresh odor of clean wool filled the room. The place was unfamiliar and warm, and a spoon stood in

a glass on the table, and beside it a bottle. I opened my mouth to call, and found I could not. My throat was exceedingly raw, and I felt as if I had been smothered in water, but I lay there, my eyes on the bright glow of the unfamiliar lamp, and my brain idly tracing the pattern on its shade. I knew there were things I should be thinking of, puzzling over, but with every muscle aching and my whole body and brain a raw torture, I wanted only to sleep.

The door opened, and the nurse came in, brisk, pleasant, bright-faced. "Awake, are you? How do you feel?"

"Sick," I groaned. "What's this all about, anyhow? Where am I?"

"Never mind." She busied herself with the peculiar industriousness which is the characteristic of nurses. "You're to rest, and sleep, and that's absolutely all. Now I'll get you some tea and toast."

She was gone, and when she came back with the food, I ate it, and went to sleep soon after.

A WEEK later I was sitting in the office of the manager of the Hoffman House, a glass at my side and a cigar between my lips, and listening.

"Well," he began rather awkwardly, his eyes on the rug beneath his feet, "I'm awfully sorry about this matter, Mr. Kent. I know it's been a terrible experience for you."

I nodded, and before my eyes rose the picture of that damp, chill room, the wisps of steam from the bath curling up into the dank air, and the high walls of the great tub rising about me and shutting out everything except the frozen-looking globe of the light. And again I seemed to hear a door close softly, and again I seemed to stare at changing pools of mist moving on marble's surface. . . . I shuddered and lifted the full glass to my lips. I could never forget that experience; a week's trying had only dimmed the first raw horror a little.

"Now," I said, setting down the glass suddenly, "I want to hear an explanation. I have been put off for a week, and the whole thing haunts me. Please tell me what it means."

"I don't know that I should tell you. Perhaps the whole thing might better be forgotten. Of course you know the rooms are being dismantled, and will be used again only for storage?"

I nodded. I had heard the sounds of hammering and moving going on near me for several days, and I had asked the nurse what they were doing. I was glad they were breaking up the rooms. At least they would no longer have a concrete existence.

He took his gaze from the carpet and looked at me.

"This whole thing happened before I became manager of the hotel, so I had no personal knowledge of the matter. . . . Anyhow, well, you want to hear what happened the night you were in there." He gestured toward the ceiling, and I knew he referred to my unfortunate occupancy of 317 and bath.

"Yes," I said, and he went on.

"That night everything was going on quite as usual, when I happened to stroll down the corridor on which 317 was situated." He paused, and seemed to shiver. "I was going to check up on the housekeeper's tally of the linen, which hadn't quite suited me, and I noticed how infernally damp the passage was. This was about half past eleven, you know, about an hour after you'd gone up to the room. I went into the storeroom, and was taking stock of the linen in the closets, and so forth, when I heard you yell. Well," he paused and took a sip from his glass, "I ran out to the corridor—I knew where it

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The Earth-Owners

By EDMOND HAMILTON

A strange story of beings from outside, that fought for the ownership of our world

CARTER and I were lounging with Randon in his cottage at Boston's western edge on the day the black clouds came. It was our habit to spend our week-ends there with Randon, whose powerful if unorthodox mind, and vigorous expression, made him the most stimulating of companions.

Randon on that afternoon would talk only of the black clouds. These had been seen by astronomers lately, groups of dark clouds apparently moving in toward the earth from space, visible against the stars. The newspapers had made much of them and there had been many theories about them.

Of these theories the one Randon expressed to us was the strangest. He had been scoffing at the published suggestions of scientists that the clouds were drifting gases from nebulæ or comets, or clouds of cosmic dust, and that chance had brought them drifting through space to earth.

"Why do they talk of chance?" he demanded. "Why don't they see the natural explanation—that these black clouds are living things winging toward earth out of space?"

"You don't think," said Carter, "that clouds of gas or dust can be living things?"

"Why not?" Randon demanded. "When we know of solid life and liquid life, what is impossible about gaseous life? They might even be not gas or dust but force, volitional creatures with bodies of tangible energy.

"They might be intelligent as well as living, for all we know, coming in from outer space to explore our world. They might be coming for reasons incomprehensible to us. *They might be the owners of the earth coming to visit their property!*"

"Owners of the earth? What the devil do you mean, Randon?" I asked.

For answer Randon strode to a shelf and pulled down a thick red book, opened it rapidly and found a page. He looked up from it to us.

"Listen to these words of Charles Fort, whose mind has explored the dark gulfs from which most minds reel back."

He read in a clear voice: " 'I think we're property. I should say we belong to something. That once upon a time, this earth was a No-Man's-Land, that other worlds explored and colonized here, and fought among themselves for possession, but that now it's owned by something. That something owns this earth—all others warned off.' "

Randon shut the book, looked up at us. "It's a strange idea," I said.

"Strange only to those who have never reflected on it," he answered. "We lords of creation, we humans who dominate the other animals of earth so completely, how few of us have ever dreamed that perhaps our earth and ourselves are owned as completely as we own a game-preserve and its animals!

"Yet there must be intelligences in the universe as far above ours as ours are above the animals. They must in past ages have come to this earth and, as Fort says, fought here among themselves for its possession until now one race of these

"I felt myself grasped; a tentacle of light wrapped around me."

intelligences owns earth and all on it—all other races warned off!"

"What evidence is there of it?" Carter demanded. "If earth is owned by a race of super-beings why haven't they ever appeared on it?"

"They may not have had use yet for earth and its inhabitants," Randon said. "They may have acquired it and then left it unused for ages, just as some of us might buy a game-preserve and never go near it for years. The animals in it wouldn't dream that the preserve and they were owned—until the owners came hunting."

"I hope you're not suggesting that earth is some sort of super-game-preserve for your super-intelligences?" I asked.

"It might be, Sterling. For all we know earth's owners may have let us spawn unchecked on it so there would be plenty of us when the time came for them to make use of us."

"A rather grim theory," Carter remarked. "Why not suppose that your earth-owners have beneficent intentions toward us, and that they own earth only to keep other super-races from falling upon us?"

"That might be," Randon said thoughtfully, "though we've no grounds for imagining a beneficent race of super-beings."

"We have the fact that in all our records earth has not been invaded by any hostile super-beings," Carter pointed out, "and that would seem to indicate that your earth-owners have guards or sentries around earth to turn back such hostile beings."

"Well, if these black clouds that started us all off are really the earth-owners," I

commented, "we might soon see whether they're beneficent or not."

Carter smiled. "What a jolt it would be to humanity to find out that its planet was owned as we might own a farm!"

WE TALKED on, discussing the idea. Randon, I remember, held forth at length upon the stupidity of orthodox scientists in denying all external interference with the earth. Carter tended rather to defend the scientists and I lounged by the open door, enjoying their argument and keeping it alive by well-timed provocative remarks.

Now and then I looked idly through the door over the panorama of Boston's sunlit roofs, stretching to the blue bay, and was so looking when I started suddenly to my feet. In the sky, which had been quite clear all that day, had appeared high up a group of three peculiarly dense-looking black clouds, moving smoothly southward.

For a moment I told myself that it was our talk of the black clouds from space that made me think the appearance of these unusual, but almost at once I saw that this was not so and that these clouds were in fact highly unusual. For they were moving southward *against the wind!*

I cried out and Randon and Carter hastened to my side, gazed up with me. The clouds had apparently halted now high above the city, unmoving despite the strong wind blowing. Each seemed a half-mile or more in diameter. And as we watched we saw that they had now begun *to descend vertically upon the city!*

"Good God, they're some of the clouds from space!" Randon cried instantly. "They're living things, as I thought, coming down on the city!"

"But it's impossible!" Carter was exclaiming. "How can a cloud of vapor move like that against the wind?"

"They move as any living thing can move, as they moved through space to earth!" Randon cried. "By heaven, they're the earth-owners we were talking about, appearing on earth at last!"

We stared transfixed. The three clouds in a moment had settled down on the middle section of Boston, blotting a great area of it from sight. They looked like three huge ink-blots on the city's area, or three black lakes of vapor.

We could glimpse a frantic panic and confusion around the edges of the three resting clouds, could see men and women in the sidewalks and streets rushing away from them in all directions. The three clouds rested but a moment where they had first descended, then rose a little and descended upon new sections of the city.

In the sections they had just quitted we saw no life or movement at all, but only the sprawled forms, tiny at our distance, of motionless people! They lay at random in the streets and ways, singly and in groups, quite motionless and silent.

"Great God, they're dead—the clouds killed them all in some way in that moment!" I cried.

"And look — they're moving out over the whole city, they're taking it section by section!" Carter cried.

For the three black clouds had moved again, leaving the streets over which they had hovered devoid like the others of life and motion, shifting their position.

They were three huge black vampires hanging upon the city and draining its life in some way in tremendous single gulps! Far out to the city's outermost edges the alarm was spreading now, bells ringing and whistles screaming. Terror was spreading like flame.

Randon's eyes were brilliant with horror. "They are the earth-owners!" he cried. "The owners of the earth come out

of space to exploit earth and all us upon it!"

Carter yelled, pointed upward. "Two more clouds—they're coming down on us!"

Two more of the black clouds had appeared high over us and were descending now like the others, coming almost straight down.

Randon shouted, and we leapt out with him into his parked car. The motor hummed, we shot down the suburban street toward the west at top speed. People in doorways and on the sidewalks were screaming and looking upward.

The sunlight about us was suddenly cut off by a monstrous spreading shadow. I looked up, saw the edge of one of the descending clouds directly above us, and no more than a hundred feet over us by then.

We could not escape it, it seemed. Randon's foot jammed the car's accelerator against the floor; it leapt forward with greatest speed, and at the same moment the cloud's black mass came down even faster, it seemed. An instant later and it was over, the cloud was resting with the other on the suburb we had just quitted and the car was roaring down the road.

"Keep on!" Carter cried. "They'll be moving again in a moment!"

Randon held tightly to the wheel as we shot around a curve and up a long grade bordered on either side by suburban estates.

Looking back I saw the two clouds we had so narrowly escaped shifting their position, moving southward over the suburbs. The streets they quitted held groups of unmoving dead.

Eastward beyond those two clouds I saw the three others we had first glimpsed moving steadily over the city's eastern sections, pausing and moving on and pausing again as they drained the city's life!

Our car reached the long grade's summit and Randon brought it to a halt. We stared back, dazedly.

Boston was a scene out of nightmare to our eyes, the five great black clouds shifting and battening upon it, thin streams of frenzied fiugitives already emerging from it in all directions.

Most of the clamor of whistles and bells had ceased. We saw motorboats and small craft beginning to swarm frantically out into the harbor, but as though aware of this one of the black clouds swept out, rested for a moment over the shipping, and then moved on along the waterfront. The boats drove aimlessly after that, those in them motionless.

Randon cried out. "Look up there—northward!"

"My God, more of them!" I exclaimed.

A group of nine black clouds was sailing southward against the wind, at a height of more than a mile.

As we watched, two of these dropped down and joined the five that had fastened upon Boston. The others, after slowing a little, continued southward until out of sight.

"Black clouds from space—the astronomers saw dozens of groups of them," Randon said chokingly. "That means hundreds of them, that have arrived here on earth!"

"It's insane, unreal!" Carter said. "Black clouds that settle on cities and drain their people's life—we're dreaming!"

"We have been dreaming, mankind has been dreaming." Randon's voice was heavy, fateful. "But mankind is just now awaking, awaking to the fact that it is owned and that its owners have come to exploit it."

A CAR, swaying drunkenly, roared up the grade at high speed and halted beside us. Far down the grade we could see a confused approaching crowd of automobiles and people on foot.

From the car that had halted beside us its driver hailed us, in a shaky voice. He was a middle-aged man whose face was white to the lips, and whose hands trembled violently.

"What's happened down there?" he cried, his voice rising almost to a shriek. "What are those clouds? They've killed thousands, tens of thousands down there. Are they poison gas—is this a war of some kind?"

"They're not poison-gas, they're living," Randon told him solemnly, "and this is not a war—no more than it is war when a farmer goes into his chicken-yard and kills off his chickens."

"What are you talking about?" the other cried. "I tell you those clouds have killed half the people in Boston already!"

He stared back down over the city. "They're keeping moving," he said. "I'm going to get out of here."

His car roared off down the road. By then other cars crammed with terror-stricken fugitives were speeding past us.

The seven clouds were still fastened upon Boston, moving over it with momentary pauses, shifting from section to section as though intent on covering every part of the city in turn.

"Randon, what are we going to do?" Carter demanded. "Man, we can't stay here long!"

Randon's lips compressed. "These clouds are going to overturn all human organizations on earth," he said. "It's evident that they feed on life in some way, killing instantly those from whom they drain the life. It's evident too that they'll not leave earth until they've denuded it of life!"

"Well, humanity has got to fight, even against those owners of earth. Sooner or later there will be some organized resistance to them and its headquarters will probably be near New York. The thing for us to do is to find whatever headquarters of resistance is established, and help with what we know about the clouds. So I say, start south to New York."

"New York it is, then," I said, "but let's get going now before one of those clouds comes up this way."

Randon threw in the clutch and we shot forward. A few other automobiles from Boston were still fleeing past us but it was evident from their small number that comparatively few had escaped from the city after the first alarm.

RANDON drove west for a short time and then turned southwestward. The roads we followed gave us evidence enough that the terror was swiftly spreading. An exodus from the whole region was starting, fugitive cars streaming on the roads and blocking crossroads with traffic-jams. Many were starting along the roads on foot.

All of these fear-driven people knew that Boston had been swept of life but nearly all seemed to think it had been done by a gas-attack from airplanes, even eye-witnesses believing that. There was much shouted speculation as to the identity of the attackers. We were driving through the turmoil of a land waking to sudden terror.

Twice in the first hour of our drive we saw groups of the black clouds passing high overhead. One was a group of eleven and the other of eight, both heading southward. The fugitives in the roads scattered into fields and woods at sight of them, but in spite of our sharp fear these clouds passed on without descending.

"God knows how many of these clouds

came to earth in those groups," Randon said. "They must have reached earth somewhere north of here, and are gradually spreading southward."

"How can we hope to resist them?" I exclaimed. "What good will guns and planes and bombs be against clouds of gas?"

He shook his head, almost hopelessly, driving on. A few minutes later we saw three more clouds, these ones going slowly southwestward.

When we reached the edge of Dedham haggard-faced men in the road informed us that all life in the town had been wiped out by two clouds that had descended on Dedham more than a half-hour before. We drove on through the town, however.

People lay in its streets and doorways in hundreds, cold and stiff. They showed no sign of asphyxiation or any other natural or known death; rather it was as though their life had simply been instantaneously drained from them. The alarm had apparently just reached the place before the clouds came; for some of these dead of Dedham had obviously been starting to flee.

As we drove through the death-smitten town Carter's eyes caught a radio-store and we stopped and listened for a brief time to one of its sets. A dozen stations were broadcasting excited warnings of the clouds that had come to earth, and bulletins as to their progress. We listened there in the Dedham radio-store to the first echoes of the disruption of civilization.

There were about two hundred of the clouds in all, we learned, and they had appeared together over Maine an hour or more before any of them had reached Boston. After their first appearance they had spread forth in all directions, most of them moving southward. Wherever was a city, a town, a hamlet even, a cloud or clouds would drop on it and in a moment drain its life and leave it peopled by corpses.

The clouds had reached as far south in Connecticut as Bridgeport and were still moving on in groups of various numbers. A tremendous exodus from New York City and its metropolitan area was already under way, the announcers stated, and the wildest scenes were being enacted. All over the eastern United States, in fact, panic was emptying towns and cities.

The nature of the clouds, it was added, was still unknown, but it was believed that they were not as first thought mere man-released volumes of poison-gas, but were in fact living, gaseous things that fed in some way upon the life of those they killed. It was believed that they had reached earth from space, as a similar group of black clouds had been seen by astronomers approaching earth.

In any case, resistance to them was already being prepared, the announcers stated. Ordinary weapons were useless against the clouds, it was evident, but a congress of scientists and military men was already being called to gather at Falmouth, a village in the New Jersey hills fifty miles west of New York. In this obscure spot, which would be less liable to an attack by the clouds, measures to check and repel the invasion of the clouds would be prepared as swiftly as possible.

"They're awaking now to what is happening!" exclaimed Randon. "But even now they think these clouds are mere invaders from space, instead of owners come to exploit their property!"

"But they're getting ready to resist them, at least," I said. "We head now for Falmouth?"

Randon nodded. "Yes, we'll cross Connecticut and get to the west side of the Hudson, then head south."

We left Dedham to its silence and

death and drove on, heading southwestward. The first Connecticut town we entered, Putnam, proved a replica of Dedham.

DURING the next hours it was as though we were driving through some weird new world instead of through familiar country. Tolland—Hartford—Waterbury, every town we passed through and almost every village had its sprawled groups of dead.

The fugitives on the roads were much fewer, though. For the most part people had left the roads and were hiding in woods or beating across country. We saw why when we passed crowds of dead on the roads, mobs of fugitives that some passing cloud had descended upon.

Twice we saw clouds in the distance, and as we crossed from Connecticut into New York above Danbury five clouds passed almost overhead. They were going very rapidly southwestward, and we kept our car beneath a tree until they were out of sight.

When we reached the west side of the Hudson and started south along it we found more people about. The towns and villages along the Hudson were not such scenes of death as those we had come from, for they had had some warning and many in them had escaped. People shouted to us that there were many clouds abroad southward, but we drove on.

Along the lower Hudson, except for the numberless fugitives in the fields, the whole countryside seemed deserted save for the dead in towns and villages. As we approached Newburgh a man driving north alone from that direction hailed us. He was a thin person over middle age, his face twitching as he spoke.

"Newburgh has only dead—the clouds are everywhere south of here," he told us. "I've come from Jersey City and only got through them by a miracle."

"Had they reached New York when you were there?" Carter asked. The other nodded, his eyes horror-stamped still.

"It was terrible there. At first the alarm of the clouds' coming wasn't believed and then suddenly every one seemed trying to get out of the city. But half the people of New York must still have been in the city when the clouds came.

"We could see the clouds dropping on the bridges to get those fleeing on them, others on the shipping in the harbor. As I drove north along the New Jersey side of the river I saw fully thirty clouds fastened on New York and Brooklyn and the Jersey cities behind me.

"A cloud dropped down on a lot of us on the road south of Haverstraw," he added. "I was almost the only one that escaped."

"We're heading down into New Jersey ourselves," Randon told him. "A place called Falmouth that is to be headquarters of the resistance against the clouds."

"I know Falmouth," he said. "But you'll have to circle to the west to have any chance of getting there, for the clouds are all about the cities and towns south of here."

We took his advice, veering westward and approaching the northwestern corner of New Jersey by a wide detour.

When we entered the New Jersey hills it was late afternoon, and we found people in the villages through which we passed fully informed, by their radios, of the clouds' progress. We learned that clouds had already reached Philadelphia, which had been deserted before their coming by its panic-driven population. The most of the clouds were apparently by then over lower New York and New Jersey, methodically descending on any fair-

sized crowds of humans they encountered.

These small villages in the western New Jersey hills had not been visited by any clouds so far, though their inhabitants were ready to flee at a moment's notice. We slept in our car in a thicket outside one of these hamlets that night, for we had found we could not reach Falmouth until the next morning.

WHEN we did reach Falmouth in the morning we found the small village thronged with the soldiers and scientists that had gathered there, mostly by plane, to make the place the headquarters of whatever resistance against the clouds might be organized. War Secretary Munson had just arrived by plane from Washington to take charge of the conference that was held in the brick high-school's auditorium just before noon.

Munson, his face drawn from a sleepless night, heard first the opinions of the scientists as to the nature of the clouds.

These scientists, among them Doctor Rillard, the biologist, the astronomers Hackner and Bent, Doctor Madison Lowell and three other famous physicists, delivered their opinions briefly.

Hackner summed up what they thought. "These black clouds are indisputably living things of gaseous constitution that have reached earth from some other world or worlds in space. We astronomers had glimpsed them several times lately, recognizing them as dark clouds nearing earth but of course having no conception of them as sentient beings.

"It is apparent that they can remove the life of all forms of human and animal life by some means which we can not guess, but which operates instantaneously. As they are at present systematically draining the life from earth's peoples wherever they find them, we are forced to the conclusion that they are ingesting into themselves in some way this life or vital principle, and that their invasion of earth is for the sole purpose of so feeding themselves upon earth's life."

Randon interjected a quick question when Hackner finished. "Is it so certain that these clouds are mere invaders of earth?" he asked.

"I don't understand your meaning," said Hackner.

"It is my belief," Randon said, "that these clouds are in a real sense the owners of this earth, that they have known of its existence for very long and have let humanity multiply unchecked on it until now, when they have come to exploit their property.

"This would explain," Randon added, "why no other predatory form of life from outside space has ever fallen upon earth before this, since the clouds owning earth would naturally guard their property until they were ready themselves to use it."

Bent, the other astronomer, nodded excitedly. "I think that I have some corroboration of that view," he said. "It arises from some observations of mine made two days ago.

"I was trying, as most astronomers have been doing, to observe the dark clouds reported approaching earth, and finally was able to glimpse them against some star-clusters. But I saw for a few moments an extraordinary spectacle, there being visible not only the black clouds but what seemed two or three globes of light also.

"The clouds and the light-globes seemed circling or moving round each other very rapidly, mingling and mixing, until finally the clouds appeared to envelope and destroy all the light-globes but one. That one darted off into space and the clouds then seemed to drift on toward earth. They must have been very close to earth at that time."

"That's proof of what I've been say-

ing," Randon declared. "Undoubtedly the light-globes you saw were some other strange form of life from space approaching earth, and beaten off by the black clouds who are the owners of earth."

"We astronomers have more than once glimpsed light-globes moving in space near earth," Hackner conceded, "though without ever thinking them living things. Yet these clouds are living undoubtedly, and so must the light-globes be too."

"But, gentlemen," Munson intervened, "granted that these clouds are in a sense the owners of earth and the light-globes you speak of another alien form of life, how are we to deal with the situation that the coming of the clouds has precipitated? Earth-owners or not, we can not let them destroy us—we must make resistance!"

"It seems to me," said Doctor Lowell briefly, "that immediate resistance is out of the question. We must first find in what way the clouds are vulnerable, if any, and then devise ways of attacking them."

"But what of civilization, of humanity, in the meantime?" Munson asked. "I have received terrifying reports in the last hour. The clouds are as far south as Baltimore and as far west as Harrisburg. Washington was evacuated last night, the government's seat being moved to Chicago for the time being, and all over the eastern half of this country towns and cities and villages are emptying streams of fugitives, already fleeing in fear of the clouds!

"Panic is beginning to convulse the whole continent, the whole world! In the few places where troops or planes have tried to resist the clouds they have found their weapons quite useless. No weapon in present use, indeed, seems of any avail against them, and yet unless their progress is checked, within days civilization as we know it will have dissolved and the clouds will be hunting down the survivors of humanity across the face of the earth!"

Rillard, the biologist, spoke thoughtfully. "As I see it, the only way in which a thing of gaseous body could be harmed would be by attacking it with gases which would compound with the gases of its own body and so destroy it."

"But what gases could be used for that —what ones would have that effect?" Munson asked.

Rillard shook his head. "We don't know and can only find out by experimenting with the thing until we find a gas that will destroy or neutralize the organic gases of their bodies. Why, even the idea of organic gases was undreamed by any of us until these things appeared."

"I would suggest, then," Hackner advanced, "that temporary laboratories be set up here as quickly as possible. It may be that analysis of bodies of those killed by the clouds will yield some light on their nature."

Rillard nodded. "That's our only chance of finding out anything about them, for it's certain we'll never get a sample of the clouds themselves."

"Then start this work as soon as possible," Munson urged, "for unless we learn some way of fighting these things soon it's all up. I'll radio Chicago to get as many planes here with technicians and the equipment you want as soon as possible. They'll have to take their chance with the clouds."

"I've had chemical training and experience," Randon told him, "and would be glad to help in any way. Carter and Sterling too, though they've no technical knowledge."

"We can use them," Munson said. "God knows we need all the help we can get."

THE next days in Falmouth were to Carter and me confused periods of unceasing action. Planes were coming in constantly from the west with scientists and equipment, and a dozen laboratories were hastily established in various buildings of the village. Rillard and his assistants had already begun in one the analysis of dead brought from cities stricken by the clouds, seeking to find by this examination some light as to the clouds' nature.

Carter and I toiled at the unloading and setting-up of various equipment, Randon working day-long in one of the chemical laboratories with the sweating chemists who were producing various gases to be tested against the clouds. Falmouth was the center of a tense, desperate activity, yet in all our hearts we thought it a futile activity, like the tiny swarmings and attempts at repairings of ants whose hill a careless foot has crushed.

For while we worked furiously at Falmouth under Munson's direction, the clouds were spreading calmly outward. By the fourth day the area they had swept over stretched from Canada to North Carolina, and from the Atlantic Ocean to western Ohio. The thousands of communities in that area, large and small, were dead and deserted, for wherever the clouds found masses of humanity they descended on them.

Across the whole country people were deserting cities, shunning crowds, hiding in little groups in forests and fields, fearing the coming of the clouds. All weapons had proved useless, and as the clouds advanced the seat of the government had been moved farther west, from Chicago to Des Moines.

The world was aghast at the sight of these huge black vampires from the void that were draining the life of a nation, and the world chilled with fear of the time when the clouds would have traversed all its surface. A thousand ways of fighting them were suggested, by scientists and laymen, but most were too impracticable even to try.

By then a dozen experimental stations like our own at Falmouth were being set up in different parts of the country, working on the same lines, trying to ascertain enough about the enigmatic clouds to suggest some way of fighting them. Three of these stations were destroyed in as many days by clouds that descended on them.

We at Falmouth twice saw groups of clouds at a distance, moving slowly over the countryside and descending on stray fugitives here and there in roads or fields. Both times they passed without nearing Falmouth, but we could not know at what moment clouds would come down upon us and end our work.

And our work seemed useless. Rillard and Lowell and our other scientists found no clue whatever to the clouds' nature in the dead they examined. Those dead had been killed, apparently, not by any damage to their bodies but by a simple draining of the life from them. The thing was beyond comprehension. And the gases our chemists produced, when tested against clouds by self-sacrificing volunteers, proved harmless to them.

Randon, after a week of our work, voiced to Carter and me what we all were thinking, we having walked to the village's edge that night.

"It's hopeless," he said. "Do you know what we are? We're sheep, running helplessly around while the butchers pick some of us here and some there. Sheep who are plotting in their feeble little way to kill the butchers!"

He brooded darkly. "We know now what it feels to be owned, we humans who

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The Whisperer in Darkness

By H. P. LOVECRAFT

Wild horror stalked the Vermont hills—a story of weird fungi from the newly discovered ninth planet

BEAR in mind closely that I did not see any actual visual horror at the end. To say that a mental shock was the cause of what I inferred—that last straw which sent me racing out of the lonely Akeley farmhouse and through the wild domed hills of Vermont in a commandeered motor at night—is to ignore the plainest facts of my final experience. Notwithstanding the deep extent to which I shared the information and speculations of Henry Akeley, the things I saw and heard, and the admitted vividness of the impression produced on me by these things, I can not prove even now whether I was right or wrong in my hideous inference. For after all, Akeley's disappearance establishes nothing. People found nothing amiss in his house despite the bullet-marks on the outside and inside. It was just as though he had walked out casually for a ramble in the hills and failed to return. There was not even a sign that a guest had been there, or that those horrible cylinders and machines had been stored in the study. That he had mortally feared the crowded green hills and endless trickle of brooks among which he had been born and reared, means nothing at all, either; for thousands are subject to just such morbid fears. Eccentricity, moreover, could easily account for his strange acts and apprehensions toward the last.

The whole matter began, so far as I am concerned, with the historic and unprecedented Vermont floods of November 3, 1927. I was then, as now, an instructor of literature at Miskatonic University in Arkham, Massachusetts, and an enthusiastic amateur student of New England folklore. Shortly after the flood, amidst the varied reports of hardship, suffering, and organized relief which filled the press, there appeared certain odd stories of things found floating in some of the swollen rivers; so that many of my friends embarked on curious discussions and appealed to me to shed what light I could on the subject. I felt flattered at having my folklore study taken so seriously, and did what I could to belittle the wild, vague tales which seemed so clearly an outgrowth of old rustic superstitions. It amused me to find several persons of education who insisted that some stratum of obscure, distorted fact might underlie the rumors.

The tales thus brought to my notice came mostly through newspaper cuttings; though one yarn had an oral source and was repeated to a friend of mine in a letter from his mother in Hardwick, Vermont. The type of thing described was essentially the same in all cases, though there seemed to be three separate instances involved—one connected with the Winooski River near Montpelier, another attached to the West River in Windham County beyond Newfane, and a third centering in the Passumpsic in Caledonia County above Lyndonville. Of course many of the stray items mentioned other instances, but on analysis they all seemed to boil down to these three. In each case country folk reported seeing one or more very bizarre and disturbing objects in the surging waters that poured down from the unfrequented hills, and there was a widespread tendency to connect these sights

"I let my flashlight return to the vacant easy-chair, then noticed for the first time the presence of certain objects in the seat."

with a primitive, half-forgotten cycle of whispered legend which old people resurrected for the occasion.

What people thought they saw were organic shapes not quite like any they had ever seen before. Naturally, there were many human bodies washed along by the streams in that tragic period; but those who described these strange shapes felt quite sure that they were not human, despite some superficial resemblances in size and general outline. Nor, said the witnesses, could they have been any kind of animal known to Vermont. They were pinkish things about five feet long; with crustaceous bodies bearing vast pairs of dorsal fins or membranous wings and several sets of articulated limbs, and with a sort of convoluted ellipsoid, covered with multitudes of very short antennæ, where a head would ordinarily be. It was really remarkable how closely the reports from different sources tended to coincide; though the wonder was lessened by the fact that the old legends, shared at one time throughout the hill country, furnished a morbidly vivid picture which might well have colored the imaginations of all the witnesses concerned. It was my conclusion that such witnesses—in every case naive and simple backwoods folk—had glimpsed the battered and bloated bodies of human beings or farm animals in the whirling currents; and had allowed the half-remembered folklore to invest these pitiful objects with fantastic attributes.

The ancient folklore, while cloudy, evasive, and largely forgotten by the present generation, was of a highly singular character, and obviously reflected the influence of still earlier Indian tales. I knew it well, though I had never been in Vermont, through the exceedingly rare

monograph of Eli Davenport, which embraces material orally obtained prior to 1839 among the oldest people of the state. This material, moreover, closely coincided with tales which I had personally heard from elderly rustics in the mountains of New Hampshire. Briefly summarized, it hinted at a hidden race of monstrous beings which lurked somewhere among the remoter hills—in the deep woods of the highest peaks, and the dark valleys where streams trickle from unknown sources. These beings were seldom glimpsed, but evidences of their presence were reported by those who had ventured farther than usual up the slopes of certain mountains or into certain deep, steep-sided gorges that even the wolves shunned.

There were queer footprints or claw-prints in the mud of brook-margins and barren patches, and curious circles of stones, with the grass around them worn away, which did not seem to have been placed or entirely shaped by Nature. There were, too, certain caves of problematical depth in the sides of the hills; with mouths closed by boulders in a manner scarcely accidental, and with more than an average quota of the queer prints leading both toward and away from them —if indeed the direction of these prints could be justly estimated. And worst of all, there were the things which adventurous people had seen very rarely in the twilight of the remotest valleys and the dense perpendicular woods above the limits of normal hill-climbing.

It would have been less uncomfortable if the stray accounts of these things had not agreed so well. As it was, nearly all the rumors had several points in common; averring that the creatures were a sort of huge, light-red crab with many pairs of legs and with two great bat-like wings in the middle of the back. They sometimes walked on all their legs, and sometimes on the hindmost pair only, using the others to convey large objects of indeterminate nature. On one occasion they were spied in considerable numbers, a detachment of them wading along a shallow woodland watercourse three abreast in evidently disciplined formation. Once a specimen was seen flying—launching itself from the top of a bald, lonely hill at night, and vanishing in the sky after its great flapping wings had been silhouetted an instant against the full moon.

These things seemed content, on the whole, to let mankind alone; though they were at times held responsible for the disappearance of venturesome individuals —especially persons who built houses too close to certain valleys or too high up on certain mountains. Many localities came to be known as inadvisable to settle in, the feeling persisting long after the cause was forgotten. People would look up at some of the neighboring mountain-precipices with a shudder, even when not recalling how many settlers had been lost, and how many farmhouses burnt to ashes, on the lower slopes of those grim, green sentinels.

But while according to the earliest legends the creatures would appear to have harmed only those trespassing on their privacy; there were later accounts of their curiosity respecting men, and of their attempts to establish secret outposts in the human world. There were tales of the queer claw-prints seen around farmhouse windows in the morning, and of occasional disappearances in regions outside the obviously haunted areas. Tales, besides, of buzzing voices in imitation of human speech which made surprizing offers to lone travellers on roads and cart-paths in the deep woods, and of children frightened out of their wits by things seen or heard where the primal forest pressed

close upon their dooryards. In the final layer of legends—the layer just preceding the decline of superstition and the abandonment of close contact with the dreaded places—there are shocked references to hermits and remote farmers who at some period of life appeared to have undergone a repellent mental change, and who were shunned and whispered about as mortals who had sold themselves to the strange beings. In one of the northeastern counties it seemed to be a fashion about 1800 to accuse eccentric and unpopular recluses of being allies or representatives of the abhorred things.

As to what the things were—explanations naturally varied. The common name applied to them was "those ones", or "the old ones," though other terms had a local and transient use. Perhaps the bulk of the Puritan settlers set them down bluntly as familiars of the devil, and made them a basis of awed theological speculation. Those with Celtic legendry in their heritage—mainly the Scotch-Irish element of New Hampshire, and their kindred who had settled in Vermont on Governor Wentworth's colonial grants — linked them vaguely with the malign fairies and "little people" of the bogs and raths, and protected themselves with scraps of incantation handed down through many generations. But the Indians had the most fantastic theories of all. While different tribal legends differed, there was a marked consensus of belief in certain vital particulars; it being unanimously agreed that the creatures were not native to this earth.

The Pennacook myths, which were the most consistent and picturesque, taught that the Winged Ones came from the Great Bear in the sky, and had mines in our earthly hills whence they took a kind of stone they could not get on any other world. They did not live here, said the myths, but merely maintained outposts and flew back with vast cargoes of stone to their own stars in the north. They harmed only those earth-people who got too near them or spied upon them. Animals shunned them through instinctive hatred, not because of being hunted. They could not eat the things and animals of earth, but brought their own food from the stars. It was bad to get near them, and sometimes young hunters who went into their hills never came back. It was not good, either, to listen to what they whispered at night in the forest with voices like a bee's that tried to be like the voices of men. They knew the speech of all kinds of men—Pennacooks, Hurons, men of the Five Nations—but did not seem to have or need any speech of their own. They talked with their heads, which changed color in different ways to mean different things.

All the legendry, of course, white and Indian alike, died down during the Nineteenth Century, except for occasional atavistical flare-ups. The ways of the Vermonters became settled; and once their habitual paths and dwellings were established according to a certain fixed plan, they remembered less and less what fears and avoidances had determined that plan, and even that there had been any fears or avoidances. Most people simply knew that certain hilly regions were considered as highly unhealthy, unprofitable, and generally unlucky to live in, and that the farther one kept from them the better off one usually was. In time the ruts of custom and economic interest became so deeply cut in approved places that there was no longer any reason for going outside them, and the haunted hills were left deserted by accident rather than by design. Save during infrequent local scares, only wonder-loving grandmothers and retro-

spective nonagenarians ever whispered of beings dwelling in those hills; and even such whisperers admitted that there was not much to fear from those things now that they were used to the presence of houses and settlements, and now that human beings let their chosen territory severely alone.

All this I had long known from my reading, and from certain folk tales picked up in New Hampshire; hence when the flood-time rumors began to appear, I could easily guess what imaginative background had evolved them. I took great pains to explain this to my friends, and was correspondingly amused when several contentious souls continued to insist on a possible element of truth in the reports. Such persons tried to point out that the early legends had a significant persistence and uniformity, and that the virtually unexplored nature of the Vermont hills made it unwise to be dogmatic about what might or might not dwell among them; nor could they be silenced by my assurance that all the myths were of a well-known pattern common to most of mankind and determined by early phases of imaginative experience which always produced the same type of delusion.

It was of no use to demonstrate to such opponents that the Vermont myths differed but little in essence from those universal legends of natural personification which filled the ancient world with fauns and dryads, and satyrs, suggested the *kallikanzari* of modern Greece, and gave to wild Wales and Ireland their dark hints of strange, small, and terrible hidden races of troglodytes and burrowers. No use, either, to point out the even more startlingly similar belief of the Nepalese hill tribes in the dread *Mi-Go* or "Abominable Snow-Men" who lurk hideously amidst the ice and rock pinnacles of the Himalayan summits. When I brought up this evidence, my opponents turned it against me by claiming that it must imply some actual historicity for the ancient tales; that it must argue the real existence of some queer elder earth-race, driven to hiding after the advent and dominance of mankind, which might very conceivably have survived in reduced numbers to relatively recent times—or even to the present.

The more I laughed at such theories, the more these stubborn friends asseverated them; adding that even without the heritage of legend the recent reports were too clear, consistent, detailed, and sanely prosaic in manner of telling, to be completely ignored. Two or three fanatical extremists went so far as to hint at possible meanings in the ancient Indian tales which gave the hidden beings a non-terrestrial origin; citing the extravagant books of Charles Fort with their claims that voyagers from other worlds and outer space have often visited the earth. Most of my foes, however, were merely romanticists who insisted on trying to transfer to real life the fantastic lore of lurking "little people" made popular by the magnificent horror-fiction of Arthur Machen.

2

As was only natural under the circumstances, this piquant debating finally got into print in the form of letters to the *Arkham Advertiser;* some of which were copied in the press of those Vermont regions whence the flood-stories came. The *Rutland Herald* gave half a page of extracts from the letters on both sides, while the *Brattleboro Reformer* reprinted one of my long historical and mythological summaries in full, with some accompanying comments in "The Pendrifter's" thoughtful column which supported and applauded my skeptical conclusions. By the spring of 1928 I was almost a well-

known figure in Vermont, notwithstanding the fact that I had never set foot in the state. Then came the challenging letters from Henry Akeley which impressed me so profoundly, and which took me for the first and last time to that fascinating realm of crowded green precipices and muttering forest streams.

Most of what I now know of Henry Wentworth Akeley was gathered by correspondence with his neighbors, and with his only son in California, after my experience in his lonely farmhouse. He was, I discovered, the last representative on his home soil of a long, locally distinguished line of jurists, administrators, and gentlemen-agriculturists. In him, however, the family mentality had veered away from practical affairs to pure scholarship; so that he had been a notable student of mathematics, astronomy, biology, anthropology, and folklore at the University of Vermont. I had never previously heard of him, and he did not give many autobiographical details in his communications; but from the first I saw he was a man of character, education, and intelligence, albeit a recluse with very little worldly sophistication.

Despite the incredible nature of what he claimed, I could not help at once taking Akeley more seriously than I had taken any of the other challengers of my views. For one thing, he was really close to the actual phenomena—visible and tangible—that he speculated so grotesquely about; and for another thing, he was amazingly willing to leave his conclusions in a tentative state like a true man of science. He had no personal preferences to advance, and was always guided by what he took to be solid evidence. Of course I began by considering him mistaken, but gave him credit for being intelligently mistaken; and at no time did I emulate some of his friends in attributing his ideas, and his fear of the lonely green hills, to insanity. I could see that there was a great deal to the man, and knew that what he reported must surely come from some strange circumstance deserving investigation, however little it might have to do with the fantastic causes he assigned. Later on I received from him certain material proofs which placed the matter on a somewhat different and bewilderingly bizarre basis.

I can not do better than transcribe in full, so far as is possible, the long letter in which Akeley introduced himself, and which formed such an important landmark in my own intellectual history. It is no longer in my possession, but my memory holds almost every word of its portentous message; and again I affirm my confidence in the sanity of the man who wrote it. Here is the text—a text which reached me in the cramped, archaic-looking scrawl of one who had obviously not mingled much with the world during his sedate, scholarly life.

R. F. D. No. 2,
Townshend, Windham Co., Vermont,
May 5, 1928.

Albert N. Wilmarth, Esq.,
118 Saltonstall St.,
Arkham, Mass.

My Dear Sir:

I have read with great interest the *Brattleboro Reformer's* reprint (April 23, '28) of your letter on the recent stories of strange bodies seen floating in our flooded streams last fall, and on the curious folklore they so well agree with. It is easy to see why an outlander would take the position you take, and even why "Pendrifter" agrees with you. That is the attitude generally taken by educated persons both in and out of Vermont, and was my own attitude as a young man (I am now 57) before my studies, both general and in Davenport's book, led me to do some exploring in parts of the hills hereabouts not usually visited.

I was directed toward such studies by the queer old tales I used to hear from elderly farmers of the more ignorant sort, but now I wish I had let the whole matter alone. I might say, with all proper modesty, that the subject of anthropology and folklore is by no means strange to me. I took a good deal of it at college, and am familiar with most of the standard authorities such as Tylor, Lubbock, Frazer, Quatrefages, Murray, Osborn, Keith, Boule, G. Elliott Smith, and so on. It is no news to me

that tales of hidden races are as old as all mankind. I have seen the reprints of letters from you, and those arguing with you, in the *Rutland Herald,* and guess I know about where your controversy stands at the present time.

What I desire to say now is, that I am afraid your adversaries are nearer right than yourself, even though all reason seems to be on your side. They are nearer right than they realize themselves—for of course they go only by theory, and can not know what I know. If I knew as little of the matter as they, I would not feel justified in believing as they do. I would be wholly on your side.

You can see that I am having a hard time getting to the point, probably because I really dread getting to the point; but the upshot of the matter is that *I have certain evidence that monstrous things do indeed live in the woods on the high hills which nobody visits.* I have not seen any of the things floating in the rivers, as reported, *but I have seen things like them* under circumstances I dread to repeat. I have seen footprints, and of late have seen them nearer my own home (I live in the old Akeley place south of Townshend Village, on the side of Dark Mountain) than I dare tell you now. And I have overheard voices in the woods at certain points that I will not even begin to describe on paper.

At one place I heard them so much that I took a phonograph there—with a dictaphone attachment and wax blank—and I shall try to arrange to have you hear the record I got. I have run it on the machine for some of the old people up here, and one of the voices has nearly scared them paralyzed by reason of its likeness to a certain voice (that buzzing voice in the woods which Davenport mentions) that their grandmothers have told about and mimicked for them. I know what most people think of a man who tells about "hearing voices" —but before you draw conclusions just listen to this record and ask some of the older backwoods people what they think of it. If you can account for it normally, very well; but there must be something behind it. *Ex nihilo nihil fit,* you know.

Now my object in writing you is not to start an argument, but to give you information which I think a man of your tastes will find deeply interesting. *This is private. Publicly I am on your side,* for certain things show me that it does not do for people to know too much about these matters. My own studies are now wholly private, and I would not think of saying anything to attract people's attention and cause them to visit the places I have explored. It is true—terribly true—that there are *non-human creatures watching us all the time;* with spies among us gathering information. It is from a wretched man who, if he was sane (as I think he was) *was one of those spies,* that I got a large part of my clues to the matter. He later killed himself, but I have reason to think there are others now.

The things come from another planet, being able to live in interstellar space and fly through it on clumsy, powerful wings which have a way of resisting the ether but which are too poor at steering to be of much use in helping them about on earth. I will tell you about this later if you do not dismiss me at once as a madman. They come here to get metals from mines that go deep under the hills, *and I think I know where they come from.* They will not hurt us if we let them alone, but no one can say what will happen if we get too curious about them. Of course a good army of men could wipe out their mining colony. That is what they are afraid of. But if that happened, more would come from *outside*—any number of them. They could easily conquer the earth, but have not tried so far because they have not needed to. They would rather leave things as they are to save bother.

I think they mean to get rid of me because of what I have discovered. There is a great black stone with unknown hieroglyphics half worn away which I found in the woods on Round Hill, east of here; and after I took it home everything became different. If they think I suspect too much they will either kill me *or take me off the earth to where they come from.* They like to take away men of learning once in a while, to keep informed on the state of things in the human world.

This leads me to my secondary purpose in addressing you—namely, to urge you to hush up the present debate rather than give it more publicity. *People must be kept away from these hills,* and in order to effect this, their curiosity ought not to be aroused any further. Heaven knows there is peril enough anyway, with promoters and real estate men flooding Vermont with herds of summer people to overrun the wild places and cover the hills with cheap bungalows.

I shall welcome further communication with you, and shall try to send you that phonograph record and black stone (which is so worn that photographs don't show much) by express if you are willing. I say "try" because I think those creatures have a way of tampering with things around here. There is a sullen, furtive fellow named Brown, on a farm near the village, who I think is their spy. Little by little they are trying to cut me off from our world because I know too much about their world.

They have the most amazing way of finding out what I do. You may not even get this letter. I think I shall have to leave this part of the country and go to live with my son in San Diego, Cal., if things get any worse, but it is not easy to give up the place you were born in, and where your family has lived for six generations. Also, I would hardly dare sell this house to anybody now that the *creatures* have taken notice of it. They seem to be trying to get the black stone back and destroy the phonograph record, but I shall not let them if I can help it. My great police dogs always hold them back, for there are very few here as yet, and they are clumsy in getting about. As I have said, their wings are not much use for short flights on earth. I am on the very brink of deciphering that stone—in a very terrible way—and with your knowledge of folklore you may be able to supply missing links enough to help me. I suppose you know all about the fearful myths antedating the coming of man to the earth—the Yog-Sothoth and Cthulhu cycles—which are hinted at in the *Necronomicon.* I had access to a copy of that once, and hear that you have one in your college library under lock and key.

To conclude, Mr. Wilmarth, I think that with our respective studies we can be very useful to each other. I don't wish to put you in any peril, and suppose I ought to warn you that possession of the stone and the record won't be very safe; but I think you will find any risks worth running for the sake of knowledge. I will drive down to Newfane or Brattleboro to send whatever you authorize me to send, for the express offices there are more to be trusted. I might say that I live quite alone now, since I can't keep hired help any more. They won't stay because of the things that try to get near the house at night, and that keep the dogs barking continually. I am glad I didn't get as deep as this into the business while my wife was alive, for it would have driven her mad.

Hoping that I am not bothering you unduly, and that you will decide to get in touch with me rather than throw this letter into the waste basket as a madman's raving, I am

Yrs. very truly,
HENRY W. AKELEY.

P. S.—I am making some extra prints of certain photographs taken by me, which I think will help to prove a number of the points I have touched on. The old people think they are monstrously true. I shall send you these very soon if you are interested. H. W. A.

IT WOULD be difficult to describe my sentiments upon reading this strange document for the first time. By all ordinary rules, I ought to have laughed more loudly at these extravagances than at the far milder theories which had previously moved me to mirth; yet something in the tone of the letter made me take it with paradoxical seriousness. Not that I believed for a moment in the hidden race from the stars which my correspondent spoke of; but that, after some grave preliminary doubts, I grew to feel oddly sure of his sanity and sincerity, and of his confrontation by some genuine though singular and abnormal phenomenon which he could not explain except in this imaginative way. It could not be as he thought it, I reflected, yet on the other hand it could not be otherwise than worthy of investigation. The man seemed unduly excited and alarmed about something, but it was hard to think that all cause was lacking. He was so specific and logical in certain ways—and after all, his yarn did fit in so perplexingly well with some of the old myths—even the wildest Indian legends.

That he had really overheard disturbing voices in the hills, and had really found the black stone he spoke about, was wholly possible despite the crazy inferences he made—inferences probably suggested by the man who had claimed to be a spy of the outer beings and had later killed himself. It was easy to deduce that this man must have been wholly insane, but that he probably had a streak of perverse outward logic which made the naive Akeley—already prepared for such things by his folklore studies—believe his tale. As for the latest developments—it appeared from his inability to keep hired help that Akeley's humbler rustic neighbors were as convinced as he that his house was besieged by uncanny things at night. The dogs really barked, too.

And then the matter of that phonograph record, which I could not but believe he had obtained in the way he said. It must mean something; whether animal noises deceptively like human speech, or the speech of some hidden, night-haunting human being decayed to a state not much above that of the lower animals. From this my thoughts went back to the black hieroglyphed stone, and to speculations upon what it might mean. Then, too, what of the photographs which Akeley said he was about to send, and which the old people had found so convincingly terrible?

As I re-read the cramped handwriting I felt as never before that my credulous opponents might have more on their side than I had conceded. After all, there might be some queer and perhaps hereditarily misshapen outcasts in those shunned hills, even though no such race of star-born monsters as folklore claimed. And if there were, then the presence of strange

bodies in the flooded streams would not be wholly beyond belief. Was it too presumptuous to suppose that both the old legends and the recent reports had this much of reality behind them? But even as I harbored these doubts I felt ashamed that so fantastic a piece of bizarrerie as Henry Akeley's wild letter had brought them up.

In the end I answered Akeley's letter, adopting a tone of friendly interest and soliciting further particulars. His reply came almost by return mail; and contained, true to promise, a number of kodak views of scenes and objects illustrating what he had to tell. Glancing at these pictures as I took them from the envelope, I felt a curious sense of fright and nearness to forbidden things; for in spite of the vagueness of most of them, they had a damnably suggestive power which was intensified by the fact of their being genuine photographs—actual optical links with what they portrayed, and the product of an impersonal transmitting process without prejudice, fallibility, or mendacity.

The more I looked at them, the more I saw that my serious estimate of Akeley and his story had not been unjustified. Certainly, these pictures carried conclusive evidence of something in the Vermont hills which was at least vastly outside the radius of our common knowledge and belief. The worst thing of all was the footprint—a view taken where the sun shone on a mud patch somewhere in a deserted upland. This was no cheaply counterfeited thing, I could see at a glance; for the sharply defined pebbles and grass-blades in the field of vision gave a clear index of scale and left no possibility of a tricky double exposure. I have called the thing a "footprint", but "claw-print" would be a better term. Even now I can scarcely describe it save to say that it was hideously crab-like, and that there seemed to be some ambiguity about its direction. It was not a very deep or fresh print, but seemed to be about the size of an average man's foot. From a central pad, pairs of saw-toothed nippers projected in opposite directions—quite baffling as to function, if indeed the whole object were exclusively an organ of locomotion.

Another photograph—evidently a time-exposure taken in deep shadow—was of the mouth of a woodland cave, with a boulder of rounded regularity choking the aperture. On the bare ground in front of it one could just discern a dense network of curious tracks, and when I studied the picture with a magnifier I felt uneasily sure that the tracks were like the one in the other view. A third picture showed a druid-like circle of standing stones on the summit of a wild hill. Around the cryptic circle the grass was very much beaten down and worn away, though I could not detect any footprints even with the glass. The extreme remoteness of the place was apparent from the veritable sea of tenantless mountains which formed the background and stretched away toward a misty horizon.

But if the most disturbing of all the views was that of the footprint, the most curiously suggestive was that of the great black stone found in the Round Hill woods. Akeley had photographed it on what was evidently his study table, for I could see rows of books and a bust of Milton in the background. The thing, as nearly as one might guess, had faced the camera vertically with a somewhat irregularly curved surface of one by two feet; but to say anything definite about that surface, or about the general shape of the whole mass, almost defies the power of language. What outlandish geometrical

principles had guided its cutting—for artificially cut it surely was—I could not even begin to guess; and never before had I seen anything which struck me as so strangely and unmistakably alien to this world. Of the hieroglyphics on the surface I could discern very few, but one or two that I did see gave me rather a shock. Of course they might be fraudulent, for others besides myself had read the monstrous and abhorred *Necronomicon* of the mad Arab Abdul Alhazred; but it nevertheless made me shiver to recognize certain ideographs which study had taught me to link with the most blood-curdling and blasphemous whispers of things that had had a kind of mad half-existence before the earth and the other inner worlds of the solar system were made.

Of the five remaining pictures, three were of swamp and hill scenes which seemed to bear traces of hidden and unwholesome tenancy. Another was of a queer mark in the ground very near Akeley's house, which he said he had photographed the morning after a night on which the dogs had barked more violently than usual. It was very blurred, and one could really draw no certain conclusions from it; but it did seem fiendishly like that other mark or claw-print photographed on the deserted upland. The final picture was of the Akeley place itself; a trim white house of two stories and attic, about a century and a quarter old, and with a well-kept lawn and stone-bordered path leading up to a tastefully carved Georgian doorway. There were several huge police dogs on the lawn, squatting near a pleasant-faced man with a close-cropped gray beard whom I took to be Akeley himself—his own photographer, one might infer from the tube-connected bulb in his right hand.

FROM the pictures I turned to the bulky, closely written letter itself; and for the next three hours was immersed in a gulf of unutterable horror. Where Akeley had given only outlines before, he now entered into minute details; presenting long transcripts of words overheard in the woods at night, long accounts of monstrous pinkish forms spied in thickets at twilight on the hills, and a terrible cosmic narrative derived from the application of profound and varied scholarship to the endless bygone discourses of the mad self-styled spy who had killed himself. I found myself faced by names and terms that I had heard elsewhere in the most hideous of connections—Yuggoth, Great Cthulhu, Tsathoggua, Yog-Sothoth, R'lyeh, Nyarlathotep, Azathoth, Hastur, Yian, Leng, the Lake of Hali, Bethmoora, the Yellow Sign, L'mur-Kathulos, Bran, and the Magnum Innominandum—and was drawn back through nameless eons and inconceivable dimensions to worlds of elder, outer entity at which the crazed author of the *Necronomicon* had only guessed in the vaguest way. I was told of the pits of primal life, and of the streams that had trickled down therefrom; and finally, of the tiny rivulet from one of those streams which had become entangled with the destinies of our own earth.

My brain whirled; and where before I had attempted to explain things away, I now began to believe in the most abnormal and incredible wonders. The array of vital evidence was damnably vast and overwhelming; and the cool, scientific attitude of Akeley—an attitude removed as far as imaginable from the demented, the fanatical, the hysterical, or even the extravagantly speculative—had a tremendous effect on my thought and judgment. By the time I laid the frightful letter aside I could understand the fears he had

come to entertain, and was ready to do anything in my power to keep people away from those wild, haunted hills. Even now, when time has dulled the impression and made me half question my own experience and horrible doubts, there are things in that letter of Akeley's which I would not quote, or even form into words on paper. I am almost glad that the letter and record and photographs are gone now—and I wish, for reasons I shall soon make clear, that the new planet beyond Neptune had not been discovered.

With the reading of that letter my public debating about the Vermont horror permanently ended. Arguments from opponents remained unanswered or put off with promises, and eventually the controversy petered out into oblivion. During late May and June I was in constant correspondence with Akeley; though once in a while a letter would be lost, so that we would have to retrace our ground and perform considerable laborious copying. What we were trying to do, as a whole, was to compare notes in matters of obscure mythological scholarship and arrive at a clearer correlation of the Vermont horrors with the general body of primitive world legend.

For one thing, we virtually decided that these morbidities and the hellish Himalayan *Mi-Go* were one and the same order of incarnated nightmare. There were also absorbing zoölogical conjectures, which I would have referred to Professor Dexter in my own college but for Akeley's imperative command to tell no one of the matter before us. If I seem to disobey that command now, it is only because I think that at this stage a warning about those farther Vermont hills—and about those Himalayan peaks which bold explorers are more and more determined to ascend—is more conducive to public safety than silence would be. One specific thing we were leading up to was a deciphering of the hieroglyphics on that infamous black stone—a deciphering which might well place us in possession of secrets deeper and more dizzying than any formerly known to man.

3

TOWARD the end of June the phonograph record came—shipped from Brattleboro, since Akeley was unwilling to trust conditions on the branch line north of there. He had begun to feel an increased sense of espionage, aggravated by the loss of some of our letters; and said much about the insidious deeds of certain men whom he considered tools and agents of the hidden beings. Most of all he suspected the surly farmer Walter Brown, who lived alone on a rundown hillside place near the deep woods, and who was often seen loafing around corners in Brattleboro, Bellows Falls, Newfane, and South Londonderry in the most inexplicable and seemingly unmotivated way. Brown's voice, he felt convinced, was one of those he had overheard on a certain occasion in a very terrible conversation; and he had once found a footprint or claw-print near Brown's house which might possess the most ominous significance. It had been curiously near some of Brown's own footprints—footprints that faced toward it.

So the record was shipped from Brattleboro, whither Akeley drove in his Ford car along the lonely Vermont back roads. He confessed in an accompanying note that he was beginning to be afraid of those roads, and that he would not even go into Townshend for supplies now except in broad daylight. It did not pay, he repeated again and again, to know too much unless one were very remote from those silent and problematical hills. He would be going to California pretty soon

to live with his son, though it was hard to leave a place where all one's memories and ancestral feelings centered.

Before trying the record on the commercial machine which I borrowed from the college administration building I carefully went over all the explanatory matter in Akeley's various letters. This record, he had said, was obtained about one a. m. on the 1st of May, 1915, near the closed mouth of a cave where the wooded west slope of Dark Mountain rises out of Lee's Swamp. The place had always been unusually plagued with strange voices, this being the reason he had brought the phonograph, dictaphone, and blank in expectation of results. Former experience had told him that May Eve—the hideous Sabbat-night of underground European legend—would probably be more fruitful than any other date, and he was not disappointed. It was noteworthy, though, that he never again heard voices at that particular spot.

Unlike most of the overheard forest voices, the substance of the record was quasi-ritualistic, and included one palpably human voice which Akeley had never been able to place. It was not Brown's, but seemed to be that of a man of greater cultivation. The second voice, however, was the real crux of the thing—for this was the accursed *buzzing* which had no likeness to humanity despite the human words which it uttered in good English grammar and a scholarly accent.

The recording phonograph and dictaphone had not worked uniformly well, and had of course been at a great disadvantage because of the remote and muffled nature of the overheard ritual; so that the actual speech secured was very fragmentary. Akeley had given me a transcript of what he believed the spoken words to be, and I glanced through this again as I prepared the machine for action. The text was darkly mysterious rather than openly horrible, though a knowledge of its origin and manner of gathering gave it all the associative horror which any words could well possess. I will present it here in full as I remember it—and I am fairly confident that I know it correctly by heart, not only from reading the transcript, but from playing the record itself over and over again. It is not a thing which one might readily forget!

(INDISTINGUISHABLE SOUNDS)

(A CULTIVATED MALE HUMAN VOICE)
. . . is the Lord of the Wood, even to . . . and the gifts of the men of Leng . . . so from the wells of night to the gulfs of space, and from the gulfs of space to the wells of night, ever the praises of Great Cthulhu, of Tsathoggua, and of Him Who is not to be Named. Ever Their praises, and abundance to the Black Goat of the Woods. Iä! Shub-Niggurath! The Goat with a Thousand Young!

(A BUZZING IMITATION OF HUMAN SPEECH)
Iä! Shub-Niggurath! The Black Goat of the Woods With a Thousand Young!

(HUMAN VOICE)
And it has come to pass that the Lord of the Woods, being . . . seven and nine, down the onyx steps . . . (tri)butes to Him in the Gulf, Azathoth, He of Whom Thou hast taught us marv-(els) . . . on the wings of night out beyond space, out beyond th . . . to That whereof Yuggoth is the youngest child, rolling alone in black æther at the rim . . .

(BUZZING VOICE)
. . . go out among men and find the ways thereof, that He in the Gulf may know. To Nyarlathotep, Mighty Messenger, must all things be told. And He shall put on the semblance of men, the waxen mask and the robe that hides, and come down from the world of Seven Suns to mock . . .

(HUMAN VOICE)
. . . (Nyarl)athotep, Great Messenger, bringer of strange joy to Yuggoth through the void, Father of the Million Favored Ones, Stalker among . . .

(SPEECH CUT OFF BY END OF RECORD)

Such were the words for which I was to listen when I started the phonograph. It was with a trace of genuine dread and reluctance that I pressed the lever and

heard the preliminary scratching of the sapphire point, and I was glad that the first faint, fragmentary words were in a human voice—a mellow, educated voice which seemed vaguely Bostonian in accent, and which was certainly not that of any native of the Vermont hills. As I listened to the tantalizingly feeble rendering, I seemed to find the speech identical with Akeley's carefully prepared transcript. On it chanted, in that mellow Bostonian voice: "Iä! Shub-Niggurath! The Goat with a Thousand Young! . . ."

And then I heard *the other voice.* To this hour I shudder retrospectively when I think of how it struck me, prepared though I was by Akeley's accounts. Those to whom I have since described the record profess to find nothing but cheap imposture or madness in it; but *could they have heard the accursed thing itself,* or read the bulk of Akeley's correspondence, (especially that terrible and encyclopedic second letter) I know they would think differently. It is, after all, a tremendous pity that I did not disobey Akeley and play the record for others—a tremendous pity, too, that all of his letters were lost. To me, with my first-hand impression of the actual sounds, and with my knowledge of the background and surrounding circumstances, the voice was a monstrous thing. It swiftly followed the human voice in ritualistic response, but in my imagination it was a morbid echo winging its way across unimaginable abysses from unimaginable outer hells. It is more than two years now since I last ran off that blasphemous waxen cylinder; but at this moment, and at all other moments, I can still hear that feeble, fiendish buzzing as it reached me for the first time.

"Iä! Shub-Niggurath! The Black Goat of the Woods with a Thousand Young!"

But though that voice is always in my ears, I have not even yet been able to analyze it well enough for a graphic description. It was like the drone of some loathsome, gigantic insect ponderously shaped into the articulate speech of an alien species, and I am perfectly certain that the organs producing it can have no resemblance to the vocal organs of man, or indeed to those of any of the mammalia. There were singularities in timbre, range, and overtones which placed this phenomenon wholly outside the sphere of humanity and earth-life. Its sudden advent that first time almost stunned me, and I heard the rest of the record through in a sort of abstracted daze. When the longer passage of buzzing came, there was a sharp intensification of that feeling of blasphemous infinity which had struck me during the shorter and earlier passage. At last the record ended abruptly, during an unusually clear speech of the human and Bostonian voice; but I sat stupidly staring long after the machine had automatically stopped.

I HARDLY need say that I gave that shocking record many another playing, and that I made exhaustive attempts at analysis and comment in comparing notes with Akeley. It would be both useless and disturbing to repeat here all that we concluded; but I may hint that we agreed in believing we had secured a clue to the source of some of the most repulsive primordial customs in the cryptic elder religions of mankind. It seemed plain to us, also, that there were ancient and elaborate alliances between the hidden outer creatures and certain members of the human race. How extensive these alliances were, and how their state today might compare with their state in earlier ages, we had no means of guessing; yet at best there was room for a limitless amount of horrified speculation. There

seemed to be an awful, immemorial linkage in several definite stages betwixt man and nameless infinity. The blasphemies which appeared on earth, it was hinted, came from the dark planet Yuggoth, at the rim of the solar system; but this was itself merely the populous outpost of a frightful interstellar race whose ultimate source must lie far outside even the Einsteinian space-time continuum or greatest known cosmos.

Meanwhile we continued to discuss the black stone and the best way of getting it to Arkham—Akeley deeming it inadvisable to have me visit him at the scene of his nightmare studies. For some reason or other, Akeley was afraid to trust the thing to any ordinary or expected transportation route. His final idea was to take it across country to Bellows Falls and ship it on the Boston and Maine system through Keene and Winchendon and Fitchburg, even though this would necessitate his driving along somewhat lonelier and more forest-traversing hill roads than the main highway to Brattleboro. He said he had noticed a man around the express office at Brattleboro when he had sent the phonograph record, whose actions and expression had been far from reassuring. This man had seemed too anxious to talk with the clerks, and had taken the train on which the record was shipped. Akeley confessed that he had not felt strictly at ease about that record until he heard from me of its safe receipt.

About this time—the second week in July—another letter of mine went astray, as I learned through an anxious communication from Akeley. After that he told me to address him no more at Townshend, but to send all mail in care of the General Delivery at Brattleboro; whither he would make frequent trips either in his car or on the motor-coach line which had lately replaced passenger service on the lagging branch railway. I could see that he was getting more and more anxious, for he went into much detail about the increased barking of the dogs on moonless nights, and about the fresh claw-prints he sometimes found in the road and in the mud at the back of his farmyard when morning came. Once he told about a veritable army of prints drawn up in a line facing an equally thick and resolute line of dog-tracks, and sent a loathsomely disturbing kodak picture to prove it. That was after a night on which the dogs had outdone themselves in barking and howling.

On the morning of Wednesday, July 18, I received a telegram from Bellows Falls, in which Akeley said he was expressing the black stone over the B. & M. on Train No. 5508, leaving Bellows Falls at 12:15 p. m., standard time, and due at the North Station in Boston at 4:12 p. m. It ought, I calculated, to get up to Arkham at least by the next noon; and accordingly I stayed in all Thursday morning to receive it. But noon came and went without its advent, and when I telephoned down to the express office I was informed that no shipment for me had arrived. My next act, performed amidst a growing alarm, was to give a long-distance call to the express agent at the Boston North Station; and I was scarcely surprized to learn that my consignment had not appeared. Train No. 5508 had pulled in only thirty-five minutes late on the day before, but had contained no box addressed to me. The agent promised, however, to institute a searching inquiry, and I ended the day by sending Akeley a night-letter outlining the situation.

With commendable promptness a report came from the Boston office on the following afternoon, the agent telephoning as soon as he learned the facts. It seemed that the railway express clerk on

No. 5508 had been able to recall an incident which might have much bearing on my loss—an argument with a very curious-voiced man, lean, sandy, and rustic-looking, when the train was waiting at Keene, New Hampshire, shortly after one o'clock standard time.

The man, he said, was greatly excited about a heavy box which he claimed to expect, but which was neither on the train nor entered on the company's books. He had given the name of Stanley Adams, and had had such a queerly thick, droning voice, that it made the clerk abnormally dizzy and sleepy to listen to him. The clerk could not remember quite how the conversation had ended, but recalled starting into a fuller awakeness when the train began to move. The Boston agent added that this clerk was a young man of wholly unquestioned veracity and reliability, of known antecedents and long with the company.

That evening I went to Boston to interview the clerk in person, having obtained his name and address from the office. He was a frank, prepossessing fellow, but I saw that he could add nothing to his original account. Oddly, he was scarcely sure that he could even recognize the strange inquirer again. Realizing that he had no more to tell, I returned to Arkham and sat up till morning writing letters to Akeley, to the express company, and to the police department and station agent in Keene. I felt that the strange-voiced man who had so queerly affected the clerk must have a pivotal place in the ominous business, and hoped that Keene station employes and telegraph-office records might tell something about him and about how he happened to make his inquiry when and where he did.

I must admit, however, that all my investigations came to nothing. The queer-voiced man had indeed been noticed around the Keene station in the early afternoon of July 18, and one lounger seemed to couple him vaguely with a heavy box; but he was altogether unknown, and had not been seen before or since. He had not visited the telegraph office or received any message so far as could be learned, nor had any message which might justly be considered a notice of the black stone's presence on No. 5508 come through the office for any one. Naturally Akeley joined with me in conducting these inquiries, and even made a personal trip to Keene to question the people around the station; but his attitude toward the matter was more fatalistic than mine. He seemed to find the loss of the box a portentous and menacing fulfilment of inevitable tendencies, and had no real hope at all of its recovery. He spoke of the undoubted telepathic and hypnotic powers of the hill creatures and their agents, and in one letter hinted that he did not believe the stone was on this earth any longer. For my part, I was duly enraged, for I had felt there was at least a chance of learning profound and astonishing things from the old, blurred hieroglyphs. The matter would have rankled bitterly in my mind had not Akeley's immediately subsequent letters brought up a new phase of the whole horrible hill problem which at once seized all my attention.

4

THE unknown things, Akeley wrote in a script grown pitifully tremulous, had begun to close in on him with a wholly new degree of determination. The nocturnal barking of the dogs whenever the moon was dim or absent was hideous now, and there had been attempts to molest him on the lonely roads he had to traverse by day. On the 2nd of August, while bound for the village in his car,

he had found a tree-trunk laid in his path at a point where the highway ran through a deep patch of woods; while the savage barking of the two great dogs he had with him told all too well of the things which must have been lurking near. What would have happened had the dogs not been there, he did not dare guess—but he never went out now without at least two of his faithful and powerful pack. Other road experiences had occurred on August 5th and 6th; a shot grazing his car on one occasion, and the barking of the dogs telling of unholy woodland presences on the other.

On August 15th I received a frantic letter which disturbed me greatly, and which made me wish Akeley could put aside his lonely reticence and call in the aid of the law. There had been frightful happenings on the night of the 12th-13th, bullets flying outside the farmhouse, and three of the twelve great dogs being found shot dead in the morning. There were myriads of claw-prints in the road, with the human prints of Walter Brown among them. Akeley had started to telephone to Brattleboro for more dogs, but the wire had gone dead before he had a chance to say much. Later he went to Brattleboro in his car, and learned there that linemen had found the main telephone cable neatly cut at a point where it ran through the deserted hills north of Newfane. But he was about to start home with four fine new dogs, and several cases of ammunition for his big-game repeating rifle. The letter was written at the post-office in Brattleboro, and came through to me without delay.

My attitude toward the matter was by this time quickly slipping from a scientific to an alarmedly personal one. I was afraid for Akeley in his remote, lonely farmhouse, and half afraid for myself because of my now definite connection with the strange hill problem. The thing was *reaching out* so. Would it suck me in and engulf me? In replying to his letter I urged him to seek help, and hinted that I might take action myself if he did not. I spoke of visiting Vermont in person in spite of his wishes, and of helping him explain the situation to the proper authorities. In return, however, I received only a telegram from Bellows Falls which read thus:

APPRECIATE YOUR POSITION BUT CAN DO NOTHING. TAKE NO ACTION YOURSELF FOR IT COULD ONLY HARM BOTH. WAIT FOR EXPLANATION.

HENRY AKELY.

But the affair was steadily deepening. Upon my replying to the telegram I received a shaky note from Akeley with the astonishing news that he had not only never sent the wire, but had not received the letter from me to which it was an obvious reply. Hasty inquiries by him at Bellows Falls had brought out that the message was deposited by a strange sandy-haired man with a curiously thick, droning voice, though more than this he could not learn. The clerk showed him the original text as scrawled in pencil by the sender, but the handwriting was wholly unfamiliar. It was noticeable that the signature was misspelled — A-K-E-L-Y, without the second "E". Certain conjectures were inevitable, but amdist the obvious crisis he did not stop to elaborate upon them.

He spoke of the death of more dogs and the purchase of still others, and of the exchange of gunfire which had become a settled feature each moonless night. Brown's prints, and the prints of at least one or two more shod human figures, were now found regularly among the claw-prints in the road, and at the back of the farmyard. It was, Akeley admitted, a pretty bad business; and before long he would probably have to go

to live with his California son whether or not he could sell the old place. But it was not easy to leave the only spot one could really think of as home. He must try to hang on a little longer; perhaps he could scare off the intruders—especially if he openly gave up all further attempts to penetrate their secrets.

Writing Akeley at once, I renewed my offers of aid, and spoke again of visiting him and helping him convince the authorities of his dire peril. In his reply he seemed less set against that plan than his past attitude would have led one to predict, but said he would like to hold off a little while longer—long enough to get his things in order and reconcile himself to the idea of leaving an almost morbidly cherished birthplace. People looked askance at his studies and speculations and it would be better to get quietly off without setting the countryside in a turmoil and creating widespread doubts of his own sanity. He had had enough, he admitted, but he wanted to make a dignified exit if he could.

THIS letter reached me on the 28th of August, and I prepared and mailed as encouraging a reply as I could. Apparently the encouragement took effect, for Akeley had fewer terrors to report when he acknowledged my note. He was not very optimistic, though, and expressed the belief that it was only the full moon season which was holding the creatures off. He hoped there would not be many densely cloudy nights, and talked vaguely of boarding in Brattleboro when the moon waned. Again I wrote him encouragingly, but on September 5th there came a fresh communication which had obviously crossed my letter in the mails; and to this I could not give any such hopeful response. In view of its importance I believe I had better give it in full—as best I can do from memory of the shaky script. It ran substantially as follows:

Monday.

Dear Wilmarth—

A rather discouraging P. S. to my last. Last night was thickly cloudy—though no rain—and not a bit of moonlight got through. Things were pretty bad, and I think the end is getting near, in spite of all we have hoped. After midnight something landed on the roof of the house, and the dogs all rushed up to see what it was. I could hear them snapping and tearing around, and then one managed to get on the roof by jumping from the low ell. There was a terrible fight up there, and I heard a frightful *buzzing* which I'll never forget. And then there was a shocking smell. About the same time bullets came through the window and nearly grazed me. I think the main line of the hill creatures had got close to the house when the dogs divided because of the roof business. What was up there I don't know yet, but I'm afraid the creatures are learning to steer better with their space wings. I put out the light and used the windows for loopholes, and raked all around the house with rifle fire aimed just high enough not to hit the dogs. That seemed to end the business, but in the morning I found great pools of blood in the yard, besides pools of a green sticky stuff that had the worst odor I have ever smelled. I climbed up on the roof and found more of the sticky stuff there. Five of the dogs were killed—I'm afraid I hit one myself by aiming too low, for he was shot in the back. Now I am setting the panes the shots broke, and am going to Brattleboro for more dogs. I guess the men at the kennels think I am crazy. Will drop another note later. Suppose I'll be ready for moving in a week or two, though it nearly kills me to think of it.

Hastily—

AKELEY.

But this was not the only letter from Akeley to cross mine. On the next morning—September 6th—still another came; this time a frantic scrawl which utterly unnerved me and put me at a loss what to say or do next. Again I can not do better than quote the text as faithfully as memory will let me.

Tuesday.

Clouds didn't break, so no moon again—and going into the wane anyhow. I'd have the house wired for electricity and put in a searchlight if I didn't know they'd cut the cables as fast as they could be mended.

I think I am going crazy. It may be that all I have ever written you is a dream or madness. It was bad enough before, but this time it is too much. *They talked to me last night*—talked in

that cursed buzzing voice and told me things *that I dare not repeat to you.* I heard them plainly above the barking of the dogs, and once when they were drowned out *a human voice helped them.* Keep out of this, Wilmarth—it is worse than either you or I ever suspected. *They don't mean to let me get to California now—they want to take me off alive, or what theoretically and mentally amounts to alive*—not only to Yuggoth, but beyond that—away outside the galaxy *and possibly beyond the last curved rim of space.* I told them I wouldn't go where they wish, *or in the terrible way they propose to take me,* but I'm afraid it will be no use. My place is so far out that they may come by day as well as by night before long. Six more dogs killed, and I felt presences all along the wooded parts of the road when I drove into Brattleboro today.

It was a mistake for me to try to send you that phonograph record and black stone. Better smash the record before it's too late. Will drop you another line tomorrow if I'm still here. Wish I could arrange to get my books and things to Brattleboro and board there. I would run off without anything if I could, but something inside my mind holds me back. I can slip out to Brattleboro, where I ought to be safe, but I feel just as much a prisoner there as at the house. And I seem to know that I couldn't get much farther even if I dropped everything and tried. It is horrible—don't get mixed up in this.

Yrs—AKELEY.

I DID not sleep at all the night after receiving this terrible thing, and was utterly baffled as to Akeley's remaining degree of sanity. The substance of the note was wholly insane, yet the manner of expression—in view of all that had gone before—had a grimly potent quality of convincingness. I made no attempt to answer it, thinking it better to wait until Akeley might have time to reply to my latest communication. Such a reply indeed came on the following day, though the fresh material in it quite overshadowed any of the points brought up by the letter it nominally answered. Here is what I recall of the text, scrawled and blotted as it was in the course of a plainly frantic and hurried composition.

Wednesday.

W———

Yr letter came, but it's no use to discuss anything any more. I am fully resigned. Wonder that I have even enough will-power left to fight them off. Can't escape even if I were willing to give up everything and run. They'll get me.

Had a letter from them yesterday—R. F. D. man brought it while I was at Brattleboro. Typed and postmarked Bellows Falls. Tells what they want to do with me—I can't repeat it. Look out for yourself, too! Smash that record. Cloudy nights keep up, and moon waning all the time. Wish I dared to get help—it might brace up my will-power—but every one who would dare come at all would call me crazy unless there happened to be some proof. Couldn't ask people to come for no reason at all—am all out of touch with everybody and have been for years.

But I haven't told you the worst, Wilmarth. Brace up to read this, for it will give you a shock. I am telling the truth, though. It is this—*I have seen and touched one of the things, or part of one of the things.* God, man, but it's awful! It was dead, of course. One of the dogs had it, and I found it near the kennel this morning. I tried to save it in the woodshed to convince people of the whole thing, but it all evaporated in a few hours. Nothing left. You know, all those things in the rivers were seen only on the first morning after the flood. And here's the worst. I tried to photograph it for you, but when I developed the film *there wasn't anything visible except the woodshed.* What can the thing have been made of? I saw it and felt it, and they all leave footprints. It was surely made of matter—but what kind of matter? The shape can't be described. It was a great crab with a lot of pyramided fleshy rings or knot of thick, ropy stuff covered with feelers where a man's head would be. That green sticky stuff is its blood or juice. And there are more of them due on earth any minute.

Walter Brown is missing—hasn't been seen loafing around any of his usual corners in the villages hereabouts. I must have got him with one of my shots, though the creatures always seem to try to take their dead and wounded away.

Got into town this afternoon without any trouble, but am afraid they're beginning to hold off because they're sure of me. Am writing this in Brattleboro P. O. This may be goodbye—if it is, write my son George Goodenough Akeley, 176 Pleasant St., San Diego, Cal., *but don't come up here.* Write the boy if you don't hear from me in a week, and watch the papers for news.

I'm going to play my last two cards now—if I have the will-power left. First to try poison gas on the things (I've got the right chemicals and have fixed up masks for myself and the dogs) and then if that doesn't work, tell the sheriff. They can lock me in a madhouse if they want to—it'll be better than what the *other creatures* would do. Perhaps I can get them to pay attention to the prints around the house—they are faint, but I can find them every morning. Suppose, though, police would say I faked them somehow; for they all think I'm a queer character.

Must try to have a state policeman spend a night here and see for himself—though it would be just like the creatures to learn about it and hold off that night. They cut my wires whenever I try to telephone in the night—the linemen think it is very queer, and may testify for me if they don't go and imagine I cut them my-

self. I haven't tried to keep them repaired for over a week now.

I could get some of the ignorant people to testify for me about the reality of the horrors, but everybody laughs at what they say, and anyway, they have shunned my place for so long that they don't know any of the new events. You couldn't get one of those run-down farmers to come within a mile of my house for love or money. The mail-carrier hears what they say and jokes me about it—God! If I only dared tell him how real it is! I think I'll try to get him to notice the prints, but he comes in the afternoon and they're usually about gone by that time. If I kept one by setting a box or pan over it, he'd think surely it was a fake or joke.

Wish I hadn't gotten to be such a hermit, so folks don't drop around as they used to. I've never dared show the black stone or the kodak pictures, or play that record, to anybody but the ignorant people. The others would say I faked the whole business and do nothing but laugh. But I may yet try showing the pictures. They give those claw-prints clearly, even if the things that made them can't be photographed. What a shame nobody else saw that *thing* this morning before it went to nothing!

But I don't know as I care. After what I've been through, a madhouse is as good a place as any. The doctors can help me make up my mind to get away from this house, and that is all that will save me.

Write my son George if you don't hear soon. Good-bye, smash that record, and don't mix up in this.

Yrs—AKELEY.

This letter frankly plunged me into the blackest of terror. I did not know what to say in answer, but scratched off some incoherent words of advice and encouragement and sent them by registered mail. I recall urging Akeley to move to Brattleboro at once, and place himself under the protection of the authorities; adding that I would come to that town with the phonograph record and help convince the courts of his sanity. It was time, too, I think I wrote, to alarm the people generally against this thing in their midst. It will be observed that at this moment of stress my own belief in all Akeley had told and claimed was virtually complete, though I did think his failure to get a picture of the dead monster was due not to any freak of Nature but to some excited slip of his own.

5

THEN, apparently crossing my incoherent note and reaching me Saturday afternoon, September 8th, came that curiously different and calming letter neatly typed on a new machine; that strange letter of reassurance and invitation which must have marked so prodigious a transition in the whole nightmare drama of the lonely hills. Again I will quote from memory—seeking for special reasons to preserve as much of the flavor of the style as I can. It was postmarked Bellows Falls, and the signature as well as the body of the letter was typed—as is frequent with beginners in typing. The text, though, was marvelously accurate for a tyro's work; and I concluded that Akeley must have used a machine at some previous period—perhaps in college. To say that the letter relieved me would be only fair, yet beneath my relief lay a substratum of uneasiness. If Akeley had been sane in his terror, was he now sane in his deliverance? And the sort of "improved rapport" mentioned . . . what was it? The entire thing implied such a diametrical reversal of Akeley's previous attitude! But here is the substance of the text, carefully transcribed from a memory in which I take some pride.

Townshend, Vermont,
Thursday, Sept. 6, 1928.

My dear Wilmarth:—

It gives me great pleasure to be able to set you at rest regarding all the silly things I've been writing you. I say "silly", although by that I mean my frightened attitude rather than my descriptions of certain phenomena. Those phenomena are real and important enough; my mistake has been in establishing an anomalous attitude toward them.

I think I mentioned that my strange visitors were beginning to communicate with me, and to attempt such communication. Last night this exchange of speech became actual. In response to certain signals I admitted to the house a messenger from those outside—a fellow-human, let me hasten to say. He told me much that neither you nor I had even begun to guess, and showed clearly how totally we had misjudged and misinterpreted the purpose of the Outer Ones in maintaining their secret colony on this planet.

It seems that the evil legends about what they have offered to men, and what they wish in connection with the earth, are wholly the result of an ignorant misconception of allegorical speech—speech, of course, molded by cultural backgrounds and thought-habits vastly different from anything we dream of. My own conjectures, I freely own, shot as widely past the mark as any of the guesses of illiterate farmers and savage Indians. What I had thought morbid and shameful and ignominious is in reality awesome and mind-expanding and even *glorious*—my previous estimate being merely a phase of man's eternal tendency to hate and fear and shrink from the *utterly different.*

Now I regret the harm I have inflicted upon these alien and incredible beings in the course of our nightly skirmishes. If only I had consented to talk peacefully and reasonably with them in the first place! But they bear me no grudge, their emotions being organized very differently from ours. It is their misfortune to have had as their human agents in Vermont some very inferior specimens—the late Walter Brown, for example. He prejudiced me vastly against them. Actually, they have never knowingly harmed men, but have often been cruelly wronged and spied upon by our species. There is a whole secret cult of evil men (a man of your mystical erudition will understand me when I link them with Hastur and the Yellow Sign) devoted to the purpose of tracking them down and injuring them on behalf of monstrous powers from other dimensions. It is against these aggressors—not against normal humanity—that the drastic precautions of the Outer Ones are directed. Incidentally, I learned that many of our lost letters were stolen not by the Outer Ones but by the emissaries of this malign cult.

All that the Outer Ones wish of man is peace and non-molestation and an increasing intellectual rapport. This latter is absolutely necessary now that our inventions and devices are expanding our knowledge and motions, and making it more and more impossible for the Outer Ones' necessary outposts to exist *secretly* on this planet. The alien beings desire to know mankind more fully, and to have a few of mankind's philosophic and scientific leaders know more about them. With such an exchange of knowledge all perils will pass, and a satisfactory *modus vivendi* be established. The very idea of any attempt to *enslave* or *degrade* mankind is ridiculous.

As a beginning of this improved rapport, the Outer Ones have naturally chosen me—whose knowledge of them is already so considerable—as their primary interpreter on earth. Much was told me last night—facts of the most stupendous and vista-opening nature—and more will be subsequently communicated to me both orally and in writing. I shall not be called upon to make any trip *outside* just yet, though I shall probably *wish* to do so later on—employing special means and transcending everything which we have hitherto been accustomed to regard as human experience. My house will be besieged no longer. Everything has reverted to normal, and the dogs will have no further occupation. In place of terror I have been given a rich boon of knowledge and intellectual adventure which few other mortals have ever shared.

The Outer Beings are perhaps the most marvelous organic things in or beyond all space and time—members of a cosmos-wide race of which all other life-forms are merely degenerate variants. They are more vegetable than animal, if these terms can be applied to the sort of matter composing them, and have a somewhat fungoid structure; though the presence of a chlorophyll-like substance and a very singular nutritive system differentiate them altogether from true cormophytic fungi. Indeed, the type is composed of a form of matter totally alien to our part of space—with electrons having a wholly different vibration-rate. That is why the beings can not be photographed on the *ordinary* camera films and plates of our known universe, even though our eyes can see them. With proper knowledge, however, any good chemist could make a photographic emulsion which would record their images.

The genus is unique in its ability to traverse the heatless and airless interstellar void in full corporeal form, and some of its variants can not do this without mechanical aid or curious surgical transpositions. Only a few species have the ether-resisting wings characteristic of the Vermont variety. Those inhabiting certain remote peaks in the Old World were brought in other ways. Their external resemblance to animal life, and to the sort of structure we understand as material, is a matter of parallel evolution rather than of close kinship. Their brain-capacity exceeds that of any other surviving life-form, although the winged types of our hill country are by no means the most highly developed. Telepathy is their usual means of discourse, though they have rudimentary vocal organs which, after a slight operation (for surgery is an incredibly expert and every-day thing among them), can roughly duplicate the speech of such types of organism as still use speech.

Their main *immediate* abode is a still undiscovered and almost lightless planet at the very edge of our solar system—beyond Neptune, and the ninth in distance from the sun. It is, as we have inferred, the object mystically hinted at as "Yuggoth" in certain ancient and forbidden writings; and it will soon be the scene of a strange focussing of thought upon our world in an effort to facilitate mental rapport. I would not be surprized if astronomers became sufficiently sensitive to these thought-currents to discover Yuggoth when the Outer Ones wish them to do so. But Yuggoth, of course, is only the stepping-stone. The main body of the beings inhabits strangely organized abysses wholly beyond the utmost reach of any human imagination. The space-time globule which we recognize as the totality of all cosmic entity is only an atom in the genuine infinity which is theirs. *And as much of this infinity as any human brain can hold is eventually to be opened up to me, as it has been to not more than fifty other men since the human race has existed.*

You will probably call this raving at first, Wilmarth, but in time you will appreciate the titanic opportunity I have stumbled upon. I want you to share as much of it as is possible, and to that end must tell you thousands of things that won't go on paper. In the past I have warned you not to come to see me. Now that all is safe, I take

pleasure in rescinding that warning and inviting you.

Can't you make a trip up here before your college term opens? It would be marvelously delightful if you could. Bring along the phonograph record and all my letters to you as consultative data—we shall need them in piecing together the whole tremendous story. You might bring the kodak prints, too, since I seem to have mislaid the negatives and my own prints in all this recent excitement. But what a wealth of facts I have to add to all this groping and tentative material—*and what a stupendous device I have to supplement my additions!*

Don't hesitate—I am free from espionage now, and you will not meet anything unnatural or disturbing. Just come along and let my car meet you at the Brattleboro station—prepare to stay as long as you can, and expect many an evening of discussion of things beyond all human conjecture. Don't tell any one about it, of course—for this matter must not get to the promiscuous public.

The train service to Brattleboro is not bad—you can get a time-table in Boston. Take the B. & M. to Greenfield, and then change for the brief remainder of the way. I suggest your taking the convenient 4:10 p. m.—standard—from Boston. This gets into Greenfield at 7:35, and at 9:19 a train leaves there which reaches Brattleboro at 10:01. That is week-days. Let me know the date and I'll have my car on hand at the station.

Pardon this typed letter, but my handwriting has grown shaky of late, as you know, and I don't feel equal to long stretches of script. I got this new Corona in Brattleboro yesterday—it seems to work very well.

Awaiting word, and hoping to see you shortly with the phonograph record and all my letters—and the kodak prints—I am

Yours in anticipation,

HENRY W. AKELEY.

To Albert N. Wilmarth, Esq.,
Miskatonic University,
Arkham, Mass.

THE complexity of my emotions upon reading, re-reading, and pondering over this strange and unlooked-for letter is past adequate description. I have said that I was at once relieved and made uneasy, but this expresses only crudely the overtones of diverse and largely subconscious feelings which comprised both the relief and the uneasiness. To begin with, the thing was so antipodally at variance with the whole chain of horrors preceding it—the change of mood from stark terror to cool complacency and even exultation was so unheralded, lightning-like, and complete! I could scarcely believe that a single day could so alter the psychological perspective of one who had written that final frenzied bulletin of Wednesday, no matter what relieving disclosures that day might have brought. At certain moments a sense of conflicting unrealities made me wonder whether this whole distantly reported drama of fantastic forces were not a kind of half-illusory dream created largely within my own mind. Then I thought of the phonograph record and gave way to still greater bewilderment.

The letter seemed so unlike anything which could have been expected! As I analyzed my impression, I saw that it consisted of two distinct phases. First, granting that Akeley had been sane before and was still sane, the indicated change in the situation itself was so swift and unthinkable. And secondly, the change in Akeley's own manner, attitude, and language was so vastly beyond the normal or the predictable. The man's whole personality seemed to have undergone an insidious mutation—a mutation so deep that one could scarcely reconcile his two aspects with the supposition that both represented equal sanity. Word-choice, spelling—all were subtly different. And with my academic sensitiveness to prose style, I could trace profound divergences in his commonest reactions and rhythm-responses. Certainly, the emotional cataclysm or revelation which could produce so radical an overturn must be an extreme one indeed! Yet in another way the letter seemed quite characteristic of Akeley. The same old passion for infinity—the same old scholarly inquisitiveness. I could not for a moment—or more than a moment—credit the idea of spuriousness or malign substitution. Did not the invitation—the willingness to

have me test the truth of the letter in person—prove its genuineness?

I did not retire Saturday night, but sat up thinking of the shadows and marvels behind the letter I had received. My mind, aching from the quick succession of monstrous conceptions it had been forced to confront during the last four months, worked upon this startling new material in a cycle of doubt and acceptance which repeated most of the steps experienced in facing the earlier wonders; till long before dawn a burning interest and curiosity had begun to replace the original storm of perplexity and uneasiness. Mad or sane, metamorphosed or merely relieved, the chances were that Akeley had actually encountered some stupendous change of perspective in his hazardous research; some change at once diminishing his danger—real or fancied—and opening dizzy new vistas of cosmic and superhuman knowledge. My own zeal for the unknown flared up to meet his, and I felt myself touched by the contagion of the morbid barrier-breaking. To shake off the maddening and wearying limitations of time and space and natural law—to be linked with the vast *outside*—to come close to the nighted and abysmal secrets of the infinite and the ultimate—surely such a thing was worth the risk of one's life, soul, and sanity! And Akeley had said there was no longer any peril—he had invited me to visit him instead of warning me away as before. I tingled at the thought of what he might now have to tell me—there was an almost paralyzing fascination in the thought of sitting in that lonely and lately-beleaguered farmhouse with a man who had talked with actual emissaries from outer space; sitting there with the terrible record and the pile of letters in which Akeley had summarized his earlier conclusions.

So late Sunday morning I telegraphed Akeley that I would meet him in Brattleboro on the following Wednesday—September 12th—if that date were convenient for him. In only one respect did I depart from his suggestions, and that concerned the choice of a train. Frankly, I did not feel like arriving in that haunted Vermont region late at night; so instead of accepting the train he chose I telephoned the station and devised another arrangement. By rising early and taking the 8:07 a. m. (standard) into Boston, I could catch the 9:25 for Greenfield; arriving there at 12:22 noon. This connected exactly with a train reaching Brattleboro at 1:08 p. m.—a much more comfortable hour than 10:01 for meeting Akeley and riding with him into the close-packed, secret-guarding hills.

I mentioned this choice in my telegram, and was glad to learn in the reply which came toward evening that it had met with my prospective host's endorsement. His wire ran thus:

ARRANGEMENT SATISFACTORY. WILL MEET 1:08 TRAIN WEDNESDAY. DON'T FORGET RECORD AND LETTERS AND PRINTS. KEEP DESTINATION QUIET. EXPECT GREAT REVELATIONS.

AKELEY.

Receipt of this message in direct response to one sent to Akeley—and necessarily delivered to his house from the Townshend station either by official messenger or by a restored telephone service—removed any lingering subconscious doubts I may have had about the authorship of the perplexing letter. My relief was marked—indeed, it was greater than I could account for at the time; since all such doubts had been rather deeply buried. But I slept soundly and long that night, and was eagerly busy with preparations during the ensuing two days.

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ON WEDNESDAY I started as agreed, taking with me a valise full of simple necessities and scientific data, including the hideous phonograph record, the kodak prints, and the entire file of Akeley's correspondence. As requested, I had told no one where I was going; for I could see that the matter demanded utmost privacy, even allowing for its most favorable turns. The thought of actual mental contact with alien, outside entities was stupefying enough to my trained and somewhat prepared mind; and this being so, what might one think of its effect on the vast masses of uninformed laymen? I do not know whether dread or adventurous expectancy was uppermost in me as I changed trains at Boston and began the long westward run out of familiar regions into those I knew less thoroughly. Waltham — Concord — Ayer — Fitchburg — Gardner — Athol——

My train reached Greenfield seven minutes late, but the northbound connecting express had been held. Transferring in haste, I felt a curious breathlessness as the cars rumbled on through the early afternoon sunlight into territories I had always read of but had never before visited. I knew I was entering an altogether older-fashioned and more primitive New England than the mechanized, urbanized coastal and southern areas where all my life had been spent; an unspoiled, ancestral New England without the foreigners and factory-smoke, billboards and concrete roads, of the sections which modernity has touched. There would be odd survivals of that continuous native life whose deep roots make it the one authentic outgrowth of the landscape—the continuous native life which keeps alive strange ancient memories, and fertilizes the soil for shadowy, marvelous, and seldom-mentioned beliefs.

Now and then I saw the blue Connecticut River gleaming in the sun, and after leaving Northfield we crossed it. Ahead loomed green and cryptical hills, and when the conductor came around I learned that I was at last in Vermont. He told me to set my watch back an hour, since the northern hill country will have no dealings with new-fangled daylight time schemes. As I did so it seemed to me that I was likewise turning the calendar back a century.

The train kept close to the river, and across in New Hampshire I could see the approaching slope of steep Wantastiquet, about which singular old legends cluster. Then streets appeared on my left, and a green island showed in the stream on my right. People rose and filed to the door, and I followed them. The cars stopped, and I alighted beneath the long train-shed of the Brattleboro station.

Looking over the line of waiting motors I hesitated a moment to see which one might turn out to be the Akeley Ford, but my identity was divined before I could take the initiative. And yet it was clearly not Akeley himself who advanced to meet me with an outstretched hand and a mellowly phrased query as to whether I was indeed Mr. Albert N. Wilmarth of Arkham. This man bore no resemblance to the bearded, grizzled Akeley of the snapshot; but was a younger and more urban person, fashionably dressed, and wearing only a small, dark mustache. His cultivated voice held an odd and almost disturbing hint of vague familiarity, though I could not definitely place it in my memory.

As I surveyed him I heard him explaining that he was a friend of my prospective host's who had come down from Townshend in his stead. Akeley, he declared, had suffered a sudden attack of some asthmatic trouble, and did not feel

equal to making a trip in the outdoor air. It was not serious, however, and there was to be no change in plans regarding my visit. I could not make out just how much this Mr. Noyes—as he announced himself—knew of Akeley's researches and discoveries, though it seemed to me that his casual manner stamped him as a comparative outsider. Remembering what a hermit Akeley had been, I was a trifle surprized at the ready availability of such a friend; but did not let my puzzlement deter me from entering the motor to which he gestured me. It was not the small ancient car I had expected from Akeley's descriptions, but a large and immaculate specimen of recent pattern—apparently Noyes's own, and bearing Massachusetts license plates with the amusing "sacred codfish" device of that year. My guide, I concluded, must be a summer transient in the Townshend region.

Noyes climbed into the car beside me and started it at once. I was glad that he did not overflow with conversation, for some peculiar atmospheric tensity made me feel disinclined to talk. The town seemed very attractive in the afternoon sunlight as we swept up an incline and turned to the right into the main street. It drowsed like the older New England cities which one remembers from boyhood, and something in the collocation of roofs and steeples and chimneys and brick walls formed contours touching deep viol-strings of ancestral emotion. I could tell that I was at the gateway of a region half-bewitched through the piling-up of unbroken time-accumulations; a region where old, strange things have had a chance to grow and linger because they have never been stirred up.

As we passed out of Brattleboro my sense of constraint and foreboding increased, for a vague quality in the hill-crowded countryside with its towering, threatening, close-pressing green and granite slopes hinted at obscure secrets and immemorial survivals which might or might not be hostile to mankind. For a time our course followed a broad, shallow river which flowed down from unknown hills in the north, and I shivered when my companion told me it was the West River. It was in this stream, I recalled from newspaper items, that one of the morbid crab-like beings had been seen floating after the floods.

Gradually the country around us grew wilder and more deserted. Archaic covered bridges lingered fearsomely out of the past in pockets of the hills, and the half-abandoned railway track paralleling the river seemed to exhale a nebulously visible air of desolation. There were awesome sweeps of vivid valley where great cliffs rose, New England's virgin granite showing gray and austere through the verdure that scaled the crests. There were gorges where untamed streams leaped, bearing down toward the river the unimagined secrets of a thousand pathless peaks. Branching away now and then were narrow, half-concealed roads that bored their way through solid, luxuriant masses of forest among whose primal trees whole armies of elemental spirits might well lurk. As I saw these I thought of how Akeley had been molested by unseen agencies on his drives along this very route, and did not wonder that such things could be.

The quaint, sightly village of Newfane, reached in less than an hour, was our last link with that world which man can definitely call his own by virtue of conquest and complete occupancy. After that we cast off all allegiance to immediate, tangible, and time-touched things, and entered a fantastic world of hushed unreality in which the narrow, ribbon-like

road rose and fell and curved with an almost sentient and purposeful caprice amidst the tenantless green peaks and half-deserted valleys. Except for the sound of the motor, and the faint stir of the few lonely farms we passed at infrequent intervals, the only thing that reached my ears was the gurgling, insidious trickle of strange waters from numberless hidden fountains in the shadowy woods.

The nearness and intimacy of the dwarfed, domed hills now became veritably breath-taking. Their steepness and abruptness were even greater than I had imagined from hearsay, and suggested nothing in common with the prosaic objective world we know. The dense, unvisited woods on those inaccessible slopes seemed to harbor alien and incredible things, and I felt that the very outline of the hills themselves held some strange and eon-forgotten meaning, as if they were vast hieroglyphs left by a rumored titan race whose glories live only in rare, deep dreams. All the legends of the past, and all the stupefying imputations of Henry Akeley's letters and exhibits, welled up in my memory to heighten the atmosphere of tension and growing menace. The purpose of my visit, and the frightful abnormalities it postulated, struck at me all at once with a chill sensation that nearly overbalanced my ardor for strange delvings.

MY GUIDE must have noticed my disturbed attitude; for as the road grew wilder and more irregular, and our motion slower and more jolting, his occasional pleasant comments expanded into a steadier flow of discourse. He spoke of the beauty and weirdness of the country, and revealed some acquaintance with the folklore studies of my prospective host. From his polite questions it was obvious that he knew I had come for a scientific purpose, and that I was bringing data of some importance; but he gave no sign of appreciating the depth and awfulness of the knowledge which Akeley had finally reached.

His manner was so cheerful, normal, and urbane that his remarks ought to have calmed and reassured me; but oddly enough, I felt only the more disturbed as we bumped and veered onward into the unknown wilderness of hills and woods. At times it seemed as if he were pumping me to see what I knew of the monstrous secrets of the place, and with every fresh utterance that vague, teasing, baffling *familiarity* in his voice increased. It was not an ordinary or healthy familiarity despite the thoroughly wholesome and cultivated nature of the voice. I somehow linked it with forgotten nightmares, and felt that I might go mad if I recognized it. If any good excuse had existed, I think I would have turned back from my visit. As it was, I could not well do so—and it occurred to me that a cool, scientific conversation with Akeley himself after my arrival would help greatly to pull me together.

Besides, there was a strangely calming element of cosmic beauty in the hypnotic landscape through which we climbed and plunged fantastically. Time had lost itself in the labyrinths behind, and around us stretched only the flowering waves of faery and the recaptured loveliness of vanished centuries—the hoary groves, the untainted pastures edged with gay autumnal blossoms, and at vast intervals the small brown farmsteads nestling amidst huge trees beneath vertical precipices of fragrant brier and meadow-grass. Even the sunlight assumed a supernal glamor, as if some special atmosphere or exhalation mantled the whole region. I had seen nothing like it before save in the magic

vistas that sometimes form the backgrounds of Italian primitives. Sodoma and Leonardo conceived such expanses, but only in the distance, and through the vaultings of Renaissance arcades. We were now burrowing bodily through the midst of the picture, and I seemed to find in its necromancy a thing I had innately known or inherited and for which I had always been vainly searching.

Suddenly, after rounding an obtuse angle at the top of a sharp ascent, the car came to a standstill. On my left, across a well-kept lawn which stretched to the road and flaunted a border of whitewashed stones, rose a white, two-and-a-half-story house of unusual size and elegance for the region, with a congeries of contiguous or arcade-linked barns, sheds, and windmill behind and to the right. I recognized it at once from the snapshot I had received, and was not surprized to see the name of Henry Akeley on the galvanized-iron mail-box near the road. For some distance back of the house a level stretch of marshy and sparsely-wooded land extended, beyond which soared a steep, thickly-forested hillside ending in a jagged leafy crest. This latter, I knew, was the summit of Dark Mountain, half-way up which we must have climbed already.

Alighting from the car and taking my valise, Noyes asked me to wait while he went in and notified Akeley of my advent. He himself, he added, had important business elsewhere, and could not stop for more than a moment. As he briskly walked up the path to the house I climbed out of the car myself, wishing to stretch my legs a little before settling down to a sedentary conversation. My feeling of nervousness and tension had risen to a maximum again now that I was on the actual scene of the morbid beleaguering described so hauntingly in Akeley's letters, and I honestly dreaded the coming discussions which were to link me with such alien and forbidden worlds.

Close contact with the utterly bizarre is often more terrifying than inspiring, and it did not cheer me to think that this very bit of dusty road was the place where those monstrous tracks and that fetid green ichor had been found after moonless nights of fear and death. Idly I noticed that none of Akeley's dogs seemed to be about. Had he sold them all as soon as the Outer Ones had made peace with him? Try as I might, I could not have the same confidence in the depth and sincerity of that peace which appeared in Akeley's final and queerly different letter. After all, he was a man of much simplicity and with little worldly experience. Was there not, perhaps, some deep and sinister undercurrent beneath the surface of the new alliance?

Led by my thoughts, my eyes turned downward to the powdery road surface which had held such hideous testimonies. The last few days had been dry, and tracks of all sorts cluttered the rutted, irregular highway despite the unfrequented nature of the district. With a vague curiosity I began to trace the outlines of some of the heterogeneous impressions, trying meanwhile to curb the flights of macabre fancy which the place and its memories suggested. There was something menacing and uncomfortable in the funereal stillness, in the muffled, subtle trickle of distant brooks, and in the crowding green peaks and black-wooded precipices that choked the narrow horizon.

And then an image shot into my consciousness which made those vague menaces and flights of fancy seem mild and insignificant indeed. I have said that I was scanning the miscellaneous prints in the road with a kind of idle curiosity—but all at once that curiosity was shock-

ingly snuffed out by a sudden and paralyzing gust of active terror. For though the dust tracks were in general confused and overlapping, and unlikely to arrest any casual gaze, my restless vision had caught certain details near the spot where the path to the house joined the highway; and had recognized beyond doubt or hope the frightful significance of those details. It was not for nothing, alas, that I had pored for hours over the kodak views of the Outer Ones' claw-prints which Akeley had sent. Too well did I know the marks of those loathsome nippers, and that hint of ambiguous direction which stamped the horrors as no creatures of this planet. No chance had been left me for merciful mistake. Here, indeed, in objective form before my own eyes, and surely made not many hours ago, were at least three marks which stood out blasphemously among the surprizing plethora of blurred footprints leading to and from the Akeley farmhouse. *They were the hellish tracks of the living fungi from Yuggoth.*

I pulled myself together in time to stifle a scream. After all, what more was there than I might have expected, assuming that I had really believed Akeley's letters? He had spoken of making peace with the things. Why, then, was it strange that some of them had visited his house? But the terror was stronger than the reassurance. Could any man be expected to look unmoved for the first time upon the claw-marks of animate beings from outer depths of space? Just then I saw Noyes emerge from the door and approach with a brisk step. I must, I reflected, keep command of myself, for the chances were that this genial friend knew nothing of Akeley's profoundest and most stupendous probings into the forbidden.

Akeley, Noyes hastened to inform me, was glad and ready to see me; although his sudden attack of asthma would prevent him from being a very competent host for a day or two. These spells hit him hard when they came, and were always accompanied by a debilitating fever and general weakness. He never was good for much while they lasted—had to talk in a whisper, and was very clumsy and feeble in getting about. His feet and ankles swelled, too, so that he had to bandage them like a gouty old beef-eater. Today he was in rather bad shape, so that I would have to attend very largely to my own needs; but he was none the less eager for conversation. I would find him in the study at the left of the front hall —the room where the blinds were shut. He had to keep the sunlight out when he was ill, for his eyes were very sensitive.

As Noyes bade me adieu and rode off northward in his car I began to walk slowly toward the house. The door had been left ajar for me; but before approaching and entering I cast a searching glance around the whole place, trying to decide what had struck me as so intangibly queer about it. The barns and sheds looked trimly prosaic enough, and I noticed Akeley's battered Ford in its capacious, unguarded shelter. Then the secret of the queerness reached me. It was the total silence. Ordinarily a farm is at least moderately murmurous from its various kinds of livestock, but here all signs of life were missing. What of the hens and the hogs? The cows, of which Akeley had said he possessed several, might conceivably be out to pasture, and the dogs might possibly have been sold; but the absence of any trace of cackling or grunting was truly singular.

I did not pause long on the path, but resolutely entered the open house door and closed it behind me. It had cost me a distinct psychological effort to do so, and now that I was shut inside I had a

momentary longing for precipitate retreat. Not that the place was in the least sinister in visual suggestion; on the contrary, I thought the graceful late-colonial hallway very tasteful and wholesome, and admired the evident breeding of the man who had furnished it. What made me wish to flee was something very attenuated and indefinable. Perhaps it was a certain odd odor which I thought I noticed—though I well knew how common musty odors are in even the best of ancient farmhouses.

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REFUSING to let these cloudy qualms overmaster me, I recalled Noyes's instructions and pushed open the six-paneled, brass-latched white door on my left. The room beyond was darkened, as I had known before; and as I entered it I noticed that the queer odor was stronger there. There likewise appeared to be some very faint, half-imaginary rhythm or vibration in the air. For a moment the closed blinds allowed me to see very little, but then a kind of apologetic hacking or whispering sound drew my attention to a great easy-cair in the farther, darker corner of the room. Within its shadowy depths I saw the white blur of a man's face and hands; and in a moment I had crossed to greet the figure who had tried to speak. Dim though the light was, I perceived that this was indeed my host. I had studied the kodak picture repeatedly, and there could be no mistake about this firm, weather-beaten face with the cropped, grizzled beard.

But as I looked again my recognition was mixed with sadness and anxiety; for certainly, this face was that of a very sick man. I felt that there must be something more than asthma behind that strained, rigid, immobile expression and unwinking glassy stare; and realized how terribly the strain of his frightful experiences must have told on him. Was it not enough to break any human being—even a younger man than this intrepid delver into the forbidden? The strange and sudden relief, I feared, had come too late to save him from something like a general breakdown. There was a touch of the pitiful in the limp, lifeless way his lean hands rested in his lap. He had on a loose dressing-gown, and was swathed around the head and high around the neck with a vivid yellow scarf or hood.

And then I saw that he was trying to talk in the same hacking whisper with which he had greeted me. It was a hard whisper to catch at first, since the gray mustache concealed all movements of the lips, and something in its timbre disturbed me greatly; but by concentrating my attention I could soon make out its purport surprizingly well. The accent was by no means a rustic one, and the language was even more polished than correspondence had led me to expect.

"Mr. Wilmarth, I presume? You must pardon my not rising, I am quite ill, as Mr. Noyes must have told you; but I could not resist having you come just the same. You know what I wrote in my last letter—there is so much to tell you tomorrow when I shall feel better. I can't say how glad I am to see you in person after all our many letters. You have the file with you, of course? And the kodak prints and records? Noyes put your valise in the hall—I supose you saw it. For tonight I fear you'll have to wait on yourself to a great extent. Your room is upstairs—the one over this—and you'll see the bathroom door open at the head of the staircase. There's a meal spread for you in the dining-room—right through this door at your right—which you can take whenever you feel like it.

I'll be a better host tomorrow—but just now weakness leaves me helpless.

"Make yourself at home—you might take out the letters and pictures and records and put them on the table here before you go upstairs with your bag. It is here that we shall discuss them—you can see my phonograph on that corner stand.

"No, thanks—there's nothing you can do for me. I know these spells of old. Just come back for a little quiet visiting before night, and then go to bed when you please. I'll rest right here—perhaps sleep here all night as I often do. In the morning I'll be far better able to go into the things we must go into. You realize, of course, the utterly stupendous nature of the matter before us. To us, as to only a few men on this earth, there will be opened up gulfs of time and space and knowledge beyond anything within the conception of human science or philosophy.

"Do you know that Einstein is wrong, and that certain objects and forces *can* move with a velocity greater than that of light? With proper aid I expect to go backward and forward in time, and actually *see* and *feel* the earth of remote past and future epochs. You can't imagine the degree to which those beings have carried science. There is nothing they can't do with the mind and body of living organisms. I expect to visit other planets, and even other stars and galaxies. The first trip will be to Yuggoth, the nearest world fully peopled by the beings. It is a strange dark orb at the very rim of our solar system—unknown to earthly astronomers as yet. But I must have written you about this. At the proper time, you know, the beings there will direct thought-currents toward us and cause it to be discovered—or perhaps let one of their human allies give the scientists a hint.

"There are mighty cities on Yuggoth—great tiers of terraced towers built of black stone like the specimen I tried to send you. That came from Yuggoth. The sun shines there no brighter than a star, but the beings need no light. They have other, subtler senses, and put no windows in their great houses and temples. Light even hurts and hampers and confuses them, for it does not exist at all in the black cosmos outside time and space where they came from originally. To visit Yuggoth would drive any weak man mad—yet I am going there. The black rivers of pitch that flow under those mysterious cyclopean bridges — things built by some elder race extinct and forgotten before the beings came to Yuggoth from the ultimate voids—ought to be enough to make any man a Dante or Poe if he can keep sane long enough to tell what he has seen.

"But remember—that dark world of fungoid gardens and windowless cities isn't really terrible. It is only to us that it would seem so. Probably this world seemed just as terrible to the beings when they first explored it in the primal age. You know they were here long before the fabulous epoch of Cthulhu was over, and remember all about sunken R'lyeh when it was above the waters. They've been inside the earth, too—there are openings which human beings know nothing of—some of them in these very Vermont hills—and great worlds of unknown life down there; blue-litten K'n-yan, red-litten Yoth, and black, lightless N'kai. It's from N'kai that frightful Tsathoggua came—you know, the amorphous, toad-like god-creature mentioned in the Pnakotic Manuscripts and the Necronomicon and the Commoriom myth-cycle preserved

by the Atlantean high-priest Klarkash-Ton.

"But we will talk of all this later on. It must be four or five o'clock by this time. Better bring the stuff from your bag, take a bite, and then come back for a comfortable chat."

Very slowly I turned and began to obey my host; fetching my valise, extracting and depositing the desired articles, and finally ascending to the room designated as mine. With the memory of that roadside claw-print fresh in my mind, Akeley's whispered paragraphs had affected me queerly: and the hints of familiarity with this unknown world of fungous life—forbidden Yuggoth—made my flesh creep more than I cared to own. I was tremendously sorry about Akeley's illness, but had to confess that his hoarse whisper had a hateful as well as pitiful quality. If only he wouldn't *gloat* so about Yuggoth and its black secrets!

My room proved a very pleasant and well-furnished one, devoid alike of the musty odor and disturbing sense of vibration; and after leaving my valise there I descended again to greet Akeley and take the lunch he had set out for me. The dining-room was just beyond the study, and I saw that a kitchen ell extended still farther in the same direction. On the dining-table an ample array of sandwiches, cake, and cheese awaited me, and a thermos-bottle beside a cup and saucer testified that hot coffee had not been forgotten. After a well-relished meal I poured myself a liberal cup of coffee, but found that the culinary standard had suffered a lapse in this one detail. My first spoonful revealed a faintly unpleasant acrid taste, so that I did not take more. Throughout the lunch I thought of Akeley sitting silently in the great chair in the darkened next room. Once I went in to beg him to share the repast, but he whispered that he could eat nothing as yet. Later on, just before he slept, he would take some malted milk—all he ought to have that day.

After lunch I insisted on clearing the dishes away and washing them in the kitchen sink—incidentally emptying the coffee which I had not been able to appreciate. Then returning to the darkened study I drew up a chair near my host's corner and prepared for such conversation as he might feel inclined to conduct. The letters, pictures, and record were still on the large center-table, but for the nonce we did not have to draw upon them. Before long I forgot even the bizarre odor and curious suggestions of vibration.

I HAVE said that there were things in some of Akeley's letters—especially the second and most voluminous one—which I would not dare to quote or even form into words on paper. This hesitancy applies with still greater force to the things I heard whispered that evening in the darkened room among the lonely haunted hills. Of the extent of the cosmic horrors unfolded by that raucous voice I can not even hint. He had known hideous things before, but what he had learned since making his pact with the Outside Things was almost too much for sanity to bear. Even now I absolutely refuse to believe what he implied about the constitution of ultimate infinity, the juxtaposition of dimensions, and the frightful position of our known cosmos of space and time in the unending chain of linked cosmos-atoms which makes up the immediate super-cosmos of curves, angles, and material and semi-material electronic organization.

Never was a sane man more dangerously close to the arcana of basic entity —never was an organic brain nearer to

utter annihilation in the chaos that transcends form and force and symmetry. I learned whence Cthulhu *first* came, and why half the great temporary stars of history had flared forth. I guessed—from hints which made even my informant pause timidly—the secret behind the Magellanic Clouds and globular nebulæ, and the black truth veiled by the immemorial allegory of Tao. The nature of the Doels was plainly revealed, and I was told the essence (though not the source) of the Hounds of Tindalos. The legend of Yig, Father of Serpents, remained figurative no longer, and I started with loathing when told of the monstrous nuclear chaos beyond angled space which the *Necronomicon* had mercifully cloaked under the name of Azathoth. It was shocking to have the foulest nightmares of secret myth cleared up in concrete terms whose stark, morbid hatefulness exceeded the boldest hints of ancient and mediæval mystics. Ineluctably I was led to believe that the first whisperers of these accursed tales must have had discourse with Akeley's Outer Ones, and perhaps have visited outer cosmic realms as Akeley now proposed visiting them.

I was told of the Black Stone and what it implied, and was glad that it had not reached me. My guesses about those hieroglyphs had been all too correct! And yet Akeley now seemed reconciled to the whole fiendish system he had stumbled upon; reconciled and eager to probe farther into the montsrous abyss. I wondered what beings he had talked with since his last letter to me, and whether many of them had been as human as that first emissary he had mentioned. The tension in my head grew insufferable, and I built up all sorts of wild theories about that queer, persistent odor and those insidious hints of vibration in the darkened room.

Night was falling now, and as I recalled what Akeley had written me about those earlier nights I shuddered to think there would be no moon. Nor did I like the way the farmhouse nestled in the lee of that colossal forested slope leading up to Dark Mountain's unvisited crest. With Akeley's permission I lighted a small oil lamp, turned it low, and set it on a distant bookcase beside the ghostly bust of Milton; but afterward I was sorry I had done so, for it made my host's strained, immobile face and listless hands look damnably abnormal and corpse-like. He seemed half incapable of motion, though I saw him nod stiffly once in a while.

After what he had told, I could scarcely imagine what profounder secrets he was saving for the morrow; but at last it developed that his trip to Yuggoth and beyond—*and my own possible participation in it*—was to be the next day's topic. He must have been amused by the start of horror I gave at hearing a cosmic voyage on my part proposed, for his head wabbled violently when I showed my fear. Subsequently he spoke very gently of how human beings might accomplish —and several times had accomplished— the seemingly impossible flight across the interstellar void. It seemed *that complete human bodies did not indeed make the trip,* but that the prodigious surgical, biological, chemical, and mechanical skill of the Outer Ones had found a way to convey human brains without their concomitant physical structure.

There was a harmless way to extract a brain, and a way to keep the organic residue alive during its absence. The bare, compact cerebral matter was then immersed in an occasionally replenished fluid within an ether-tight cylinder of a metal mined in Yuggoth, certain electrodes reaching through and connecting at will with elaborate instruments capable

of duplicating the three vital faculties of sight, hearing, and speech. For the winged fungus-beings to carry the brain-cylinders intact through space was an easy matter. Then, on every planet covered by their civilization, they would find plenty of adjustable faculty-instruments capable of being connected with the encased brains; so that after a little fitting these traveling intelligences could be given a full sensory and articulate life—albeit a bodiless and mechanical one—at each stage of their journeying through and beyond the space-time continuum. It was as simple as carrying a phonograph record about and playing it wherever a phonograph of the corresponding make exists. Of its success there could be no question. Akeley was not afraid. Had it not been brilliantly accomplished again and again?

For the first time one of the inert, wasted hands raised itself and pointed stiffly to a high shelf on the farther side of the room. There, in a neat row, stood more than a dozen cylinders of a metal I had never seen before—cylinders about a foot high and somewhat less in diameter, with three curious sockets set in an isosceles triangle over the front convex surface of each. One of them was linked at two of the sockets to a pair of singular-looking machines that stood in the background. Of their purport I did not need to be told, and I shivered as with ague. Then I saw the hand point to a much nearer corner where some intricate instruments with attached cords and plugs, several of them much like the two devices on the shelf behind the cylinders, were huddled together.

"There are four kinds of instruments here, Wilmarth," whispered the voice. "Four kinds—three faculties each—makes twelve pieces in all. You see there are four different sorts of beings represented in those cylinders up there. Three humans, six fungoid beings who can't navigate space corporeally, two beings from Neptune (God! if you could see the body this type has on its own planet!), and the rest entities from the central caverns of an especially interesting dark star beyond the galaxy. In the principal outpost inside Round Hill you'll now and then find more cylinders and machines—cylinders of extra-cosmic brains with different senses from any we know—allies and explorers from the uttermost Outside—and special machines for giving them impressions and expression in the several ways suited at once to them and to the comprehensions of different types of listeners. Round Hill, like most of the beings' main outposts all through the various universes, is a very cosmopolitan place! Of course, only the more common types have been lent to me for experiment.

"Here—take the three machines I point to and set them on the table. That tall one with the two glass lenses in front—then the box with the vacuum tubes and sounding-board—and now the one with the metal disk on top. Now for the cylinder with the label 'B-67' pasted on it. Just stand in that Windsor chair to reach the shelf. Heavy? Never mind! Be sure of the number—B-67. Don't bother that fresh, shiny cylinder joined to the two testing-instruments—the one with my name on it. Set B-67 on the table near where you've put the machines—and see that the dial switch on all three machines is jammed over to the extreme left.

"Now connect the cord of the lens machine with the upper socket on the cylinder—there! Join the tube machine to the lower left-hand socket, and the disk apparatus to the other socket. Now move all the dial switches on the machines over to the extreme right—first the lens one,

then the disk one, and then the tube one. That's right. I might as well tell you that this is a human being—just like any of us. I'll give you a taste of some of the others tomorrow."

TO THIS day I do not know why I obeyed those whispers so slavishly, or whether I thought Akeley was mad or sane. After what had gone before, I ought to have been prepared for anything; but this mechanical mummery seemed so like the typical vagaries of crazed inventors and scientists that it struck a cord of doubt which even the preceding discourse had not excited. What the whisperer implied was beyond all human belief—yet were not the other things still farther beyond, and less preposterous only because of their remoteness from tangible concrete proof?

As my mind reeled amidst this chaos, I became conscious of a mixed grating and whirring from all three of the machines lately linked to the cylinder—a grating and whirring which soon subsided into a virtual noiselessness. What was about to happen? Was I to hear a voice? And if so, what proof would I have that it was not some cleverly concocted radio device talked into by a concealed but closely watching speaker? Even now I am unwilling to swear just what I heard, or just what phenomenon really took place before me. But something certainly seemed to take place.

To be brief and plain, the machine with the tubes and sound-box suddenly began to speak, and with a point and intelligence which left no doubt that the speaker was actually present and observing us. The voice was loud, metallic, lifeless, and plainly mechanical in every detail of its production. It was incapable of inflection or expressiveness, but scraped and rattled on with a deadly precision and deliberation.

"Mr. Wilmarth," it said, "I hope I do not startle you. I am a human being like yourself, though my body is now resting safely under proper vitalizing treatment inside Round Hill, about a mile and a half east of here. I myself am here with you—my brain is in that cylinder and I see, hear, and speak through these electronic vibrators. In a week I am going across the void as I have been many times before, and I expect to have the pleasure of Mr. Akeley's company. I wish I might have yours as well; for I know you by sight and reputation, and have kept close track of your correspondence with our friend. I am, of course, one of the men who have become allied with the outside beings visiting our planet. I met them first in the Himalayas, and have helped them in various ways. In return they have given me experiences such as few men have ever had.

"Do you realize what it means when I say I have been on thirty-seven different celestial bodies—planets, dark stars, and less definable objects — including eight outside our galaxy and two outside the curved cosmos of space and time? All this has not harmed me in the least. My brain has been removed from my body by fissions so adroit that it would be crude to call the operation surgery. The visiting beings have methods which make these extractions easy and almost normal —and one's body never ages when the brain is out of it. The brain, I may add, is virtually immortal with its mechanical faculties and a limited nourishment supplied by occasional changes of the preserving fluid.

"Altogether, I hope most heartily that you will decide to come with Mr. Akeley and me. The visitors are eager to know men of knowledge like yourself, and to

show them the great abysses that most of us have had to dream about in fanciful ignorance. It may seem strange at first to meet them, but I know you will be above minding that. I think Mr. Noyes will go along, too—the man who doubtless brought you up here in his car. He has been one of us for years—I suppose you recognized his voice as one of those on the record Mr. Akeley sent you."

At my violent start the speaker paused a moment before concluding.

"So, Mr. Wilmarth, I will leave the matter to you; merely adding that a man with your love of strangeness and folklore ought never to miss such a chance as this. There is nothing to fear. All transitions are painless, and there is much to enjoy in a wholly mechanized state of sensation. When the electrodes are disconnected, one merely drops off into a sleep of especially vivid and fantastic dreams.

"And now, if you don't mind, we might adjourn our session till tomorrow. Good-night—just turn all the switches back to the left; never mind the exact order, though you might let the lens machine be last. Good-night, Mr. Akeley—treat our guest well! Ready now with those switches?"

That was all. I obeyed mechanically and shut off all three switches, though dazed with doubt of everything that had occurred. My head was still reeling as I heard Akeley's whispering voice telling me that I might leave all the apparatus on the table just as it was. He did not essay any comment on what had happened, and indeed no comment could have conveyed much to my burdened faculties. I heard him telling me I could take the lamp to use in my room, and deduced that he wished to rest alone in the dark. It was surely time he rested, for his discourse of the afternoon and evening had been such as to exhaust even a vigorous man. Still dazed, I bade my host good-night and went upstairs with the lamp, although I had an excellent pocket flashlight with me.

I WAS glad to be out of that downstairs study with the queer odor and vague suggestions of vibration, yet could not of course escape a hideous sense of dread and peril and cosmic abnormality as I thought of the place I was in and the forces I was meeting. The wild, lonely region, the black, mysteriously forested slope towering so close behind the house, the footprint in the road, the sick, motionless whisperer in the dark, the hellish cylinders and machines, and above all the invitations to strange surgery and stranger voyagings—these things, all so new and in such sudden succession, rushed in on me with a cumulative force which sapped my will and almost undermined my physical strength.

To discover that my guide Noyes was the human celebrant in that monstrous bygone Sabbat-ritual on the phonograph record was a particular shock, though I had previously sensed a dim, repellent familiarity in his voice. Another special shock came from my own attitude toward my host whenever I paused to analyze it; for much as I had instinctively liked Akeley as revealed in his correspondence, I now found that he filled me with a distinct repulsion. His illness ought to have excited my pity; but instead, it gave me a kind of shudder. He was so rigid and inert and corpse-like—and that incessant whispering was so hateful and un-human!

It occurred to me that this whispering was different from anything else of the kind I had ever heard; that, despite the curious motionlessness of the speaker's mustache-screened lips, it had a latent strength and carrying-power remarkable

for the wheezings of an asthmatic. I had been able to understand the speaker when wholly across the room, and once or twice it had semed to me that the faint but penetrant sounds represented not so much weakness as deliberate repression—for what reason I could not guess. From the first I had felt a disturbing quality in their timbre. Now, when I tried to weigh the matter, I thought I could trace this impression to a kind of subconscious familiarity like that which had made Noyes's voice so hazily ominous. But when or where I had encountered the thing it hinted at, was more than I could tell.

One thing was certain—I would not spend another night here. My scientific zeal had vanished amidst fear and loathing, and I felt nothing now but a wish to escape from this net of morbidity and unnatural revelation. I knew enough now. It must indeed be true that strange cosmic linkages do exist—but such things are surely not meant for normal human beings to meddle with.

Blasphemous influences seemed to surround me and press chokingly upon my senses. Sleep, I decided, would be out of the question; so I merely extinguished the lamp and threw myself on the bed fully dressed. No doubt it was absurd, but I kept ready for some unknown emergency; gripping in my right hand the revolver I had brought along, and holding the pocket flashlight in my left. Not a sound came from below, and I could imagine how my host was sitting there with cadaverous stiffness in the dark.

Somewhere I heard a clock ticking, and was vaguely grateful for the normality of the sound. It reminded me, though, of another thing about the region which disturbed me—the total absence of animal life. There were certainly no farm beasts about, and now I realized that even the accustomed night-noises of wild living things were absent. Except for the sinister trickle of distant unseen waters, that stillness was anomalous—interplanetary—and I wondered what star-spawned, intangible blight could be hanging over the region. I recalled from old legends that dogs and other beasts had always hated the Outer Ones, and thought of what those tracks in the road might mean.

8

DO NOT ask me how long my unexpected lapse into slumber lasted, or how much of what ensued was sheer dream. If I tell you that I awaked at a certain time, and heard and saw certain things, you will merely answer that I did not wake then; and that everything was a dream until the moment when I rushed out of the house, stumbled to the shed where I had seen the old Ford, and seized that ancient vehicle for a mad, aimless race over the haunted hills which at last landed me—after hours of jolting and winding through forest-threatened labyrinths—in a village which turned out to be Townshend.

You will also, of course, discount everything else in my report; and declare that all the pictures, record-sounds, cylinder-and-machine sounds, and kindred evidences were bits of pure deception practised on me by the missing Henry Akeley. You will even hint that he conspired with other eccentrics to carry out a silly and elaborate hoax—that he had the express shipment removed at Keene, and that he had Noyes make that terrifying wax record. It is odd, though, that Noyes has not even yet been identified; that he was unknown at any of the villages near Akeley's place, though he must have been frequently in the region. I wish I had stopped to memorize the license-number of his car—or perhaps it

is better after all that I did not. For I, despite all you can say, and despite all I sometimes try to say to myself, know that loathsome outside influences must be lurking there in the half-unknown hills—and that those influences have spies and emissaries in the world of men. To keep as far as possible from such influences and such emissaries is all that I ask of life in future.

When my frantic story sent a sheriff's posse out to the farmhouse, Akeley was gone without a leaving a trace. His loose dressing-gown, yellow scarf, and foot-bandages lay on the study floor near his corner easy-chair, and it could not be decided whether any of his other apparel had vanished with him. The dogs and livestock were indeed missing, and there were some curious bullet-holes both on the house's exterior and on some of the walls within; but beyond this nothing unusual could be detected. No cylinders or machines, none of the evidences I had brought in my valise, no queer odor or vibration-sense, no footprints in the road, and none of the problematical things I glimpsed at the very last.

I stayed a week in Brattleboro after my escape, making inquiries among people of every kind who had known Akeley; and the results convince me that the matter is no figment of dream or delusion. Akeley's queer purchases of dogs and ammunition and chemicals, and the cutting of his telephone wires, are matters of record; while all who knew him—including his son in California—concede that his occasional remarks on strange studies had a certain consistency. Solid citizens believe he was mad, and unhesitatingly pronounce all reported evidences mere hoaxes devised with insane cunning and perhaps abetted by eccentric associates; but the lowlier country folk sustain his statements in every detail. He had showed some of these rustics his photographs and black stone, and had played the hideous record for them; and they all said the footprints and buzzing voice were like those described in ancestral legends.

They said, too, that suspicious sights and sounds had been noticed increasingly around Akeley's house after he found the black stone, and that the place was now avoided by everybody except the mail man and other casual, tough-minded people. Dark Mountain and Round Hill were both notoriously haunted spots, and I could find no one who had ever closely explored either. Occasional disappearances of natives throughout the district's history were well attested, and these now included the semi-vagabond Walter Brown, whom Akeley's letters had mentioned. I even came upon one farmer who thought he had personally glimpsed one of the queer bodies at flood-time in the swollen West River, but his tale was too confused to be really valuable.

When I left Brattleboro I resolved never to go back to Vermont, and I feel quite certain I shall keep my resolution. Those wild hills are surely the outpost of a frightful cosmic race—as I doubt all the less since reading that a new ninth planet has been glimpsed beyond Neptune, just as those influences had said it would be glimpsed. Astronomers, with a hideous appropriateness they little suspect, have named this thing "Pluto". I feel, beyond question, that it is nothing less than nighted Yuggoth—and I shiver when I try to figure out the real reason *why* its monstrous denizens wish it to be known in this way at this especial time. I vainly try to assure myself that those demoniac creatures are not gradually leading up to some new policy hurtful to the earth and its normal inhabitants.

But I have still to tell of the ending of that terrible night in the farmhouse. As

I have said, I did finally drop into a troubled doze; a doze filled with bits of dream which involved monstrous landscape-glimpses. Just what awaked me I can not yet say, but that I did indeed awake at this given point I feel very certain. My first confused impression was of stealthily creaking floor-boards in the hall outside my door, and of a clumsy, muffled fumbling at the latch. This, however, ceased almost at once; so that my really clear impressions begin with the voices heard from the study below. There seemed to be several speakers, and I judged that they were controversially engaged.

By the time I had listened a few seconds I was broad awake, for the nature of the voices was such as to make all thought of sleep ridiculous. The tones were curiously varied, and no one who had listened to that accursed phonograph record could harbor any doubts about the nature of at least two of them. Hideous though the idea was, I knew that I was under the same roof with nameless things from abysmal space; for those two voices were unmistakably the blasphemous buzzings which the Outside Beings used in their communication with men. The two were individually different—different in pitch, accent, and tempo—but they were both of the same damnable general kind.

A third voice was indubitably that of a mechanical utterance-machine connected with one of the detached brains in the cylinders. There was as little doubt about that as about the buzzings; for the loud, metallic, lifeless voice of the previous evening, with its inflectionless, expressionless scraping and rattling, and its impersonal precision and deliberation, had been utterly unforgettable. For a time I did not pause to question whether the intelligence behind the scraping was the identical one which had formerly talked to me; but shortly afterward I reflected that *any* brain would emit vocal sounds of the same quality if linked to the same mechanical speech-producer; the only possible differences being in language, rhythm, speed, and pronunciation. To complete the eldritch colloquy there were two actually human voices—one the crude speech of an unknown and evidently rustic man, and the other the suave Bostonian tones of my erstwhile guide Noyes.

As I tried to catch the words which the stoutly-fashioned floor so bafflingly intercepted, I was also conscious of a great deal of stirring and scratching and shuffling in the room below; so that I could not escape the impression that it was full of living beings—many more than the few whose speech I could single out. The exact nature of this stirring is extremely hard to describe, for very few good bases of comparison exist. Objects seemed now and then to move across the room like conscious entities; the sound of their footfalls having something about it like a loose, hard-surfaced clattering—as of the contact of ill-coördinated surfaces of horn or hard rubber. It was, to use a more concrete but less accurate comparison, as if people with loose, splintery wooden shoes were shambling and rattling about on the polished board floor. Of the nature and appearance of those responsible for the sounds, I did not care to speculate.

BEFORE long I saw that it would be impossible to distinguish any connected discourse. Isolated words—including the names of Akeley and myself—now and then floated up, especially when uttered by the mechanical speech-producer; but their true significance was lost for want of continuous context. Today I refuse to

form any definite deductions from them, and even their frightful effect on me was one of *suggestion* rather than of *revelation*. A terrible and abnormal conclave, I felt certain, was assembled below me; but for what shocking deliberations I could not tell. It was curious how this unquestioned sense of the malign and the blasphemous pervaded me despite Akeley's assurances of the Outsiders' friendliness.

With patient listening I began to distinguish clearly between voices, even though I could not grasp much of what any of the voices said. I seemed to catch certain typical emotions behind some of the speakers. One of the buzzing voices, for example, held an unmistakable note of authority; whilst the mechanical voice, notwithstanding its artificial loudness and regularity, seemed to be in a position of subordination and pleading. Noyes's tones exuded a kind of conciliatory atmosphere. The others I could make no attempt to interpret. I did not hear the familiar whisper of Akeley, but well knew that such a sound could never penetrate the solid flooring of my room.

I will try to set down some of the few disjointed words and other sounds I caught, labeling the speakers of the words as best I know how. It was from the speech-machine that I first picked up a few recognizable phrases.

(THE SPEECH-MACHINE)

". . . brought it on myself . . . sent back the letters and the record . . . end on it . . . taken in . . . seeing and hearing . . . damn you . . . impersonal force, after all . . . fresh, shiny cylinder . . . great God . . ."

(FIRST BUZZING VOICE)

". . . time we stopped . . . small and human . . . Akeley . . . brain . . . saying . . ."

(SECOND BUZZING VOICE)

". . . Nyarlathotep . . . Wilmarth . . . record and letters . . . cheap imposture . . ."

(NOYES)

". . . (an unpronounceable word or name, possibly *N'gah-Kthun)* . . . harmless . . . peace . . . couple of weeks . . . theatrical . . . told you that before . . ."

(FIRST BUZZING VOICE)

". . . no reason . . . original plan . . . effects . . . Noyes can watch . . . Round Hill . . . fresh cylinder . . . Noyes's car . . ."

(NOYES)

". . . well . . . all yours . . . down here . . . rest . . . place . . ."

(SEVERAL VOICES AT ONCE IN INDISTINGUISHABLE SPEECH)

(MANY FOOTSTEPS, INCLUDING THE PECULIAR LOOSE STIRRING OR CLATTERING)

(A CURIOUS SORT OF FLAPPING SOUND)

(THE SOUND OF AN AUTOMOBILE STARTING AND RECEDING)

(SILENCE)

That is the substance of what my ears brought me as I lay rigid upon that strange upstairs bed in the haunted farmhouse among the demoniac hills—lay there fully dressed, with a revolver clenched in my right hand and a pocket flashlight gripped in my left. I became, as I have said, broad awake; but a kind of obscure paralysis nevertheless kept me inert till long after the last echoes of the sounds had died away. I heard the wooden, deliberate ticking of the ancient Connecticut clock somewhere far below, and at last made out the irregular snoring of a sleeper. Akeley must have dozed off after the strange session, and I could well believe that he needed to do so.

Just what to think or what to do was more than I could decide. After all, what *had* I heard beyond things which previous information might have led me to expect? Had I not known that the nameless Outsiders were now freely admitted to the farmhouse? No doubt Akeley had been surprized by an unexpected visit from them. Yet something in that

fragmentary discourse had chilled me immeasurably, raised the most grotesque and horrible doubts, and made me wish fervently that I might wake up and prove everything a dream. I think my subconscious mind must have caught something which my consciousness has not yet recognized. But what of Akeley? Was he not my friend, and would he not have protested if any harm were meant me? The peaceful snoring below seemed to cast ridicule on all my suddenly intensified fears.

Was it possible that Akeley had been imposed upon and used as a lure to draw me into the hills with the letters and pictures and phonograph record? Did those beings mean to engulf us both in a common destruction because we had come to know too much? Again I thought of the abruptness and unnaturalness of that change in the situation which must have occurred between Akeley's penultimate and final letters. Something, my instinct told me, was terribly wrong. All was not as it seemed. That acrid coffee which I refused—had there not been an attempt by some hidden, unknown entity to drug it? I must talk to Akeley at once, and restore his sense of proportion. They had hypnotized him with their promises of cosmic revelations, but now he must listen to reason. We must get out of this before it would be too late. If he lacked the will-power to make the break for liberty, I would supply it. Or if I could not persuade him to go, I could at least go myself. Surely he would let me take his Ford and leave it in a garage at Brattleboro. I had noticed it in the shed—the door being left unlocked and open now that peril was deemed past—and I believed there was a good chance of its being ready for instant use. That momentary dislike of Akeley which I had felt during and after the evening's conversation was all gone now. He was in a position much like my own, and we must stick together. Knowing his indisposed condition, I hated to wake him at this juncture, but I knew that I must. I could not stay in this place till morning as matters stood.

At last I felt able to act, and stretched myself vigorously to regain command of my muscles. Arising with a caution more impulsive than deliberate, I found and donned my hat, took my valise, and started downstairs with the flashlight's aid. In my nervousness I kept the revolver clutched in my right hand, being able to take care of both valise and flashlight with my left. Why I exerted these precautions I do not really know, since I was even then on my way to awaken the only other occupant of the house.

As I half-tiptoed down the creaking stairs to the lower hall I could hear the sleeper more plainly, and noticed that he must be in the room on my left—the living-room I had not entered. On my right was the gaping blackness of the study in which I had heard the voices. Pushing open the unlatched door of the living-room I traced a path with the flashlight toward the source of the snoring, and finally turned the beams on the sleeper's face. But in the next second I hastily turned them away and commenced a cat-like retreat to the hall, my caution this time springing from reason as well as from instinct. For the sleeper on the couch was not Akeley at all, but my quondam guide Noyes.

Just what the real situation was, I could not guess; but common sense told me that the safest thing was to find out as much as possible before arousing anybody. Regaining the hall, I silently closed and latched the living-room door after me;

thereby lessening the chances of awaking Noyes. I now cautiously entered the dark study, where I expected to find Akeley, whether asleep or awake, in the great corner chair which was evidently his favorite resting-place. As I advanced, the beams of my flashlight caught the great center-table, revealing one of the hellish cylinders with sight and hearing machines attached, and with a speech machine standing close by, ready to be connected at any moment. This, I reflected, must be the encased brain I had heard talking during the frightful conference; and for a second I had a perverse impulse to attach the speech machine and see what it would say.

It must, I thought, be conscious of my presence even now; since the sight and hearing attachments could not fail to disclose the rays of my flashlight and the faint creaking of the floor beneath my feet. But in the end I did not dare meddle with the thing. I idly saw that it was the fresh shiny cylinder with Akeley's name on it, which I had noticed on the shelf earlier in the evening and which my host had told me not to bother. Looking back at that moment, I can only regret my timidity and wish that I had boldly caused the apparatus to speak. God knows what mysteries and horrible doubts and questions of identity it might have cleared up! But then, it may be merciful that I let it alone.

From the table I turned my flashlight to the corner where I thought Akeley was, but found to my perplexity that the great easy-chair was empty of any human occupant asleep or awake. From the seat to the floor there trailed voluminously the familiar old dressing-gown, and near it on the floor lay the yellow scarf and the huge foot-bandages I had thought so odd. As I hesitated, striving to conjecture where Akeley might be, and why he had so suddenly discarded his necessary sick-room garments, I observed that the queer odor and sense of vibration were no longer in the room. What had been their cause? Curiously it occurred to me that I had noticed them only in Akeley's vicinity. They had been strongest where he sat, and wholly absent except in the room with him or just outside the doors of that room. I paused, letting the flashlight wander about the dark study and racking my brain for explanations of the turn affairs had taken.

Would to Heaven I had quietly left the place before allowing that light to rest again on the vacant chair. As it turned out, I did not leave quietly; but with a muffled shriek which must have disturbed, though it did not quite awake, the sleeping sentinel across the hall. That shriek, and Noyes's still-unbroken snore, are the last sounds I ever heard in that morbidity-choked farmhouse beneath the black-wooded crest of haunted mountain —that focus of trans-cosmic horror amidst the lonely green hills and curse-muttering brooks of a spectral rustic land.

It is a wonder that I did not drop flashlight, valise, and revolver in my wild scramble, but somehow I failed to lose any of these. I actually managed to get out of that room and that house without making any further noise, to drag myself and my belongings safely into the old Ford in the shed, and to set that archaic vehicle in motion toward some unknown point of safety in the black, moonless night. The ride that followed was a piece of delirium out of Poe or Rimbaud or the drawings of Doré, but finally I reached Townshend. That is all. If my sanity is still unshaken, I am lucky. Sometimes I fear what the years will bring, especially since that new planet Pluto has been so curiously discovered.

As I have implied, I let my flashlight

return to the vacant easy-chair after its circuit of the room; then noticing for the first time the presence of certain objects in the seat, made inconspicuous by the adjacent loose folds of the empty dressing-gown. These are the objects, three in number, which the investigators did not find when they came later on. As I said at the outset, there was nothing of actual visual horror about them. The trouble was in what they led one to infer. Even now I have my moments of half-doubt—moments in which I half accept the skepticism of those who attribute my whole experience to dream and nerves and delusion.

The three things were damnably clever constructions of their kind, and were furnished with ingenious metallic clamps to attach them to organic developments of which I dare not form any conjecture. I hope—devoutly hope—that they were the waxen products of a master artist, despite what my inmost fears tell me. Great God! That whisperer in darkness with its morbid odor and vibrations! Sorcerer, emissary, changeling, outsider . . . that hideous repressed buzzing . . . and all the time in that fresh, shiny cylinder on the shelf . . . poor devil . . . "prodigious surgical, biological, chemical, and mechanical skill". . . .

For the things in the chair, perfect to the last, subtle detail of microscopic resemblance—or identity—were the face and hands of Henry Wentworth Akeley.

Tam, Son of the Tiger

By OTIS ADELBERT KLINE

A vivid novel of thrills and strange happenings, with the very gods of Asia as characters

The Story Thus Far

TAM EVANS, two-year-old son of Major Charles Evans, American philanthropist and sportsman, was carried off by a white tigress while his parents were hunting in the Burmese jungle.

The tigress, which had lost three of her four cubs, adopted the boy, and raised him in a pagoda in an old temple ruin that stood in the heart of the jungle. Her remaining cub was Tam's only playmate.

Tam's foster mother had been reared by a lama named Lozong, who had gone on a pilgrimage. Lozong later returned to find the cub full-grown and Tam about half-grown, living and acting exactly like a tiger.

The lama made friends with all three, and being well educated, taught Tam much from his store of knowledge. In his youth he had been a brigand leader and a mighty swordsman, and he also taught the boy to use weapons, particularly the *yatagan*, a terrible, double-curved sword with which he could cut down a tall tree at a single stroke.

The boy made friends with many

"He threw his weight on the nearest stone petal."

jungle creatures, including a huge bull elephant, which he named Ganesha. At the age of twenty, Tam had the strength and bravery of a tiger, an education better than the average, a knowledge of the jungle such as only its creatures possess, and an almost uncanny ability with weapons.

One day Ganesha strayed off into the jungle. Tam, while hunting for him, rescued a beautiful girl in golden armor from a man-eating tiger. Speaking a language which resembled both Sanskrit and Tibetan, both of which Tam understood, she told him her name was Nina, and that she came from a place called Iramatri. She was hungry, and Tam shot a peafowl for her. But while they were cooking it they were attacked by a band of four-armed giants riding on strange beasts larger than elephants, and assisted by a number of hairy, primitive men.

Tam slew one of the hairy men and cut down one of the four-armed giants. But the girl was carried off, while Tam, knocked senseless by a blow from a mace, was left for dead.

CHAPTER 7

The World Below

WHEN Tam regained consciousness after being knocked out by the terrible, four-armed rider, he felt a blast of hot breath in his face. Looking up, he saw a great shadowy bulk swaying above him. It was Ganesha, the elephant.

The giant bull was shifting his weight from one foot to another, after the manner of his kind, flapping his great ears and, from time to time, throwing bunches of jungle grass over his back to rid it of accumulated insect pests.

Presently Tam sat up.

The end of the trunk sniffed at him affectionately for a moment, then, as he grasped it, stiffened, forming a brace by which he drew himself erect. His head ached dully, and touching it with his hand he felt the hair matted with dried blood over a painful bump where the mace had struck.

Suddenly dizzy, he swayed, and would have fallen but for the supporting trunk. But presently his vision cleared, and he was able to look about him. Lying undisturbed where it had fallen, he saw the body of his gigantic enemy.

To his surprize, the sun was just rising over the eastern tree tops. It had been early afternoon when he had fought to save Nina, the beautiful girl in the golden armor. Hence, he had lain unconscious all night. Or had it been but one night? With his jungle training it was easy for him to solve the problem quickly. He knew that Ganesha must have come upon him almost immediately after he had lost his senses, or he and the body of his adversary would have been devoured by the scavengers which quickly scent out dead and wounded animals in the wilds, and that the elephant must have been standing guard over him since that time.

The tracks showed that Ganesha had gone to the little stream twice to drink. In two days of munching the dry jungle grass he would have gone oftener. Tam also noticed the condition of the trampled area about him and the amount of grass which had been devoured. All these signs told him that he had lain unconscious but one night.

Presently, finding that he could stand unsupported, he staggered off toward the little stream. Depositing his weapons and his single scant garment on the bank, he wallowed in the shallow water for a time, drinking and bathing. Ganesha came to join him, and Tam splashed water over his big friend to the latter's manifest enjoyment.

Then, resuming his clothing and weap-

ons, he commanded the elephant to hoist him to his neck, and with his bare feet dangling behind the great, flapping ears, he set out to the northward, riding on the trail of the strange and fearful creatures who had carried off the beautiful Nina.

As he hurried Ganesha along the trail, Tam did not attempt to analyze the reason for his pursuit of Nina's abductors. He only knew that he felt the urge to follow and rescue her—that somehow, though he had never felt that way in the jungle before, he now was strangely lonely. Other than Lozong, she was the only human friend he had found, and it seemed to him that the short hours of their comradeship were the brightest and most interesting of his existence.

FOR six days Tam followed the well-marked trail left by the gigantic mounts of his enemies. Game was plentiful, and there was forage for the elephant in abundance, so it was not necessary to make any long stops to secure food. As he progressed, the trail began to slant toward the northwest. He noticed, with satisfaction, that he was rapidly overhauling Nina's captors, as evinced by the increasing freshness of the tracks, and the fact that each day their camp-sites were passed earlier.

Having crossed the foothills, he came at length to the great mountain barrier that separates Burma and Tibet. And very suddenly, just after he entered the mountains on the morning of the seventh day, he sighted the rear guard of the band he pursued, as it filed over the brow of a hill.

Urging Ganesha to his utmost speed, Tam soon reached the hilltop. He had formed no definite plan for rescuing Nina, but he knew this must be done by stealth, and probably under cover of darkness in order to have any chance of success.

He halted his huge mount, and slipping to the ground, went forward to reconnoiter. He took advantage of every bit of cover as he advanced, in order that his enemies might not see him and so be on their guard against his intended foray.

The hill from which he was looking down descended steeply into a small valley. The strange cavalcade he followed was already at the bottom of the valley, and making straight for the tall, perpendicular cliffs directly opposite. His heart gave a great bound as he made out, seated before one of the giant riders, the slender, gold-clad form of Nina. The hairy, manlike Zargs, armed with their slings and clubs, trotted tirelessly along beside the huge steeds.

It was a most formidable band, and might have appalled a large and well-armed force. But Tam, accustomed to overcoming great odds since infancy, thought nothing of the risks. He was concerned only as to the best means for accomplishing his purpose, for in this he was determined not to fail.

He was puzzled by the fact that the entire company was moving steadily toward the cliff, in which there was neither a pass nor pathway. Then he noticed that directly in front of them was a large shrine, which arched fully fifty feet above the valley floor. Under the dome of this shrine was a stone colossus—a gigantic image of a beautiful woman seated cross-legged in the heart of an immense lotus. Both were carved from stone, and rested on a pedestal about twenty feet high of the same material.

While Tam watched, the foremost rider halted his mount beside the pedestal, then stood up in the saddle. Grasping one of the stone petals of the lotus, he threw his weight on it, dragging it downward. Then he resumed his seat, and riding around behind the pedestal, disappeared.

The others followed, accompanied by the Zargs, and soon the entire company had disappeared behind the pedestal.

Tam blinked, to make sure that his eyes had not deceived him, then looked again. It seemed incredible that this large cavalcade could be concealed in the relatively small niche back of the pedestal. There must be a cave, perhaps an immense cavern, behind it, the mouth hidden by the supporting base of the colossus. He would investigate.

He returned to Ganesha, who was making use of the idle moments by browsing on the leaves of a tree that overhung the trail, and mounting, he rode forward.

The path down the hillside was steep, and Tam fidgeted impatiently while the elephant cautiously felt his way downward. But once at the bottom, he responded to his master's urging with long swift strides.

DISMOUNTING several hundred feet from the shrine, Tam left Ganesha concealed in a clump of trees, and stealthily approached his objective. Upon reaching the base of the pedestal he crouched there for several minutes, listening intently. There were two sounds coming from the niche, but neither was particularly alarming. One was the tinkle of a small spring or waterfall and the other sounded like two large stones being rubbed together.

Cautiously he emerged from the bushes and crept around the base of the pedestal. There was no living thing in sight, but he did catch a glimpse of a narrow opening in the wall behind. This was being slowly closed by an immense slab of rock. While he watched, amazed, the aperture shut completely, and the sound of rubbing stones ended. But the trickling sound continued unabated, despite the fact that there was no water in sight.

Obviously, it was through this opening that the cavalcade carrying Nina had gone. But how could the slab be raised so that he and Ganesha might get through to follow? There were no knobs, handles or levers on the huge stone that now stood between him and his objective. Then how had it been manipulated? In a flash, he thought of the lotus petal.

He called the elephant, who came crashing up through the underbrush. Mounting, he rode the big beast up beside the pedestal, and stood up. But stretch and jump as he would, he could not reach the rim. Then he remembered that Ganesha was greater longitudinally than vertically, and bade him rear up. The big bull complied, resting his forefeet on the pedestal. Mounting to his broad forehead, Tam easily reached the rim and drew himself up.

He threw his weight on the nearest stone petal. It would not budge. He tried another with a like result. But the third instantly tilted when he leaned on it. Pressing it down as far as it would go, he descended to the brow of the waiting Ganesha, slid down to his neck, and ordered him to lower his forefeet.

Riding around the base of the pedestal, he waited expectantly. The familiar grinding sound had commenced again, and in a moment he saw a narrow crack at the bottom of the entrance, which was widening perceptibly.

Breathlessly he watched the opening grow, wondering what would be behind it. Perhaps there would be enemies lurking there, waiting to spring at him. His hand went unconsciously to the hilt of his *yatagan* at the thought.

As he was striving to see what lay beyond that dark portal, he heard, far back in the valley, the report of a rifle. It was followed by two more in rapid succession.

To Tam, these sounds indicated the proximity of possible enemies. He ordered Ganesha forward, but the elephant

refused to budge, elevating his trunk and gleaming tusks as if he scented danger. It was the first time he had disobeyed for many months, and Tam, who had lost his *ankus,* pricked him with the point of his *dah.* The big beast trumpeted angrily, but still refused to move. So Tam, noticing that the slab was beginning to descend once more, slid to the ground and entered the cavity on foot.

Yatagan in hand, he hurried down the sloping floor into the deepening gloom. He had not gone far when he heard the thud of heavy feet behind. Whirling to see what was pursuing him, he was relieved to learn that it was only Ganesha, who, despite his evident fear of the place, had decided to follow his beloved master. Soon the big brute caught up with him and began nuzzling him with his trunk in a quite obvious attempt to be restored to grace. Pausing, Tam permitted himself to be lifted to the massive neck once more, after which the now thoroughly submissive Ganesha carried him down the ramp at his swiftest pace.

But the way grew darker as they descended, and soon the elephant was compelled to feel his way. They had traveled thus laboriously for some time when Tam saw a faint light far ahead of them. At the same time he heard sounds in the passageway behind which indicated that he was being pursued.

Now, as they progressed, the way grew lighter, and soon Ganesha was able to resume his fastest gait. Suddenly they emerged into light bright as day, and a scene that held Tam spellbound with wonder. He had expected to find a large cave, but was in no way prepared for the immense panorama that spread before him. At first, he thought he had come clear through the mountain and was viewing the open country beyond it. But he remembered that he had started at the valley floor, and since then had continuously traveled downward. This, then, could not be the outer world, for Lozong had taught him that Tibet, the country beyond the mountains, was higher than Burma—a lofty plateau sometimes referred to as "The Top of the World."

But if he were under the plateau, and not on it, whence came the light, bright as day, streaming down through the silver mist in the sky above him? It was strong as sunlight, yet a trifle whiter than it usually appears when filtered through a mist—white with a faint bluish cast. And what was this vast country that stretched before him, with its mountains and valleys, forests and plains, rushing rivers and placid lakes?

He was on a road cut from the stony face of a rugged cliff, the topmost of a whole series of terraced cliffs, descending one after another to a depth that was appalling. Above him, the cliff face disappeared into the silver mists. Far below, following the windings of the road on which he stood, he saw a procession of creatures looking no larger than ants. He realized, with a start, that this was the cavalcade he was pursuing, and turning Ganesha, urged him down the trail.

Tam had not covered more than a tenth of the distance to the bottom when he looked back to see who followed him. So far above him that they looked no larger than the cavalcade he was following, three elephants, one carrying a howdah, and two with loaded pads, came down the trail. Trudging ahead of them was the barely visible figure of a man, accompanied by two trotting animals. They looked much like tigers, but might have been large dogs.

Puzzled, Tam rode on, wondering who these newcomers could be. The journey down the cliff trail occupied several hours, during which time he kept about an equal distance between the party he pursued and the one that was following him.

When he reached the level plain below, the road wound through a forest for some distance, crossed a roaring river over an arched stone bridge, and entered a dense jungle on the other side. But he had not gone far when he saw tracks where the cavalcade he followed had turned off at the left, breaking a narrow trail through the jungle growths where the great beasts had traveled single file.

GLAD to leave the stone road for a trail more like that to which he was accustomed, Ganesha plunged eagerly into the jungle, stripping leaves from overhanging limbs and munching them as he lumbered along.

Soon they emerged from the forest on to a rolling grassy plain, thinly dotted with small clumps of trees and shrubs, and of vast extent.

The trail led quite near one of these clumps, and Tam, straining his eyes ahead in an effort to see the party he was following, failed to notice the stealthy movement of a great, tawny beast in the shrubbery at his left. The little pig-like eyes of the huge carnivore glittered hungrily as it waited for the approaching beast and rider, and its snout twitched apprehensively as it sniffed the breeze that bore it the scent of this strange game.

Suddenly Tam heard a roar more terrific than that of any tiger, and saw a giant beast of fearful aspect hurtling through the air toward him. It was larger than any lion or tiger, though it looked a little like both, with a bit of the hyena thrown in for good measure.

At the sound of that roar, Ganesha leaped back, with the result that the beast, instead of alighting on his back, struck the ground beside him, then reared up, clawing at his shoulder and growling thunderously.

As the elephant started off at his swiftest pace with the strange and terrible carnivore clinging to his side, Tam whipped bow and arrow from his quiver, and turning, sent a feathered shaft into the breast of the attacker. But it only seemed to infuriate the great flesh-eater. Before he could launch a second arrow, the monster was upon him.

Man and beast rolled down together from the back of the plunging elephant, and Tam struck the ground with a force that nearly knocked the breath from his body. Weakly he tried to hold off the huge jaws that sought his throat by gripping the wiry mane. But the shock of his fall seemed to have paralyzed him—robbed him of his strength.

Slowly, relentlessly, the gleaming fangs descended.

CHAPTER 8

Gods at War

SEATED at a camp table breakfasting with his friend, Dr. Hubert Green, archeologist and paleontologist, was Major Charles Evans. The passage of the years since his son Tam had been stolen had made little difference in the major's tall, athletic figure, for the active, outdoor life he led had kept him fit. Only by a slightly deeper etching of the lines of his handsome, sunbrowned face, and a touch of silver at each temple, had time left any noticeable marks on him during that period.

His companion was almost his exact opposite in every particular. Doctor Green was short, heavy-set, red-headed and bespectacled. When on an exploring trip, which was most of the time, he never bothered with a razor, and the resultant flaming red beard was a never-ending wonder to guides, mahouts and natives.

Yusuf, the major's efficient Pathan servant, refilled the coffee cups, cleared off the dishes, and silently padded away to the cook tent.

"This joint expedition of ours seems to

have been rather a one-sided affair, thus far, Doc," said the major, lighting a cigarette and leaning back in his camp chair. "I've bagged four tigers, not to mention the bears, deer, and other less lordly game, but your search for traces of the original Aryan civilization hasn't netted a single stone or bone."

"I'm not kicking," replied the doctor cheerfully, as he stirred his coffee. "Every clue I have unearthed in a lifetime of search points to this locality as the place from which our Aryan ancestors started their long trek—a trek that has spread their language and culture to every corner of the globe. And it is here I am content to wander—to poke about until I've dug up the key that will unlock the riddle of their origin and ours."

"This ground has been combed over by scientists, time and again. I think you're on a wild-goose chase, Doc."

"Suppose you let me do the worrying about that, Major," replied the doctor, stuffing his briar with tobacco. "Because a tigress carried off your infant son, you've devoted your life to the grim business of killing tigers. Because of my insatiable curiosity about my remote ancestors, I've dedicated mine to unraveling the greatest and most important archeological riddle known to scientists. But though we travel in the same territory, the nature of our work is quite different. Yours is bound to show tangible results as you go along. But mine requires infinite patience and much laborious detail that, on the surface, shows no such results. However, I have the satisfaction of knowing that what I seek is not far off, and that my chances for success are greater than my chances for failure. It's better than a fifty-fifty break, and I'm content."

The major stood up.

"All right, Doc. If you're satisfied, I certainly ought to be. Hello! Here comes one of the grass-cutters looking as if he had seen a ghost! What is it, boy?"

A slim, nut-brown native, naked save for his loin-cloth, came running up. He was one of the men whose business it was to provide fodder for the elephants. There was a look of abject terror in his eyes, and when he tried to speak he could not, at first, because of the chattering of his teeth.

"I have s-s-seen the gods, *s-sahibs,*" he finally managed to stutter. "G-gods riding on war horses bigger than elephants. And they are fighting with other smaller g-gods, who ride strange elephants with long brown hair. It is t-terrible, *sahibs.* The end of the world is at hand."

Major Evans glanced meaningly at the doctor.

"Hashish," he said.

"Come here, boy."

The doctor grasped the brown wrist, found the pulse with unerring fingers. He squinted at the eyes and face-muscles.

"Not hashish," he said. "Fear."

"Where are the other cutters, boy?" he asked.

"D-down on their faces, praying to the gods, *sahib,*" was the reply.

"What are these gods like?" asked the doctor.

"The big gods are much like Siva—white with four arms. One has four faces, three of gold. But none has the eye in the forehead. With them are many hairy men, who fight for them. The little gods are also white, and are led by a goddess in bright and shining golden armor."

"Rot!" said the major. "The man must be drugged or demented."

"He is not drugged," said the archeologist. "I'm sure of that. Perhaps he has seen something. Let's go over and investigate."

"No harm in that. Ho, Yusuf! An elephant with a pad. Don't bother with the howdah."

A few moments later a big elephant lumbered out of camp carrying its *mahout*, the two white men armed with rifles and pistols, and Yusuf with extra rifles. Ahead, leading the way, trudged the frightened grass-cutter.

About a mile from camp the pandemonium of battle became audible to all. There were shouts, shrieks of agony, the trumpeting and bellowing of beasts and the clash of metal on metal.

"By Jove! There is a fight!" exclaimed Evans.

"Probably a company of natives beating off some brigands from the hills," said the doctor. "Nothing out of the ordinary."

"I'm not so sure of that," said the major. "Why don't we hear any gunshots?"

"Right. I never thought of that."

THEY soon came upon the grass-cutters, who were prostrating themselves toward the sounds of the conflict and muttering prayers. Here the elephant knelt, and the three men on the pad dismounted.

"By George!" exclaimed the major. "It does look like four-armed giants riding on huge monsters of some sort!"

"Better not go too near," cautioned the doctor. "There's no use of our getting mixed up in it."

He paused, and raising his binoculars to his eyes, adjusted them.

"They are four-armed giants," he cried, "and mounted on baluchitheriums! Their opponents are riding mammoths! Why, this is astounding!"

Major Evans was adjusting his own binoculars.

"The battle is nearly over," he said. "Why, look at those shambling hairy creatures, using slings and clubs! They're helping the four-armed giants. I just saw one disembowel a mammoth with his knife.

"And look at that girl in the golden armor! How she fights! Wow! Good girl! She just broke her sword on the crest of a giant warrior and tumbled him from the saddle. Her men rally around her, but they are being overwhelmed. She's thrown her useless hilt away and drawn her dagger. A hairy man has climbed up behind her by clinging to the wool of her mammoth. He's pulled her down! They fall to the ground together!"

"Her last man has been cut down," said the doctor. "She can't escape now. But wait. Look at her fighting that hairy fellow. She buries her dagger in his breast. He falls, wrenching it from her grasp, but she's free. She's running across that shambles of butchered beasts and men. She has darted into the jungle where the riders can't follow her. But the hairy ones are on her trail, and the riders are going around to cut her off."

"What a game little thing she is!" said the major. "I hope she gets away. Well, the battle is over, and all the living have gone. Let's have a closer look at the battlefield. We've stumbled upon something that you scientists have never dreamed of."

As the three men approached the scene of the fray, though the din of battle was over, the horrible sounds of its aftermath had not died away. Mingled with the groans and shrieks of the dying men were the bellowings and trumpetings of the stricken beasts. Overhead the kites and vultures wheeled, while occasional slinking forms drawing nearer in an ever-narrowing circle showed that the jackals and hyenas were gathering for their share of the grisly banquet.

By the time they reached the battle scene the men had evidently all succumbed to their wounds. Fully fifty men, as many of the four-armed giants, and

about thirty of the hairy troglodytes lay dead. There were also ten mammoths, dead and dying, and a dozen baluchitheriums. All the mammoths had been hamstrung and partly disemboweled, and their agonies were horrible to witness. The baluchitheriums had been slain by the long lances of the girl's followers, and only a few of these showed any signs of life.

SWIFTLY, while Yusuf reloaded the rifles for them, the two men went about the business of putting the stricken brutes out of their misery.

The men, it seemed, were beyond all help. Evidently no quarter had been asked or given. The followers of the girl in the golden armor had been cut down to a man. The victorious monsters and their hairy allies had carried off their own wounded, but abandoned their dead.

Their grim task of mercy completed, the doctor said: "Suppose we send Yusuf back to camp for my assistants. Here are enough mammoths and baluchitheriums to stock the leading museums of the world. The skeletons of these troglodytes and four-armed monsters should be of even greater interest, as well as their weapons and equipment."

"Of course, Doc. Science must be served."

"Too bad we couldn't have taken in a single specimen alive," mused the doctor.

"I have it!" exclaimed the major. "Why not follow them? Find out where they came from. Then we can organize a larger expedition equipped for the purpose of capturing the beasts alive."

"Splendid idea! Their trail should be easy to follow. "We'll leave the main body of the expedition here to look after these specimens, then take two or three elephants and go after them. Hello! What's this? I thought I saw this fellow in the chain-mail move."

"Good Lord! He did move!"

The doctor was down beside the fallen warrior in an instant. His face was covered with blood, but he did not appear to have any injuries about the body. Gently removing his battered steel casque, the scientist made a swift examination.

"Only a scalp wound," he said. "Must have been a terrific blow to knock him senseless through that helmet. The steel saved his life. He'll be all right in a little while."

Scarcely had he spoken, ere the warrior opened his eyes and muttered a few words in a language which the major was unable to understand, though many of the words sounded strangely familiar. But much to his surprize, the doctor answered him, apparently in the same tongue. Then the scientist proffered him his canteen, from which he drank deeply. He then helped him to his feet, and they conversed for some time in the strange language.

"Looks as if you two are going to be great pals," commented the major, stuffing his pipe. "What language does the iron-clad gentleman talk?"

"He speaks the language from which our own began," replied the doctor. "Aryan. Remember what I told you this morning about the Aryan migrations starting hereabouts? Well, I was right, so far as the surface of the world is concerned. But if this chap is telling the truth, I'm in for a whole lot bigger discovery than I dreamed of."

"How's that?"

"He says he is the subject of a Princess Nina, who rules the Aryan nation in a subterranean world called Iramatri, or Earth Mother. He tells me that Siva the Destroyer, who rules the race of white four-armed giants, the Saivas, decided to come out of retirement and conquer the world. He asked the co-operation of Princess Nina, but she refused, and came secretly with only a small bodyguard, to

warn the world. Siva, learning of this through his spies in her court, sent his warriors to capture her and take her back a prisoner to his subterranean city, that he might force her to accede to his wishes, and at the same time hold her as a hostage in order to keep her people in line. With his crude weapons I don't think this Siva would have any more chance of conquering the earth than would the cannibals of New Guinea. But of course he needs to be put in his place."

"I disagree with you, Doc," said Evans. "I mean about Siva not having a chance. Remember how our grass-cutters bowed down to his men? Siva has approximately two hundred million worshippers in this part of the world. What do you suppose would happen if he should suddenly appear among them, a god incarnate? Without striking a blow, he could enlist this vast army of men, women and children in his cause. As for modern weapons, these people have them, and the means to get more."

"Never thought of it from that angle. Why, it might cause the biggest and bloodiest war the world has ever known! I would have followed his warriors solely for the sake of science, but now there's a bigger task to perform. We must locate his lair, then return and enlist government aid for the purpose of keeping him bottled up."

"Right. And the sooner the better."

At this moment a group of the doctor's assistants came up. He gave them instructions as to the disposition of the specimens, while the major returned to camp with Yusuf to oversee preparations for their trek after the Saivas.

THEY started on the trail about two hours later, with three elephants and their *mahouts*. In the howdah rode the major, the doctor, Yusuf, and the now fully-recovered Aryan warrior, whose name was Dhava. The two remaining elephants carried their equipment and supplies on pads.

Darkness overtook them before they had traveled far, and they stopped and camped for the night. Early the following morning they resumed the trail.

Some hours later they were crossing a stretch of jungle grass when their elephant suddenly raised his trunk as if he scented danger.

"He smells tiger, *sahibs*," said the mahout.

"I see it," cried the sharp-eyed Yusuf. "It is lying on the bank of the little stream, dead. Several birds are devouring it."

"Sure enough! Let's go down and investigate," said the doctor.

Leaving Yusuf and Dhava in the howdah, the two Americans took their rifles and went forward on foot. As they drew near the spot indicated by the Pathan, a vulture and three kites reluctantly arose from their feast and flapped to a near-by tree, where they waited with the patient resignation of their kind. A swarm of flies which had arisen with them, settled once more.

"Phew! It's a tiger, all right," said the major. "And he's getting riper every minute. Wonder what killed him."

"From the look of his head," said the doctor, "he ran into a buzz-saw. It's split clear in two."

"Here are tracks," said the major, looking down at the imprints in the soft mud. "Looks as if a barefooted man had been here. And there are smaller tracks like those of a woman."

"The man who struck that blow must have had the strength of a giant," said the doctor, "as well as considerable skill with a blade."

"He had both, gentlemen."

Startled at sound of a strange voice, the two men looked up. Standing on the op-

posite bank of the little stream they saw a man with a wrinkled, yellow face, who wore the red cap and garments of a lama. His robes were tucked up to give greater freedom to his legs. A *dah* swung from one side of his belt, and a *yatagan* from the other. At his back was a quiver containing bow and arrows, and in his right hand he carried a long spear on which he now leaned as on a staff.

"A militant lama, by all that's holy!" exclaimed the doctor. Then he said to the stranger: "So it was you who slew the tiger."

"Not I, gentlemen. In my youth I might have dealt such a stroke. But that time is past. It was my son, Tam, for whom I am now searching. I taught him to use the *yatagan,* and the pupil now excels his master."

"Your son Tam!" exclaimed the major. "How came you to give him a Celtic name?"

"I did not name him, nor is he really my son, though I love him as if he were. He was my pupil, my *chela.* When I found him living in the lair of Leang, my white tigress who had adopted him, he told me his name was Tam. So I have always called him by that name."

"With a white tigress! How old is he?"

"I do not know for sure, but I judge him to be about twenty."

"He is my son," said the major, "whom I have mourned as dead for eighteen years—whose mother died of grief shortly after he was carried off."

"Then you are——?"

"Major Charles Evans. This is my friend, Doctor Hubert Green, archeologist and paleontologist."

"I am honored," replied the lama, with dignity. "My name is Lozong."

"Lozong! The brigand leader?" asked the doctor.

"Formerly. But for many years I have sought salvation by way of the eightfold path."

"I have heard of your brilliant exploits, and your retirement to a lamasery," said the doctor. "Your name is famous throughout the East. You later became abbot of the lamasery, did you not?"

"For a time, yes. But I was not satisfied to remain. I have been on many pilgrimages, and I have communicated with the Prince of Righteousness in the solitudes—a seeker after truth."

"And now you carry the weapons of war and the chase. Is this not contrary to the tenets of your faith?"

"Yes, but now I have become a seeker for my *chela.* When I have found him, I will again follow the eightfold path. I will build me a water-wheel that will say for me a thousand *Om Mani Padme Hums* each minute of the day and night. Thus will I regain such merit as I have lost, before it is too late."

The two men crossed the stream to where the lama stood.

"Where is my son now?" asked the major. "Have you any idea?"

"I've been examining the signs hereabout," replied Lozong. "When he slew the tiger he rescued some one from its clutches—apparently a girl or woman, from the tracks."

"The girl in the golden armor!" exclaimed the doctor.

"They then killed and cooked a peacock," continued the lama, "but while they were eating, they were attacked by some strange and fearful creatures. Two of these he slew, one a white giant with four arms, and the other a hairy man-ape. But he was struck down and left for dead, while the girl or woman was apparently carried off. Then came Ganesha, his elephant, to stand guard over him. Early this morning, he rode away on the trail left by the strange beasts on which

his enemies were mounted. I intend following him."

"We are now following the same trail," said the major, "and will be glad of your company. Will you ride in the howdah with us?"

"Thank you, no. I prefer to walk, and can easily keep pace with your elephants. You see I have walked many thousands of miles. Besides, I am accompanied by——"

He was interrupted by a sudden exclamation from the major.

"Look! A tiger!"

He snapped his rifle to his shoulder and pulled the trigger. But the lama struck his gun up, and the bullet sped harmlessly through the upper branches of a korinda. A roar followed the shot, and two beasts, one white, the other striped, came charging out from beneath the korinda bush.

"My tigers," said Lozong. "Do not shoot them." He turned and shouted to the two beasts, whereupon they stopped, regarding the two Americans curiously, their animosity quelled by the voice of the lama.

"The white one is Tam's foster mother," said Lozong. "I call her Leang. The other is his foster brother, Chiam. They both love him, and follow his trail with me."

"I beg to be excused from closer acquaintanceship," said the major.

"And I," said the doctor. "The farther those beasts are from me, the better I'll like it."

"Suppose I travel ahead of you with them," said Lozong. "I'll keep them away from your elephants, and see that they don't go near your camps. They will prove valuable allies if we should find Tam in need of help, as either would die for him."

And so it was agreed.

FOR six days they followed the trail, the lama eating with his friends when they stopped for meals, but sleeping with his tigers at night.

On the seventh day they caught a glimpse of Tam, riding over the top of a hill. At sight of him, Lozong and his tigers redoubled their speed, and the *mahouts* urged the elephants to their fastest pace.

When they reached the top of the hill, they saw Tam on the opposite side of the valley, throwing his weight on the lotus petal beneath the stone colossus.

"It is the entrance to Iramatri," explained Dhava, when the doctor questioned him. "By pressing down the petal he opens the gate."

Tam and Ganesha had already disappeared behind the pedestal when the doctor explained this to Tam's father.

"We can never catch him now, before he gets inside," said the major. "Perhaps I can attract his attention with some shots."

He fired his rifle three times, but Tam did not again appear. When they reached the colossus, boy and elephant were gone, and the stone slab was closed.

Standing on top of the howdah, Dhava was able to reach the rim of the pedestal. Pulling himself up, he pressed down the petal.

When the slab raised, Lozong and his tigers were permitted to enter first. They were followed by the three elephants with the men and supplies.

Curious as to how the gate operated, the doctor looked back, flashing his electric torch on the mechanism.

"Hmm. Operated by a counterbalance," he said, "with a small water reservoir. The slab weighs just a trifle more than the counterbalance. But when the petal is moved, water from a little spring is directed into the reservoir. This increases the weight of the counterbalance and raises the slab. But when the counter-

balance has dipped to a certain angle the water runs out of the reservoir, and the slab again slides into place. A most ingenious contrivance."

With the aid of their flashlights they found it easy to negotiate the dark tunnel, and gained considerably on Tam in the process.

Reaching the road that wound down the terraced cliff, they were able to see both Tam and those he pursued. They followed him down this road, across the bridge at the base of the cliff, and into the jungle, gaining rapidly on him all the time.

Suddenly, as they emerged from the forest on to the grassy plain, the doctor exclaimed:

"Look! The boy is being attacked! It's an andrewsarchus, and it has dragged him off the elephant!"

"I'll have to risk a shot," said the major, "or he'll be torn to pieces. Stop the elephant, boy."

Obedient to his command, the mahout stopped the beast on which they were riding. Snatching up his heaviest rifle, the .450 caliber Bury, the major took careful aim and fired at the great brute, which was standing over his prostrate son.

He knew the beast was hit, for he saw it leap high in the air, but whether he had slain it or only rendered it more ferocious he was not to know, for at this moment there suddenly galloped up from an opening in the jungle, a company of fully a hundred four-armed giants, mounted on white baluchitheriums. Unlike the white Saivas, these giants had skins that were a livid blue in color.

They were armed with long-shafted tridents, the center prong of each plated with gold and the outer prongs with silver. They also carried heavy war clubs and *chakras,* queer, quoit-like weapons.

"The Vaishnavas!" exclaimed Dhava. "Surrender to them, or they will hurl their *chakras* and slay us all!"

CHAPTER 9

The City of Monsters

TAM fought desperately to keep the sharp fangs of the carnivore that had pulled him down from reaching his throat. But the shock of his fall had robbed him of his strength, and it seemed that his efforts were useless.

Faintly he heard the distant crack of a rifle. To his surprize, the beast that had sought his life leaped high in the air, then fell beside him, kicking and quivering in its death throes. Ganesha, who had returned to his assistance, first impaled the quivering body with his tusks, then knelt on it.

Getting unsteadily to his feet, Tam looked back. About an eighth of a mile distant, he saw a large company of four-armed blue giants riding on white mounts. They had just surrounded the party that had been following him. He had no way of knowing whether this party was hostile or friendly to him, nor did he connect the sound of the rifle-shot with the death of the beast that had attacked him, but thought it had driven his arrow into its heart by its exertions.

Well, it was no affair of his if the party that pursued him was captured. His purpose was to rescue Nina. Recovering his fallen weapons, he coaxed the infuriated Ganesha away from the remains of his crushed and mangled foe, mounted, and rode off after the captors of the girl in the golden armor.

His struggle with the monster had delayed him but a few minutes, yet during that interval the party he pursued had forged so far ahead as to be out of sight. The trail was well marked, however, and he was able to continue his swift pace unabated.

When he had first entered this strange, subterranean jungle, Tam had been so engrossed with the chase that he had paid no attention to its unusual flora and fauna. But his recent narrow escape had put him on his guard, and now, as he hurried Ganesha along the trail, he constantly glanced about him, every faculty alert for sign of some hidden enemy.

Presently his empty stomach began insistently to remind him that it had received no attention for quite some time. And so while he watched for enemies, he was also on the lookout for edible game.

It was not long before he saw a large rodent about two feet tall, squatting on its haunches at the mouth of its burrow. His bow twanged, and the arrow transfixed the creature.

At an order from Tam, Ganesha reluctantly picked up the still-kicking game with his trunk and handed it to his master. He was fearful of all rodents, and had it been of a smaller variety, would have refused to go near it. Removing his arrow from the carcass and drawing his knife, Tam dined on his favorite food, fresh, raw meat, as he rode along.

At length, with a sigh of satisfaction, he heaved the remains of his kill into the grass and wished for a drink of water. But as there was none in sight, he promptly forgot the matter with the patient resignation he had learned in the jungle, and concentrated on the business of trying to catch up with Nina's abductors as soon as possible.

Grazing on the rolling, grassy country he was traversing, Tam saw many strange creatures, none of which were like anything he had seen in the outer world. There were herds of lizard-like creatures as large as buffalos, with tails like alligators and bony ruffs around their thick necks. They were cropping grass with their hooked beaks, which resembled those of vultures.

There were also herds of tiny horses no bigger than jackals, that scurried off with shrill squeals whenever he approached them. They were dogged by giant flightless birds twice as big as ostriches, which easily outran them, and preyed on them constantly. In fact, it seemed to Tam that every species of herbivorous creature roaming these plains had a carnivorous enemy species which gave it special attention. And this in addition to the dozens of other carnivorous beasts, birds and reptiles that might stalk it, outrun it, or swoop down upon it from the air.

But despite all this, the herds of grazers were large and numerous. Obviously, there was no wanton slaughter. Unlike wasteful man, the flesh-eaters slew only when they needed food. Thus a plentiful supply of game was constantly maintained.

Passing out of this hunters' paradise, the trail led Tam across a chain of rugged hills. Here the ground was strewn with boulders and the vegetation was sparse and stunted.

But beyond the hills he came to a pleasant wooded valley, down the center of which a river meandered. The trail led straight down to the river bank, and here Tam and Ganesha paused for a time, to drink and bathe.

Back on the bank, Tam had donned his garment and was buckling his belt about him, when he noticed two little lumps gliding along the surface of the water. Ganesha was still in the river, dipping his trunk in the water from time to time, filling it and spraying his broad back and sides.

Suddenly Tam saw the two little bumps dart straight for the tip of the elephant's trunk, just as he immersed it. Ganesha instantly reared up, then backed toward the bank. Clinging to the tip of his trunk was a snake-like head, attached to a long,

scaly neck. But at the other end of that neck was a large, oval body almost as big as that of the elephant. And it was reinforced by two pairs of wide flippers that assisted it in maintaining its position in the water nearly as well as did the elephant's feet on land. In an instant, both trunk and neck were stretched out straight by the ensuing tug-of-war, the elephant striving to scramble up the bank, while the great saurian did its best to pull him into the water, churning the stream to foam with its huge flippers.

Without a moment's hesitation Tam whipped out his *yatagan* and leaped into the water. One stroke of the keen blade severed the scaly neck, and the elephant backed up on the bank, trumpeting angrily and endeavoring to shake off the still-clinging reptilian head, while the huge body of the saurian threshed aimlessly about in the shallows.

After some time, Tam succeeded in quieting Ganesha, and tried to remove the head that still clung to the trunk. But he found it impossible to pry the jaws apart, and was compelled to cut the muscles before it could finally be removed.

As he mounted the elephant and once more resumed the trail, Tam noticed a change in the color of the light which streamed down through the mists that shrouded the invisible vault above this strange land. When he had first entered the subterranean world the light had been blue-white, and quite as intense as strong sunlight. Now it was beginning to turn yellow, and was growing dimmer. He noticed that the shadows, too, were lengthening, just as they lengthened near the close of the day on the outer earth.

From this point the trail followed the winding of the river for a considerable distance, and from time to time Tam noticed strange and monstrous creatures disporting themselves in its waters. There were a great many of the large scaly saurians like that which had attacked Ganesha. Still larger and more ferocious than these were creatures with heads like crocodiles and bodies like porpoises. And equally formidable were the gigantic water snakes.

Swiftly the yellow twilight turned to orange—then to red. Numerous fearsome creatures came down to the river to drink, among them curious birds and still more curious flying reptiles, some of which were large enough to have easily flown off with a man.

There were titanic struggles among the water, land and air creatures, and the woods echoed and re-echoed with roars, bellows, snarls and shrieks. Often Tam was compelled to stop his mount in order to avoid some monster which came crashing across their path on its way to the water.

The red light faded swiftly, to be succeeded by a brownish-gray twilight. Suddenly, to Tam's surprize, the trail emerged on to a broad stone road which ran at right angles with it. An examination of the pavement showed that the mounts of those he pursued had turned to the left. Their muddy tracks on the hard stone led across an arched bridge that spanned the streams he had been following. These tracks grew fainter as he pressed onward, and the oncoming darkness made it increasingly difficult to see them.

Presently, as he rounded a bend in the road, he saw far ahead of him the towers, turrets and battlements of a great, walled city of white stone. Standing in the very center of this city was a cylindrical tower, fully five hundred feet in height. Tam recognized it instantly from descriptions and pictures he had seen, as the *linga,* the phallic symbol of Siva, built on a gigantic scale never dreamed of on the outer earth.

The road he was following led straight

to a pair of massive brazen gates in the city wall. He felt positive that somewhere behind those gates Nina was being held prisoner.

The problem of how to go to her rescue was now made a thousandfold more difficult. He had planned to take her from an enemy camp by stealth, but a large city was quite another matter. He had never been in one. All he knew of cities had been gleaned from books. Besides, no city such as the one which now confronted him had ever been described in any book he had read.

How to get into the city without being seen, and then locate and rescue the girl, he had not the slightest idea. Though he was without a definite plan, he did not lack determination. The task must be accomplished somehow.

But the problem he pondered as he rode toward the city in the gathering darkness was not left for his solution. Something whizzed through the air, colliding violently with the side of his head and knocking him from his seat. It was a heavy club. Half stunned by its impact, he lost his balance and fell to the ground with a jolt that knocked the breath from his body. Instantly an immense horde of the hairy Zargs burst out into the road from the concealment of the forest shadows, yelling like demons and brandishing their clubs. A half-dozen of them pounced on the partly-stunned Tam, disarmed him, and bound him hand and foot, while a number of their companions foolishly attacked the elephant.

Maddened by the savage yells and the stones and clubs striking him, Ganesha charged the troglodytes, trampling many of the hairy bodies and seizing others in his powerful trunk, to hurl them shrieking to the ground with such force that when they struck they never rose again.

WHILE Tam's faithful mount was thus occupied, four of the Zargs were trotting with him slung over their shoulders, straight for the brazen gates of the city. As darkness fell, lights blinked forth from the walls, and in the towers, turrets and minarets. Tam caught glimpses of these from time to time as he was bounced about on the shoulders of his captors.

He could still hear the shrieks and howls of the Zargs and the trumpeting of Ganesha as his captors took him before the city gate. On each side of the gateway, mounted on the wall, was a watch-tower. From one of these a four-armed white warrior leaned out.

"What have you there, Zargs?" he asked, speaking the same language Nina had used, and which Tam understood because of his studies of Sanskrit and Tibetan.

"A prisoner, master," replied one of the Zargs. "He followed our expedition, and we waited to capture him by order of the Great Lord Ranya."

"Good! I will see that you are rewarded."

The brazen gates swung outward, revealing a broad, straight street. Two giant, four-armed soldiers armed with *tulwars*, maces and tridents came out and took charge of Tam. One of them cut the bonds from his ankles and jerked him erect, then marched him through the gate, gripping his left arm with one powerful right hand and menacing him with the *tulwar* held in the other. The second warrior carried Tam's bundle of weapons, which the Zargs had brought along.

The street, like the highway, was paved with stone, and was fronted, in this section, mostly by low, two- and three-storied buildings of white stone, roofed and trimmed with brass. The doors and windows were covered with ornate brass grillework, in strange and unusual designs,

which were kept so well polished that they reflected the yellow glow of the street lamps with considerable brilliancy.

Many of the gigantic, pasty-faced monsters who formed the citizenry were on the streets, and most of these paused to stare at Tam as his two guards hustled him along. There were a number of females, on the average slightly smaller than the males, but equally hideous. Some of them were accompanied by children who, when only half grown, were larger than the average man of the outer earth.

But what surprized Tam the most was the variety of monstrous forms which these people assumed. Some of them had but one eye, placed just above the nose. Some had three and even four eyes. And there did not seem to be any uniformity in the number of limbs. The number of arms varied from two to eight, four being the average. And some of them had as many as six legs. Limbs seemed to sprout at random from almost any part of the trunk, so that some walked on two feet with extra legs dangling uselessly in the air, while others moved about like quadrupeds or centipedes. From the uniform size of the soldiers, and the fact that they were all four-armed, two-legged and two-eyed, Tam judged that the individuals who formed the army were chosen from among those who had these particular qualifications.

As they neared the central tower the buildings became larger and more pretentious, evidently the homes of dignitaries, mercantile establishments, warehouses, factories and government buildings. They followed no standard of design, but were built in many queer shapes and styles, and diversely decked with spires, minarets, towers and domes.

The immense central building, which supported the huge *linga* that towered above all else, was shaped like a gigantic millstone, flat-roofed and sheer-sided.

Tam's conductors, after a word with the giant guards, hustled him through a door in this building and down a long hallway. Then they pushed him into a small round room and closed the door. Suddenly he felt the floor rising beneath him. As it shot swiftly upward he had a strange feeling in his stomach and a curious sense of pressure in his ears. It was his first experience with an elevator.

PRESENTLY the floor stopped moving, and one of the warriors opened the door. Again they hurried Tam along the corridor, then stopped before an arched doorway at which two giants stood guard.

"Whom have you here?" asked one of the guards.

"A prisoner for the Great Lord, Ranya," was the reply.

"Good! Take him in. The Great Lord is waiting."

Tam was ushered into an immense audience chamber, at one end of which was a dais surmounted by a glittering throne. Surrounding the dais were a number of courtiers and warriors, and seated on the throne was the leader who had carried off Nina, and whose helmet was adorned with three golden faces resembling his own.

His hands still bound behind him, Tam was led before the throne. His conductors bowed low; then the one who carried his weapons laid them at the foot of the dais, and both withdrew.

"Who are you, puny one, and why have you come here?" asked the man on the throne.

"You have named me a puny one, so let that name suffice you," said Tam. "But if you will give me a sword and step down from that throne, I'll teach you to call me something else."

"So! A braggart! Well, the name does not matter. I have been told that you are the man of the prophecy—the son of the

white tigress whose destiny it is to defeat my master, Siva the Destroyer, and save the world from his conquest. Know, then, O puny weakling, that my master is a great god, and the gods shape destiny to suit their ends."

He turned to a guard at his left.

"Fetch the Princess," he commanded.

The guard clanked out of a side door, and returned a moment later, followed by a tall warrior leading Nina, the girl in the golden armor.

As Nina was brought before him, Ranya grinned evilly down at her from his lofty seat. Then he said, sneeringly:

"So this is your great hero, who will rescue you and save the world! What think you of him now?"

She turned and looked at Tam with a start of recognition.

"Tam! Tam!" she cried. "Oh, why did you come here alone? You should have gone on to Arya, roused my people, and led my army to crush these beasts. Now they will kill you."

Suddenly twisting from her escort, she ran toward him with outstretched arms.

But the monster on the throne quickly pressed a lever, whereupon a circular wall of transparent glass shot up from the floor, completely surrounding Tam. He laughed uproariously as Nina ran against it and futilely beat upon it with her small fists.

Her guard caught and dragged her away from the glass, struggling as ineffectually as a bird in the grip of a serpent.

"Enough!" said Ranya. "I but wished to make sure that this was the man.

"Now mark you well, puny one, for this is your sentence from my master, Siva the Destroyer, and these are the last words you shall hear in this incarnation. You will be consigned to the Black Pit, where your flesh shall go to nourish a loathsome thing, while your soul enters the body of another like it. So low will you be in the scale of creation that you will not become a man again for a thousand reincarnations." He chuckled as he reached for a lever beside the throne. "Farewell, puny one," he cried, as he pulled the lever.

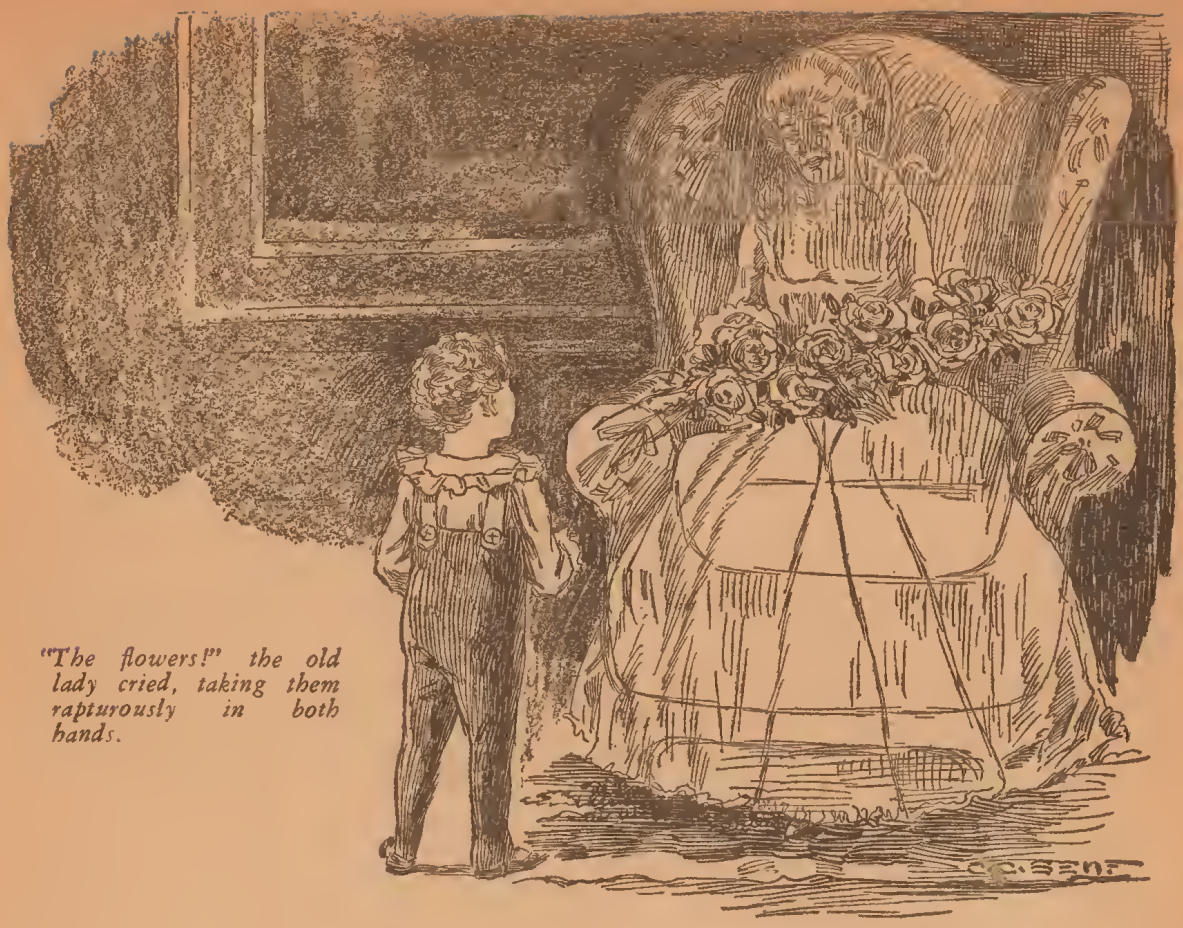
Tam heard a shriek of fear from the girl. Then the floor shot from beneath him, and he plunged downward into a black abyss with sickening speed.

Presently he was brought up with a jolt that threw him down. Then the floor tilted, and he rolled off, falling a distance of about ten feet and alighting on a damp earthen surface in a place of stygian blackness, the air of which was heavy with a sickening charnel odor.

He lay there for a moment, panting heavily in an effort to regain his breath knocked from his body by the fall, and wrenching at the stout bonds that held his numbed wrists together behind his back.

Then, suddenly, every hair on his body stiffened, and a low growl issued from his throat. For he saw coming stealthily toward him in the inky darkness, like two glowing coals suspended in a black void, a pair of burning, red-rimmed eyes.

Read about Tam's terrific struggle with the loathsome thing in the Black Pit, and the even more thrilling and breath-taking adventures of Tam and Nina that follow, in the September number of WEIRD TALES, *on sale August first.*



"The flowers!" the old lady cried, taking them rapturously in both hands.

OLD ROSES

By STELLA G. S. PERRY

A tender and touching tale of the Vieux Carré—a story of New Orleans

THE tiny, picturesque figure on the old box-steps looked like a boy. It wore bright blue trousers, high-belted, long and tight, held up by straps over the shoulders of a faded pink shirt and punctuated about the girdle by white buttons; but frills at cuffs and neck, a flat tie of white ribbon, diminutive hands and feet and a certain grace revealed a little girl.

Johnny's sun-colored curls were cut like a lad's; but her face was all feminine roguishness and she pursed her mouth with inborn coquetry. It was a pixy face and teasing, plainly telling that here was one accustomed to diplomacy toward her elders.

Johnny stood on the box-step before the old green-plank door with the trefoil cut in the top and the broken hinge. She was looking up and down the street, as if fearing arrest by her household authorities.

She was slipping away to her secret play-place. None of the grown-up ones knew how she had found a way of swinging the green door back on its broken hinges, until an opening came just wide

enough for her to flash through, like a fish behind a leaf. There, without permission or interference, she played alone in the curve of the old stone steps between the green door and the inner wrought-iron gate it protected.

In a niche behind a broken stone were Johnny's treasures: dried peach-stones that she played jacks with, a precious sack of colored sand, a bottle of water in which two orange blossoms were decaying in the vain hope that she was manufacturing perfume; and there were limp paper dolls sketchily cut from old magazines.

It was a lair to be well guarded; Johnny was cautious. But just now the few people in this quiet street of the *Vieux Carré*—that historic old "square" in New Orleans—were all looking in the other direction.

Whether they were hanging over the balconies of wrought-iron lace, or grouped on the bluestone or red-brick pavements, all their interest was in the large house down the street, the Hotel de Madame Rénaud. All heads were turned toward it, like roosting sparrows turning one way in a wind.

They were looking at the doctor's car before the door of Madame Rénaud's courtyard.

"Eh! But today he comes too late! What can he do—now?" sighed old Miss C'leste Ledoux to her crony, Madame Grenelle. "The best doctor in New Orleans is powerless now. Eh? Is it not so? But, well, he had a long, strong life."

"And a good one! Some day for us all!"

"Look! Already they post the notices," some one pointed.

Renewed alertness raised and fixed each head, as with a photographer's clutch-piece. A man had begun to tack up on the telegraph poles the black-bordered, black-printed notices, with the name written in with strong ink—as is the ancient custom in the city—to tell the passers-by that Jean de Plaine Dionne was dead at ninety years.

Screened by this greater interest, little Johnny, feeling herself unobserved, carefully drew her hand from behind her back and regarded a bouquet of roses that she held concealed there.

It was a stiff, old-fashioned nosegay, scallop-edged with paper lace. The roses were slightly faded and the stems showed that they had spent a day in a vase of water.

Indeed, Johnny had stolen it from the vase on the three-legged table beside Grandpère's bed.

It was naughty to steal, of course. But her colored nurse, Mam' Bea, herself, had said that those roses ought to be changed; and surely there were other flowers enough in that room where Grandpère lay, so sound asleep that Johnny could not wake him, making horrid noises in his throat but seeming not to mind them himself. Poor Grandpère!

Johnny was glad he was better now. She had feared he was worse when, just after she had stolen the roses, everybody ran into Grandpère's room—Petite Maman and Daddy Toutou and Tante and Mam' Bea—and all of them had called out and cried so and said, "It is over!"

But just then she saw Grandpère himself, standing out there in the hall, and he smiled at her. So she knew everything was all right. He smiled at the stolen flowers, too. He had not in the least objected to her taking his bouquet. He looked at it and smiled.

Grandpère was always so good to her! Little Johnny was never afraid of him, even when she was naughty. Petite Maman was a little bit afraid of him

sometimes, and Tante, and even Daddy Toutou. But Little Johnny never! Mam' Bea often said with a sigh, "He make her still mo' spoiled. She do what she please wid dat Grandpère."

Therefore when Johnny had met him in the hall, she had fearlessly shown him the stolen roses, looking up at him with her wheedling air of contrition; and Grandpère had smiled.

It was a different smile, though—not her own special one; and he had looked at her as if he were going to ask her about something. It was just the way he had smiled on her two days ago when she had "told on" Doctor Fouret.

She had told on the doctor because she was angry with him for making Petite Maman cry in the hall. She had gone straight into the room where Daddy Toutou sat beside Grandpère, and protested indignantly, "Doctor Fouret is making Petite Maman cry! Out there in the hall."

Daddy Toutou had silenced Johnny quickly, with an anxious side-glance at Grandpère.

But Grandpère had answered her so gently and so slowly and so low—not a bit "click-click," as Grandpère usually spoke—"It is not Doctor Fouret who makes her cry. It is Another."

"But, yes, Grandpère; it *is* Doctor Fouret——"

"Well, never mind. Come here, *mignonne.*" And Grandpère had looked a long time into her eyes, in that same pleading way, with that same different smile.

Johnny had felt so sure that he was begging her to do something for him that she said, "I will, Grandpère!" as if he had asked her to promise. They understood each other, these two. She had no idea what Grandpère wanted done; but she knew he would tell her in good time, when he got better; and then, whatever it was that he wanted, she would do it for her Grandpère.

Then Grandpère said to Daddy Toutou, "It is too late for *me* to do it. It has always been too late. But it seems somehow that my Little Johnny will help me —get a chance—try again. One last time. Who knows?"

Daddy Toutou had taken her away then and had whispered to the doctor in the hall, "His mind is wandering."

But Johnny had slipped away from them and run back to the door and called out firmly, "Oh, yes, Grandpère! I will. Whatever you wish, I will do it. Honor of a soldier!" in the formula of a game they played together.

Grandpère had smiled. He understood. He knew everything!

It would have been no use hiding these flowers from him, anyway, she thought now. She could hide things from the others, until there were "findings out" and tears and humiliating confessions; but never was any dreadful confessing necessary to Grandpère; for he always knew from the first, all the time.

Why, just think how he knew about this very green door and the closed house!

Just today, while they were all crying and sobbing so loud, there in his room, around the bed, she had met him in the hall and Grandpère had pointed to this green door, pointed through the staircase window. He knew her secret about it.

Johnny laughed. She had believed that nobody knew about it but Beauregard, her kitten. But Grandpère knew everything.

Still, he did not object; indeed she saw that he *wanted* her to go there with her roses.

So she had blown him a kiss and slipped out to her green door, hiding the stolen flowers behind her.

Now she pushed the green door open. There were those cool, broad, shady, hidden, delightful blue-gray stone steps.

Johnny had meant to play with her treasures in this corner, so remote and yet so safely near the outside world and its noises. But now that she was here, she did not want to play. Instead, on a sudden courageous impulse, she did what she had never dared do before.

She proceeded onward, up the blue-gray steps, and p u s h e d against the wrought-iron inner gate.

That gate creaked a little—and opened!

Beyond it, the steps went upward a few yards to the right, then turned sharply back and ascended again in the other direction.

Johnny, taking great strides, mounted, turned, mounted with them.

She found herself on the porch of the old house, in the open air. Now she was afraid that somebody in the street would see, would call to her.

But no one was looking. Besides, she was not in full view; the flowery wrought iron-lace balustrade with its broad porch rail reached taller than her head, and, as the old house was on the shady side of the street, the shadows were almost as blue as her blue trousers.

So far, safe. She dimpled. It was an adventure.

In the middle of the porch stood the door of the house, a big door of black wood, with blackened knobs that she did not know were silver. Something urged her to open it. She turned the knobs shyly, more boldly pushed at the door. It clicked a little, but nothing moved.

Johnny pouted. Was the enterprise so soon over? *Ohé!* It was as well, perhaps; there might have been a scolding at the other end of it. Anyway, it was fine up there on the porch. The street looked different from this height; who would have thought there were so many potted plants on Madame Blair's gallery?

But look! They were tying something on the door of the Hotel de Madame Rénaud, where Johnny lived on the chief floor with Grandpère and Petite Maman and Daddy Toutou and the others. A long black thing. Perhaps she had best go back and see about that; she felt strong disapproval of whatever that black thing was that they were hanging there.

She had begun to descend the steps when a faint sound behind her caught her attention. The glass in one of the French windows leading on the gallery where she stood vibrated as she passed it; that window had lost a shutter and the glass reached to the floor. It sounded to Johnny as if it invited her. She returned to investigate.

The glass was too dirty to be seen through; but a lower pane was broken out and she stooped down and peeped through this opening.

In the sunlight that came from an opposite window, across the wide room inside, she saw a cabinet, an *étagère,* thick with dust on its carved ebony, its little shelves falling to pieces. Oh! What a hiding-place for her treasures! In an empty house! She could never resist it.

Johnny crept in, wriggled in, through the frame that had lost its pane. She had to take care not to crush Grandpère's flowers.

Then she gasped; stopped short.

Some one was calling. From upstairs.

The voice itself did not scare her, because it was sweet. Still she was frightened, for she knew herself guilty of trespass.

The voice upstairs repeated, "Who is there?" and then asked, "Is that *you,* Johnny?"

Oh, what a relief! Good chance! It was some one who knew her; some neighbor, perhaps, who would not scold.

"Yes'm. *Oui, madame.* It's Johnny," she answered, rather faintly.

A laugh like the sparkles in the sky-rockets on New Year's Eve, floated up, then down.

"Don't be afraid," said the sweet voice tenderly. "Come, my dear! Have you the flowers for me?"

Oh-h! It was all right, then. The lady wanted the posy. Johnny was very willing to give the roses to a lady with that sweet voice. She was a friendly little person and glad to make her elders happy, for all their incomprehensible ways.

She climbed the inner staircase as quickly as she could—for the steps were high—wondering that this house, if occupied, should be so shut up and so bare within. But adult ways were beyond deciphering; always some mystery or other!

The upper room she now entered was not bare. It was very pretty. It opened with high windows on the street—their graying white shades were drawn and there were birds and garlands and butterflies painted on them—and with long windows on the back gallery over the courtyard, these flooded with sunlight and the smell of honeysuckle. The room was furnished with gilt chairs and pinky sofas under golden Cupids, and rosy hangings over lace, tied back with golden cords. There were plump and ruddy footstools. There were vases, with flowers painted on one side, and on the other, lovely bowing and curtseying gentlemen and ladies, all dressed in pink and blue and mauve, with ribbons and fluttering frills. Johnny could see both sides, because the vases were reflected in long, gold-bound mirrors that reached from floor to ceiling. The carpets were so flowery that it was like walking in a garden.

A sunny mist filled the room—as if Johnny were looking at it through a golden veil.

In the midst of all this beauty, like a little white moth in a rose, sat a small, white-haired, white-clad old lady, with eyes as young and blue as Johnny's own.

She pushed away the tapestry at which she had been working and rose eagerly.

Then she stepped back, plainly disappointed.

"Oh!" she said sadly. "I thought it was Johnny. Who are you, little boy?"

"It *is* Johnny. *I'm* Johnny. I'm not a little boy, though. I'm a girl. Grandpère's boy-girl. Grandpère likes them, when he can't have boys."

"Why do you come here?"

Johnny blushed, and made her eyes beg forgiveness. "'Cause I'm naughty. Just a little mischief." Then, seeing the sadness as of a hope deceived on the old lady's face, Johnny said winningly, "I've brought you the flowers."

Instantly the sorrow on that face changed to radiance.

"The flowers!" the old lady cried, taking them rapturously in both hands. "The flowers! *Whose* flowers? Whose?"

"We-ell, it's true they're not really mine. But it's all right. Grandpère saw me take them," Johnny began, but the old lady paid no attention to her; she was fumbling in the bouquet.

"There is no card," she said. "No note. No name. But they *must* be his at last. Is there no name, no note?" feeling among the blossoms with nervous fingers, turning a troubled face to the child. "Whose flowers, little girl? Whose roses are these? His name! Tell his name. Don't you know his name?"

"Grandpère's name? Of course I do," said Johnny laughing. "It's just like mine.

Yes'm, it is. *Oui, madame.* Sure enough. I'm named like'him, if I *am* a girl. He is Jean de Plaine Dionne. I'm Jeanne. Both two Johnnies, big and little!"

A sudden joy transfigured the lady. "Thank God!" she whispered. "Oh! Thank, thank God!"

For a long time she fondled the flowers, forgetting the child, did not seem to hear her as Johnny prattled on sociably. "Yes'm. I'm named after him. Daddy Toutou was named something else, although he was Grandpère's *real* little boy. But Daddy Toutou's poor *maman* died before she ever saw him and so he was named for her folks. But it was a great mistake, because they never noticed him at all. And then they died. I was *ordered* to be a boy, but Doctor Fouret got mixed up somehow and didn't bring a boy, though he'd promised to. And I was *nearly* an awful disappointment to Grandpère; only he liked me after all and wouldn't let them send me back. He kept me and let me be his boy-girl and named Johnny, like him. So that made it all right. Because there *has* to be a Johnny Dionne in this city, you know. There *must.* Oh! Look at the flowers! Look, look!"

She ran excitedly up to the pink rocker where the old lady sat holding the flowers. Little Johnny laughed with amazement and delight to see them brighten, freshen, revive themselves in the frail little hands. "They're all fresh again!" she cried out. "They were dying. How did you make them do that?"

"I can not see you very clearly," the old lady said apologetically, in a dreamy, puzzled way. "You must forgive. You do not seem entirely real to me. And yet I seem strangely to—yes, to love you. I can not understand it," she laughed that brilliant skyey laugh. "It is as if you were my fairy. I do not really believe in you, but I want you to be true, to belong to me. Even if I *am* only dreaming you, you seem—beneficent to me."

JOHNNY understood very little of all this; but it was grown-up talk and that was often vague. It did not matter.

She laughed and said, dimpling, "I'm real. I'm not a fairy a bit."

She sat on the floor at the old lady's feet. The old lady's nearness was comfortable. "I'd *like* to belong to you," said Johnny sincerely.

"It's waiting so long for the flowers that makes me stupid and blind," the old lady said, sighing. "If he could know how I've waited, and so long! He'd be astonished that I've stayed and waited; wouldn't he?"

"Oui, madame. Yes'm," said Johnny. "Reckon prob'ly he would." She was astonished herself. How had this lady known that the flowers were coming?

"We were both too proud," her hostess continued. "I was spoiled by having been so much sought after and pampered. And perhaps I did remember, though I thought I tried to ignore it, that I had left a home far richer than my husband's and that so many others had wanted me. I expected to be courted always, even after we were married. Ah, yes! And Johnny Dionne was proud, too, of all that he had accomplished, as he had good right to be. But he loved me dearly. I knew that all the time, Johnny, my dear. Indeed, I knew it. Oh, yes, child, little girl! But the little things, the small attentions so valuable to me, sometimes they seemed silly to him. Or not *silly.* Oh, no, never really that!" She shook her head. "He couldn't have *meant* they were silly. But when those great matters were weighing on his mind, you understand, as the approach of the War and Beauregard relying on him so—why,

then, my daily gift of flowers that seemed a service, a symbol to me, to him they became a trivial custom, wilfully imposed. I dare say he did not understand women —or flowers. Men do not understand what flowers can mean to women. Nor love them as we do."

"My Grandpère loves flowers," said Johnny. "Specially roses."

"Your Grandpère?" gropingly.

Johnny remembered that this old lady liked to hear people's full names. "Big Johnny de Plaine Dionne loves flowers," she amended. "Every day he brings them and puts them on his table. And when he was sick he made Tante get them for him and he put them right by his bed. Flowers every day! And when he puts them down he always says, 'For you, Fernande!' "

"Oh! Is it so? Is it true? Say it once more! I beseech you! But once more!"

Little Johnny obligingly said it once more, her hands clasped about her knees, her eyes wide, wondering why Grandpère's floral habit delighted this strange lady and so transfigured her. As she enjoyed making people happy, Johnny expatiated, "Yes, even when he was *so* sick——"

"No, no!" the lady interrupted. "It was *I* who was ill; not he. He could not know that I was going to be so very ill. He did not even know that our child was to come. I had meant to tell him that, that very day. But he bade me a brisk—almost a brusk—good-bye, *that* morning, without the flowers! Looking into my moist eyes, he said, 'I have not the time today, my dear. Do not be childish. Do not be—silly. I can not stop for flowers at a time like this.' Ah, me! I was foolish, young. I was leaving home, going away to visit cousins, that day, too; and that also he had forgotten in his excitement about the States. I was too proud, too hurt to remind him. How I wanted to wait here for the evening, for forgiveness, for good-byes! But I did not wait for his return. I went to my cousins. Then the War! You see, it kept me from getting back to our home. All those months. And it kept Johnny from coming to me. Then I was so ill and—*something* happened to me." She paused. "Ah, well! I came home for him after *all*. I have waited for him ever since. And now he has sent the roses at last. Thank God!"

"*I* brought them," Johnny ventured.

The bewildered look returned. "Why did *he* not bring them? Where is he, himself? How did you know about it, little child? Why are you the one to come to me from him?"

"My Gran—Big Johnny Dionne," said Johnny, thinking that she saw at last the grown-up reason in all this, "he said, 'Little Johnny will do it.' He said, 'It is too late for me, but Little Johnny will do everything for me.' And I *will* do it all for him, too. He made me promise. I reckon he just knew I come to this house and that you wanted the roses. He knows everything. And that's why he didn't scold when he saw I had them, but just pointed to this door," sagely. "He couldn't come bring them, I s'pose. So he meant for me to' tote them to you for him. And I did it!"

"He has not come; but he remembers! I knew he would remember. And sends roses. Ah, my dear one! Perhaps he no longer thinks the little attentions, the tender thoughts and deeds, the small considerations, the acts of grace, are trivial, foolish, childish."

"My — Big Johnny Dionne," said Johnny, "I *think* that's what he's always talking about. To Daddy Toutou. He says the littlest, sweetest doings are——" She puckered her brow, a brow very like

that of the lady before her. "I forget. I forget what he says Fernande called them."

"Fernande? But I am Fernande."

"Um-*hum?* Are you? I didn't know it. Then what *was* it you told Gr—told Big Johnny Dionne that sweet little nice doings were? Oh, I remember now! Pressed roses. Sweet kind little doings are——"

"Like roses pressed in the pages of memory," said Fernande.

"Yes, ma'am! *Oui, madame!*" exultantly. "That's just what Grandpère said you said.—Didn't you, Grandpère? Here comes Grandpère, right now!"

Grandpère stood in the doorway.

HE SMILED glowingly at Little Johnny Dionne. Then he never saw her again.

"Fernande!" he cried running into the room. "I could not find you until you had my roses. Fernande, my love! You must forgive me, for I sent you the roses."

"And you must forgive me, too, Johnny, my darling. For I have waited for them."

His eyes and hands caressed her.

"But, *ma mie!*" Grandpère exclaimed in astonishment. "You are changed. Your hair is white. Can you be old? You, old? How can this be? You are beautiful always—but your hair has grown white. You *went* so young! And, now, are you old, like me?"

Then Fernande lifted up her face and the blessed brightness fell full upon little Johnny Dionne, as she said, looking into her husband's eyes, "And did you think I would *go,* still young, and let you grow old without me? Darling, I would not go all the way. I have been waiting here all the time, here in our home, for you!"

Grandpère kissed her hands. Fernande put one arm in his, holding her bouquet proudly in the other. She walked like a bride and said, "Come, now! We two must go—on. To grow young again, together."

They passed down the stairway.

Little Johnny followed them, taking the high steps carefully.

But when she reached the lower room, they were not there.

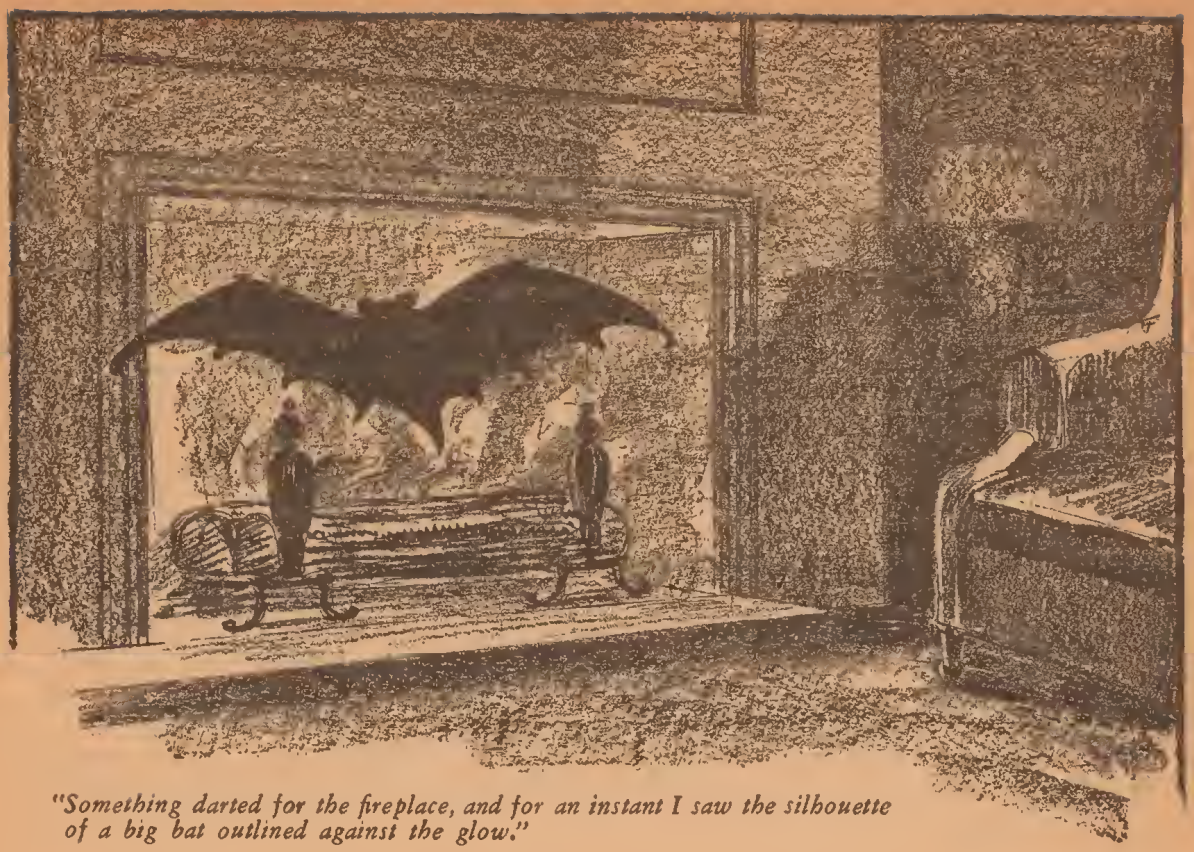
She wondered about this for a moment. But the ways of adults were all mysterious. It did not matter.

Little Johnny crawled through the frame of the broken window-pane, went down the stone steps, through the iron gate and wooden door, back into the street.

All the neighbors were standing, just as she had left them, looking toward the Hotel de Madame Rénaud.

Johnny looked, too. She saw some men carrying great armfuls of flowers in through the courtyard door.

And Johnny Dionne, the last of the name, said to herself, "I reckon that's why it all smells so lovely 'round here—like roses."



"Something darted for the fireplace, and for an instant I saw the silhouette of a big bat outlined against the glow."

THE UNDEAD

By AMELIA REYNOLDS LONG

A shuddery tale of a flapping creature with a bloated face that spread wild terror upon the moor

"THERE it is now!" Henry Thorne's dilated, terrified eyes stared past me into the darkness. "On the wall behind you! Look!"

I wheeled sharply and stared where the undulating reflection from the fire made the bizarre, misshapen shadows careen in grotesque dance upon the decaying wainscot. "I see only shadows," I said.

"Only shadows?" he repeated, laughing a little hysterically. "Well, perhaps. But shadows are driving me mad."

I filled his glass with brandy from the bottle on the table and made him drink it. "You're overwrought," I said in my most matter-of-fact tones. "Your brother's death, and the coming of this other, hitherto unknown brother — odd Sir James never spoke of him before."

"He never told me anything until near the end," Henry replied. "I might have been a total stranger instead of his half-brother. And now—Michael, do you believe in ghosts?"

"I have dabbled in psychical research," I answered guardedly. "But tell me your story from the beginning. Remember, I know almost nothing."

"My brother's illness came upon him suddenly," he began. "He suffered from

no discernible disease, yet he was slowly but surely dying. He never spoke to me about it, but I knew that his coming dissolution preyed upon his mind; for I often came upon him at twilight, swaying his body rhythmically back and forth and muttering half beneath his breath. I can not describe his face as it appeared at those times. It showed neither fear nor resignation; only an eery, set expressionlessness that was somehow unhuman.

"About two weeks before his death, he called me to his room. 'I suppose you are expecting to inherit the manor when I die,' he said. Before I could answer, he went on: 'It is only natural that you should, but you will most likely be disappointed; I have a twin brother in Tibet whom I have sent for. However, if he does not appear within six months after my passing, you may assume that he, too, is dead, and claim the baronetcy and the estate.'

"That is all he would say upon the subject, and when I attempted to question him, he sent me away."

"But did he never bring up the subject again?" I asked.

"No," answered Henry, "although I thought he meant to when he sent for me the day before he died. However, he wanted me for something quite different: He made me solemnly swear that when he was dead I would not permit his body to be cremated. What put such an idea into his head, I can't imagine; for it is a tradition with our family that all the baronets be buried in the crypt under the manor-house.

"It was about a month after his death that his brother George appeared. I say *his* brother, for I can't feel any fraternal connection between myself and this man. I was standing at one of the library windows, looking out over the moor. It was that timeless hour when day has just died and night is still unborn and a niggard gray twilight broods, giving familiar objects the alien, fey quality of another world. Presently I saw a black figure approaching the house. Its movements were stiff and jerky, like some ungainly bird's, but I knew from its size and general shape that it must be a man wrapped in a long cloak. As I watched him, he stopped and stretched out his arms. The cloak, draped from them, flapped in the wind like the leathery wings of a bat. I turned away in loathing, and when I looked again, he was gone. Just then my butler came in to announce that Sir George Thorne, the new baronet, had arrived. To my horror, the man he brought in was the black stranger of the moor!

"He didn't say a word, but simply handed me his credentials. As I pretended to glance through them in the half-darkness, I could feel his dead-black eyes staring at me impersonally out of his white, bloated face. I gave his papers back to him, muttering something about hoping he'd like the manor. Then he spoke, and his hollow, cadaverous voice was more awful than his appearance. 'I shall live in the tower—alone,' he said. 'You may continue to live in the rest of the house, if you care to.' With that, he was gone. I have not seen him since."

"What!" I exclaimed incredulously. "Do you mean to say that the two of you inhabit this house together, and never see each other?"

"No," he replied. "I said that I have not seen *him,* which is quite different. He sees *me,* knows my every movement, knows that I am talking with you at this moment." He leaned toward me across the table, and dropped his voice to a hoarse, rasping whisper. "I am convinced that the man is a sorcerer—or worse."

"Oh, I say!" I began protestingly.

"I know," he interrupted. "Sorcerers

and their kind are considered a worn-out superstition. But have you ever sat alone at night and felt dead, impersonal eyes feeding upon the back of your head, then turned just in time to see a shadow like a big bat scuttle out of sight into the surrounding darkness? Never anything but the shadow!"

"And you sent for me to help you catch a shadow?" I laughed.

He shrugged. "Wait until you have been here a while," he said.

Realizing that he was genuinely unstrung, I tried to lead the conversation into healthier channels, but I saw that, while he listened courteously and answered intelligently, his attention was elsewhere. Around half past ten, I gave up, and had him show me to my room.

ALTHOUGH I closed and bolted my door, I did not prepare for bed. Something of Henry's nervousness had communicated itself to me. I found that I was at high tension, waiting for something that had been preordained to take place.

I did not laugh at this mood as I had laughed earlier to reassure Henry: I knew too much of psychic influences to disregard it. Instead, I returned to my door, softly unbolted it, and opened it a few inches. Thus I might receive quicker intelligence of anything occurring in another part of the house.

In the hall outside, the blackness was like a thick, turgid fluid that oozed clammily into the room. I sat listening by the open door, but there was no sound anywhere, not even the usual groanings of an old house settling down for the night. The silence was so intense that I began to fear lest some unknown force had deprived me of my powers of hearing; then——

I had heard nothing, but I knew that some one was moving about the house. It was as if something were passing through that heavy, sluggish darkness, causing it to ripple. I slipped into the hall and crept to the head of the stairs. From there I could dimly see the hall below under its series of tall, Gothic arches.

Suddenly I was aware that far down the hall a light was appearing. It was growing steadily brighter as if moving down the hall, sending the long shadows racing before it like black heralds of evil. As I watched, it resolved into a lantern carried by a tall figure wrapped from head to foot in a long, black cloak that flapped in leathery folds. One hand held the lantern out at arm's length; the other lay lifelessly across the breast. Above it all floated a white, bloated face with puffy, lack-luster eyes, like a huge, unhealthy fungus.

I stared soundlessly at the apparition. So this was Sir George Thorne! Poor Henry! No wonder he—by this time the thing had passed. I heard it raise the latch of the library door, and knew by the disappearance of the light that it had gone into the room. It was the click of the latch that brought me out of my temporary trance. Silently as a shadow I glided down the stairs and toward the library.

At the threshold I stopped. On the library table stood the lantern, but of the mysterious walker there was no sign. But he could not be far away, since he had left his lantern. I decided to secrete myself and await his return.

I was about to slip behind an arras when a thought smote me with the smashing force of a physical blow: Henry Thorne's room was directly overhead! It did not matter that the only direct means of communication was the stairway by which I had just descended; I knew that the cloaked figure had gone there!

In an instant I was retracing my steps at top speed. My rubber-soled shoes made no noise upon the solid old stones of stairs and halls, and the first sound I made was when I clicked the latch and flung open Henry's bedroom door. My head swam at what I saw there.

On the side of the bed perched a gigantic black shape, at the top of which I thought I discerned a swollen, bleached face! It started violently at my entry, uttered a shrill, rodent-like cry, and rose high in the air to lose itself among the shadows of the ceiling!

I struck myself smartly upon the forehead with the palm of my hand in an attempt to dispel the fog that was enwrapping my senses. There was a humming in my head like the beating of heavy wings. I looked toward the ceiling. There were wings up there; I could hear them thrashing about. Suddenly something darted toward the fireplace, and for an instant I saw the silhouette of a big bat outlined against the glow of the dying coals! The next instant it had disappeared up the chimney.

I turned back to Henry, who was now awake and staring at me.

"You saw the shadow?" he asked. "It was here?"

"There was a bat in the room," I replied evasively, wondering how much of my adventure I should tell him and how much I could safely believe myself.

"A bat?" he repeated. "Perhaps. But it was not a bat at first."

THE next morning I went with him to visit a tenant farmer on his estate. The man had a fine horse for sale, which Henry, who is an enthusiastic horseman, was contemplating buying. When the business had been concluded and we were about to leave, the farmer remarked:

"They do zay, zor, as how the poor loony what escaped two weeks ago was vound last night ower in the wood; him and Master Dorn's little boy."

Henry looked up sharply. "Found!" he exclaimed. "How? Who found them?"

"Ay," affirmed the farmer, "they be vound, but both of them be stone-dead. Aleck Zmith were out huntin' voxes yesterday, and as he were comin' home late last evening, what should he stumble ower right there in the wood but the body o' little Bob Dorn! Aleck knew that it were again' the law to touch the laddie, bein' dead there like that; zo after markin' well the spot, he started off to the village to get the crowner. He had only gone a bit of a way when he comes upon the body o' the loony. Findin' one corp' were bad enough, but the two o' them near bowled him ower, he zays."

"Had the lunatic killed the child, and then destroyed himself?" I asked.

"Us don't know, zor," replied the farmer. "The crowner, he thinks not, zeein' as they were both killed zo strange."

"And how was that?" I inquired.

"They were a little wound in the neck of each o' them," the farmer explained, "and every drop o' blood had been drained from their bodies."

"Horrible!" I cried. "Who could have done such a thing?"

"Us wishes us knew," answered my informant dryly. "Today they be scourin' the wood to zee if they can find Mrs. Williams and the little Evans girl what disappeared last week."

As we rode back to the manor, Henry was morosely silent. Finally he turned to me with, "Well, now you know why I sent for you?"

I did not pretend to misunderstand. "You believe that Sir George——?" I began.

He nodded. "Perhaps not with his own

hand," he said, "but his was the brain responsible. He—oh, I don't know what I believe, Michael. It's all too impossible —too horrible!"

I did not ask him what he meant, for with his words a hideous suspicion had suggested itself. What had the creature called Sir George Thorne been about to do last night? Suppose—the idea was monstrous; and yet——

THAT afternoon I found excuse to visit the farmer again.

"By the way," I said off-handedly, "did they find those other two bodies you were telling me about this morning?"

"Ay, zor," he answered, "that they have, an' they both be dead the zame as the virst two."

"How shocking! Do you suppose the lunatic could have been the murderer after all?"

"They be zome what thinks zo," he granted non-committally.

"And you?" I prompted.

"Oh, I be only an ignorant varmer, zor," he hedged.

I tried a bold stroke. "You may as well tell me," I said, giving him a significant look. "I am a friend of Mr. Henry's, and —I suspect it too."

He glanced at me quickly, then looked away again. "My old 'oman an' me, us thinks it must be zo, although us did blame the loony till they vound the bodies," he said quietly. "You may zet no vaith by it, zor, but if I had been Mizter Henry, I'd have pinned Zor James to his coffin with an aspen spike through his heart. He was always a queer un; an' they has been others o' the Thornes what wouldn't stay dead."

I walked back to the manor with my thoughts in a turmoil. So it was reputed that there had been vampires, living dead men, in the Thorne family! I had begun to suspect it after hearing of the bloodless bodies and after Henry's, "Well, now you know why I sent for you?" It all linked up with Sir James' fear lest he be cremated. And yet the whole theory was too bizarre, too terrible to be possible.

When I reached the manor-house Henry read my thoughts in my face. "So you suspect at last," he commented. "Is such a horror really possible, Michael? I must know definitely, or I shall go insane."

"It is impossible to say with certainty," I replied. "There are many records of vampires in the past, but up to the present the Society for Psychical Research has never come into contact with any of the creatures. What is this story of vampires in your own family?"

"In the days of the Commonwealth," he answered, "a series of mysterious murders followed the death of Sir Geoffrey Thorne. At the advice of a mystic, his coffin was opened, and the body examined. His heart was found to be full of fresh blood."

"Does Sir George know this legend?" I asked.

"Yes." At my question, all his old terror returned, and he gripped my arm convulsively. "He knows—and he knew what would be its present sequel before he came here. He—he is here to aid and abet the thing that was my brother James!"

"Hold on," I cut in, attempting to steady him. "We are not sure that there *is* such a thing. It may all be a lot of superstitious——"

"Then we must make sure," he interrupted hysterically. "And there is only one way to do that. We must go down to the crypt, and make sure that James' body is in its coffin!"

I tried to dissuade him, but he was resolved. Moreover, he was determined to go at once. Resignedly I accompanied

him as, taper in hand, he unfastened the iron-bound door and began to descend the worn stone steps that led to the crypt.

Overhead the broad arches that supported the heavy roof fell away in shadow, but on all sides the walls and pillars glimmered moistly in the light of the candle. The air was damp, and heavy with the odor of slow decay. The unwholesomeness of the place was nauseating.

Henry led the way through the ranks of long-dead Thornes to a stone sarcophagus that stood apart in one corner. "Here," he said, and stopped.

Together we lifted the stone slab from the top of the sarcophagus; then with my pocket knife I loosened the screws of the wooden coffin-lid beneath. Henry was now trembling so violently that he dropped several of them as I handed them to him.

At last I was able to slide the lid to the flagged paving of the crypt. Wordlessly I took the candle from Henry's quivering grasp, and bent forward. A dim, white shroud took form in the flickering glimmer. I thrust in my hand, and did what I had to do. . . .

"It's all right," I reported a minute later.

But it was not all right. The body was there, but it was lying on its side, and there were no signs of decomposition!

Two or three days passed uneventfully. Meanwhile I once more visited the farmer, and elicited his promise to notify me at once if there should be any more mysterious disappearances in the countryside.

One day Henry came to me with a strange question. "Michael," he asked, "have you ever heard of a corpse's being brought to life by being fed human blood?"

"Good Lord!" I exclaimed. "No! Where did you ever get such an idea?"

He held up an ancient, hand-made book. "I found this in the library," he explained. "It is the work of a necromancer of the Middle Ages. In it he describes an experiment in which he partly revived a corpse by feeding it the blood of unfortunate travelers whom he lured to his tower. Finally his activities were discovered, and put a stop to."

I made no comment, although I guessed what was in his mind. After a moment's hesitation, he put it into words:

"If the thing was done once, it could be done again. Could Sir George have come here under James' orders to — to——"

I was about to make an emphatic denial when I remembered the condition of the body in the crypt. Had Henry stumbled upon the solution to the weird mystery that had already cost four lives? But the thing was preposterous! His authority was only the mad ravings of a mediæval magician, and not to be credited.

And then a curious thing happened. Across the blank space of the opposite wall flitted the ugly shadow of an immense bat! At the same instant, although we heard no actual sound, the air of the room seemed to vibrate with the echo of wild, unholy laughter!

Suddenly my mind was made up to a course of action. "Come!" I exclaimed. "We are going to the tower to see Sir George!"

Together we mounted the flight of stairs leading to the tower room, from whose high, narrow windows the gleam of a lantern burning far into the night had often before spoken to me of the invisible presence of Sir George Thorne. Our repeated knocking at the stout oaken door at the top brought no response.

Henry reached past me, and raised the latch. To our surprize, the heavy door swung open.

The room beyond was vacant, but on a table stood the ancient lantern, burning. We closed the door behind us, and looked around. Save for the table with the lantern and a narrow cot-bed, the apartment was unfurnished.

On the end of the cot something black was lying. I crossed and examined it. It was a broad-brimmed black hat and a black cloak. As I picked them up, a musty odor of mold breathed from them. And there was something else; along the edge of the cloak was a smear of a substance that made the material stiff to the touch.

Henry and I regarded it silently. Against the dark cloth it looked like rust, but we both knew that it was something far more sinister. Should we confront Sir George with it, or should we take it away for evidence? But before we could decide, a sound broke the stillness. It was a slow, cumbrous step on the stair!

We cast about frantically for a place of concealment, for suddenly we knew that we must not be found with that cloak in our possession—not in that room! There was no other exit, no long curtains behind which to slip. There was only one chance; the door opened inward. I seized Henry by the arm, and we flattened ourselves against the wall beside it.

The steps were just outside now. Then the latch clicked, and the door swung slowly open. We heard the rhythmic, deliberate footfalls cross to the cot and stop. There was the rustle of cloth, and a tall figure, swathed in the hat and cloak that had lain on the cot, came within our range of vision as it crossed to the table, took up the lantern, turned, and with trance-like movement retraced its steps. We drew a sigh of relief as the door closed behind it; it had not discovered us.

Giving it just time to reach the foot of the stairs, I fumbled in the darkness for the latch. "We must follow him," I whispered to Henry. "Hell alone knows where he is going or what mischief he is planning." For now I was convinced that Sir George Thorne was at the heart of the ghastly terror that hovered over the countryside.

We hurried down the stairs and out into the cool night. The figure in black should be some ten rods in front of us, at most. We peered guardedly forth. To our amazement, there was no sign of it in any direction!

"He may have gone into the main part of the house," Henry said.

We went in and searched, but there was nothing anywhere.

All that evening the atmosphere seemed charged with a growing tension, a gathering, evil force that was preparing to break in some horrible climax. We could do nothing to circumvent it, for we had no idea how or where it meant to strike.

"Michael," Henry asked once, "should we not send some warning to the neighboring farmers and villagers?"

"Warning against what?" I asked ironically, for I had already thought of that. "Against Sir George Thorne?"

He was silent, realizing the impossibility of it. Presently he left the room, and came back with a small pistol.

"What's that?" I asked.

"Merely an ordinary pistol," he answered, "but I have had made for it—a silver bullet."

"What!" I exclaimed. "You are not going to shoot your half-brother as a sorcerer?"

"Not unless I must," he replied grimly "But we must have some weapon to

use against him if it should become necessary."

After that, silence fell between us for a long time. And then suddenly the old house resounded to a furious thumping at the front door!

We heard the servant go to answer it. Then footsteps rushed past him, and a disheveled man staggered into the room. It was my acquaintance, the farmer.

"Vor the love o' God, zor," he gasped, "help us! The Thing has been amongst us again, and this time it has taken my brother's little girl! My wife an' me saw it as it were makin' off with her, and it were headed this way."

"You saw it?" I cried. "What was it like?"

"It were all wrapped in a long black cloak that made it flap like a big bat," he replied all too vividly.

I saw Henry's face turn a sickly gray. But before any of us could speak further, a new sound startled us. Through the night outside rang the frightened cry of a child!

A long window behind us opened upon a stone balcony. With one accord we rushed through it, in time to see a great bat-like figure disappear around an angle of the house. In an instant we had leaped the low stone parapet, and were in hot pursuit.

As we rounded the corner of the house, we saw the monster, carrying something light flung over one shoulder, running close under the shadow of the wall. Suddenly he darted across a patch of feeble moonlight, and made straight for the tower.

"We've got him!" exclaimed Henry exultantly. "There's no other way out of there."

Like hounds when their quarry is in sight, we raced after him, thundering up the steep, narrow steps just as the door at the top was slammed shut. The next instant we had flung our combined weight against it. It flew wide open under the impact.

In the center of the room, the black thing turned at bay to face us. When it saw that there were three of us, it dropped the child it had been carrying, and made a dash for the window. A second it poised upon the sill in the pallid light of the moon; then it spread its cloaked arms like great webbed wings, and jumped.

Leaving the farmer to look after the child, we flung ourselves down the stairs and out into the night, expecting to find a crushed, broken figure at the tower's foot. There was nothing there!

Of a sudden, as if a voice had shouted orders into my ear, I knew what to do. "To the crypt!" I cried. "He will go there."

Back into the house we sped, and, pausing only long enough to snatch up a powerful electric torch, made for the crypt. As we passed along its damp, gelid vaults, our steps were drawn as if by a magnet to that new sarcophagus in the corner. We stopped before it, and our blood grew chill with cold horror: The coffin was open, and its occupant was gone!

"My God!" gasped Henry. "It isn't Sir George out there; it's——" Then a new thought struck him. "But where is Sir George?"

I did not reply, for I did not like to contemplate the answer to that question just then. I drew Henry with me into the shadow of a pillar to wait for the thing that I knew would soon make its appearance.

Soon it came. We heard the measured, hollow ring of its steps, like clods of earth falling upon a coffin-lid. My heart

beat stiflingly as I listened to it—the vampire returning to its grave!

In a second or so it came into view, going straight for the open sarcophagus. But before it quite reached its destination, it turned its head and saw us. With a high, piercing squeak of rage and fright, it darted back, flapping its ungainly wing-like arms.

"Stop it!" I cried, in my excitement addressing the bare stone walls around me. "It is a murderer, a thing of evil!"

The creature was now flitting in and out among the vaulted pillars that held up the roof. "Stop it!" I cried again in desperation. "If it escapes now, we can never capture it!"

The thing flapped its pinion-like cloak as if in defiance, and rose several feet in the air. And then from behind me rang the sharp crack of a pistol. The monster screamed, and collapsed in a heap upon the flagging.

Henry, smoking weapon in hand, leaned weakly against the wall while I knelt beside the thing on the stones. As I removed the crumpled felt hat, the beam of my electric torch betrayed that which the dim candle-light had failed to reveal upon our former visit to the crypt: the face of the corpse was the bloated, fungus-like face of Sir George Thorne!

Two days later, the body of James Thorne, under its adopted name of George Thorne, was cremated, and its ashes scattered upon the winds of the moor. It was given out that the baronet, Sir George, had been the victim of a shooting accident; and this fiction was politely accepted by the countryside. Henry, now Sir Henry, although he seldom uses the title, has left the manor for an indefinite period. There now remains no evidence of this awful interlude save a silver bullet, oddly flattened into the shape of a pentagon, which I wear set in a ring as a memento of our grotesque adventure with the undead.

Prince Borgia's Mass

By AUGUST W. DERLETH

A brief tale of black magic, in which the Cesare Borgia plays a leading part

CESARE, the Prince Borgia, Duke of Valentinois and Romagna, Lord of Imola and Forli, of Rimini and Pesaro, of Faenza and Urbino, stretched forth his imperial hand and took from the lackey the paper he extended. At the same moment two figures moved out of the shadows behind the Borgia and peered over his shoulder at the paper. The younger of the two, he with the incipient mustache, nervously stroked the down on his sharp chin; the other, an older, gray-haired man in military costume, betrayed by nought save the narrowing of his eyes the intensity of his interest.

Cesare, the Prince Borgia, grunted suddenly. "Three more!" he exclaimed with sullen vehemence.

"Devil's work," muttered the military men.

"Three more," repeated the young man under his breath.

"Some action must be taken, Highness," said the military man in a jerky voice. "This thing can not . . . must not continue."

"It is not fitting that you rebuke me thus, Captain," returned the Prince Borgia shortly. "Be assured; action has already been taken. This very night shall see the end of this satanic business." He turned abruptly to the lackey, who at once began to bow with the rapidity and regularity of an automaton. "Summon before me the mage, René!"

The lackey, still bowing, backed himself out of the spacious tent. The young man sank into a chair at the side of the Prince Borgia.

"What would you with René, Highness? Is it that you need magic now to combat this vandalism?"

Cesare, the Prince Borgia, turned his gaze on his companion. "Your mind is yet too young, Midi, to know this thing. Think you common vandals come to steal the bodies of my dead . . . such bodies already denuded of all things costly and of value? Pah!"

"It is good to think not, Highness. But if it is not vandals who do this thing, who then?"

The captain leaned forward. "You suspect then, Highness? Shall we take them this night?"

"They shall die before the dawn!"

"That is well," said the captain. "Yes, that is well."

Cesare nodded.

The flap of the tent was drawn aside, and into the large, dimly lit space shuffled the bent, wizened figure of René, the mage, and his grotesque, bird-like shadow followed behind, trailing the wall of the tent. He approached the Prince Borgia.

"Highness!" he murmured, and inclined his head.

"René, this night have three more bodies gone." Cesare paused for the full import of his words to reach the mage. In a moment he continued, "These, my men, have died an honorable death in battle, and it is fitting that an honorable burial be given them. But their bodies have been taken, and burial is not to be for them. Yet, you were set to watch them with a purpose. Have you accomplished that purpose, René?"

The mage bowed low. "My commission is fulfilled; it is as you had foreseen, Highness. If a body of retainers is summoned together, I shall guide Highness to the spot where the bodies have been taken. There Highness shall see and know the guilty, and shall devise for them fit punishment. Fourteen bodies now in all have gone; these three we can yet save from indignity."

"Well done, my worthy René; go now and array yourself for the journey." The Prince Borgia turned. "And you, Captain, give orders for picked men to be in readiness to accompany us within the hour."

The captain murmured, inclined his head, and left the tent, the crabbed figure of René trailing slowly in his wake.

A HALF-HOUR'S hard riding brought the group of men to the base of a small knoll some distance from the camp, where René indicated that the Prince Borgia should give the signal to dismount. The Borgia relayed a curt order to his captain, and in a moment the body of men was creeping silently up the slope, René, with the Prince Borgia, Midi, and the captain in the lead. Topping the rise, René turned and raised a hand to enjoin silence. Then he bent to the three around him.

"Recollect, Highness," he muttered in a low voice, "tonight is Walpurgis night; this night do all the demons of the earth, the air, the fire, and the water come together to serve through earthly men at the Black Mass. See there!" He crouched low, and pointed.

Before them, in a slight depression at the base of the knoll, there stood a grove of trees; in the midst of this grove could be discerned vague, black shadows moving to and fro in the flickering light of huge candles. Midi gasped. The Prince Borgia gave the order for the men to surround the grove in silence; at his call they were to take those in the grove. Then the four, again led by the mage, crept forward, and came at last to a vantage-point, where they stood to watch the horrible ritual taking place before them. Midi, the young companion of Cesare, started forward, the better to see, but Cesare drew him softly back.

There were nine of the men in the grove, and each was robed in black from head to toe, and upon each face there was a grotesque mask. Their robes, the watchers could see, were decorated with furs. Midi turned a startled, puzzled face to René.

"Mockery, Messer," said the mage softly. "The furs of panther, lynx, and cat are worn always in these rituals. And those candles, Highness," he went on, turning now to the Prince Borgia, "those candles are made from the fat of corpses. See too how they are made, each in the form of an inverted cross. Their bowls are skulls, and their fires are fed with cypress branches, and with the wood of gibbets. Soon they will consecrate a black host before that huge inverted cross they have stolen somewhere."

The air was heavy with the stench of sulfur and evil-smelling asafetida. The watchers saw the nine in the grove walk upon an earth covered with triangles, columns, stars, pentagrams and all manner of cabalistic signs. Now one of the nine separated himself and strode forward alone, where, with incredible obscenities, he held aloft a black host, and at once there arose from the eight before him a low chant, a calling upon Beelzebub and Ahriman, a pæan to Satan on high.

But the Prince Borgia was not inclined to grant the nine sufficient time to complete their rituals; for suddenly he gave a sharp command, and at once there came rushing from all sides the retainers, who threw themselves upon the black priests in fury. "Alive!" called Cesare. "I want them brought to me alive!" He turned and began to walk rapidly to where his horse was tethered. "Come," he said to the three with him, "I shall punish them to fit the crime; they shall celebrate with me a Mass of my own devising . . . and that their last!"

THEY rode swiftly back to the camp, where Cesare gave a quick order, rousing his troops from their sleep. At his order, too, men started to fashion nine inverted crosses, to set them in the ground when they were completed. Then he, with Midi and the mage, sat to await the coming of his retainers with the nine black priests.

They came at last, with the nine, a sorry group, stripped of their robes, securely bound. Cesare, the Prince Borgia, scrutinized them closely. Then he motioned for them to be brought forward and flung to their knees; again he studied the faces before him. He leaned forward to speak to them.

"Did you not know this the camp of the Borgia Prince, eh? . . . And yet you took from it the bodies of its dead! . . . Swine! Know that you are about to die; prepare to go before your black master."

He motioned to the men. "Strip these of all clothing, and nail them upon the crosses . . . see to it that their heads do not touch upon the earth." He turned now to René. "Take with you their black hosts, and by your magic make them white."

The mage bowed and shambled away.

"Look you to it that upon each cross there is placed a portion of the tallow candles these swine have used," the Prince addressed his men. "These must be placed and lit so that each drop of hot wax strikes the faces of the men below; let it remind them of their eternity."

René appeared suddenly, in his hands nine of the white wafers which had been black only a moment before. These he gave to Cesare, and stood aside to await the further orders of the Prince Borgia.

"To fight these carrion," murmured Cesare, "I can use either white or black magic . . . and it is my pleasure to use black. Think you not the black more fitting, René?"

"Highness knows best." The mage inclined his head. "Black, too, is the more dangerous."

"And the better then," said Cesare and strode forward. "Come!"

Obediently René followed him. The Prince Borgia paused before the first of the nine, and with his own fingers forced into the man's mouth one of the unconsecrated white wafers. At the same moment René mumbled a short ritual in Latin. Cesare waited until the mage had finished; then he moved to the second, repeated his process, and the mage again said the ritual. Thus the nine were served. Now Cesare turned once more to the retainers.

"Bring to me the skull-bowls these carrion have used."

Two retainers moved forward with the bowls, which the mage took carefully in his hands. The Prince Borgia moved forward in his turn and dipped his hands into the fluid in the bowl; then he turned and began to sprinkle the bodies on the crosses with the fluid. This completed, he stepped away and gave the ritual into the charge of the mage.

René cast from him the skulls, so that they fell before the crosses, and more of the fluid splattered upward into the straining faces of the nine. Then he took from one of the retainers a black robe, which had been worn in the grove that night, and put it over his clothes. Now he fell to gesticulating and shouting, and at last, with incredible rapidity, began to repeat the entire ritual of the Black Mass backward, and at its conclusion pronounced in a loud voice the name of Beelzebub seven times.

Hardly had the sound of his voice died away, when there came from the depths of the sky a dense black cloud resembling nothing so much as a mass of dull black velvet suspended in the air. This hovered for a moment above the crosses; then descended suddenly, and immediately the air became intolerable for the smell of sulfur saturating it. Instinctively the soldiers crowded back; but René held his ground. For a moment the black cloud clung to the crosses, writhing and weaving about them; then suddenly there came a bluish pallor, and at once a brilliant flash of flame . . . and it was gone.

Then the startled soldiers saw that though the crosses remained as fresh as they had been made, the bodies of the nine were gone, and with them the skull-bowls, and the tallow candles—but below each cross there lay a tiny heap of ashes!

"My Mass is over," said Cesare, the Prince Borgia. "And I am very tired . . . And you, Midi? Come."

Together the two moved away, and behind them in silence came the crabbed, weary figure of the mage, René.

A Voyage to Sfanomoë

By CLARK ASHTON SMITH

THERE are many marvelous tales, untold, unwritten, never to be recorded or remembered, lost beyond all divining and all imagining, that sleep in the double silence of far-recessive time and space. The chronicles of Saturn, the archives of the moon in its prime, the legends of Antillia and Moaria—these are full of an unsurmised or forgotten wonder. And strange are the multitudinous tales withheld by the light-years of Polaris and the Galaxy. But none is stranger, none more marvelous, than the tale of Hotar and Evidon and their voyage to the planet Sfanomoë, from the last isle of foundering Atlantis. Harken, for I alone shall tell the story, who came in a dream to the changeless center where the past and future are always contemporary with the present; and saw the veritable happening thereof; and, waking, gave it words:

Hotar and Evidon were brothers in science as well as by consanguinity. They were the last representatives of a long line of illustrious inventors and investigators, all of whom had contributed more or less to the knowledge, wisdom and scientific resources of a lofty civilization matured through cycles. One by one they and their fellow-savants had learned the arcanic secrets of geology, of chemistry, of biology, of astronomy; they had subverted the elements, had constrained the sea, the sun, the air and the force of gravitation, compelling them to serve the uses of man; and lastly they had found a way to release the typhonic power of the atom, to destroy, transmute and reconstruct the molecules of matter at will.

However, by that irony which attends all the triumphs and achievements of man, the progress of this mastering of natural law was coincidental with the profound geologic changes and upheavals which caused the gradual sinking of Atlantis. Age by age, eon by eon, the process had gone on: huge peninsulas, whole seaboards, high mountain ranges, citied plains and plateaus, all went down in turn beneath the diluvial waves. With the advance of science, the time and location of future cataclysms was more accurately predictable; but nothing could be done to avert them.

In the days of Hotar and Evidon, all that remained of the former continent was a large isle, called Poseidonis. It was well known that this isle, with its opulent seaports, its eon-surviving monuments of art and architecture, its fertile inland valleys, and mountains lifting their spires of snow above semi-tropic jungles, was destined to go down ere the sons and daughters of the present generation had grown to maturity.

Like many others of their family, Hotar and Evidon had devoted long years of research to the obscure telluric laws governing the imminent catastrophe; and had sought to devise a means of prevention, or, at least, of retardation. But the seismic forces involved were too deeply seated and too widespread in their operation to be controllable in any manner or degree. No magnetic mechanism, no zone of repressive force, was powerful enough to affect them. When the two brothers were nearing middle age, they realized the ultimate fu-

tility of their endeavors; and though the peoples of Poseidonis continued to regard them as possible saviors, whose knowledge and resource were well-nigh superhuman, they had secretly abandoned all effort to salvage the doomed isle, and had retired from sea-gazing Lephara, the immemorial home of their family, to a private observatory and laboratory far up in the mountains of the interior.

Here, with the hereditary wealth at their command, the brothers surrounded themselves not only with all the known instruments and materials of scientific endeavor, but also with a certain degree of personal luxury. They were secluded from the world by a hundred scarps and precipices and by many leagues of little-trodden jungle; and they deemed this seclusion advisable for the labors which they now proposed to themselves, and whose real nature they had not divulged to any one.

Hotar and Evidon had gone beyond all others of their time in the study of astronomy. The true character and relationship of the world, the sun, the moon, the planetary system and the stellar universe, had long been known in Atlantis. But the brothers had speculated more boldly, had calculated more profoundly and more closely than any one else. In the powerful magnifying mirrors of their observatory, they had given special attention to the neighboring planets; had formed an accurate idea of their distance from the earth; had estimated their relative size; and had conceived the notion that several, or perhaps all, might well be inhabited by creatures similar to man; or, if not inhabited, were potentially capable of supporting human life.

Venus, which the Atlanteans knew by the name of Sfanomoë, was the planet which drew their curiosity and their conjecture more than any other. Because of its position, they surmised that it might readily resemble the earth in climatic conditions and in all the prerequisites of biological development. And the hidden labor to which they were now devoting their energies was nothing less than the invention of a vehicle by which it would be possible to leave the ocean-threatened isle and voyage to Sfanomoë.

Day by day the brothers toiled to perfect their invention; and night by night, through the ranging seasons, they peered at the lustrous orb of their speculations as it hung in the emerald evening of Poseidonis, or above the violet-shrouded heights that would soon take the saffron footprints of the dawn. And ever they gave themselves to bolder imaginings, to stranger and more perilous projects.

The vehicle they were building was designed with complete foreknowledge of all the problems to be faced, of all the difficulties to be overcome. Various types of air-vessels had been used in Atlantis for epochs; but they knew that none of these would be suitable for their purpose even in a modified form. The vehicle they finally devised, after much planning and long discussion, was a perfect sphere, like a miniature moon; since, as they argued, all bodies travelling through etheric space were of this shape. It was made with double walls of a metallic alloy whose secret they themselves had discovered—an alloy that was both light and tough beyond any substance classified by chemistry or mineralogy. There were a dozen small round windows lined with an unbreakable glass, and a door of the same alloy as the walls, that could be shut with hermetic tightness. The explosion of atoms in sealed cylinders was to furnish the propulsive and levitative power and would also serve to heat the sphere's interior against the absolute cold of space. Solidified air was to be carried in electrum containers and vaporized at the rate which

would maintain a respirable atmosphere. And foreseeing that the gravitational influence of the earth would lessen and cease as they went further and further away from it, they had established in the floor of the sphere a magnetic zone that would simulate the effect of gravity and thus obviate any bodily danger or discomfort to which they might otherwise be liable.

Their labors were carried on with no other assistance than that of a few slaves, members of an aboriginal race of Atlantis, who had no conception of the purpose for which the vessel was being built; and who, to insure their complete discretion, were deaf-mutes. There were no interruptions from visitors, for it was tacitly assumed throughout the isle that Hotar and Evidon were engaged in seismologic researches that required a concentration both profound and prolonged.

At length, after years of toil, of vacillation, doubt, anxiety, the sphere was completed. Shining like an immense bubble of silver, it stood on a westward-facing terrace of the laboratory, from which the planet Sfanomoë was now visible at eventide beyond the purpling sea of the jungle. All was in readiness: the vessel was amply provisioned for a journey of many lustrums and decades, and was furnished with an abundant supply of books, with implements of art and science, with all things needful for the comfort and convenience of the voyagers.

Hotar and Evidon were now men of middle years, in the hale maturity of all their powers and faculties. They were the highest type of the Atlantean race, with fair complexions and lofty stature, with the features of a lineage both aristocratic and intellectual. Knowing the nearness of the final cataclysm, they had never married, they had not even formed any close ties but had given themselves to science with a monastic devotion. They mourned the inevitable perishing of their civilization, with all its epoch-garnered lore, its material and artistic wealth, its consummate refinement. But they had learned the universality of the laws whose operation was plunging Atlantis beneath the wave —the laws of change, of increase and decay; and they had schooled themselves to a philosophic resignation—a resignation which, mayhap, was not untempered by a foresight of the singular glory and novel, unique experiences that would be entailed by their flight upon hitherto-untravelled space.

Their emotions, therefore, were a mingling of altruistic regret and personal expectancy, when, on the evening chosen for their departure, they dismissed their wondering slaves with a writ of manumission, and entered the orb-shaped vessel. And Sfanomoë brightened before them with a pulsing luster, and Poseidonis darkened below, as they began their voyage into the sea-green heavens of the west.

THE great vessel rose with a buoyant ease beneath their guidance; till soon they saw the lights of Susran the capital and its galley-crowded port Lephara, where nightly revels were held and the very fountains ran with wine that people might forget awhile the predicted doom. But so high in air had the vessel climbed, that Hotar and Evidon could hear no faintest murmur of the loud lyres and strident merrymaking in the cities beneath. And they went onward and upward till the world was a dark blur and the skies were aflame with stars that their optic mirrors had never revealed. And anon the black planet below was rimmed with a growing crescent of fire, and they soared from its shadow to unsetting daylight. But the heavens were no longer a familiar blue, but had taken on the lucid ebon of ether;

and no star nor world, not even the littlest, was dimmed by the rivalship of the sun. And brighter than all was Sfanomoë, where it hung with unvacillating lambence in the void.

Mile by stellar mile the earth was left behind; and Hotar and Evidon, peering ahead to the goal of their dreams, had almost forgotten it. Then, gazing back, they saw that it was no longer below but above them, like a vaster moon. And studying its oceans and isles and continents, they named them over one by one from their maps as the globe revolved; but vainly they sought for Poseidonis, amid an unbroken glittering waste of sea. And the brothers were conscious of that regret and sorrow which is the just due of all evanished beauty, of all sunken splendor. And they mused awhile on the glory that had been Atlantis, and recalled to memory her obelisks and domes and mountains, her palms with high and haughty crests, and the fire-tall plumes of her warriors, that would lift no longer to the sun.

Their life in the orb-like vessel was one of ease and tranquillity, and differed little from that to which they were accustomed. They pursued their wonted studies, they went on with experiments they had planned or begun in past days, they read to each other the classic literature of Atlantis, they argued and discussed a million problems of philosophy or science. And time itself was scarcely heeded by Hotar and Evidon; and the weeks and months of their journey became years, and the years were added into lustrums, and the lustrums into decades. Nor were they sensible of the change in themselves and in each other, as the years began to weave a web of wrinkles in their faces, to tint their brows with the yellow ivory of age and to thread their sable beards with ermine. There were too many things to be solved or debated, too many speculations and surmises to be ventured, for such trivial details as these to usurp their attention.

Sfanomoë grew larger and larger as the half-oblivious years went by; till anon it rolled beneath them with strange markings of untravelled continents and seas unsailed by man. And now the discourse of Hotar and Evidon was wholly concerning the world in which they would so soon arrive, and the peoples, animals and plants which they might expect to find. They felt in their ageless hearts the thrill of an anticipation without parallel, as they steered their vessel toward the ever-widening orb that swam below them. Soon they hung above its surface, in a cloud-laden atmosphere of tropic warmth; but though they were childishly eager to set foot on the new planet, they sagely decided to continue their journey on a horizontal level till they could study its topography with some measure of care and precision.

To their surprize, they found nothing in the bright expanse below that in any manner suggested the work of men or living beings. They had looked for towering cities of exotic aerial architecture, for broad thoroughfares and canals and geometrically measured areas of agricultural fields. Instead, there was only a primordial landscape of mountains, marshes, forests, oceans, rivers and lakes.

At length they made up their minds to descend. Though they were old, old men, with five-foot ermine beards, they brought the moon-shaped vessel down with all the skill of which they would have been capable in their prime; and opening the door that had been sealed for decades, they emerged in turn—Hotar preceding Evidon, since he was a little the elder.

THEIR first impressions were of torrid heat, of dazzling color and overwhelming perfume. There seemed to be a million odors in the heavy, strange, un-

stirring air—odors that were almost visible in the form of wreathing vapors—perfumes that were like elixirs and opiates, that conferred at the same time a blissful drowsiness and a divine exhilaration. Then they saw that there were flowers everywhere—that they had descended in a wilderness of blossoms. They were all of unearthly forms, of supermundane size and beauty and variety, with scrolls and volutes of petals many-hued, that seemed to curl and twist with a more than vegetable animation or sentiency. They grew from a ground that their overlapping stems and calyxes had utterly concealed; they hung from the boles and fronds of palm-like trees they had mantled beyond recognition; they thronged the water of still pools; they poised on the jungle-tops like living creatures winged for flight to the perfume-drunken heavens. And even as the brothers watched, the flowers grew and faded with a thaumaturgic swiftness, they fell and replaced each other as if by some legerdemain of natural law.

Hotar and Evidon were delighted, they called out to each other like children, they pointed at each new floral marvel that was more exquisite and curious than the rest; and they wondered at the speed of their miraculous growth and decay. And they laughed at the unexampled bizarrerie of the sight, when they perceived certain animals new to zoology, who were trotting about on more than the usual number of legs, with orchidaceous blossoms springing from their rumps.

They forgot their long voyage through space, they forgot there had ever been a planet called the earth and an isle named Poseidonis, they forgot their lore and their wisdom, as they roamed through the flowers of Sfanomoë. The exotic air and its odors mounted to their heads like a mighty wine; and the clouds of golden and snowy pollen which fell upon them from the arching arbors were potent as some fantastic drug. It pleased them that their white beards and violet tunics should be powdered with this pollen and with the floating spores of plants that were alien to all terrene botany.

Suddenly Hotar cried out with a new wonder, and laughed with a more boisterous mirth than before. He had seen that an oddly folded leaf was starting from the back of his shrunken right hand. The leaf unfurled as it grew, it disclosed a flower-bud; and lo! the bud opened and became a triple-chaliced blossom of unearthly hues, adding a rich perfume to the swooning air. Then, on his left hand, another blossom appeared in like manner; and then leaves and petals were burgeoning from his wrinkled face and brow, were going in successive tiers from his limbs and body, were mingling their hair-like tendrils and tongue-shaped pistils with his beard. He felt no pain, only an infantile surprize and bewilderment as he watched them.

Now from the hands and face and limbs of Evidon the blossoms also began to spring. And soon the two old men had ceased to wear a human semblance, and were hardly to be distinguished from the garland-laden trees about them. And they died with no agony, as if they were already part of the teeming floral life of Sfanomoë, with such perceptions and sensations as were appropriate to their new mode of existence. And before long their metamorphosis was complete, and every fiber of their bodies had undergone a dissolution into flowers. And the vessel in which they had made their voyage was embowered from sight in an ever-climbing mass of plants and blossoms.

Such was the fate of Hotar and Evidon, the last of the Atlanteans, and the first (if not also the last) of human visitors to Sfanomoë.

The Time-Traveler

By RALPH MILNE FARLEY

What would you do if you were given a chance to influence events so that you could live the past over again?

IF HE had his life to live over again, and especially one certain day in his college career back in Cambridge, would he rescue his room-mate from the icy waters of the Charles River, as he had done on that particular day?

Professor John D. Smith turned this question bitterly over in his mind. For he had just received a blow, the crowning indignity of a long series of indignities at the hands of that ungrateful room-mate!

The blow consisted in a letter from the board of regents, informing him that Paul Arkwright (that room-mate), rather than himself, had been chosen to fill the vacancy as dean of the mathematics department. The letter went on to suggest tactfully that, if Professor Smith objected to serving under a junior, his resignation would be accepted, although regretfully.

This last was too much!

Smith exploded to his wife, "Mary, I can see Paul's hand in this, the dirty crook! Not content with beating me out of the position, he even wants to get me off the faculty, in addition. It's the last straw! Why didn't I let him drown ten years ago?"

UP TO ten years ago, the two men had been bosom friends: John Smith, the student; and Paul Arkwright, the athlete and handshaker. Then came the day when Paul had upset his rowing-shell, and John had plunged into the frigid stream to save Paul's life.

Some philosopher has said: "To make a man love you, let him do you a favor; to make him hate you, do a favor for him."

This had proved true in this instance. Smith adored his room-mate all the more. But Arkwright became secretly embittered that he, an athlete, had been rescued by a mere grind, especially as the Boston newspapers all featured that phase of the story.

John Smith was graduated with honors, and received an appointment to a Western university. He secured for his friend a position on the same faculty; which favor still further intensified Smith's love and Arkwright's hate. The latter, as soon as he was firmly established, began bootlicking the regents and neglecting Smith. As Smith stood in the way of his further ambition, Smith must be eliminated, gratitude or no gratitude.

So when Smith published his first big bit of research, Arkwright supplied a footnote pointing out a fundamental flaw. When Smith published his second thesis, his ex-friend called attention to the fact that the theory was old, and hinted that Smith had deliberately plagiarized it.

Yet even so, Smith was merely grieved, rather than resentful. But now came the last straw, and his long-suffering love for his old chum turned to hate.

Mrs. Smith was desolated by the situation.

Said she, "Of course, you will have no difficulty getting a good position in some other college. But I love this town. We have many friends here. And we shall

have to sell our beautiful house. Oh, the ungrateful wretch!"

" 'He who expects gratitude hath not conferred a favor,' " quoted Smith, adding bitterly, "But Paul might, at least, have given me a square deal."

THAT evening his colleague, Dr. Willis, called to condole with him, and to take his mind off his troubles by staging one of their periodic quarrels about relativity.

Assuming a gayety which he did not feel, Smith recited the following limerick:

> There was a young lady named Bright,
> Who could travel much faster than light.
> She set out one day
> In a relative way,
> And arrived on the preceding night.

Dr. Willis, horrified at this sacrilege, protested: "If you will persist in refusing to accept the Einstein theory, please, please use argument, rather than arrant flippancy!"

"Very well," said Smith, "here goes for some argument. If, as you say, time is a dimension, like length, breadth and thickness, why can't we go backward and forward through time, the same as we can in the other three directions?"

"It's not the fault of time," Willis replied, "but is merely due to our own limitations. God can view all time and space as one complete whole, so who knows but that some human beings, by virtue of the divine spark within them, may occasionally be able to travel backward through time?"

"Bosh!" objected Smith.

But Willis persisted, "Isn't memory really a sort of traveling backward through time?"

"No, it isn't!" asserted Smith positively; "for, if it were, then we could go back to a past event in memory, change the event in the light of our present knowledge, and then return to the present and enjoy the fruits of that change."

To himself he added, "If I could go back into the past, there is one event which I should most certainly change: my rescue of Paul Arkwright!"

Late that night he fell asleep, still cursing his ungrateful chum.

PROFESSOR SMITH dreamed that he was a college boy again, standing on a bridge over the Charles River, watching an athletic youth navigate the stream in a single-scull racing-shell. The air was crisp and cold. He saw a submerged log just ahead of the rower, and shouted a warning. But it was too late. The craft struck and capsized. No danger, though, for Paul was as expert a swimmer as he was a rower.

The dream was as vivid as though it were real! To the dreamer it was actually real; he had no idea that he was merely dreaming.

As Smith looked, the swimmer's face suddenly contorted and his head went under. As he came to the surface again, he cried in a strained voice, "Cramps! Help!"

"Coming, Paul!" shouted Smith, casting off his coat and leaping onto the parapet of the bridge.

But then something stayed him, some premonition, or an Einsteinian memory of the future, who can say which?

"Sink, you damned scoundrel!" Smith shouted; and jumping down from the parapet again, he put on his coat and walked briskly away, without even glancing back at the drowning man.

PROFESSOR SMITH awoke in a sweat of horror, for he had dreamed that he had deliberately let his best friend drown. He switched on the light and shuddered. Then he remembered all that this false

friend had done to injure him in the years that had followed that drowning, from which he had really rescued the friend, instead of deserting him as in the dream. And with the recollection of all those ungrateful indignities, he sincerely wished that the dream were true, and that the truth had been only a dream.

But no such luck, for there on his dresser lay the fateful letter from the regents, complete proof of his friend's faithlessness!

Smith reached for the letter, and opened it; then rubbed his eyes and looked again. For the letter from the board of regents took pleasure in informing him of his selection as dean of mathematics, the coveted position!

"This must be some more of the same dream," Smith thought, "for this is what would have happened if I had let that beast drown, instead of saving his ungrateful hide as I did."

To see if the illusion still held, he got up and went over to the bookcase, which held the bound copies of the *Bulletin of the American Mathematical Society*. Taking out one well-thumbed volume, he turned to the page where Paul Arkwright's damning note had pointed out the fallacy in Smith's thesis. There stood the thesis and the note, but the note was very mild, and was by the editor instead of by Arkwright.

Professor Smith turned to his second article in another volume. Sure enough, there was the note about the German anticipation of his ideas, but this note too was by the editor, and it contained *no* veiled accusation of intentional plagiarism.

Professor Smith smiled. The dream was going good! So he looked up Arkwright's name in the college catalog, only to find no such person among the faculty. Even Paul's mathematics courses were all listed as given by others. Smith's smile became a grin.

The gray light of morning was beginning to show. He dressed quietly, then sneaked downstairs, and getting into his car, drove out to the new subdivision, where Paul Arkwright's house was being built. But the lot stood vacant, and still held a "for sale" sign.

About the time that Professor Smith reached home again, he began to realize that he was awake and not dreaming. And then he began to worry. Things like this just don't happen in real life! Yesterday Paul had blocked his promotion; today all trace of Paul had been wiped from the face of the earth. Or else he himself was losing his mind.

His one hope lay in his wife. She would, she *must*, remember their despairing conference of the night before!

At breakfast she appeared, looking worried; and no wonder, with him traipsing off in the car in the early morning, when usually she had difficulty getting him out of bed in time for breakfast!

He noticed her tense look, and it cheered him, for he interpreted it as being due to the letter of the night before. But still he could not be sure.

So he said in a level tone, "Do you remember that letter from the regents last night?"

To his surprize, his wife brightened at once.

"Indeed I do!" she said. "Isn't it splendid! You acted like a kid when you read it to me. And didn't we have a wonderful celebration-party together downtown! A regular second honeymoon. To you, the promotion means the fulfilment of your ambitions. And to me it means that we shall soon be able to pay off the mortgage on our home. Oh, John, isn't it glorious!"

"But how about Paul Arkwright?" he asked, bewildered.

"You poor dear," she sympathized, "it's just like you to grieve over your old room-mate in your hour of triumph. I wish that I had known him. He must have been quite a fellow, to judge from the way you have always praised him. He would be so glad, I am sure, if he were alive today, to know of your success."

Professor Smith gave it up! He passed a bewildered hand across his brow. He would accept the gift of the gods without question. Paul's death would never be on his conscience, for he knew in his heart of hearts that he had actually saved Paul ten years ago, and that letting Paul drown had been only a figment of last night's dream.

And yet had it been merely a dream? As the day wore on, Professor Smith began to believe that some probably unfounded premonition had caused him actually to kill his beloved and trusting room-mate, years ago; and that the long chain of ungrateful indignities at the hands of that room-mate had been the dream, a mere invention of his imagination, conjured up by some defense-mechanism in his brain, to justify his dastardly act.

In spite of the congratulations which were showered upon him because of his promotion, he became more and more morose and harassed during the day. By evening he was a wreck!

THAT night the same dream came again. Once more John Smith, the college grind, stood on the parapet overlooking the Charles River, and watched his athletic room-mate, Paul Arkwright, struggling amid the ice-cakes.

"If I save him," the thought flashed through Smith's mind, "he will be ungrateful. He will hound me and ruin my career. But if I let him drown, his death will haunt me forever."

"Coming, Paul!" he cried, and dived into the swirling stream.

PROFESSOR SMITH awoke, feeling very proud of himself. He had saved Paul Arkwright's life.

But had he?

There lay the letter from the regents. That letter would tell the tale.

Fearfully Smith arose, and approached the letter as though it had been a poisonous serpent. Gingerly he reached out for the envelope. For a moment he held it, not daring to look inside. But at last, with an effort, he took out the letter and unfolded it. With a further effort, he looked at it and read it carefully.

Then he actually smiled with relief!

The letter was in its old original form, informing him of Paul Arkwright's appointment as Dean, and tactfully suggested his own resignation. He could stand it now, for his conscience was clear. There were worse things in life than a lost job!

Professor Smith then remembered his dispute with Dr. Willis on the Einstein theory two evenings ago, and his grin became even broader.

"Won't Willis be interested!" said he to himself. "I've twice gone back into time, and have twice changed my entire career." Then he smiled ruefully, and added, "And yet how can I ever prove it to anyone?"

The Wolf-Leader*

By ALEXANDRE DUMAS

CHAPTER 1

The Grand Master of His Highness' Wolfhounds

THE Seigneur Jean, Baron of Vez, was an indefatigable sportsman. If you follow the beautiful valley which runs between Berval and Longpré, you will see, on your left hand, an old tower, which by reason of its isolated position will appear doubly high and formidable to you.

It was a building of the Twelfth or Thirteenth Century, rugged and gloomy, its terrifying exterior having assumed no kindlier aspect as the years rolled by. True, the sentinel with his measured tread and flashing steel cap no longer paced its ramparts, the archer with his shrill-sounding horn no longer kept watch and ward on the battlements; the postern was no longer guarded by men at arms, ready at the least signal of danger to lower the portcullis and draw up the bridge; but the solitude alone which surrounded this grim giant of granite was sufficient to inspire the feeling of awe-inspiring majesty awakened by all mute and motionless things.

The lord of this old fortress, however, was by no means so much to be dreaded; those who were more intimately acquainted with him than were the peasants, and could do him more justice, asserted that his bark was worse than his bite, and that he caused more fear than harm—that is, among his fellow Christians. With the animals of the forest it was different, for he was their implacable enemy.

He was chief wolf-hunter to his Royal Highness Louis Philippe of Orleans, the fourth of that name—a post which allowed him to gratify the inordinate passion he had for the chase. Although it was not easy, it was yet possible to bring the Baron to listen to reason in other matters; but as regards the chase, if once he had got a fixed idea in his head, nothing would satisfy him until he had carried it out and had achieved his purpose.

His wife, according to report, was the natural daughter of the Prince, which, in conjunction with his title of chief wolf-hunter, gave him almost absolute power throughout the domains of his illustrious father-in-law, a power which no one dared to contest with him, especially after the remarriage of his Royal Highness with Madame de Montesson. This had taken place in 1773, since which date he had almost abandoned his castle at Vil-

*This remarkable werewolf novel, by Alexandre Dumas, *fils*, is not included in the published collections of Dumas' works in English, and will therefore be new to our readers, except those who have had the good fortune to read the story in the original French.

lers-Cotterets for his delightful residence at Bagnolet, where he entertained all the first wits of the day and amused himself with play-acting.

And so, whether the sun was shining to rejoice the earth, or the rain was saddening it, whether the winter fields lay hidden beneath a shroud of snow, or the spring had spread her fresh green carpet over the meadows, it was rare, on any day of the year, not to see the great gates of the castle thrown wide open between eight and nine o'clock in the morning, and first the Baron come forth, and immediately after him his chief pricker, Marcotte, followed by the other prickers. Then appeared the dogs, coupled and held in leash by the keepers of the hounds, under the superintendence of Engoulevent, who aspired to become a pricker. Even as the German executioner walks alone, behind the nobles and in front of the citizens, to show that he is the least of the former and the first of the latter, so he walked immediately after the prickers and ahead of the keepers of the hounds, as being the chief of the whippers-in and least of the prickers.

The whole procession filed out of the castle court in full hunting array, with the English horses and the French hounds; twelve horses, and forty dogs.

Before we go any farther, let me say that with these twelve horses and forty dogs the Baron hunted every sort of quarry, but more especially the wolf, in order no doubt to do honor to his title.

No further proof will be needed by the genuine sportsman of the fine faith he had in the general quality of his hounds, and in their keenness of scent, than the fact that next to the wolf he gave preference to the boar, then to the red deer, then to the fallow-deer, and lastly to the roebuck; finally, if the keepers of the pack failed to sight the animal they had tracked, he uncoupled at random, and went after the first hare that crossed his path. For the worthy Baron went hunting every day, and he would sooner have gone for four-and-twenty hours without foor or drink than have spent that time without seeing his hounds run.

But, as everybody knows, however swift the horses, and however keen the dogs, hunting has its bad times as well as its good.

One day, Marcotte came up to where the Baron was awaiting him, with a crestfallen expression of countenance.

"How now, Marcotte," asked the Baron frowning, "what is the matter this time? I see by your face we are to expect bad sport today."

Marcotte shook his head.

"Speak up, man," continued the Baron with a gesture of impatience.

"The matter is, my lord, that the black wolf is about."

"Ah! ah!" exclaimed the Baron, his eyes sparkling; for you must know that this made the fifth or sixth time that the worthy Baron had started the animal in question, but never once had he been able to get within gun-shot of him or to run him down.

"Yes," Marcotte went on, "but the damned beast has employed himself so well all night crossing his track and doubling, that after having traced him over half the forest, I found myself at the place from which I started."

"You think then, Marcotte, that there is no chance of getting near him."

"I am afraid not."

"By all the devils in hell!" exclaimed the Lord of Vez, who had not had his equal in swearing since the mighty Nimrod. "However, I am not feeling well today, and I must have a burst of some kind, to get rid of these bad humors. What do you think we can hunt, Marcotte, in place of this damned black wolf?"

"Well, having been so taken up with the wolf," answered Marcotte, "I have not traced any other animal. Will my Lord uncouple at random and hunt the first animal that we come across?"

The Baron was about to express his willingness to agree to this proposal when he caught sight of little Engoulevent coming toward them cap in hand.

"Wait a moment," he said; "here comes Engoulevent, who, I fancy, has some advice to give us."

"I have no advice to give to a noble lord like yourself," replied Engoulevent, assuming an expression of humility on his sly and crafty face; "it is, however, my duty to inform you that there is a splendid buck in the neighborhood."

"Let us see your buck, Engoulevent," replied the chief wolf-hunter, "and if you are not mistaken about it, there will be a new crown for you."

"Where is this buck of yours?" asked Marcotte; "but look to your skin, if you make us uncouple to no purpose."

"Let me have Matador and Jupiter, and then we shall see." Matador and Jupiter were the finest among the hounds belonging to the Lord of Vez. And indeed, Engoulevent had not gone a hundred paces with them through the thicket, before, by the lashing of their tails, and their repeated yelping, he knew that they were on the right scent. In another minute or two a magnificent ten-tined stag came into view. Marcotte cried tally-ho, sounded his horn, and the hunt began, to the great satisfaction of the Lord of Vez, who although regretting the black wolf, was willing to make the best of a fine buck in its stead. The hunt had lasted two hours, and the quarry still held on. It had first led its pursuers from the little wood of Haramont to the Chemin du Pendu, and thence straight to the back of Oigny, and it still showed no sign of fatigue; for it was not one of those poor animals of the flat country who get their tails pulled by every wretched terrier.

As it neared the low grounds of Bourgfontaine, however, it evidently decided that it was being run rather hard, for it gave up the bolder measures which had hitherto enabled it to keep ahead, and began to double.

Its first maneuver was to go down to the brook which joins the ponds of Baisemont and Bôurg, then to walk against stream with the water up to its haunches, for nearly half a mile; it then sprang on to the right bank, back again into the bed of the stream, made another leap to the left, and with a succession of bounds, as vigorous as its failing strength allowed, continued to out-distance its pursuers. But the dogs of my lord Baron were not animals to be put out by such trifles as these. Being both sagacious and well-bred, they, of their own accord, divided the task between themselves, half going up stream, and half down, these hunting on the right, those on the left, and so effectually that they ere long put the animal off its changes, for they soon recovered the scent, rallying at the first cry given by one of the pack, and starting afresh on the chase, as ready and eager as if the deer had been only twenty paces in front of them.

And so with galloping of horses, with cry of hounds and blare of horn, the Baron and his huntsmen reached the ponds of Saint Antoine, a hundred paces or so from the confines of Oigny. Between these and the osier-beds stood the hut of Thibault, the sabot-maker.

WE MUST pause to give some description of this Thibault, the shoemaker, the real hero of the tale.

You will ask why I, who have summoned kings to appear upon the stage, who have obliged princes, dukes, and barons to play secondary parts in my ro-

mances, should take a simple shoemaker for the hero of this tale.

First, I will reply by saying that, in my dear home country of Villers-Cotterets, there are more sabot-makers than barons, dukes and princes, and that, as soon as I decided to make the forest the scene of the events I am about to record, I was obliged to choose one of the actual inhabitants of this forest as hero.

More than that, it is not the author who decides on the subject, but the subject which takes possession of the author, and, good or bad, this particular subject has taken possession of me. I will therefore endeavor to draw Thibault's portrait for you, plain shoemaker as he was, as exactly as the artist paints the portrait which a prince desires to send to his lady-love.

Thibault was a man between twenty-five and twenty-seven years of age, tall, well made, physically robust, but by nature melancholy and sad of heart. This depression of spirits arose from a little grain of envy, which he harbored toward all such of his neighbors as had been more favored by fortune than himself.

His father had committed a fault, a serious one at all times, but more especially in those days of absolutism, when a man was not able to rise above his station as nowadays, when with sufficient capacity he may attain to any rank. Thibault had been educated above his position; he had been at school under the Abbé Fortier, at Villers-Cotterets, and had learnt to read, write, and cipher; moreover, he knew a little Latin, which made him inordinately proud of himself. Thibault had spent a great part of his time in reading, and his books had been chiefly those which were in vogue at the close of the preceding century. But he had not been a sufficiently clever analyst to know how to separate the good from the bad, or rather he *had* separated what was bad, and swallowed it in large doses, leaving the good to precipitate itself at the bottom of the glass.

At twenty years of age Thibault had certainly had dreams of being something other than a sabot-maker. He had, for instance, for a very little while, cast his eyes toward the army. But his comrades who had worn the double livery of king and country had left the service as they entered it, mere soldiers of the ranks, having failed during five or six years of slavery to obtain promotion, even to the not very exalted grade of corporal.

Thibault had also thought of becoming a sailor. But a career in the navy was as much forbidden to the plebeian as one in the army. Possibly after enduring danger and storm and battle for fifteen or twenty years, he might be made a boatswain's mate, and that was all. Besides, it was by no means Thibault's ambition to wear a short vest and sail-cloth trousers, but the blue uniform of the king with red vest and gold epaulettes. He had moreover known of no single case in which the son of a mere shoemaker had become master of a frigate, or even lieutenant. So he was forced to give up all idea of joining the King's navy.

Thibault would not have minded being a notary, and at one time thought of apprenticing himself to the Royal Scrivener, Maître Niquet, as a stepping-stone, and of making his way up on the strength of his own legs and with the help of his pen. But supposing him to have risen to the position of head clerk with a salary of a hundred crowns, where was he to find the thirty thousand francs which would be required for the purchase of the smallest village practise?

There was, therefore, no better chance of his becoming a scrivener than of becoming an officer on sea or land. Meanwhile, Thibault's father died, leaving

very little ready money. There was about enough to bury him, so he was buried, and this done, there remained some thirty or forty francs over for Thibault.

Thibault knew his trade well; indeed, he was a first-rate workman; but he had no inclination to handle either auger or parer. It ended, therefore, by his leaving all his father's tools in the care of a friend, a remnant of prudence still remaining to him, and selling every vestige of furniture; having thus realized a sum of five hundred and forty livres, he determined to make what was then called the tour of France.

Thibault spent three years in traveling; he did not make his fortune during that time, but he learnt a great many things in the course of his journey of which he was previously ignorant, and acquired certain accomplishments which he had previously been without.

He learnt amongst other things that, although it was as well to keep one's word on matters of business with a man, it was no use whatever keeping love vows made to a woman.

So much for his character and habits of mind. As to his external accomplishments, he could dance a jig beautifully, could hold his own at quarter-staff against four men, and could handle the boar-spear as cleverly as the best huntsman going. All these things had not a little served to increase Thibault's natural self-esteem, and, seeing himself handsomer, stronger, and cleverer than many of the nobles, he would exclaim against Providence, crying, "Why was I not nobly born? Why was not that nobleman yonder born a peasant?"

But as Providence took care not to make any answer to these apostrophes, and as Thibault found that dancing, playing at quarter-staff, and throwing the boar-spear only fatigued the body, without procuring him any material advantage, he began to turn his thoughts toward his ancient trade, humble though it was, saying to himself, if it enabled the father to live, it would also enable the son. So Thibault went and fetched away his tools; and then, tools in hand, he went to ask permission of the steward of his Royal Highness Louis Philippe of Orleans to build a hut in the forest, in which to carry on his trade. He had no difficulty in obtaining this, for the steward knew by experience that his master was a very kind-hearted man, expending as much as two hundred and forty thousand francs a year on the poor; he felt sure, therefore, that one who gave away a sum like this would be willing to let an honest workman who wished to ply his trade have thirty or forty feet of ground.

As he had leave to establish himself in whatever part of the forest he liked best, Thibault chose the spot near the osier-beds, where the roads crossed, one of the most beautiful parts of the woods, less than a mile from Oigny and about three times that distance from Villers-Cotterets. The shoemaker put up his work-shop, built partly of old planks given him by Monsieur Panisis, who had been having a sale in the neighborhood, and partly of the branches which the steward gave him leave to cut in the forest.

When the building of the hut, which consisted of a bedroom, cozily shut in, where he could work during the winter, and of a lean-to, open to the air, where he could work in the summer, was completed, Thibault began to think of making himself a bed. At first, a layer of fern had to serve for this purpose; but after he had made a hundred pairs of wooden shoes and had sold these to Bedeau, who kept a general shop at Villers-Cotterets, he was able to pay a sufficient deposit to get a mattress, to be paid for in full by the end of three months. The framework

of the bed was not difficult to make; Thibault was not the shoemaker he was without being a bit of a carpenter into the bargain, and when this was finished he plaited osiers to take the place of sacking, laid the mattress upon them, and found himself at last with a bed to lie upon.

Little by little came the sheets, and then in turn the coverlids; the next purchase was a chafing-dish, and earthenware pots to cook in, and finally some plates and dishes. Before the year was out Thibault had also made additions to his furniture of a fine oak chest and a fine walnut-wood cupboard, both, like the bed, his own handiwork. All the while he was driving a brisk trade, for none could beat Thibault in turning a block of beech into a pair of shoes, and in converting the odd chips into spoons, salt-cellars and nattly little bowls.

He had now been settled in his workshop for three years, that is, ever since his return after the completion of his tour round France, and there was nothing for which any one could have reproached him during this interval except the failing we have already mentioned — that he was rather more envious of the good fortune of his neighbor than was altogether conducive to the welfare of his soul. But this feeling was as yet so inoffensive that his confessor had no need to do more than awaken in him a sense of shame for harboring thoughts which had, so far, not resulted in any active crime.

CHAPTER 2

The Seigneur Jean and the Sabot-maker

As already said, the buck began to dodge and double on reaching Oigny, turning and twisting round Thibault's hut, and the weather being fine although the autumn was well advanced, the shoemaker was sitting at his work in his open lean-to. Looking up, he suddenly espied the trembling animal, quivering in every limb, standing a few paces in front of him, gazing at him with intelligent and terrified eyes.

"Saint Sabot!" he exclaimed—I should explain that the festival of Saint Sabot is the wooden-shoe fête—"Saint Sabot! but that is a dainty morsel and would taste as fine, I warrant, as the chamois I ate at Vienne once at the grand banquet of the Jolly Shoemakers of Dauphiné. Lucky folk who can dine on the like every day. I tasted such once, and my mouth waters when I think of it. Oh! these lords! these lords! with their fresh meats and their old wines at every meal, while I have to be satisfied with potatoes to eat and water to drink from one week's end to the other; and it is a chance if even on Sunday I can feast myself with a lump of rusty bacon and an old cabbage, and a glass of *pignolet* fit to make my old goat stand on her head."

It need scarcely be said, that as soon as Thibault began this monologue, the buck had turned and disappeared. Thibault had finished rounding his periods, and had just declaimed his peroration, when he heard himself roughly accosted in forcible terms:

"Ho, there, you scoundrel! answer me."

It was the Baron, who, seeing his dogs wavering, was anxious to make sure that they were not on the wrong scent.

"Ho, there, you scoundrel!" repeated the wolf-hunter, "have you seen the beast?"

There was evidently something in the manner of the Baron's questioning which did not please our philosophical shoemaker, for although he was perfectly aware what was the matter, he answered: "What beast?"

"Curse you! why, the buck we are hunting! He must have passed close by here, and standing gaping as you do, you must have seen him. It was a fine stag of

ten, was it not? Which way did he go? Speak up, you blackguard, or you shall have a taste of my stirrup-leather!"

"The black plague take him, cub of a wolf!" muttered the shoemaker to himself. Then, aloud, with a fine air of pretended simplicity, "Ah, yes!" he said, "I did see him."

"A buck, was it not? a ten-tiner, eh? with great horns."

"Ah, yes, to be sure, a buck, with great horns—or great corns, was it?—yes, I saw him as plain as I see you, my Lord. But there, I can't say if he had any corns, for I did not look at his feet, anyhow," he added, with the air of a perfect simpleton, "if he had corns, they did not prevent him running."

At any other time the Baron would have laughed at what he might have taken for genuine stupidity; but the doublings of the animal were beginning to put him into a regular huntsman's fever.

"Now, then, you scoundrel, a truce to this jesting! If you are in a humor for jokes, it is more than I am!"

"I will be in whatever humor it may please your Lordship I should be."

"Well, then, answer me."

"Your Lordship has asked me nothing as yet."

"Did the deer seem tired?"

"Not very."

"Which way did he come?"

"He did not come, he was standing still."

"Well, but he must have come from one side or the other."

"Ah! very likely, but I did not see him come."

"Which way did he go?"

"I would tell you directly; only I did not see him go."

The Lord of Vez cast an angry look at Thibault.

"Is it some while ago the buck passed this way, Master Simpleton?"

"Not so very long, my lord."

"About how long ago?"

Thibault made as if trying to remember; at last he replied: "It was, I think, the day before yesterday," but in saying this, the shoemaker, unfortunately, could not suppress a grin. This grin did not escape the Baron, who, spurring his horse, rode down on Thibault with lifted whip.

Thibault was agile, and with a single bound he reached the shelter of his lean-to, whither the wolf-hunter could not follow, so long as he remained mounted; Thibault was therefore in momentary safety.

"You are only bantering and lying!" cried the huntsman; "for there is Marcassino, my best hound, giving cry not twenty yards off, and if the deer passed by where Marcassino is, he must have come over the hedge, and it is impossible, therefore, that you did not see him."

"Pardon, my lord, but according to our good priest, no one but the Pope is infallible, and Monsieur Marcassino may be mistaken."

"Marcassino is never mistaken, do you hear, you rascal? and in proof of it I can see from here the marks where the animal scratched up the ground."

"Nevertheless, my Lord, I assure you, I swear——" said Thibault, who saw the Baron's eyebrows contracting in a way that made him feel uneasy.

"Silence, and come here, blackguard!" cried my lord.

Thibault hesitated a moment, but the black look on the sportsman's face became more and more threatening, and fearing to increase his exasperation by disobeying his command, he thought he had better go forward, hoping that the Baron merely wished to ask a service of him.

But it was an unlucky move on his part, for scarcely had he emerged from the protection of the shed, before the horse

of the Lord of Vez, urged by bit and spur, gave a leap, which brought his rider swooping down upon Thibault, while at the same moment a furious blow from the butt end of the Baron's whip fell upon his head.

The shoemaker, stunned by the blow, tottered a moment, lost his balance and was about to fall face downward, when the Baron, drawing his foot out of the stirrup, with a violent kick in the chest, not only straightened him again, but sent the poor wretch flying in an opposite direction, where he fell with his back against the door of his hut.

"Take that!" said the Baron, as he first felled Thibault with his whip, and then kicked him. "Take that for your lie, and that for your banter!"

And then, without troubling himself any further about the man, whom he left lying on his back, the Lord of Vez, seeing that the hounds had rallied on hearing Marcassino's cry, gave them a cheery note on his horn, and cantered away.

THIBAULT lifted himself up, feeling bruised all over, and began feeling himself from head to foot to make sure that no bones were broken.

Having carefully passed his hand over each limb in succession, "That's all right," he said; "there is nothing broken either above or below, I am glad to find. So, my lord Baron, that is how you treat people, because you happen to have married a Prince's bastard daughter! But let me tell you, my fine fellow, it is not you who will eat the buck you are hunting today; it will be this blackguard, this scoundrel, this simpleton of a Thibault who will eat it. Yes, it shall be I who eat it, that I vow!" cried Thibault, confirming himself more and more in his bold resolution, and it is no use being a man if, having once made a vow, one fails to keep it.

So without further delay, Thibault thrust his bill-hook into his belt, seized his boar-spear, and after listening for a moment to the cry of the hounds to ascertain in which direction the hunt had gone, he ran off with all the speed of which a man's legs are capable to get the start of them, guessing by the curve which the stag and its pursuers were following what would be the straight line to take so as to intercept them.

There were two ways of doing his deed open to Thibault; either to hide himself beside the path which the buck must take and kill him with his boar-spear, or else to surprize the animal just as he was being hunted down by the dogs, and collar him there and then.

And as he ran, the desire to revenge himself on the Baron for the latter's brutality was not so uppermost in Thibault's mind as the thoughts of the sumptuous manner in which he would fare for the next month, on the shoulders, the back, and the haunches of the deer, either salted to a turn, roasted on the spit, or cut in slices and done in the pan. And these two ideas, moreover, of vengeance and gluttony, were so jumbled up in his brain, that while still running at the top of his speed he laughed in his sleeve, as he pictured the dejected mien of the Baron and his men returning to the castle after their fruitless day's hunt, and at the same time saw himself seated at table, the door securely fastened, and a pint of wine beside him, *tête-à tête* with a haunch of the deer, the rich and delicious gravy escaping as the knife returned for a third or fourth cut.

The deer, as far as Thibault could calculate, was making for the bridge which crosses the Ourcq, between Noroy and Troesne. As the river was very high and very rapid, Thibault decided that the deer would not attempt to ford it; so he hid

himself behind a rock, within reach of the bridge, and waited.

It was not long before he saw the graceful head of the deer appear above the rock at some ten paces' distance; the animal was bending its ears to the wind, in the endeavor to catch the sound of the enemy's approach as it was borne along the breeze. Thibault, excited by this sudden appearance, rose from behind the rock, poised his boar-spear and sent it flying toward the animal.

The buck, with a single bound, reached the middle of the bridge; a second carried him on to the opposite bank, and a third bore him out of sight.

The boar-spear had passed within a foot of the animal, and had buried itself in the grass fifteen paces from where Thibault was standing. Never before had he been known to make such an unskilful throw; he, Thibault, of all the company who made the tour of France, the one known to be surest of his aim! Enraged with himself, therefore, he picked up his weapon, and bounded across the bridge with an agility equal to that of the deer.

Thibault knew the country quite as well as the animal he was pursuing, and so got ahead of the deer and once more concealed himself, this time behind a beech-tree, half-way up, and not too far from a little footpath.

The deer now passed so close to him, that Thibault hesitated whether it would not be better to knock the animal down with his boar-spear than to throw the weapon at it; but his hesitation did not last longer than a flash of lightning, for no lightning could be quicker than the animal itself, which was already twenty paces off when Thibault threw his boar-spear, but without better luck than the time before.

And now the baying of the hounds was drawing nearer and nearer; another few minutes, and it would, he felt, be impossible for him to carry out his design. But in honor to his spirit of persistence, be it said that in proportion as the difficulty increased, the greater became Thibault's desire to get possession of the deer.

"I must have it, come what will!" he cried. "I must! and if there is a God who cares for the poor, I shall have satisfaction of this confounded Baron, who beat me as if I were a dog; but I am a man notwithstanding, and I am quite ready to prove the same to him."

And Thibault picked up his boar-spear and once more set off running. But it would appear that the good God whom he had just invoked, either had not heard him, or wished to drive him to extremities, for his third attempt had no greater success than the previous ones.

"By Heaven!" exclaimed Thibault, "God Almighty is assuredly deaf, it seems. Let the Devil then open his ears and hear me! In the name of God or of the Devil, I want you and I will have you, cursed animal!"

Thibault had hardly finished this double blasphemy when the buck, doubling back, passed close to him for the fourth time, and disappeared among the bushes, but so quickly and unexpectedly that Thibault had not even time to lift his boar-spear.

At that moment he heard the dogs so near him that he deemed it would be imprudent to continue his pursuit. He looked round him, saw a thickly-leaved oak tree, threw his boar-spear into a bush, swarmed up the trunk, and hid himself among the foliage. He imagined, and with good reason, that since the deer had gone ahead again, the hunt would only pass by following on its track. The dogs had not lost the scent, in spite of the quarry's doublings, and they were not likely to lose it now.

Thibault had not been seated among the branches for above five minutes, when first the hounds came into sight, then the

Baron, who in spite of his fifty-five years, headed the chase as if he had been a man of twenty. It must be added that the Lord of Vez was in a state of rage that we will not even endeavor to describe.

To lose four hours over a wretched deer and still to be running behind it! Such a thing had never happened to him before.

He stormed at his men, he whipped his dogs, and had so plowed his horse's sides with his spurs that the thick coating of mud which covered his gaiters was reddened with blood.

On reaching the bridge over the Ourcq, however, there had been an interval of alleviation for the Baron, for the hounds had so unanimously taken up the scent, that the cloak which the wolf-hunter carried behind him would have sufficed to cover the whole pack as they crossed the bridge.

Indeed the Baron was so pleased, that he was not satisfied with humming a tirra-la, but, unslinging his hunting-horn he sounded it with his full lung-power, a thing which he only did on great occasions.

But, unfortunately, the joy of my Lord of Vez was destined to be short-lived.

All of a sudden, just as the hounds, that were crying in concert in a way which more and more delighted the Baron's ears, were passing under the tree where Thibault was perched, the whole pack came to a standstill, and every tongue was silenced as by enchantment. Marcotte, at his master's command, dismounted to see if he could find any traces of the deer, the whippers-in ran up, and they and Marcotte looked about, but they could find nothing.

Then Engoulevent, who had set his heart on a view-halloo being sounded for the animal he had tracked down, joined the others, and he too began to search. Every one was searching, calling out and trying to rouse the dogs, when above all the other voices, was heard, like the blast of a tempest, the voice of the Baron.

"Ten thousand devils!" he thundered. "Have the dogs fallen into a pit-hole, Marcotte?"

"No, my lord, they are here, but they are come to a check."

"How? Come to a standstill?" exclaimed the Baron.

"What is to be done, my lord? I can not understand what has happened, but such is the fact."

"Come to a check!" again exclaimed the Baron, "come to a standstill, here, in the middle of the forest, here where there is no stream where the animal could have doubled, or rock for it to climb. You must be out of your mind, Marcotte!"

"I, out of my mind, my lord?"

"Yes, you, you fool, as truly as your dogs are all worthless trash!"

As a rule, Marcotte bore with admirable patience the insults which the Baron was in the habit of lavishing upon everybody about him at critical moments of the chase, but this word *trash,* applied to his dogs, was more than his habitual long-suffering could bear, and drawing himself up to his full height, he answered vehemently, "Trash, my lord? my dogs worthless trash! dogs that have brought down an old wolf after such a furious run that the best horse in your stable was foundered! my dogs trash!"

"Yes, trash, worthless trash, I say it again, Marcotte. Only trash would stop at a check like that, after hunting one wretched buck so many hours on end."

"My lord," answered Marcotte, in a tone of mingled dignity and sorrow, "my lord, say that it is my fault; call me a fool, a blockhead, a scoundrel, a blackguard, an idiot; insult me in my own person, or in that of my wife, of my children, and it is nothing to me; but for the sake of all my past services to you, do not attack me

in my office of chief pricker, do not insult your dogs."

"How do you account for this silence, then? tell me that! How do you account for it? I am quite willing to hear what you have to say, and I am listening."

"I can not explain it any more than you can, my lord; the damned animal must have flown into the clouds or disappeared in the bowels of the earth."

"What nonsense are you talking?" exclaimed the Baron. "Do you want to make out that the deer has burrowed like a rabbit, or risen from the ground like a grouse?"

"My lord, I meant it only as a manner of speech. What is a truth, what is the fact, is that there is some witchcraft behind all this. As sure as it is now daylight, my dogs, every one of them, lay down at the same moment, suddenly, without an instant's hesitation. Ask anybody who was near them at the time. And now they are not even trying to recover the scent, but there they lie flat on the ground like so many stags in their lair. I ask you, is it natural?"

"Thrash them, man! thrash them, then," cried the Baron, "flay the skin off their backs; there is nothing like it for driving out the evil spirit."

And the Baron was going forward to emphasize with a few blows from his own whip the exorcisms which Marcotte, according to his orders, was distributing among the poor beasts, when Engoulevent, hat in hand, drew near to the Baron and timidly laid his hand on the horse's bridle.

"My lord," said the keeper of the kennel, "I think I have just discovered a cuckoo in that tree who may perhaps be able to give us some explanation of what has happened."

"What the devil are you talking about, with your cuckoo, you ape?" said the Baron. "If you wait a moment, you scamp, I will teach you how to come chaffing your master like that!"

And the Baron lifted his whip. But with all the heroism of a Spartan, Engoulevent lifted his arm above his head as a shield and continued:

"Strike, if you will, my lord, but after that look up into this tree, and when your lordship has seen the bird that is perched among the branches, I think you will be more ready to give me a crown than a blow."

And the good man pointed to the oak tree in which Thibault had taken refuge on hearing the huntsmen approach. He had climbed up from branch to branch and had finally hoisted himself on to the topmost one.

THE Baron shaded his eyes with his hand, and, looking up, caught sight of Thibault.

"Well, here's something mighty queer!" he cried. "It seems that in the forest of Villers-Cotterets the deer burrow like foxes, and men perch on trees like crows. However," continued the worthy Baron, "we will see what sort of creature we have to deal with." And putting his hand to his mouth, he halloed:

"Ho, there, my friend! would it be particularly disagreeable for you to give me ten minutes' conversation?"

But Thibault maintained the most profound silence.

"My lord," said Engoulevent, "if you like——" and he made a sign to show that he was ready to climb the tree.

"No, no," said the Baron, at the same time putting out his hand to hold him back.

"Ho, there, my friend!" repeated the Baron, still without recognizing Thibault, "will it please you to answer me, yes or no?"

He paused a second.

"I see, it is evidently, no; you pretend

to be deaf, my friend; wait a moment, and I will get my speaking-trumpet," and he held out his hand to Marcotte, who, guessing his intention, handed him his gun.

Thibault, who wished to put the huntsmen on the wrong scent, was meanwhile pretending to cut away the dead branches, and he put so much energy into this feigned occupation that he did not perceive the movement on the part of the Baron, or, if he saw, only took it as a menace, without attaching the importance to it which it merited.

The wolf-hunter waited for a little while to see if the answer would come, but as it did not, he pulled the trigger; the gun went off, and a branch was heard to crack.

The branch which cracked was the one on which Thibault was poised; the Baron was a fine shot and had broken it just between the trunk and the shoemaker's foot.

Deprived of his support, Thibault fell, rolling from branch to branch. Fortunately the tree was thick, and the branches strong, so that his fall was broken and less rapid than it might have been, and he finally reached the ground, after many rebounds, without further ill consequences than a feeling of great fear and a few slight bruises on that part of his body which had first come in contact with the earth.

"By Beelzebub's horns!" exclaimed the Baron, delighted with his own skill, "if it is not my joker of the morning! Ah! so, you scamp! did the discourse you had with my whip seem too short to you, that you are so anxious to take it up again where we left off?"

"Oh, as to that, I assure you it is not so, my lord," answered Thibault in a tone of the most perfect sincerity.

"So much the better for your skin, my good fellow. Well, and now tell me what you were doing up there, perched on the top of that oak-tree?"

"My lord can see himself," answered Thibault, pointing to a few dry twigs lying here and there on the ground, "I was cutting a little dry wood for fuel."

"Ah! I see. Now then, my good fellow, you will please tell us, without any beating about the bush, what has become of our deer."

"By the devil, he ought to know, seeing that he has been perched up there so as not to lose any of its movements," put in Marcotte.

"But I swear, my lord," said Thibault, "that I don't know what it is you mean about this wretched buck."

"Ah, I thought so," cried Marcotte, delighted to divert his master's ill-humor from himself, "he has not seen it, he has not seen the animal at all, he does not know what we mean by this wretched buck! But look here, my lord, see, the marks on these leaves where the animal has bitten; it was just here that the dogs came to a full stop, and now, although the ground is good to show every mark, we can find no trace of the animal, for ten, twenty, or a hundred paces even."

"You hear?" said the Baron, joining his words on to those of the pricker, "you were up there, and the deer here at your feet. It did not go by like a mouse without making any sound, and you did not see or hear. You must needs have seen or heard it!"

"He has killed the deer," said Marcotte, "and hidden it away in a bush—that's as clear as the day."

"Oh, my lord," cried Thibault, who knew better than anybody else how mistaken the pricker was in making this accusation, "my lord, by all the saints in paradise, I swear to you that I have not killed your deer; I swear it to you on the salvation of my soul, and may I perish on the spot if I have given him even the slightest scratch. And besides, I could not have killed him without wounding him,

and if I had wounded him, blood would have flowed. Look, I pray you, sir," continued Thibault, turning to the pricker, "and God be thanked, you will find no trace of blood. I kill a poor beast? and, my God, with what? Where is my weapon? God knows I have no other weapon than this bill-hook. Look yourself, my lord."

But unfortunately for Thibault, he had hardly uttered these words, before Maître Engoulevent, who had been prowling about for some minutes past, reappeared, carrying the boar-spear which Thibault had thrown into one of the bushes before climbing up the tree.

He handed the weapon to the Baron.

There was no doubt about it—Engoulevent was Thibault's evil genius.

CHAPTER 3

Agnelette

THE Baron took the weapon which Engoulevent handed him, and carefully and deliberately examined the boar-spear from point to handle, without saying a word. On the handle had been carved a little wooden shoe, which had served as Thibault's device while making the tour of France, as thereby he was able to recognize his own weapon. The Baron now pointed to this, saying to Thibault as he did so:

"Ah, ah, Master Simpleton! there is something which witnesses terribly against you! I must confess this boar-spear smells to me uncommonly of venison, by the devil it does! However, all I have now to say to you is this: You have been poaching, which is a serious crime; you have perjured yourself, which is a great sin; I am going to enforce expiation from you for the one and for the other, to help toward the salvation of that soul by which you have sworn."

Whereupon, turning to the pricker, he continued: "Marcotte, strip off that rascal's vest and shirt, and tie him up to a tree with a couple of the dog leashes, and then give him thirty-six strokes across the back with your shoulder belt—a dozen for his perjury, and two dozen for his poaching; no, I make a mistake, a dozen for poaching and two dozen for perjuring himself—God's portion must be the largest."

This order caused great rejoicing among the menials, who thought it good luck to have a culprit on whom they could avenge themselves for the mishaps of the day.

In spite of Thibault's protestations, who swore by all the saints in the calendar that he had killed neither buck nor doe, neither goat nor kidling, he was divested of his garments and firmly strapped to the trunk of a tree; then the execution commenced.

The pricker's strokes were so heavy that Thibault, who had sworn not to utter a sound, and bit his lips to enable himself to keep his resolution, was forced at the third blow to open his mouth and cry out.

The Baron, as we have already seen, was about the roughest man of his class for a good thirty miles round, but he was not hard-hearted, and it was a distress to him to listen to the cries of the culprit as they became more and more frequent. As, however, the poachers on His Highness's estate had of late grown bolder and more troublesome, he decided that he had better let the sentence be carried out to the full, but he turned his horse with the intention of riding away, determined no longer to remain as a spectator.

As he was on the point of doing this, a young girl suddenly emerged from the underwood, threw herself on her knees beside the horse, and lifting her large, beautiful eyes, all wet with tears, to the Baron, cried:

"In the name of the God of mercy, my lord, have pity on that man!"

The Lord of Vez looked down at the young girl. She was indeed a lovely child; hardly sixteen years of age, of a slender and exquisite figure, with a pink and white complexion, large blue eyes, soft and tender in expression, and a crown of fair hair, which fell in luxuriant waves over neck and shoulders, escaping from underneath the shabby little gray linen cap which endeavored in vain to imprison them.

All this the Baron took in with a glance, in spite of the humble clothing of the beautiful suppliant, and as he had no dislike to a pretty face, he smiled down on the charming young peasant girl, in response to the pleading of her eloquent eyes.

But, as he looked without speaking, and all the while the blows were still falling, she cried again, with a voice and gesture of even more earnest supplication:

"Have pity, in the name of Heaven, my lord! Tell your servant to let the poor man go, his cries pierce my heart."

"Ten thousand fiends!" cried the Grand Master; "you take a great interest in that rascal over there, my pretty child. Is he your brother?"

"No, my lord."

"Your cousin?"

"No, my lord."

"Your lover?"

"My lover! My lord is laughing at me."

"Why not? If it were so, my sweet girl, I must confess I should envy him his lot."

The girl lowered her eyes.

"I do not know him, my lord, and have never seen him before today."

"Without counting that now she only sees him wrong side before," Engoulevent ventured to put in, thinking that it was a suitable moment for a little pleasantry.

"Silence, sirrah!" said the Baron sternly. Then, once more turning to the girl with a smile:

"Really!" he said. "Well, if he is neither a relation nor a lover, I should like to see how far your love for your neighbor will let you go. Come, a bargain, pretty girl!"

"How, my lord?"

"Grace for that scoundrel in return for a kiss."

"Oh! with all my heart!" cried the young girl. "Save the life of a man with a kiss! I am sure that our good *curé* himself would say there was no sin in that."

And without waiting for the Baron to stoop and take himself what he had asked for, she threw off her wooden shoe, placed her dainty little foot on the tip of the wolf-hunter's boot, and taking hold of the horse's mane, lifted herself up with a spring to the level of the face of the hardy huntsman, and there of her own accord offered him her round cheek, fresh and velvety as the down of an August peach.

The Lord of Vez had bargained for one kiss, but he took two; then, true to his sworn word, he made a sign to Marcotte to stay the execution.

Marcotte was religiously counting his strokes; the twelfth was about to descend when he received the order to stop, and he did not think it expedient to stay it from falling. It is possible that he also thought it would be as well to give it the weight of two ordinary blows, so as to make up good measure and give a thirteenth in; however that may be, it is certain that it furrowed Thibault's shoulders more cruelly than those that went before. It must be added, however, that Thibault was unbound immediately after.

Meanwhile the Baron was conversing with the young girl.

"What is your name, my pretty one?"

"Georgine Agnelette, my lord, my mother's name! but the country people

are content to call me simply Agnelette."

"Ah, that's an unlucky name, my child," said the Baron.

"In what way, my lord?" asked the girl.

"Because it makes you a prey for the wolf, my beauty. And from what part of the country do you come, Agnelette?"

"From Préciamont, my lord."

"And you come alone like this into the forest, my child? that's brave for a lambkin."

"I am obliged to do it, my lord; for my mother and I have three goats to feed."

"So you come here to get grass for them?"

"Yes, my lord."

"And you are not afraid, young and pretty as you are?"

"Sometimes, my lord, I can not help trembling."

"And why do you tremble?"

"Well, my lord, I hear so many tales, during the winter evenings, about werewolves, that when I find myself all alone among the trees, and can hear no sound but the west wind, and the branches creaking as it blows through them, I feel a kind of shiver run through me, and my hair seems to stand on end; but when I hear your hunting-horn and the dogs crying, then I feel at once quite safe again."

The Baron was pleased beyond measure with this reply of the girl's, and stroking his beard complacently, he said:

"Well, we give Master Wolf a pretty rough time of it; but, there is a way, my pretty one, whereby you may spare yourself all these fears and tremblings."

"And how, my lord?"

"Come in future to the Castle of Vez; no werewolf, or any other kind of wolf, has ever crossed the moat there, except when slung by a cord on to a hazel-pole."

Agnelette shook her head.

"You would not like to come? And why not?"

"Because I should find something worse there than the wolf."

On hearing this, the Baron broke into a hearty fit of laughter, and, seeing their master laugh, all the huntsmen followed suit and joined in the chorus. The fact was, that the sight of Agnelette had entirely restored the good humor of the Lord of Vez, and he would, no doubt, have continued for some time laughing and talking with Agnelette, if Marcotte, who had been recalling the dogs, and coupling them, had not respectfully reminded my lord that they had some distance to go on their way back to the Castle. The Baron made a playful gesture of menace with his finger to the girl, and rode off followed by his train.

AGNELETTE was left alone with Thibault. We have related what Agnelette had done for Thibault's sake, and also said that she was pretty.

Nevertheless, for all that, Thibault's first thoughts on finding himself alone with the girl were not for the one who had saved his life, but were given up to hatred and the contemplation of vengeance.

Thibault, as you see, had, since the morning, been making rapid strides along the path of evil.

"Ah! if the devil will but hear my prayer this time," he cried, as he shook his fist, cursing the while, after the retiring huntsmen, who were just out of view, "if the devil will but hear me, you shall be paid back with usury for all you have made me suffer this day! that I swear."

"Oh, how wicked it is of you to behave like that!" said Agnelette, going up to him. "The Baron is a kind lord, very good to the poor, and always gently behaved with women."

"Quite so, and you shall see with what gratitude I will repay him for the blows he has given me."

"Come now, frankly, friend, confess that you deserved those blows," said the girl, laughing.

"So, so!" answered Thibault, "the Baron's kiss has turned your head, has it, my pretty Agnelette?"

"You, I should have thought, would have been the last person to reproach me with that kiss, Monsieur Thibault. But what I have said, I say again; my lord Baron was within his rights."

"What, in belaboring me with blows?"

"Well, why do you go hunting on the estates of these great lords?"

"Does not the game belong to everybody, to the peasant just as much as to the great lords?"

"No, certainly not; the game is in their woods, it is fed on their grass, and you have no right to throw your boar-spear at a buck which belongs to my lord the Duke of Orleans."

"And who told you that I threw a boar-spear at his buck?" replied Thibault, advancing toward Agnelette in an almost threatening manner.

"Who told me? why, my own eyes, which, let me tell you, do not lie. Yes, I saw you throw your boar-spear, when you were hidden there, behind the beech-tree."

Thibault's anger subsided at once before the straightforward attitude of the girl, whose truthfulness was in such contrast to his falsehood.

"Well, after all," he said, "supposing a poor devil does once in a way help himself to a good dinner from the superabundance of some great lord! Are you of the same mind, Mademoiselle Agnelette, as the judges who say that a man ought to be hanged just for a wretched rabbit? Come now, do you think God created that buck for the Baron more than for me?"

"God, Monsieur Thibault, has told us not to covet other men's goods; obey the law of God, and you will not find yourself any the worse off for it!"

"Ah, I see, my pretty Agnelette, you know me then, since you call me so glibly by my name?"

"Certainly I do; I remember seeing you at Boursonnes, on the day of the fête; they called you the beautiful dancer, and stood round in a circle to watch you."

Thibault, pleased with this compliment, was now quite disarmed.

"Yes, yes, of course," he answered, "I remember now having seen you; and I think we danced together, did we not? but you were not so tall then as you are now; that's why I did not recognize you at first, but I recall you distinctly now. And I remember too that you wore a pink frock, with a pretty little white bodice, and that we danced in the dairy. I wanted to kiss you, but you would not let me."

"You have a good memory, Monsieur Thibault!"

"And do you know, Agnelette, that during these last twelve months—for it is a year since that dance—you have not only grown taller, but grown prettier too; I see you are one of those people who understand how to do two things at once."

The girl blushed and lowered her eyes, and the blush and the shy embarrassment made her look more charming still.

Thibault's eyes were now turned toward her with more marked attention than before, and in a voice not wholly free from a slight agitation he asked:

"Have you a lover, Agnelette?"

"No, Monsieur Thibault," she answered, "I have never had one, and do not wish to have one."

"And why is that? Is Cupid such a bad lad that you are afraid of him?"

"No, not that, but a lover is not at all what I want."

"And what do you want?"

"A husband."

Thibault made a movement, which Agnelette either did not, or pretended not to see.

"Yes," she repeated, "a husband. Grandmother is old and infirm, and a lover would distract my attention too much from the care which I now give her; whereas a husband, if I found a nice fellow who would like to marry me—a husband would help me to look after her in her old age, and would share with me the task which God has laid upon me, of making her happy and comfortable in her last years."

"But do you think your husband," said Thibault, "would be willing that you should love your grandmother more than you loved him? and do you not think he might be jealous at seeing you lavish so much tenderness upon her?"

"Oh," replied Agnelette, with an adorable smile, "there is no fear of that, for I will manage so as to let him have such a large share of my love and attention that he will have no cause to complain; the kinder and the more patient he is to the dear old thing, the more I shall devote myself to him, the harder shall I work that there may be nothing wanting to our little household. You see me looking small and delicate, and you doubt that I should have strength for this; but I have plenty of spirit and energy for work, and then, when the heart gives consent, one can work day and night without fatigue. Oh, how I should love the man who loved my grandmother! I promise you that she, and my husband, and I, we should be three happy folks together."

"You mean that you would be three very poor folks together, Agnelette!"

"And do you think the loves and friendship of the rich are worth a farthing more than those of the poor? At times, when I have been loving and caressing my grandmother, Monsieur Thibault, and she takes me on her lap and clasps me in her poor weak trembling arms, and puts her dear old wrinkled face against mine, and I feel my cheek wet with the loving tears she sheds, I begin to cry myself, and, I tell you, Monsieur Thibault, so soft and sweet are my tears, that there is no woman or girl, be she queen or princess, who has ever, I am sure, even in her happiest days, known such a real joy as mine. And, yet, there is no one in all the country round who is so destitute as we two are."

Thibault listened to what Agnelette was saying without answering; his mind was occupied with many thoughts, such thoughts as are indulged in by the ambitious; but his dreams of ambition were disturbed at moments by a passing sensation of depression and disillusionment.

He, the man who had spent hours at a time watching the beautiful and aristocratic dames belonging to the court of the Duke of Orleans, as they swept up and down the wide entrance stairs; who had often passed whole nights gazing at the arched windows of the keep at Vez, when the whole place was lit up for some festivity, he, that same man, now asked himself, if what he had so ambitiously desired to have, a lady of rank and a rich dwelling, would, after all, be so much worth possessing as a thatched roof and this sweet and gentle girl called Agnelette. And it was certain that if this dear and charming little woman were to become his, he would be envied in turn by all the earls and barons in the countryside.

"Well, Agnelette," said Thibault, "and suppose a man like myself were to offer himself as your husband, would you accept him?"

It has been already stated that Thibault was a handsome young fellow, with fine eyes and black hair, and that his travels had left him something better than a mere workman. And it must further be borne

in mind that we readily become attached to those on whom we have conferred a benefit, and Agnelette had, in all probability, saved Thibault's life; for, under such strokes as Marcotte's, the victim would certainly have been dead before the thirty-sixth had been given.

"Yes," she said, "if it would be a good thing for my grandmother."

Thibault took hold of her hand.

"Well then, Agnelette," he said, "we will speak again about this, dear child, and that as soon as may be."

"Whenever you like, Monsieur Thibault."

"And you will promise faithfully to love me if I marry you, Agnelette?"

"Do you think I should love any man besides my husband?"

"Never mind, I want you just to take a little oath, something of this kind, for instance: Monsieur Thibault, I swear that I will never love any one but you."

"What need is there to swear? The promise of an honest girl should be sufficient for an honest man."

"And when shall we have the wedding, Agnelette?" and in saying this, Thibault tried to put his arm round her waist.

But Agnelette gently disengaged herself.

"Come and see my grandmother," she said, "it is for her to decide about it; you must content yourself this evening with helping me up with my load of heath, for it is getting late, and it is nearly three miles from here to Préciamont."

So Thibault helped her as desired, and then accompanied her on her way home as far as the Forest-fence of Billemont, that is until they came in sight of the village steeple. Before parting, he so begged of pretty Agnelette to give him one kiss as an earnest of his future happiness, that at last she consented, and then, far more agitated by this one kiss than she had been by the Baron's double embrace, Agnelette hastened on her way, in spite of the load which she was carrying on her head, and which seemed far too heavy for so slender and delicate a creature.

Thibault stood for some time looking after her as she walked away across the moor. All the flexibility and grace of her youthful figure were brought into relief as the girl lifted her pretty rounded arms to support the burden upon her head, and thus silhouetted against the dark blue of the sky she made a delightful picture. At last, having reached the outskirts of the village, the land dipping at that point, she suddenly disappeared, passing out of sight of Thibault's admiring eyes. He gave a sigh, and stood still, plunged in thought; but it was not the satisfaction of thinking that this sweet and good young creature might one day be his that had caused his sigh. Quite the contrary, he had wished for Agnelette, because Agnelette was young and pretty, and because it was part of his unfortunate disposition to long for everything that belonged or might belong to another. His desire to possess Agnelette had been quickened by the innocent frankness with which she had talked to him; but it had been a matter of fancy rather than of any deeper feeling, of the mind, and not of the heart. For Thibault was incapable of loving as a man ought to love, who, being poor himself, loves a poor girl; in such a case there should be no thought, no ambition on his part beyond the wish that his love may be returned. But it was not so with Thibault; on the contrary, the farther he walked away from Agnelette, leaving it would seem his good genius farther behind him with every step, the more urgently did his envious longings begin again as usual to torment his soul.

It was dark when he reached home.

(To be continued next month)

The Earth-Owners

(Continued from page 31)

always thought we were the owners. Lords of creation—the highest work of nature—until our owners came!"

"I've been thinking of what Bent told us about the light-globes he saw fighting out there outside earth with the clouds." I said. "Do you suppose there are other beings in the universe as strange and alien as those two kinds?"

"There must be many," said Randon slowly. "No doubt long ago those light-globes or some other alien beings would have descended on earth if it hadn't been owned by these black clouds. Because of their ownership we lived in a false security. No doubt the animals our farmers fattened for slaughter felt the same security."

"The end is near," he said. "For us here and for all humanity. Our work here has shown us no single way of fighting the clouds, and meanwhile the clouds have swept over half this nation, the mightiest on earth, without even knowing that we are resisting them!"

RANDON was right when he said the end was near, though he could not know that night how right he was. For it was on the next day, the ninth after the appearance of the clouds on earth, that the end came.

It came with hoarse shouts that brought us all running from our laboratories and quarters into the streets. One glance was enough to show us what had caused those shouts. A group of seven black clouds was moving calmly over the village from the south.

The following moments are to me even now a confused memory. I know that as I stumbled along the street in a moment's desperate, instinctive flight, Carter and Randon were beside me, that at the street's edge Hackner with crimson face was shaking his fist upward in mad defiance, that the sunlight was suddenly darkened about us as the clouds sank downward on us.

I looked up, saw the colossal masses of black vapor looming immense just over us, stumbled, and as I fell heard a mad cry from Randon.

I struggled up to see Randon point with trembling finger upward. The clouds had halted above us, were rising again!

Out of the sunlight far above them, great things of light were plummeting down upon the clouds, *great globes of dazzling light in groups of scores!*

These light-globes and the seven black clouds were meeting and mingling in the air high over us! The clouds were endeavoring to envelope the globes, while from the light-globes shot tremendous tentacles of living light that seemed to grasp the clouds, to rive them asunder!

"They're fighting!" Randon screamed. *"The black clouds that own the earth and the light-globes that want it—they're fighting for the earth—for us!"*

"Out of here, then, while we can get out!" Carter cried. "Whichever wins it means death for us!"

"Too late!" Randon cried. "Look, the light-globes are annihilating the clouds!"

The stupendous battle overhead was swiftly ending. The light-globes had with their outthrust tentacles torn asunder five of the clouds, scattering them in wisps of black vapor.

One of the remaining clouds enveloped a light-globe, seemed to smother and destroy it within its black vapors. But in an instant the scores of other light-globes

were upon these two also, and in a moment of them also but wisps of vapor floating away remained.

The light-globes gathered and a half-dozen of them sank downward, stupendous spheres of pure and living light descending on us. In a stupor in which we hardly felt fear we saw them, and then as they paused in the air just over us, immense tentacles of light whipped down from them toward us.

I felt myself grasped as though by a strong yet intangible great arm, a tentacle of light wrapping round me and Randon and Carter, others grasping Rillard and Bent and dozens of others in the street. We were held by those strange great limbs of light!

It seemed to me that into my mind was rushing the will, the thoughts, of the huge light-globe that held us, that all fear was leaving my mind and that there beat upon me the vast, calm, beneficent will of the light-globe, reassuring me as one might reassure a frightened child! I saw the faces of Randon and Carter and the rest drained of their terror as they too stood in that grasp of living light!

The light-tentacles gently released us then, and the light-globes massed together quickly high above us. They sped away toward the west, disappearing quickly. We staggered in the street, our terror gone, and the amazement that had replaced it overwhelming.

"They didn't hurt us!" Carter was saying dazedly. "They didn't come to destroy us but to protect us from the black clouds! They *liked* us!"

"But why?" I cried. "The black clouds are the earth-owners, yet these light-globes fought them to save us!"

"No, I see it all now!" Randon cried. "We've been wrong all along! *Earth is owned as we thought, but the black clouds aren't the owners—the light-globes are the owners!* It is the light-globes that have owned earth maybe for ages, that have guarded it against all the other super-beings of space! They've guarded it and guarded us, because somewhere in their alien, tremendous minds is liking for us, benevolence toward us, perhaps pity of us!

"They've had sentries or guards outside earth to warn off all hostile beings—light-globes have been seen by astronomers near earth many times. But the black clouds that came to prey on earth's life met these sentries and destroyed them all but one, as Bent saw when he observed the clouds and light-globes struggling!

"Then the clouds descended on earth and started their ravages, but either the light-globes in whatever far region of space or whatever world they inhabit knew in some way about it, or were informed by that one of their guards that escaped. For they've come to earth in force to destroy the black clouds, have come to beat away the invaders of this world they own!"

From a doorway somewhere along the street some one was shouting. "They're broadcasting that the light-globes have appeared over earth in thousands—they're destroying the clouds wherever they find them!"

THUS ends my record of the black clouds' coming to earth and of the terror they brought. All the world knows now how that terror ended, how the light-globes swiftly, surely, hunted down the clouds and annihilated them until none remained on earth. And how, with that done, the light-globes rose and departed into the heavens, into the outer void.

Somewhere out there they are now, we know, those mighty minds cased in spheres of light that are the owners and

the guardians of this earth. Never since then has any cloud or any other dread invader appeared on our world. We know that out in space around earth the guards and sentries of the light-globes still must be, watching and warding this world of ours, warning away whatever other hideous beings roam the void with predatory purpose.

Once humanity would have felt inexpressibly humiliated to know that it and its world were owned. But we who have known the dread clouds are glad. Glad that the vast, beneficent intelligences of the light-globes are a shield against all the terrible super-entities that the universe may hold.

And our dreams and aspirations remain unchecked. Randon expressed them to me a few minutes ago, as he and Carter watched me write these pages, in his cottage whose windows look east on a Boston again filled with life.

"We know that we and our earth are owned and we're glad they are," he said, "but we won't always remain thus. As our own knowledge and power increase we'll come at last to the point where we can live without need of this guardianship of the light-globes, able to fight our own battles against any beings.

"Who knows, we may even some day attain to such power and wisdom that we too will take over the ownership and guardianship of other worlds, protecting the weaker races on them from predatory powers as the light-globes now protect us. If ever that day comes, let us remember that in that guardianship and trust we are but discharging a debt that we owe to those who now own and guard our earth."

Moon Madness

(Continued from page 15)

out of here I am going to kill the man who sent us on that awful journey and then skulked behind. I'll make him pay for the death of my Mary as I have paid. Oh, I know she is not dead. She suffers worse than death.'

"What had been François Marden staggered to his feet and shouted so that the padded walls resounded dully: 'I'll nail Henry Weatherford to a rocket and send him shooting upward to the moon and to hell! Go tell him so!'

"The threat ended in a scream as he hurled the empty glass at me.

"I stumbled away. That night I got howling drunk from sheer fright and horror. Next day I fled London. Finally I came here as the least likely place on God's earth for Marden to find me when he is released. Oh, I know he will get out somehow, sometime, and follow me. And shoot me to the moon. And I shall be as they are.

"But," cackled Henry Weatherford, wagging a lean finger at me "he can't find me when the moon goes down. It's gone now, I think."

He lurched to his feet, peered out a rear door which opened onto the filthy street, placed a finger on his lips, and, without giving me another thought, tiptoed away into the panting Asiatic night.

COMING NEXT MONTH

CALLING a huge black who bore a heavy hammer, Hassim ordered him to open the door of the tomb.

As the black swung up his sledge, Solomon Kane gave a sharp exclamation. Was he mad? The apparent antiquity of this brooding mass of stone was proof that it had stood undisturbed for thousands of years. Yet he could have sworn that he heard the sound of footfalls within. Back and forth they padded, as if something paced the narrow confines of that grisly prison in a never-ending monotony of movement. A cold hand touched Kane's spine. Whether the sounds registered on his conscious ear or on some unsounded depth of soul or sub-feeling, he could not tell, but he *knew* that somewhere within his consciousness there re-echoed the tramp of monstrous feet from within that ghastly mausoleum.

"Stop!" he exclaimed. "Hassim, I may be mad, but I hear the tread of some fiend within that pile of stone."

Hassim raised his hand and checked the hovering hammer. He listened intently, and the others strained their ears in a silence that had suddenly become tense.

"I hear nothing," grunted a bearded giant.

Hassim laughed harshly and made a gesture to the black. The hammer fell with a crash that re-echoed deafeningly and shivered off through the black jungle in a strangely altered cachinnation. Again—again—and again the hammer fell, driven with all the power of the rippling black muscles and the mighty ebon body. And between the blows Kane still heard that lumbering tread, and knew that inside that hideously ancient mausoleum some nameless *thing* moved with soul-shaking and elephantine tread.

At last, beneath the heavy blows the ancient lock shattered; the hinges snapped; the door burst inward. And Yussef screamed. From that black gaping entrance——

What horror it was that burst forth you will never guess, but we won't tell you now, we will keep it a secret and let you find out for yourself in the next issue when you read

The Footfalls Within

By ROBERT E. HOWARD

—ALSO—

SATAN'S STEPSON
by Seabury Quinn

The eeriest and most thrilling of all Jules de Grandin's adventures—a tale of the Black Mass.

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THE IMMEASURABLE HORROR
by Clark Ashton Smith

An incredible monster, like a horror out of some particularly terrible nightmare, attacked the explorers on the planet Venus.

THE GOLDEN ELIXIR
by Paul Ernst

A whimsical, eery story of a man whose personality was divided into two parts, and the awkward situations into which he blundered in consequence.

These are some of the super-excellent stories that will appear in the next issue. Also, another thrilling installment of *Tam, Son of the Tiger,* by Otis Adelbert Kline.

September WEIRD TALES out August 1

The Eyrie

(Continued from page 6)

me with that 'after sense of refreshment.' My favorite author without a doubt is Seabury Quinn. His inimitable little Frenchman and his cocksure ways are all the more pleasing because I can understand French. Let's have him more and more. If *The Horror from the Hills* continues in the vein of the January issue it's gonna be awfully chilly around here. I just bought a new sweater to keep down the goose-flesh while I read the concluding chapters. Now may I speak a good word about WEIRD TALES' companion magazine, ORIENTAL STORIES? I believe that I bought the first copy in the city of Batavia. I was in the local news store when they were unpacked —that's how I waited for them. They are splendid. I am a movie operator, and your magazine is just the thing to keep one's mind alert after nine hours of grueling work in a hot, stuffy booth."

"Keep the magazine weird by all means," writes Harold Farnese, of Los Angeles; "not too many mechanical stories, aviation, etc.; a modern atmosphere usually lacks the thrill of things unknown, unless penned by a master hand. Speculative stories of other planets, however, should be welcomed by your readers. H. P. Lovecraft's poems are very fine and play a good second to this author's inimitable stories. His style of building up a weird and eldritch atmosphere has yet to be equalled by other writers."

A letter from Rose Perricone, of Brooklyn, who signs herself "a prodigal reader," says: "I used to be a constant reader of WEIRD TALES; then stopped, but something drew me back to it. It was Seabury Quinn's stories. No matter how much I tried I could not forget him. He is wonderful, marvelous, superb and unforgettable And as for Hugh Jeffries, his story called *The Dust of Death* is also incomparable. Let's have more from him."

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Reader's name and address:

Creeping Fingers

(Continued from page 21)

came from, of course—called for help at the top of my voice, and then tried to get the door open. In a minute there was a crowd of bellboys and guests around me and all together we broke down the door. Well, you weren't in the bedroom, so we went to the bathroom door. It wasn't locked, because it hadn't any key, you know, but we couldn't open it. And all the time we could hear you inside, drowning. We didn't waste any time, as you can imagine. We broke the door down at last and got you out just in time. The doctor said a little more immersion would have finished you. I had you brought to the best room in the hotel, got a doctor and nurse, and here you are. . . ."

He looked up, and smiled, and I realized that the experience was one that the manager of the Hoffman House would not forget very quickly. Standing in that damp, cold corridor, alone, and hearing me cry for help in the accents of insane fright, was something that would tend to remain in a man's memory.

"Yes," I said, "here I am, a little the worse for wear, and very bewildered." I told him my story, from my first impressions of the rooms to my last moment when I felt myself sinking into the deep water. When I finished, he nodded very quietly.

"I thought it was something like that. The rooms have a vile reputation; it's just as well they're being broken up. I'll tell their story and perhaps it will explain things a little, I don't know. Anyhow," he took another long drink from the glass at his elbow, and resumed, "317 was taken three years and a week ago, to be exact, by two men, an old man very feeble, and a much younger man, uncle and nephew they were. Anyhow, that night the young

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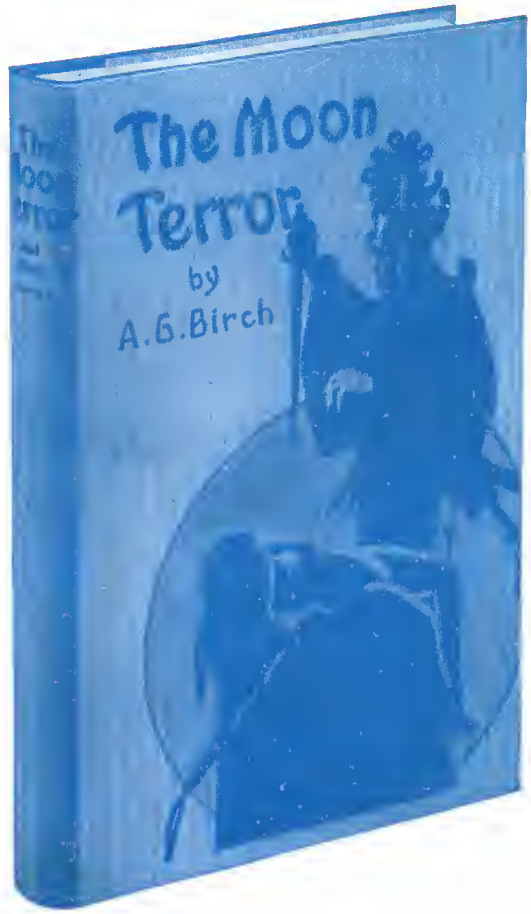

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man drowned his uncle in the bathtub, and disappeared. He was tracked down later, and hung."

I shivered. The rooms had been the scene of murder then. No wonder their air of being consecrated to evil. The door that had been shut so strangely on the night that I was there had been shut those years before by the murderer. Just so had he crept in, hidden by the high sides of the tub, then, when the old man lay unsuspecting, laid his hands on the side of the marble, and a moment later. . . . It must have been easy to do, considering the age of the victim and the youth and strength of the murderer, to push him beneath the water and hold him there, until his last struggles were over. I shivered at the ugly picture, and the strange closeness of my escape.

"That's not all," the manager went on. "The next year it didn't happen to be occupied, on the fifteenth. The year after that, last year, it was occupied, and a man was found drowned in the tub the next morning—accidentally, we thought, of course. And the night you were there was the third anniversary. You see, I wasn't manager at the time all these things happened, and I didn't have facts at first hand, or I would have thought twice about letting you take the room. But you were so insistent, so I . . . anyhow, I've had one coincidence too many; so the rooms are being torn down, and won't be used for living purposes any more."

"A damn good thing," I said, picking up my hat from the table, and lifting my suitcase. And as he turned to go with me to the door, I realized unhappily that never again would I see a bathtub without a psychic shudder stirring at the roots of my hair, and that of all the numbers and all the possible combinations of numbers in the world, "317" was the one I would never be able to forget.