Weird Tales

JULY—25c

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H. P. Lovecraft
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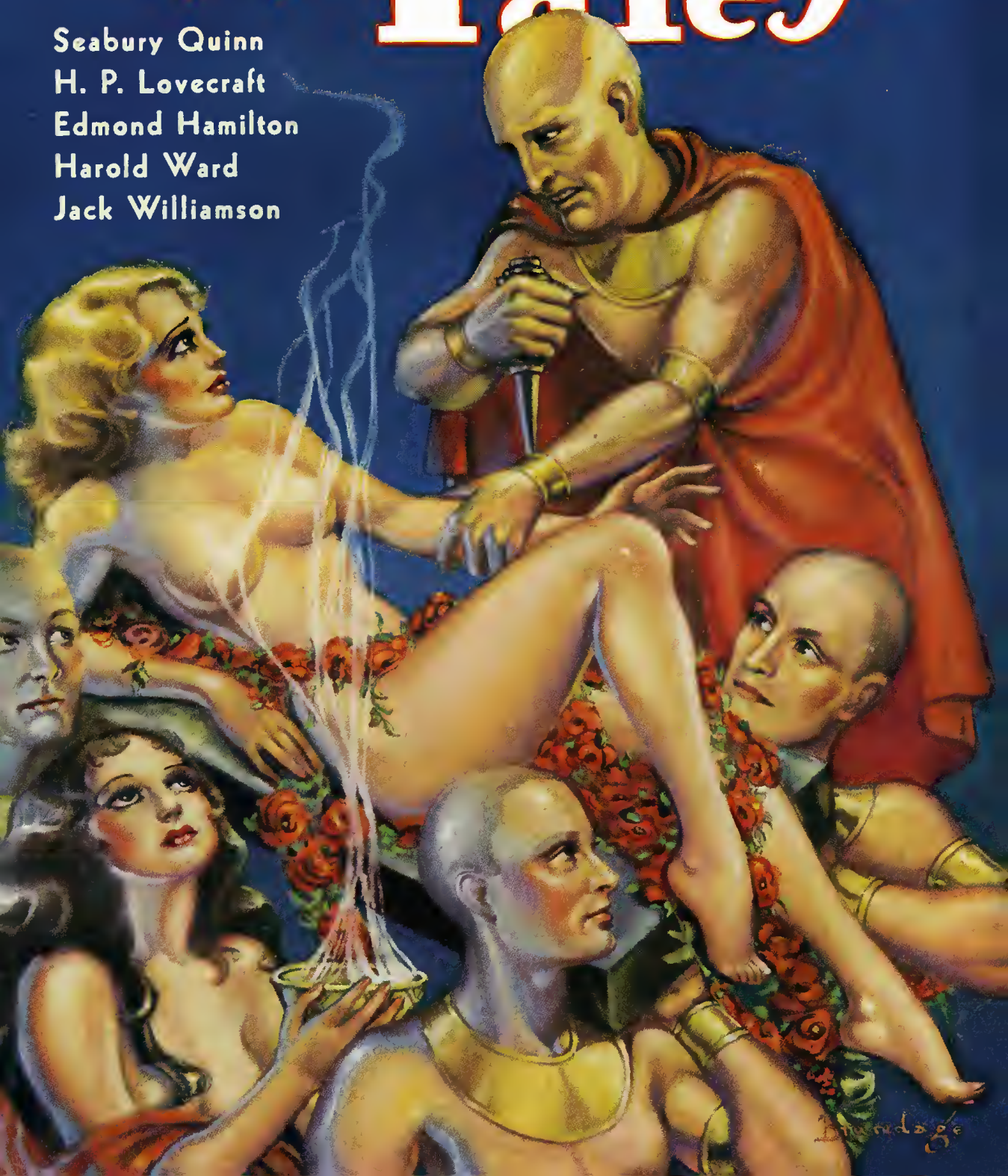

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W. T.—1

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FARNSWORTH WRIGHT, Editor.

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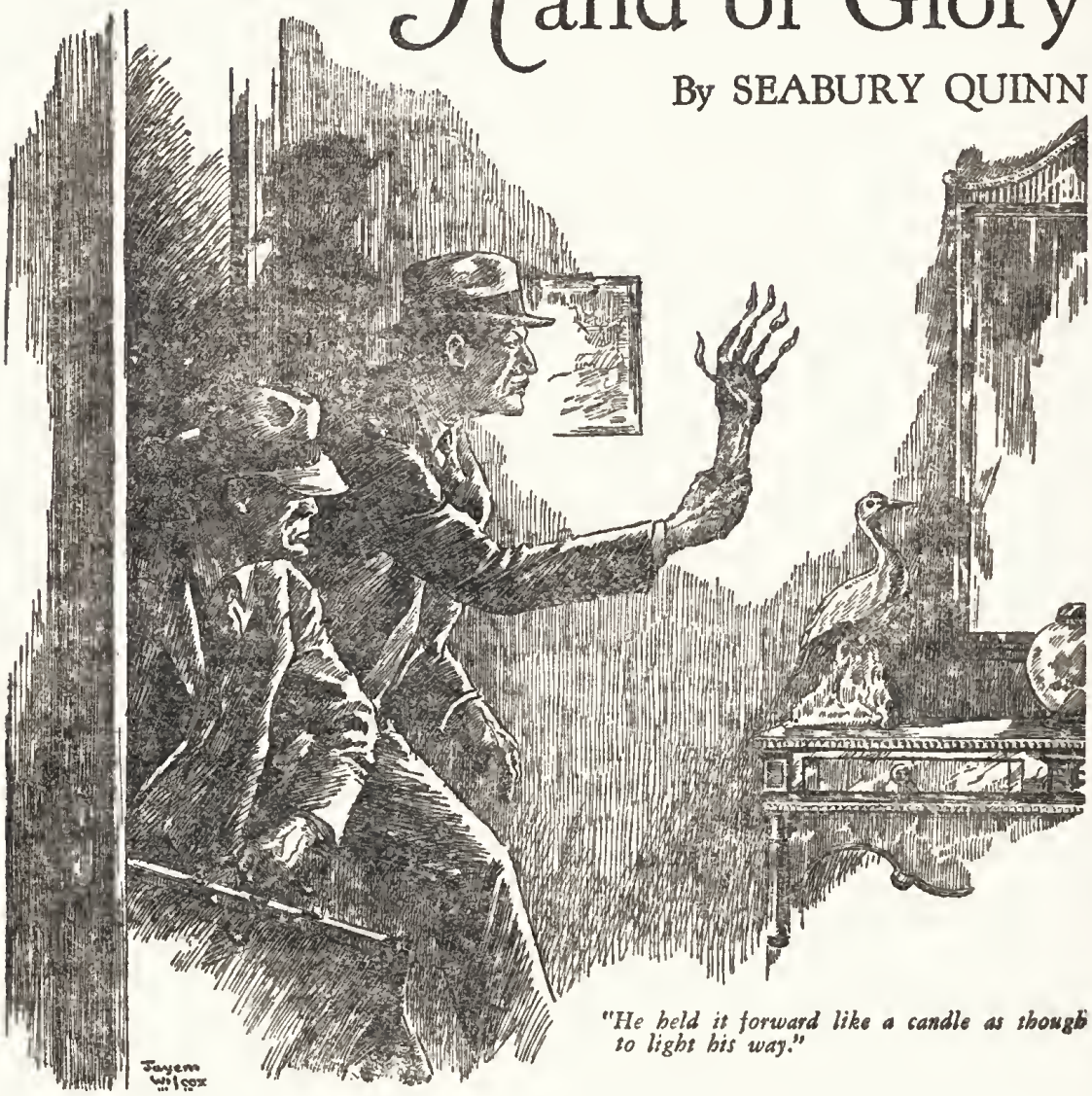
The Hand of Glory

By SEABURY QUINN



"He held it forward like a candle as though to light his way."

A stirring tale about an Orientalist who was willing to sacrifice his own daughter to gain occult power—a story of the little French scientist, Jules de Grandin.

1. The Shrieking Woman

"TH' TIP o' th' marnin' to yez, gintlemen." Officer Collins touched the vizor of his cap as Jules de Grandin and I rounded the corner with none too steady steps. The night was cold, and our host's rum punch had a potency peculiarly its own, which accounted for our decision to walk the mile or so which stretched between us and home.

"*Holà, mon brave,*" responded my companion, now as ever ready to stop and chat with any member of the gendarmerie. "It is morning, you say? *Ma foi,* I had not thought it much past ten o'clock."

Collins grinned appreciatively. "Arrah,

Doctor de Grandin, sor," he answered, "wid a bit o' th' crayter th' likes o' that ye've had, 'tis meself as wouldn't be bodderin' wid th' time o' night, ayther, fer——"

His witticism died birth-strangled, for, even as he paused to guffaw at the intended thrust, there came stabbing through the pre-dawn calm a cry of such thin-edged, unspeakable anguish as I had not heard since the days when as an intern I rode an ambulance's tail and amputations often had to be performed without the aid of anesthesia.

"Bon Dieu!" de Grandin cried, dropping my elbow and straightening with the suddenness of a coiled spring released from its tension. "What is that, in pity's gracious name?"

His answer followed fast upon his question as a pistol's crack succeeds the powder-flash, for round the shoulder of the corner building came a girl on stumbling, fear-hobbled feet, arms spread, eyes wide, mouth opened for a scream which would not come, a perfect fantasm of terror.

"Here, here, now, phwat's up?" demanded Collins gruffly, involuntary fright lending harshness to his tones. " 'Tis a foin thing ye're afther doin', runnin' through th' strates in yer nighties, scarin' folks out o' their sivin senses, an'——"

The woman paid him no more heed than if he'd been a shadow, for her dilated eyes were blinded by extremity of fear, as we could see at a glance, and had de Grandin not seized her by the shoulder she would have passed us in her headlong, stumbling flight. At the touch of the Frenchman's hand she halted suddenly, swayed uncertainly a moment; then, like a marionette whose strings are cut, she buckled suddenly, fell half kneeling, half sprawling to the sidewalk and lifted trembling hands to him beseechingly.

"It was afire!" she babbled thickly. "Afire—blazing, I tell you—and the door flew open when they held it out. They—they—*aw-wah-wahl*——" her words degenerated into unintelligible syllables as the tautened muscles of her throat contracted with a nervous spasm, leaving her speechless as an infant, her thin face a white wedge of sheer terror.

"D. T.'s, sor?" asked Collins cynically, bending for a better view of the trembling woman.

"Hysteria," denied de Grandin shortly. Then, to me:

"Assist me, Friend Trowbridge, she goes into the paroxysmal stage." As he uttered the sharp warning the woman sank face-downward to the pavement, lay motionless a moment, then trembled with convulsive shudders, the shudders becoming twitches and the twitches going into wild, abandoned gestures, horribly reminiscent of the reflex contortions of a decapitated fowl.

"Good Lord, I'll call th' wagon," Collins offered; but:

"A cab, and quickly, if you please," de Grandin countermanded. "This is no time for making of arrests, my friend; this poor one's sanity may depend upon our ministrations."

Luckily, a cruising taxi hove in sight even as he spoke, and with a hasty promise to inform police headquarters of the progress of the case, we bundled our patient into the vehicle and rushed at breakneck speed toward my office.

"MORPHINE, quickly, if you please," de Grandin ordered as he bore the struggling woman to my surgery, thrust her violently upon the examination table and drew up the sleeve of her georgette pajama jacket, baring the white flesh for the caress of the mercy-bearing needle.

Swabbing the skin with alcohol, I

pinched the woman's trembling arm, inserted the hypo point in the folded skin and thrust the plunger home, driving a full three-quarter grain dose into her system; then, with refilled syringe, stood in readiness to repeat the treatment if necessary.

But the opiate took effect immediately. Almost instantly the clownish convulsions ceased, within a minute the movements of her arms and legs had subsided to mere tremblings, and the choking, anguished moans which had proceeded from her throat died to little, childish whimpers.

"Ah, so," de Grandin viewed the patient with satisfaction. "She will be better now, I think. Meantime, let us prepare some stimulant for the time of her awakening. She has been exposed, and we must see that she does not take cold."

Working with the speed and precision of one made expert by long service in the war's field hospitals, he draped a steamer rug across the back of an easy-chair in the study, mixed a stiff dose of brandy and hot water and set it by the open fire; then, calm-eyed but curious, resumed his station beside the unconscious girl upon the table.

We had not long to wait. The opiate had done its work quickly, but almost as quickly had found its antidote in the intensely excited nervous system of the patient. Within five minutes her eyelids fluttered, and her head rolled from side to side, like that of a troubled sleeper. A little moan, half of discomfort, half involuntary protest at returning consciousness, escaped from her.

"You are in the office of Doctor Samuel Trowbridge, *Mademoiselle,*" de Grandin announced in a low, calm voice, anticipating the question which nine patients out of every ten propound when recovering from a swoon. "We found you in the street in a most deplorable condition and brought you here for treatment. You are better now? Good. *Permettez-moi.*"

Taking her hands in his, he raised her from the table, eased her to the floor and, his arms about her waist, guided her gently to the study, where, with the adeptness of a deck steward, he tucked the steamer rug about her feet and knees, placed a cushion at her back and before she had a chance to speak, held the glass of steaming toddy to her lips.

She drank the torrid liquid greedily, like a starving child gulping at a goblet of warm milk; then, as the potent draft raced through her, leaving a faint flush on her dead-pale cheeks, gave back the glass and viewed us with a pathetic, drowsy little smile.

"Thank you," she murmured. "I—oh, I remember now!" Abruptly her half-somnolent manner vanished and her hands clutched claw-like at the chair-arms. "It was afire!" she told us in a hushed, choking voice. "It was blazing, and——"

"Mademoiselle! You will drink this, if you please!" Sharply, incisively, the Frenchman's command cut through her fearful utterance as he held forward a cordial glass half full of cloudy liquid.

Startled but docile, she obeyed, and a look of swift bewilderment swept across her pale, peaked features as she finished drinking. "Why"—she exclaimed—"why——" Her voice sank lower, her lids closed softly and her head fell back against the cushion at her shoulders.

"Voilà, I feared that recollection might unsettle her and had it ready," he announced. "Do you go up to bed, my friend. Me, I shall watch beside her, and should I need you I shall call. I am inured to sleeplessness and shall not mind the vigil; but it is well that one of us has rest, for tomorrow—*eh bien,* this poor one's case has the smell of herring

on it and I damn think that we shall have more sleepless nights than one before we see the end of it."

Murmuring, I obeyed. Delightful companion, thoughtful friend, indefatigable co-worker that he was, Jules de Grandin possessed a streak of stubbornness beside which the most refractory mule ever sired in the State of Missouri was docility personified, and I knew better than to spend the few remaining hours of darkness in fruitless argument.

2. *The Hand of Glory*

A GENTLE murmur of voices sounded from the study when I descended from my room after something like four hours' sleep. Our patient of the night before still sat swathed in rugs in the big wing chair, but something approximating normal color had returned to her lips and cheeks, and though her hands fluttered now and again in tremulous gesticulation as she talked, it required no second glance to tell me that her condition was far from bordering on nervous collapse. "Taut, but not stretched dangerously near the snapping-point," I diagnosed as I joined them. De Grandin reclined at ease across the fire from her, a pile of burned-out cigarettes in the ash-tray beside him, smoke from a freshly lighted "Maryland" slowly spiraling upward as he waved his hand back and forth to emphasize his words.

"What you tell is truly interesting, *Mademoiselle,*" he was assuring her as I entered the study.

"Trowbridge, *mon vieux,* this is Mademoiselle Wickwire. *Mademoiselle,* my friend and colleague, Doctor Samuel Trowbridge. Will you have the goodness to repeat your story to him? I would rather that he had it from your own lips."

The girl turned a wan smile toward me, and I was struck by her extreme slenderness. Had her bones been larger, she would have been distressfully thin; as it was, the covering of her slight skeletal structure was so scanty as to make her almost as ethereal as a sprite. Her hair was fair, her eyes of an indeterminate shade somewhere between true blue and amethyst, and their odd coloration was picked up and accentuated by a chaplet of purple stones about her slender throat and the purple settings of the rings she wore upon the third finger of each hand. Limbs and extremities were fine-drawn as silver wire and elongated to an extent which was just short of grotesque, while her profile was robbed of true beauty by its excessive clarity of line. Somehow, she reminded me more of a statuette carved from crystal than of a flesh-and-blood woman, while the georgette pajamas of sea-green trimmed with amethyst and the absurd little boudoir cap which perched on one side of her fair head helped lend her an air of tailor's-dummy unreality.

I bowed acknowledgment of de Grandin's introduction and waited expectantly for her narrative, prepared to cancel ninety percent of all she told me as the vagary of an hysterical young woman.

"Doctor de Grandin tells me I was screaming that 'it was burning' when you found me in the street last night," she began without preamble. "It was."

"Eh?" I ejaculated, turning a quick glance of inquiry on de Grandin. "What?"

"The hand."

"Bless my soul! The *what?*"

"The hand," she returned with perfect aplomb. Then: "My father is Joseph Wickwire, former Horner Professor of Orientology and Ancient Religion at De Puy University. You know his book, *The Cult of the Witch in Assyria?*"

I shook my head, but the girl, as though anticipating my confession of ignorance, went on without pause:

"I don't understand much about it, for Father never troubled to discuss his studies with me, but from some things he's told me, he became convinced of the reality of ancient witchcraft—or magic—some years ago, and gave up his chair at De Puy to devote himself to private research. While I was at school he made several trips to the Near East and last year spent four months in Mesopotamia, supervising some excavations. He came home with two big cases—they looked more like casket-boxes than anything else—which he took to his study, and since then no one's been allowed in the room, not even I or Fanny, our maid. Father won't permit anything, not even so much as a grain of dust, to be taken from that room; and one of the first things he did after receiving those boxes was to have an iron-plated door made for the study and have heavy iron bars fitted to all the windows.

"Lately he's been spending practically all his time at work in the study, sometimes remaining there for two or three days at a time, refusing to answer when called to meals or to come out for rest or sleep. About a month ago something happened which upset him terribly. I think it was a letter he received, though I'm not sure, for he wouldn't tell me what it was; but he seemed distracted, muttering constantly to himself and looking over his shoulder every now and then as though he expected some one, or something, to attack him from behind. Last week he had some workmen come and reinforce all the doors with inch-wide strips of cast iron. Then he had special combination locks fitted to the outside doors and Yale locks to all the inside ones, and every night, just at dusk, he sets the combinations, and no one may enter or leave the house till morning. It's been rather like living in prison."

"More like a madhouse," I commented mentally, looking at the girl's thin face with renewed interest. "Delusions of persecution on the part of the parent might explain abnormal behavior on the part of the offspring, if——"

The girl's recital broke in on my mental diagnosis: "Last night I couldn't sleep. I'd gone to bed about eleven and slept soundly for an hour or so; then suddenly I sat up, broad awake, and nothing I could do would get me back to sleep. I tried bathing the back of my neck with cologne, turning my pillows, even taking ten grains of allonal; nothing was any good, so finally I gave up trying and went down to the library. There was a copy of Hallam's *Constitutional History of England* there, and I picked that out as being the dullest reading I could find, but I read over a hundred pages without the slightest sign of drowsiness. Then I decided to take the book upstairs. Possibly, I thought, if I tried reading it in bed I might drop off without realizing it.

"I'd gotten as far as the second floor—my room's on the third—and was almost in front of Father's study when I heard a noise at the front door. 'Any burglar who tries breaking into this house will be wasting his talents,' I remember saying to myself, when, just as though they were being turned by an invisible hand, the dials of the combination lock started to spin. I could see them in the light of the hall ceiling-lamp, which Father insists always be kept burning, and they were turned not slowly, but swiftly, as though being worked by one who knew the combination perfectly.

"At the same time the queerest feeling came over me. It was like one of those dreadful nightmares people sometimes

have, when they're being attacked or pursued by some awful monster, and can't run or cry out, or even *move.* There I stood, still as a marble image, every faculty alert, but utterly unable to make a sound or move a finger—or even wink an eye.

"And as I watched in helpless stillness, the front door swung back silently and two men entered the hall. One carried a satchel or suitcase of some sort, the other"—she paused and caught her breath like a runner nearly spent, and her voice sank to a thin, harsh whisper—"the other was holding *a blazing hand* in front of him!"

"A *what?*" I demanded incredulously. There was no question in my mind that the delusions of the sire were ably matched by the hallucinations of the daughter.

"A BLAZING hand," she answered, and again I saw the shudder of a nervous chill run through her slender frame. "He held it forward, like a candle, as though to light his way; but there was no need of it for light, for the hall lamp has a hundred-watt bulb, and its luminance reached up the stairs and made everything in the upper passage plainly visible. Besides, the thing burned with more fire than light. There seemed to be some sort of wick attached to each of the fanned-out fingers, and these burned with a clear, steady blue flame, like blazing alcohol. It——"

"But my dear young lady," I expostulated, "that's impossible."

"Of course it is," she agreed with unexpected calmness. "So is this: As the man with the blazing hand mounted the stairs and paused before my father's study, I heard a distinct *click,* and the door swung open, unlocked. Through the opening I could see Father standing in the middle of the room, the light from an unshaded ceiling-lamp making everything as clear as day. On a long table was some sort of object which reminded me of one of those little marble stones they put over soldiers' graves in national cemeteries, only it was gray instead of white, and a great roll of manuscript lay beside it. Father had risen and stood facing the door with one hand resting on the table, the other reaching toward a sawed-off shotgun which lay beside the stone and manuscript. But he was paralyzed—frozen in the act of reaching for the gun as I had been in the act of walking down the hall. His eyes were wide and set with surprize—no, not quite that, they were more like the painted eyes of a window-figure in a store, utterly expressionless—and I remember wondering, in that odd way people have of thinking of inconsequential things in moments of intense excitement, whether mine looked the same.

"I saw it all. I saw them go through the study's open door, lift the stone off the table, bundle up Father's manuscript and stuff everything into the bag. Then, the man with the burning hand going last, walking backward and holding the thing before him, they left as silently as they came. The doors swung to behind them without being touched. The study door had a Yale snap-lock in addition to its combination fastenings, so it was fastened when it closed, but the bolts of the safe lock on the front door didn't fly back in place when it closed.

"I don't know how long that strange paralysis held me after the men with the hand had gone; but I remember suddenly regaining my power of motion and finding myself with one foot raised—I'd been overcome in the act of stepping and had remained helpless, balanced on one foot, the entire time. My first act, of course, was to call Father, but I could get no response, even when I beat and kicked on the door.

"Then panic seized me. I didn't quite know what I was doing, but something seemed urging me to get away from that house as though it had been haunted, and the horrifying memory of that blazing hand with those combination-locked doors flying open before it came down on me like a cloud of strangling, smothering gas. The front door was still unfastened, as I've told you, and I flung it open, fighting for a breath of fresh outdoors air, and ran screaming into the street. You know the rest."

"You see?" asked Jules de Grandin.

I nodded understandingly. I saw only too well. A better symptomatized case of dementia præcox it had never been my evil fortune to encounter.

There was a long moment of silence, broken by de Grandin. *"Eh bien, mes amis,* we make no progress here," he announced. "Grant me fifteen small minutes for my toilette, *Mademoiselle,* and we shall repair to the house of your father. There, I make no doubt, we shall learn something of interest concerning last night's so curious events."

He was as good as his promise, and within the stipulated time had rejoined us, freshly shaved, washed and brushed, a most agreeable odor of bath salts and dusting-powder emanating from his spruce, diminutive person.

"Come, let us go," he urged, assisting our patient to her feet and wrapping the steamer rug about her after the manner of an Indian's blanket.

3. *The House of the Magician*

THE front entrance of Professor Wickwire's house was closed, but unfastened, when we reached our destination, and I looked with interest at the formidable iron reinforcements and combination locks upon the door. Thus far the girl's absurd story was borne out by facts, I was forced to admit, as we mounted the stairs to the upper floor where Wickwire had his barricaded sanctum.

No answer coming to de Grandin's peremptory summons, Miss Wickwire tapped lightly on the iron-bound panels. "Father, it is I, Diane," she called.

Somewhere beyond the door we heard a shuffling step and a murmuring voice, then a listless fumbling at the locks which held the portal fast.

The man who stood revealed as the heavy door swung back looked like a Fundamentalist cartoonist's caricature of Charles Darwin. The pate was bald, the jaw bearded, the brows heavy and prominent, but where the great evolutionist's forehead bulged with an intellectual swell, this man's skull slanted back obliquely, and the temples were flat, rather than concave. Also, it required no second glance to tell us that the full beard covered a soft, receding chin, and the eyes beneath the shaggy brows were weak with a weakness due to more than mere poor vision. He looked to me more like the sort of person who would spend spare time reading books on development of will-power and personality than poring over ponderous tomes on Assyriology. And though he seemed possessed of full dentition, he mumbled like a toothless ancient as he stared at us, feeble eyes blinking owlishly behind the pebbles of his horn-rimmed spectacles.

"Magna Mater . . . trismegistus . . . salve . . ." we caught the almost unintelligible Latin of his mumbled incantation.

"Father!" Diane Wickwire exclaimed in distress. "Father, here are——"

The man's head rocked insanely from side to side, as though his neck had been a flaccid cord, and: *"Magna Mater . . ."* he began again with a whimpering persistence.

"*Monsieur!* Stop it. I command it, and I am Jules de Grandin!" Sharply the little Frenchman's command rang out; then, as the other goggled at him and began his muttered prayer anew, de Grandin raised his small gloved hand and dealt him a stinging blow across the face. "*Parbleu,* I will be obeyed, me!" he snorted wrathfully. "Save your conjurations for another time, *Monsieur;* at present we would talk with you."

Brutal as his treatment was, it was efficacious. The blow acted like a douche of cold water on a swooning person, and Wickwire seemed for the first time to realize we were present.

"These gentlemen are Doctors Trowbridge and de Grandin," his daughter introduced. "I met them when I ran for help last night, and they took me with them. Now, they are here to help you——"

Wickwire stopped her with uplifted hand. "I fear there's no help for me—or you, my child," he interrupted sadly. "They have the Sacred Meteorite, and it is only a matter of time till they find the Word of Power, then——"

"*Nom d'un coq, Monsieur,* let us have things logically and in decent order, if you please," de Grandin broke in sharply. "This sacred meteorite, this word of powerfulness, this so mysterious 'they' who have the one and are about to have the other, in Satan's name, who and what are they? Tell us from the start of the beginning. We are intrigued, we are interested; *parbleu,* we are consumed with the curiosity of a dying cat!"

Professor Wickwire smiled at him, the weary smile a tired adult might give a curious child. "I fear you wouldn't understand," he answered softly.

"By blue, you do insult my credulity, *Monsieur!*" the Frenchman rejoined hotly. "Tell us your tale, all—every little so small bit of it—and let us be the judges of what we shall believe. Me, I am an occultist of no small ability, and this so strange adventure of last night assuredly has the flavor of the superphysical. Yes, certainly."

WICKWIRE brightened at the other's words. "An occultist?" he echoed. "Then perhaps you can assist me. Listen carefully, if you please, and ask me anything which you may not understand:

"Ten years ago, while assembling data for my book on witchcraft in the ancient world, I became convinced of the reality of sorcery. If you know anything at all of mediæval witchcraft, you realize that Diana was the patroness of the witches, even in that comparatively late day. Burchard, Bishop of Worms, writing of sorcery, heresy and witchcraft in Germany in the year 1000 says: 'Certain wretched women, seduced by the sorcery of demons, affirm that during the night they ride with Diana, goddess of the heathens, and a host of other women, and that they traverse immense spaces.'

"Now, Diana, whom most moderns look upon as a clean-limbed goddess of chastity, was only one name for the great Female Principle among the pantheon of ancient days. Artemis, or Diana, is typified by the moon, but there is also Hecate, goddess of the black and fearful night, queen of magic, sorcery and witchcraft, deity of goblins and the underworld and guardian of crossroads; she was another attribute of the same night-goddess whom we know best today as Diana.

"But back of all the goddesses of night, whether they be styled Diana, Artemis, Hecate, Rhea, Astarte or Ishtar, is the Great Mother—*Magna Mater.* The origin of her cult is so ancient that recorded history does not even touch it, and even

oral tradition tells of it only by indirection. Her worship is so old that the Anatolian meteorite brought to Rome in 204 B. C. compares to it as Christian Science or New Thought compare in age with Buddhism.

"Piece by piece I traced back the chain of evidence of her worship and finally became convinced that it was not in Anatolia at all that her mother-shrine was located, but in some obscure spot, so many centuries forgotten as to be no longer named, near the site of the ancient city of Uruck. An obscure Roman legionary mentions the temple where the goddess he refers to by the Syro-Phenician name of Astarte was worshipped by a select coterie of adepts, both men and women, to whom she gave dominion over earth and sea and sky—power to raise tempests or to quiet them, to cause earthquakes, to cause fertility or sterility in men and beasts, or cause the illness or death of an enemy. They were also said to have the power of levitation, or flying through the air for great distances, or even to be seen in several places at the same time. This, you see, is about the sum total of all the powers claimed for witches and wizards in mediæval times. In fine, this obscure goddess of our nameless centurion is the earliest ascertainable manifestation of the female divinity who governed witchcraft in the ancient world, and whose place has been usurped by the Devil in Christian theology.

"But this was only the beginning: The Roman chronicler stated definitely that her idol was a 'stone from heaven, wrapped in an envelope of earth', and that no man durst break the tegument of the celestial stone for fear of rousing Astarte's wrath; yet to him who had the courage to do so would be given the *Verbum Magnum,* or Word of Power—an incantation whereby all majesty, might, power and dominion of all things visible and invisible would be put into his hands, so that he who knew the word would be, literally, Emperor of the Universe.

"As I said before, I became convinced of the reality of witchcraft, both ancient and modern, and the deeper I delved into the records of the past the more convinced I was that the greatest claims made by latter-day witches were mere childish nonsense compared to the mighty powers actually possessed by the wizards of olden times. I spent my health and bankrupted myself seeking that nameless temple of Astarte—but at last *I found it.* I found the very stone of which the Roman wrote and brought it back to America—here."

Wickwire paused, breathing in labored gasps, and his pale eyes shone with the quenchless ardor of the enthusiast as he looked triumphantly from one of us to the other.

"Bien, Monsieur, this stone of the old one is brought here; what then?" de Grandin asked as the professor showed no sign of proceeding further with his narrative.

"Eh? Oh, yes." Once more Wickwire lapsed into semi-somnolence. "Yes, I brought it back, and was preparing to unwrap it, studying my way carefully, of course, in order to avoid being blasted by the goddess' infernal powers when I broke the envelope, but—but they came last night and stole it."

"Bon sang d'un bon poisson, must we drag information from you bit by little bit, *Monsieur?"* blazed the exasperated Jules de Grandin. "Who was it pilfered your unmentionable stone."

"Kraus and Steinert stole it," Wickwire answered tonelessly. "They are German *illuminati,* Hanoverians whose researches paralleled mine in almost every particular, and who discovered the approximate location of the mystic meteorite

shortly after I did. Fortunately for me their data were not so complete as mine, and they lost some time trying to locate the ancient temple. I had dug up the stone and was on my way home when they finally found the place.

"Can you imagine what it would mean to any mortal man to be suddenly translated into godhood, to sway the destinies of nations—of all mankind—as a wind sways a wheatfield? If you can, you can imagine what those two adepts in black magic felt when they arrived and found the key to power gone and on its way to America in the possession of a rival. They sent astral messengers after me, first offering partnership, then, when I laughed at them, making all manner of threats. Several times they attempted my life, but my magic was stronger than theirs, and each time I beat their spirit-messengers off.

"Lately, though, their emissaries have been getting stronger. I began to realize this when I found myself weaker and weaker after each encounter. Whether they have found new sources of strength, or whether it is because two of them work against me I do not know, but I began to realize we were becoming more evenly matched and it was only a matter of time before they would master me. Yet there was much to be done before I dared remove the envelope from that stone; to attempt it unprepared would be foolhardy. Such forces as would be unleashed by the cracking of that wrapping are beyond the scope of human imagining, and every precaution had to be taken. Any dunce can blow himself up handling gunpowder carelessly; only the skilled artillerist can harness the explosive and make it drive a projectile to a given target.

"While I was perfecting my spiritual defenses I took all physical precautions, also, barring my windows and so securing my doors that if my enemies gave up the battle of magic in disgust and fell back upon physical force, I should be more than a match for them. Then, because I thought myself secure, for a little time at least, I overlooked one of the most elementary forms of sorcery, and last night they entered my house as though there had been no barriers and took away the magic stone. With that in their possession I shall be no match for them; they will work their will on me, then overwhelm the world with the forces of their wizardry. If only——"

"EXCUSE me, Professor," I broke in, for, wild as his story was, I had become interested despite myself; "what was the sorcery these men resorted to in order to force entrance? Your daughter told us something of a blazing hand, but——"

"It was a hand of glory," he returned, regarding me with something of the look a teacher might bestow upon a backward schoolboy, "one of the oldest, simplest bits of magic known to adepts. A hand —preferably the sinister—is cut from the body of an executed murderer, and five locks of hair are clipped from his head. The hand is smoked over a fire of juniper wood until it becomes dry and mummified; after this the hair is twisted into wicks which are affixed to the finger tips. If the proper invocations are recited while the hand and wicks are being prepared and the words of power pronounced when the wicks are lighted, no lock can withstand the light cast by the blazing glory hand, and——"

"*Ha,* I remember him," de Grandin interrupted delightedly. "Your so droll Abbé Barham tells of him in his exquisitely humorous poem:

"Now open lock to the dead man's knock,
Fly bolt and bar and band;
Nor move nor swerve joint, muscle or nerve,

At the spell of the dead man's hand.
Sleep all who sleep, wake all who wake,
But be as the dead for the dead man's sake."

Wickwire nodded grimly. "There's a lot of truth in those doggerel rimes," he answered. "We laugh at the fairy-story of Bluebeard today, but it was no joke in Fifteenth Century France when Bluebeard was alive and making black magic."

"Tu parles, mon vieux," agreed de Grandin, "and——"

"Excuse me, but you've spoken several times of removing the envelope from this stone, Professor," I broke in again. "Do you mean that literally, or——"

"Literally," Wickwire responded. "In Babylonia and Assyria, you know, all 'documents' were clay tablets on which the cuneiform characters were cut while they were still moist and soft, and which were afterward baked in a kiln. Tablets of special importance, after having been once written upon and baked, were covered with a thin coating of clay upon which an identical inscription was impressed, and the tablets were once more baked. If the outer writing were then defaced by accident or altered by design, the removal of the outer coating would at once show the true text. Such a clay coating has been wrapped about the mystic meteorite of the Great Mother-Goddess, but even in the days of the Roman historian most of the inscription had been obliterated by time. When I found it I could distinguish only one or two characters, such as the double triangle, signifying the moon, and the eight-pointed asterisks meaning the lord of lords and god of gods, or lady of ladies and goddess of goddesses. These, I may add, were not in the Assyrian cuneiforms of 700 B. C. or even the archaic characters dating back to 2500, but the early, primitive cuneiform, which was certainly not used later than 4500 B. C., probably several centuries earlier."

"And how did you propose removing this clay integument without hurt to yourself, *Monsieur?*" de Grandin asked.

Wickwire smiled, and there was something devilish, callous, in his expression as he did so. "Will you be good enough to examine my daughter's rings?" he asked.

Obedient to his nodded command, the girl stretched forth her thin, frail hands, displaying the purple settings of the circlets which adorned the third finger of each. The stones were smoothly polished, though not very bright, and each was deeply incised with this inscription:

"It's the ancient symbol of the Mother-Goddess," Wickwire explained, "and signifies 'Royal Lady of the Night, Ruler of the Lights of Heaven, Mother of Gods, Men and Demons.' Diane would have cracked the envelope for me, for only the hands of a virgin adorned with rings of amethyst bearing the Mother-Goddess' signet can wield the hammer which can break that clay—and the maid must do the act without fear or hesitation; otherwise she will be powerless."

"U'm?" de Grandin twisted fiercely at his little blond mustache. "And what becomes of this ring-decorated virgin, *Monsieur?*"

Again that smile of fiendish indifference transformed Wickwire's weak face into a mask of horror. "She would die," he answered calmly. "That, of course, is certain, but"—some lingering light of

parental sanity broke through the look of wild fanaticism—"unless she were utterly consumed by the tremendous forces liberated when the envelope was cracked, I should have power to restore her to life, for all power, might, dominion and majesty in the world would have been mine; death should bow before me, and life should exist only by my sanction. I——"

"You are a scoundrel and a villain and a most unpleasant species of a malodorous camel," cut in Jules de Grandin.

"*Mademoiselle,* you will kindly pack a portmanteau and come with us. We shall esteem it a privilege to protect you till danger from those *sales bêtes* who invaded your house last night is past."

Without a word, or even a glance at the man who would have sacrificed her to his ambition, Diane Wickwire left the room, and we heard the clack-clack of her bedroom mules as she ascended to her chamber to procure a change of clothing.

Professor Wickwire turned a puzzled look from de Grandin to me, then back to the Frenchman. That we could not understand and sympathize with his ambition and condone his willingness to sacrifice his daughter's life never seemed to enter his mad brain. "But me—what's to become of me?" he whimpered.

"*Eh bien,* one wonders," answered Jules de Grandin. "As far as I am concerned, *Monsieur,* you may go to the Devil, nor need you delay your departure in anywise out of consideration for my feelings."

"MAD," I diagnosed. "Mad as hatters, both of 'em. The man's a potential homicidal maniac; only heaven knows how long it will be before we have to put the girl under restraint."

De Grandin looked cautiously about; then, satisfied that Diane Wickwire was still in the chamber to which she had been conducted by Nora McGinnis, my efficient household factotum, he replied: "You think that story of the glory hand was madness, *hein?*"

"Of course it was," I answered. "What else could it be?"

"*Le bon Dieu* knows, not I," he countered; "but I would that you read this item in today's *Journal* before consigning her to the madhouse." Picking up a copy of the morning paper he indicated a boxed item in the center of the first page:

Police are seeking the ghouls who broke into James Gibson's funeral parlor, 1037 Ludlow St., early last night and stole the left hand from the body of José Sanchez, which was lying in the place awaiting burial today. Sanchez had been executed Monday night at Trenton for the murder of Robert Knight, caretaker in the closed Stephens iron foundry, last summer, and relatives had commissioned Gibson to bring the body to Harrisonville for interment.

Gibson was absent on a call in the suburbs last night, and as his assistant, William Lowndes, was confined to bed at home by unexpected illness, had left the funeral parlor unattended, having arranged to have any telephone calls switched to his residence in Winthrop St. On his return he found a rear door of his establishment had been jimmied and the left hand of the executed murderer severed at the wrist.

Strangely enough, the burglars had also shorn a considerable amount of hair from the corpse's head. A careful search of the premises failed to disclose anything else had been taken, and a quantity of money lying in the unlocked safe was untouched.

"Well!" I exclaimed, utterly nonplussed; but:

"*Non,*" he denied shortly. "It is not at all well, my friend, it is most exceedingly otherwise. It is fiendish, it is diabolical; it is devilish. These are determined miscreants against whom we have set ourselves, and I damn think that we shall lose some sleep ere all is done. Yes."

4. *The Sending*

HOWEVER formidable Professor Wickwire's rivals might have been, they gave no evidence of ferocity that I could see. Diane settled down comfortably in our midst, fitting perfectly into the quiet

routine of the household, giving no trouble and making herself so generally agreeable that I was heartily glad of her presence. There is something comforting about the pastel shades of filmy dresses and white arms and shoulders gleaming softly in the candle-light at dinner. The melody of a well-modulated feminine voice, punctuated now and again with little rippling notes of quiet laughter, is more than vaguely pleasant to the bachelor ear, and as the time of our companionship lengthened I often found myself wondering if I should have had a daughter such as this to sit at table or before the fire with me if fate had willed it otherwise and my sole romance had ended elsewhere than an ivy-covered grave with low white headstone in St. Stephen's churchyard. One night I said as much to Jules de Grandin, and the pressure of his hand on mine was good to feel.

"*Bien,* my friend," he whispered, "who are we to judge the ways of heaven? The grass grows green above the lips you used to kiss—me, I do not know if she I loved is in the world or gone away. I only know that never may I stand beside her grave and look at it, for in that cloistered cemetery no man may come, and—*eh,* what is that? *Un chaton?*" Outside the window of the drawing-room, scarce heard above the shrieking of the boisterous April wind, there sounded a plaintive mew, as though some feline wanderer begged entrance and a place before our fire.

Crossing the room, I drew aside the casement curtain, straining my eyes against the murky darkness. Almost level with my own, two eyes of glowing green looked through the pane, and another pleading miaul implored my charity.

"All right, Pussy, come in," I invited, drawing back the sash to permit an entrance for the little waif, and through the opening jumped a plump, soft-haired angora cat, black as Erebus, jade-eyed, velvet-pawed. For a moment it stood at gaze, as though doubtful of the worthiness of my abode to house one of its distinction; then, with a satisfied little cat-chuckle, it crossed the room, furry tail waving jauntily, came to halt before the fire and curled up on the hearth rug, where, with paws tucked demurely in and tail curled about its body, it lay blinking contentedly at the leaping flames and purring softly. A saucer of warm milk further cemented cordial relations, and another member was added to our household personnel.

The little cat, on which we had bestowed the name of Eric Brighteyes, at once attached himself to Diane Wickwire, and could hardly be separated from her. Toward de Grandin and me it showed disdainful tolerance. For Nora McGinnis it had supreme contempt.

IT WAS the twenty-ninth of April, a raw, wet night when the thermometer gave the lie to the calendar's assertion that spring had come. Three of us, de Grandin, Diane and I, sat in the drawing-room. The girl seemed vaguely nervous and distrait, toying with her coffee cup, puffing at her cigarette, grinding out its fire against the ash-tray, then lighting another almost instantly. Finally she went to the piano and began to play. For a time she improvised softly, white fingers straying at random over the white keys; then, as though led by some subconscious urge for the solace of ecclesiastical music, she began the opening bars of Gounod's *Sanctus:*

Holy, Holy, Holy,
Lord God of Hosts,
Heaven and earth are full of Thy Glory . . .

The music ended on a sharply dissonant note and a gasp of horrified surprize broke

the echoing silence as the player lifted startled fingers from the keys. We turned toward the piano, and:

"Mon Dieu!" exclaimed de Grandin. "Hell is unchained against us!"

The cat, which had been contentedly curled up on the piano's polished top, had risen and stood with arched back, bristling tail and gaping, blood-red mouth, gazing from blazing ice-green eyes at Diane with such a look of murderous hate as made the chills of sudden blind, unreasoning fear run rippling down my spine.

"Eric—Eric Brighteyes!" Diane extended a shaking hand to soothe the menacing beast, and in a moment it was its natural, gentle self again, its back still arched, but arched in seeming playfulness, rubbing its fluffy head against her fingers and purring softly with contented friendliness. "And did the horrid music hurt its eardrums? Well, Diane won't play it any more," the girl promised, taking the jet-black ball of fur into her arms and nursing it against her shoulder. Shortly afterward she said good-night, and, the cat still cuddled in her arms, went up to bed.

"I hardly like the idea of her taking that brute up with her," I told de Grandin. "It's always seemed so kind and gentle, but—well"—I laughed uneasily—"when I saw it snarling at her just now I was heartily glad it wasn't any bigger."

"U'm," returned the Frenchman, looking up from his silent study of the fire, "one wonders."

"Wonders what?"

"Much, by blue. Come, let us go."

"Where?'

"Upstairs, *cordieu,* and let us step softly while we are about it."

De Grandin in the lead, we tiptoed to the upper floor and paused before the entrance to Diane's chamber. From behind the white-enameled panels came the sound of something like a sob; then, in a halting, faltering voice:

"Amen. Evil from us deliver but temptation into not us lead, and us against trespass who those forgive we as . . ."

"Grand Dieu—la prière renversée!" de Grandin cried, snatching savagely at the knob and dashing back the door.

Diane Wickwire knelt beside her bed, purple-ringed hands clasped before her, tears streaming down her cheeks, while slowly, haltingly, like one wrestling with the vocables of an unfamiliar tongue, she painfully repeated the Lord's Prayer backward.

And on the counterpane, its black muzzle almost forced against her face, crouched the black cat. But now its eyes were not the cool jade-green which we had known; they were red as embers of a dying fire when blown to life by some swift draft of air, and on its feline face, in hellish parody of humanity, there was a *grin,* a smile as cold and menacing, yet wicked and triumphant as any mediæval artist ever painted on the lips of Satan!

We stood immovable a moment, taking in the tableau with a quickening gaze of horror; then:

"Say it, *Mademoiselle,* say it after me *—properly!"* commanded Jules de Grandin, raising his right hand to sign the cross above the girl's bowed head and beginning slowly and distinctly: "Our Father, which art in Heaven, hallowed be Thy name . . ."

A terrifying screech, a scream of unsupportable agony, as though it had been plunged into a blazing fire, broke from the cowering cat-thing on the bed. Its reddened eyes flashed savagely, and its gaping mouth showed gleaming, knife-sharp teeth as it turned its gaze from

Diane Wickwire and fixed it on de Grandin. But the Frenchman paid no heed.

". . . and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Amen," he finished the petition.

And Diane prayed with him. Catching her cue from his slowly spoken syllables, she repeated the prayer word by painful word, and at the end collapsed, a whimpering, flaccid thing, against the bedstead.

But the cat? It was gone. As the girl and Frenchman reached "Amen" the beast snarled savagely, gave a final spiteful hiss, and whirled about and bolted through the open window, vanishing into the night from which it had come a week before, leaving but the echo of its menacing sibilation and the memory of its dreadful transformation as mementoes of its visit.

"IN HEAVEN'S name, what was it?" I asked breathlessly.

"A spy," he answered. "It was a sending, my old one; an emissary from those evil ones to whom we stand opposed."

"A—a sending?"

"Perfectly. Assist me with Mademoiselle Diane and I shall elucidate."

The girl was sobbing bitterly, trembling like a wind-shaken reed, but not hysterical, and a mild sedative was sufficient to enable her to sleep. Then, as we once more took our seats before the fire, de Grandin offered:

"I did not have suspicion of the cat, my friend. He seemed a natural animal, and as I like cats, I was his friend from the first. Indeed, it was not until tonight when he showed aversion for the sacred music that I first began to realize what I should have known from the beginning. He was a sending."

"Yes, you've said that before," I reminded him, "but what the devil is a 'sending'?"

"The crystallized, physicallized desires and passions of a sorcerer or wizard," he returned. "Somewhat as the medium builds a semi-physical, semi-spiritual body out of that impalpability which we call psychoplasm or ectoplasm, so the skilled adept in magic can evoke a physical-seeming entity out of his wicked thoughts and send it where he will, to do his bidding and work his evil purposes. These ones against whom we are pitted, these burglar-thieves who entered Monsieur Wickwire's house with their accursed glory hand and stole away his unnamable stone of power are no good, my friend. No, certainly. On the contrary, they are all bad. They are drunk with lust for the power which they think will come into their hands when they have stripped the wrapping off that unmentionable stone. They know also, I should say, that Wickwire—may he eat turnips and drink water throughout eternity!—had ordained his daughter for the sacrifice, had chosen her for the rôle of envelope-stripper-off for that stone, and they accordingly desire to avail themselves of her services. To that end they evoke that seeming-cat and send it here, and it did work their will—conveyed their evil suggestions to the young girl's mind. She, who is all innocent of any knowledge of witchery or magic-mongering, was to be perverted; and right well the work was done, for tonight when she knelt to say her prayers she could not frame to pronounce them aright, but was obliged perforce to pray witch-fashion."

"Witch-fashion?"

"But certainly. Of course. Those who have taken the vows of witchhood and signed their names in Satan's book of blackness are unable to pray like Christians from that time forward; they must repeat the holy words in reverse. Mademoiselle Diane, she is no professed witch, but I greatly fear she is infected by the

virus. Already she was unable to pray like others, though when I said the prayer aright, she was still able to repeat it after me. Now——"

"Is there any way we can find these scoundrels and free Diane," I interrupted. Not for a moment did I grant his premises, but that the girl was suffering some delusion I was convinced; possibly it was long-distance hypnotic suggestion, but whatever its nature, I was determined to seek out the instigators and break the spell.

For a moment he was silent, pinching his little pointed chin between a thoughtful thumb and forefinger and gazing pensively into the fire. At length: "Yes," he answered. "We can find the place where they lair, my friend; she will lead us to them."

"She? How——"

"*Exactement.* Tomorrow is May Eve, Witch-Night—Walpurgis-Nacht. Of all the nights which go to make the year, they are most likely to try their deviltry then. It was not for nothing that they sent their spy into this house and established rapport with Mademoiselle Diane. Oh, no. They need her in their business, and I think that all unconsciously she will go to them some time tomorrow evening. Me, I shall make it my especial duty to keep in touch with her, and where she goes, there will I go also."

"I, too," I volunteered, and we struck hands upon it.

5. *Walpurgis-Nacht*

COVERTLY, but carefully, we noted every movement the girl made next day. Shortly after luncheon de Grandin looked in at the consulting-room and nodded significantly. "She goes; so do I," he whispered, and was off.

It was nearly time for the evening meal when Diane returned, and a moment after she had gone upstairs to change for dinner I heard de Grandin's soft step in the hall.

"Name of a name," he ejaculated, dropping into the desk-side chair and lighting a cigarette, "but it is a merry chase which she has led me today, that one!"

I raised interrogative brows, and:

"From pharmacy to pharmacy she has gone, like a hypochondriac seeking for a cure. Consider what she bought"—he checked the items off upon his fanned-out fingers—"aconitum, belladonna, solanin, mandragora officinalis. Not in any one, or even any two places did she buy these things. No, she was shrewd, she was clever, by blue, but she was subtle! Here she bought a *flacon* of perfume, there a box of powder, again, a cake of scented soap, but mingled with her usual purchases would be occasionally one of these strange things which no young lady can possibly be supposed to want or need. What think you of it, my friend?"

"H'm, it sounds like some prescription from the mediæval pharmacopœia," I returned.

"Well said, my old astute one!" he answered. "You have hit the thumb upon the nail, my Trowbridge. That is exactly what it is, a prescription from the *Pharmacopœia Maleficorum*—the witches' book of recipes. Every one of those ingredients is stipulated as a necessary part of the witch's ointment——"

"The what?"

"The unguent with which those about to attend a sabbat, or meeting of a coven of witches, anointed themselves. If you will stop and think a moment, you will realize that nearly every one of those ingredients is a hypnotic or sedative. One thoroughly rubbed with a concoction of them would to a great degree lose con-

sciousness, or, at the least, a sense of true responsibility."

"Yes? And——"

"Quite yes. Today foolish people think of witches as rather amiable, sadly misunderstood and badly persecuted old females. That is quite as silly as the vapid modern belief that fairies, elves and goblins are a set of well-intentioned folk. The truth is that a witch or wizard was—and is—one who by compact with the powers of darkness attains to power not given to the ordinary man, and uses that power for malevolent purposes; for a part of the compact is that he shall love evil and hate good. Very well. *Et puis?* Just as your modern gunmen of America and the *apaches* of Paris drug themselves with cocain in order to stifle any flickering remnant of morality and remorse before committing some crime of monstrous ruthlessness, so did—and do—the witch and wizard drug themselves with this accursed ointment that they might utterly forget the still small voice of conscience urging them to hold their hands from evil unalloyed. It was not merely magic which called for this anointing, it was practical psychology and physic which prescribed it, my friend."

"Yes; well——"

"By damn," he hurried on, heedless of my interruption, "I think that we have congratulated ourselves all too soon. Mademoiselle Diane is not free from the wicked influence of those so evil men; she is very far from free, and tonight, unconsciously and unwillingly, perhaps, but nevertheless surely, she will anoint herself with this witch-prescription, and, her body shining like something long dead and decomposing, will go to them."

"But what are we to do? Is there anything——"

"But yes; of course. You will please remain here, as close as may be to her door, and if she leaves the house, you follow her. Me, I have important duties to perform, and I shall do them quickly. Anon I shall return, and if she has not gone by then, I shall join you in your watch. If——"

"Yes, that's just it. Suppose she leaves while you're away," I broke in. "How am I to get in touch with you? How will you know where to come?"

"Call this number on the 'phone," he answered, scratching a memorandum on a card. "Say but 'She is gone and I go with her,' and I shall come at once. For safety's sake I would suggest that you take a double pocketful of rice, and scatter it along your way. I shall see the small white grains and follow hard upon your trail as though you were a hare and I a hound."

OBEDIENT to his orders, I mounted to the second floor and took my station where I could see the door of Diane's room. Half an hour or more I waited in silence, feeling decidedly foolish, yet fearing to ignore his urgent request. At length the soft creaking of hinges brought me alert as a fine pencil of light cut through the darkened hall. Walking so softly that her steps were scarcely audible, Diane Wickwire came from her room. From throat to insteps she was muffled in a purple cloak, while a veil or scarf of some dark-colored stuff was bound about her head, concealing the bright beacon of her glowing golden hair. Hoping desperately that I should not lose her in the delay, I dialed the number which de Grandin had given me and as a man's voice challenged "Hello?" repeated the formula he had stipulated:

"She goes, and I go with her."

Then, without waiting for reply, I clashed the monophone back into its hooks, snatched up my hat and topcoat,

seized a heavy blackthorn cane and crept as silently as possible down the stairs behind the girl.

She was fumbling at the front door lock as I reached the stairway's turn, and I flattened myself against the wall, lest she descry me; then, as she let herself through the portal, I dashed down the stairs, stepped soft-footedly across the porch, and took up the pursuit.

She hastened onward through the thickening dusk, her muffled figure but a faint shade darker than the surrounding gloom, led me through one side street to another, gradually bending her way toward the old East End of town where ramshackle huts of squatters, abandoned factories, unofficial dumping-grounds and occasional tumbledown and long-vacated dwellings of the better sort disputed for possession of the neighborhood with weed-choked fields of yellow clay and partly inundated swamp land—the desolate backwash of the tide of urban growth which every city has as a memento of its early settlers' bad judgment of the path of progress.

Where field and swamp and desolate tin-can-and-ash-strewn dumping-ground met in dreary confluence, there stood the ruins of a long-abandoned church. Immediately after the Civil War, when rising Irish immigration had populated an extensive shantytown down on the flats, a young priest, more ambitious than practical, had planted a Catholic parish, built a brick chapel with funds advanced by sympathetic co-religionists from the richer part of town, and attempted to minister to the spiritual needs of the newcomers. But prosperity had depopulated the mean dwellings of his flock who, offered jobs on the railway or police force, or employment in the mills then being built on the other side of town, had moved their humble household gods to new locations, leaving him a shepherd without sheep. Soon he, too, had gone and the church stood vacant for two-score years or more, time and weather and ruthless vandalism taking toll of it till now it stood amid the desolation which surrounded it like a lich amid a company of sprawling skeletons, its windows broken out, its doors unhinged, its roof decayed and fallen in, naught but its crumbling walls and topless spire remaining to bear witness that it once had been a house of prayer.

The final grains of rice were trickling through my fingers as I paused before the barren ruin, wondering what my next move was to be. Diane had entered through the doorless portal at the building's front, and the darkness of the black interior had swallowed her completely. I had a box of matches in my pocket, but they, I knew, would scarcely give me light enough to find my way about the ruined building. The floors were broken in a dozen places, I was sure, and where they were not actually displaced they were certain to be so weakened with decay that to step on them would be courting swift disaster. I had no wish to break a leg and spend the night, and perhaps the next day and the next, in an abandoned ruin where the chances were that any one responding to my cries for help would only come to knock me on the head and rob me.

But there was no way out but forward. I had promised Jules de Grandin that I'd keep Diane in sight, and so, with a sigh which was half a prayer to the God of Foolish Men, I grasped my stick more firmly and stepped across the threshold of the old, abandoned church.

STYGIAN darkness closed about me as waters close above the head of one who dives, and like foul, greasy water, so it seemed to me, the darkness pressed

upon me, clogging eyes and nose and throat, leaving only the sense of hearing —and of apprehension—unimpaired. The wind soughed dolefully through the broken arches of the nave and whistled with a sort of mocking ululation among the rotted cross-beams of the transept. Drops of moisture accumulated on the studdings of the broken roof fell dismally from time to time. The choir and sanctuary were invisible, but I realized they must be at the farther end of the building, and set a cautious foot forward, but drew it quickly back, for only empty air responded to the pressure of my probing boot. "Where was the girl? Had she fallen through an opening in the floor, to be precipitated on the rubble in the basement?" I asked myself.

"Diane? Oh, Diane?" I called softly.

No answer.

I struck a match and held the little torch aloft, its feeble light barely staining the surrounding blackness with the faintest touch of orange, then gasped involuntarily.

Just for a second, as the match-head kindled into flame, I saw a vision. Vision, perhaps, is not the word for it; rather, it was like one of those phosphenes or subjective sensations of light which we experience when we press our fingers on our lowered eyelids, not quite perceived, vague, dancing and elusive, yet, somehow, definitely *felt*. The molding beams and uprights of the church, long denuded of their pristine coat of paint and plaster, seemed to put on new habiliments, or to have been mysteriously metamorphosed; the bare brick walls were sheathed in stone, and I was gazing down a long and narrow colonnaded corridor, agleam with glowing torches, which terminated in a broad, low flight of steps leading to a marble platform. A giant statue dominated all, a figure hewn from stone and representing a tall and bearded being with high, virgin female breasts, clothed below the waist in woman's robes, a scepter tipped with an acorn-like ornament in the right hand, a new-born infant cradled in the crook of the left elbow. Music, not heard, but rather felt, filled the air until the senses swooned beneath its overpowering pressure, and a line of girls, birth-nude, save for the veilings of their long and flowing hair, entered from the right and left, formed twos and stepped with measured, mincing tread in the direction of the statue. With them walked shaven-headed priests in female garb, their weak and beardless faces smirking evilly.

Brow-down upon the tessellated pavement dropped the maiden priestesses, their hands, palms forward, clasped above their heads while they beat their foreheads softly on the floor and the eunuch priests stood by impatiently.

And now the groveling women rose and formed a circle where they stood, hands crossed above their breasts, eyes cast demurely down, and four shaven-pated priests came marching in, a gilded litter on their shoulders. On it, garlanded in flowers, but otherwise unclothed, lay a young girl, eyes closed, hands clasped as if in prayer, slim ankles crossed. They put the litter on the floor before the statue of the monstrous hermaphroditic god-thing; the circling maidens clustered round; a priest picked up a golden knife and touched the supine girl upon the insteps. There was neither fear nor apprehension on the face of her upon the litter, but rather an expression of ecstatic longing and anticipation as she uncrossed her feet. The flaccid-faced, emasculated priest leant over her, gloating. . . .

As quickly as it came the vision vanished. A drop of gelid moisture fell from a rafter overhead, extinguishing the quivering flame of my match, and once

more I stood in the abandoned church, my head whirling, my senses all but gone, as I realized that through some awful power of suggestion I had seen a tableau of the worship of the great All-Mother, the initiation of a virgin priestess to the ranks of those love-slaves who served the worshippers of the goddess of fertility, Diana, Milidath, Astarte, Cobar or by whatever name men knew her in differing times and places.

But there was naught of vision in the flickering lights which now showed in the ruined sanctuary-place. Those spots of luminance were torches in the hands of living, mortal men, men who moved softfootedly across the broken floor and set up certain things—a tripod with a brazen bowl upon its top, a row of tiny brazen lamps which flickered weakly in the darkness, as though they had been votive lamps before a Christian altar. And by their faint illumination I saw an odd-appearing thing stretched east and west upon the spot where the tabernacle had been housed, a gray-white, leprous-looking thing which might have been a sheeted corpse or lichened tombstone, and before it the torch-bearers made low obeisance, genuflecting deeply, and the murmur of their chant rose above the whispering reproaches of the wind.

It was an obscene invocation. Although I could not understand the words, or even classify the language which was used, I felt that there was something wrong about it. It was something like a phonographic record played in reverse. Syllables which I knew instinctively should be sonorously noble were oddly turned and twisted in pronunciation . . . *"diuq sirairolg."* With a start I found the key. It was Latin—spoken backward. They were intoning the fifty-second Psalm: *"Quid gloriaris* . . . why boastest thou thyself . . . whereas the goodness of God endureth yet daily?"

A stench, as of burning offal, stole through the building as the incense pot upon the tripod began to belch black smoke into the air.

And now another voice was chanting. A woman's rich contralto. *"Oitanimulli sunimod* . . ." I strained my ears and bent my brows in concentration, and at last I had the key. It was the twenty-seventh Psalm recited in reverse Latin: "The Lord is my light and my salvation . . ."

From the shadows Diane Wickwire came, straight and supple as a willow wand, unclothed as for the bath, but smeared from soles to hair-line with some luminous concoction, so that her slim, nude form stood out against the blackness like a spirit out of Purgatory visiting the earth with the incandescence of the purging fires still clinging to it.

Silently, on soft-soled naked feet, she stepped across the long-deserted sanctuary and paused before the object lying there. And as her voice mingled with the chanting of the men I seemed to see a monstrous form take shape against the darkness. A towering, obscene, freakish form, bearded like a hero of the *Odyssey,* its pectoral region thick-hung with multiple mammæ, its nether limbs encased in a man's chiton, a lingam-headed scepter and a child held in its hands.

I shuddered. A chill not of the storm-swept night, but colder than any physical cold, seemed creeping through the air, as the ghostly, half-defined form seemed taking solidarity from the empty atmosphere. Diane Wickwire paused a moment, then stepped forward, a silver hammer gleaming in the lambent light rays of the little brazen lamps.

But suddenly, like a draft of clear, fresh mountain breeze cutting through the

thick, mephitic vapors of a swamp, there came another sound. Out of the darkness it came, yet not long was it in darkness, for, his face picked out by candlelight, a priest arrayed in full canonicals stepped from the shadows, while beside him, clothed in cassock and surplice, a lighted taper in his hand, walked Jules de Grandin.

They were intoning the office of exorcism. "Remember not, Lord, our offenses nor the offenses of our forefathers, neither take Thou vengeance of our sins. . . ."

As though struck dumb by the singing of the holy chant, the evocators ceased their sacrilegious intonation, and stared amazed as de Grandin and the cleric approached. Abreast of them, the priest raised the aspergillum which he bore and sprinkled holy water on the men, the woman and the object of their veneration.

The result was cataclysmic. Out went the light of every brazen lamp, vanished was the hovering horror from the air above the stone, the luminance on Diane's body faded as though wiped away, and from the sky's dark vault there came the rushing of a mighty wind.

It shook the ancient ruined church, broke joists and timbers from their places, toppled tattered edges of brick walls into the darkened body of the rotting pile. I felt the floor swaying underneath my feet, heard a woman's wild, despairing scream, and the choking, suffocated roar of something in death-agony, as though a monster strangled in its blood; then:

"Trowbridge, *mon brave;* Trowbridge, *mon cher,* do you survive? are you still breathing?" I heard de Grandin's hail, as though from a great distance.

I sat up gingerly, his arm behind my shoulders. "Yes, I think so," I answered doubtfully. "What was it, an earthquake?"

"Something very like it," he responded with a laugh. "It might have been coincidence—though I do not think it was—but a great wind came from nowhere and completed the destruction which time began. That ruined church will never more give sanctuary to wanderers of the night. It is only debris, now."

"Diane——" I began, and:

"She is yonder," he responded, nodding toward an indistinct figure lying on the ground a little distance off. "She is still unconscious, and I think her arm is broken, but otherwise she is quite well. Can you stand?"

With his assistance I rose and took a few tottering steps, then, my strength returning, helped him lift the swooning girl and bear her to a decrepit Ford which was parked in the muddy apology for a road beside the marshy field. "*Mon Père,*" de Grandin introduced, "this is the good physician, Doctor Trowbridge, of whom I told you, he who led us to this place. Friend Trowbridge, this is Father Ribet of the French Mission, without whom we should—*eh bien,* who can say what we should have done?"

The priest, who, like most members of his calling, drove well but furiously, took us home, but declined to stay for refreshment, saying he had much to do the next day.

We put Diane to bed, her fractured arm carefully set and bandaged. De Grandin sponged her with a Turkish cloth, drying her as deftly as any trained hospital nurse could have done; then, when we'd put her night-clothes on her and tucked her in between the sheets, he bore the basin of bath-water to the sink, poured it out and followed it with a liberal libation of carbolic antiseptic. "See can you withstand that, vile essence of the old

one?" he demanded as the strong scent of phenol filled the room.

"WELL, I'm listening," I informed him as we lighted our cigars. "What's the explanation, if any?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "Who can say?" he answered. "You know from what I told you that Mademoiselle Diane prepared to go to them; from what you did observe yourself, you know she went.

"To meet their magic with a stronger counter-agent, I had recourse to the good Père Ribet. He is a Frenchman, therefore he was sympathetic when I laid the case before him, and readily agreed to go with me and perform an exorcism of the evil spirit which possessed our dear Diane and was ruled by those vile miscreants. It was his number which I bade you call, and fast we followed on your message, tracing you by the trail of rice you left and making ready to perform our office when all was ready. We waited till the last safe minute; then, while they were chanting their so blasphemous inverted Psalms, we broke in on them and——"

"What was that awful, monstrous thing I saw forming in the air just before you and Father Ribet came in?" I interrupted.

"*Tiens,* who can say?" he answered with another shrug. "Some have called it one thing, some another. Me, I think it was the visible embodiment of the evil thing which man worshipped in the olden days and called the Mother Principle. These things, you know, my friend, were really demons, but their strength was great, for they drew form and substance from the throngs which worshipped them. But demons they were and are, and so are subject to the rite of exorcism, and accordingly, when good Père Ribet did sprinkle——"

"D'ye mean you actually believe a few phrases of ecclesiastical Latin and a few drops of holy water could dissipate that dreadful thing?" I asked incredulously.

He puffed slowly at his cigar; then: "Have it this way, if you prefer," he answered. "The power of evil which this thing we call the *Magna Mater* for want of a better name possesses comes from her — or its—worshippers. Generation after superstitious generation of men worshipped it, pouring out daily praise and prayer to it, *believing* in it. Thereby they built up a very great psychological power, a very exceedingly great power, indeed; make no doubt about that.

"But the olden gods died when Christianity came. Their worshippers fell off; they were weakened for very lack of psychic nourishment. Christianity, the new virile faith, upon the other hand, grew strong apace. The office of exorcism was developed by the time-honored method of trial and error, and finally it was perfected. Certain words—certain sounds, if you prefer — pronounced in certain ways, produced certain ascertainable effects, precisely as a note played upon a violin produces a responsive note from a piano. You have the physical explanation of that? Good; this is a spiritual analogy. Besides, generations of faithful Christians have believed, firmly believed, that exorcism is effective. *Voilà;* it is, therefore, effective. A psychological force of invincible potency has been built up for it.

"And so, when Père Ribet exorcised the demon goddess in that old and ruined church tonight—*tiens,* you saw what happened."

"What became of those men?" I asked.

"One wonders," he responded. "Their bodies I can vouch for. They are broken and buried under tons of fallen masonry. Tomorrow the police emergency squad will dig them out, and speculation as to who they were, and how they met their

fate, will be a nine days' wonder in the newspapers."

"And the stone?"

"Crushed, my friend. Utterly crushed and broken. Père Ribet and I beheld it, smashed into a dozen fragments. It was all clay, not clay surrounding a meteorite, as the poor, deluded Wickwire believed. Also——"

"But look here, man," I broke in. "This is all the most fantastic lot of balderdash I've ever heard. D'ye think I'm satisfied with any such explanation as this? I'm willing to concede part of it, of course, but when it comes to all that stuff about the *Magna Mater* and——"

"*Ah bah,*" he cut me off, "as for those explanations, they satisfy me no more than they do you. There *is* no explanation for these happenings which will meet a scientific or even logical analysis, my friend. Let us not be too greatly concerned with whys and wherefores. The hour grows late and I grow very thirsty. Come, let us take a drink and go to bed."

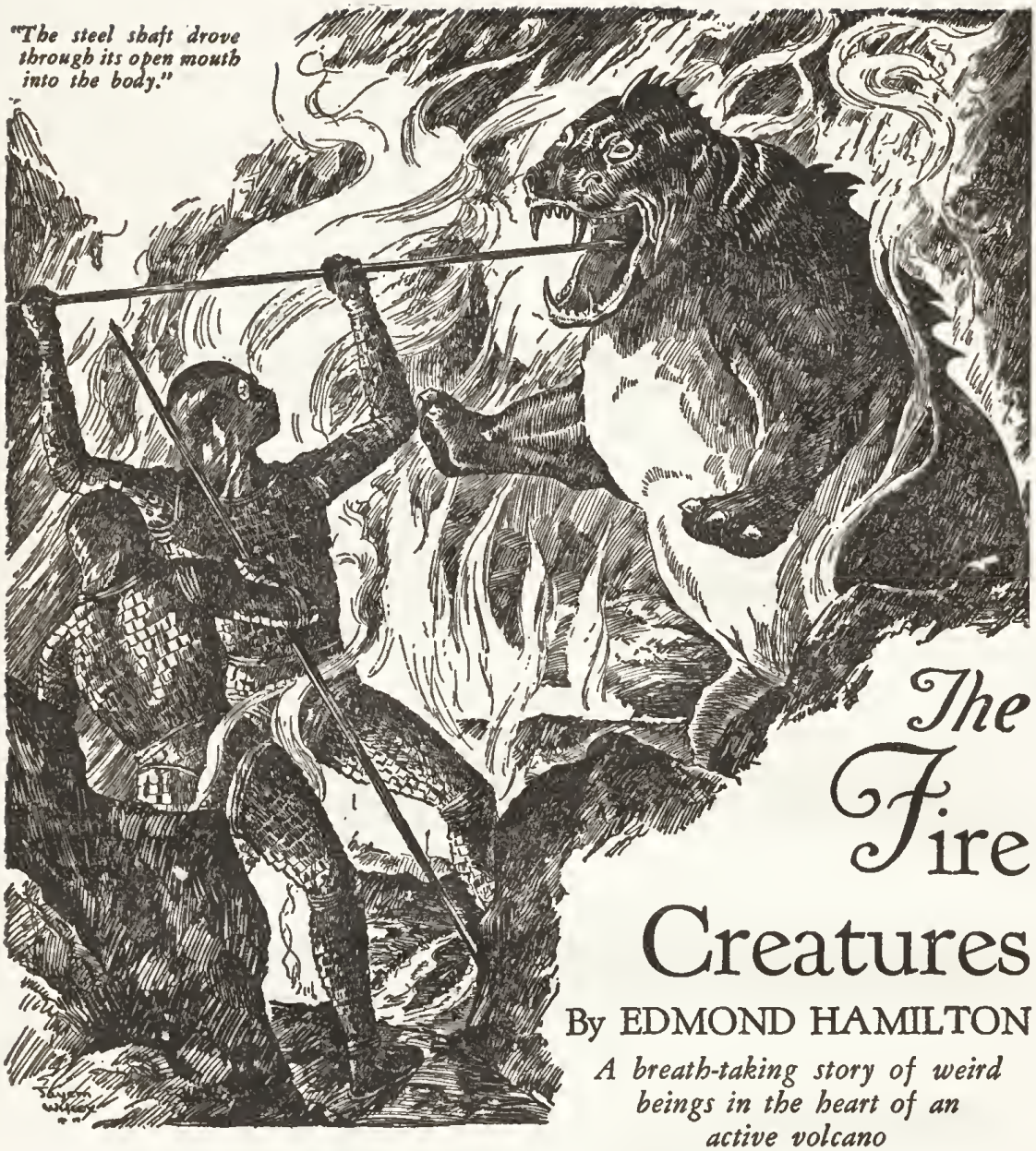
Voodoo Song

By MARY ELIZABETH COUNSELMAN

What say the throbbing tom-toms
Deep in the jungle masses?
  "*Obambou . . . Obambou . . .*" What chilling sound is this?
What say the humid breezes,
Breathed in the tangled grasses?
  "*Obambou . . . Obambou . . .*" soft as a serpent's hiss.

What does the leopard mutter?
What is the jackal screaming?
  "*Obambou . . . Obambou . . .*" Wild beast, and tropic bird,
And now the sluggish river,
Waked from its jungle dreaming,
  "*Obambou . . . Obambou,*" takes up the chanted word.

"*Obambou . . . Obambou . . .*"
The jungle drones, "*Obambou . . .*"
  What potent name may this be, that all take up the sound
And murmur with the tom-toms
In muted tone: "*Obambou . . .*"?
  A lone witch-doctor grovels and moans upon the ground.



"The steel shaft drove through its open mouth into the body."

The Fire Creatures

By EDMOND HAMILTON

A breath-taking story of weird beings in the heart of an active volcano

JERRY HOLT curved his plane's flight as there loomed ahead the colossal mass of Mauna Loa. The mighty volcano bulked in the clear Hawaiian sunlight like a huge inverted bowl, its flattened summit holding the crater from which curled sulfurous smoke. Its vast sides were split by great fissures, and down along the western side sped the plane.

It slanted down through the tricky air-currents and swept low over a small bungalow perched on a ledge far up the volcano's side. Not far below this a little table-land of hardened lava jutted from Mauna Loa's slope, and skilfully Jerry Holt brought the plane down to a bumpy landing on this.

He left the plane and started up the slope toward the bungalow. He was almost to it when a girl appeared on the path, running to meet him.

"Jerry!" she cried, half sobbing. "Thank heaven you've come!"

"What's happened, Helen?" he exclaimed.

"It's father," she told him. "He's been gone since yesterday—inside the volcano."

Jerry Holt stared at her, his jaw dropping. "Professor Newsom inside the volcano since yesterday? Helen, it's impossible!"

"It's true!" she said. "Father went in by one of the fissures yesterday morning and was to have come out in a few hours. But he hasn't come out since and I've been almost crazy with worry!"

"But the heat and fiery gases inside would kill Newsom or any one else who went in——" Jerry Holt was starting to say, then stopped. "Wait until we get up to the house, Helen, and then you can tell me about it."

With a steadying arm around Helen Newsom he walked up the path toward the bungalow. It was built upon a lava ledge of some length, and not far from it opened one of the great vertical fissures in Mauna Loa's side. But Jerry Holt ignored the fissure, as he and the girl entered the bungalow.

The bungalow's spacious rooms, with their wicker chairs and flower-boxes, seemed more appropriate to some quiet suburb than to this lonely spot on the great volcano's side. Yet here for two years had lived Professor Ernest Newsom and his daughter, carrying out his volcanological studies of the great active volcano, Mauna Loa.

"What does it all mean?" Jerry Holt asked Helen when she was seated in a chair. "Professor Newsom knew better than any one what terrific heat and flaming gases the volcano holds—why was he mad enough to enter it?"

"He wasn't mad," Helen defended. "Father had it all planned—he said that his work here at Mauna Loa wouldn't be complete until he could explore its interior. Of course the heat and flames would kill any one entering it unprotected, but he had protection."

"Protection?" Jerry repeated. "What would protect Newsom from those terrific fires and heats? Why, no one's ever dared venture inside this or any other active volcano!"

"Father had planned it all," Helen insisted. "He had some suits of what he called heat-armor designed and made for him, hermetically-tight armor made from material insulating almost perfectly against heat. In this heat-armor one could go through heat of almost any degree, even through flames, without feeling it, and in it he meant to explore the fiery spaces inside and under Mauna Loa.

"So yesterday morning in one of the heat-armor suits he entered the fissure that opens a little along this ledge from here, telling me he'd not go in far this first time and would return in a few hours. Jerry, he hasn't come out since! I've waited and waited, and I was getting ready to go in after him in one of the other heat-armor suits, when I heard your plane coming."

"You were going into this volcano's hell-caverns after him?" exclaimed Jerry Holt.

"I *am* going in after him," Helen Newsom told him. "Jerry, I'm afraid for him, terribly afraid—afraid that he's been trapped by shifting lava or is lost in the volcano's interior. It's why I've got to go in to find him!"

"You mean it's why *I've* got to go in to find him!" Jerry corrected grimly. "Don't think for one minute I'm letting you go into that inferno, heat-armor or no heat-armor."

"But we can go together——" she began.

"We can not," he cut her short. "You'll wait for me out here."

Her mouth grew firm. "Jerry, I'm go-

ing! Don't you see—if you went in and anything happened to you, I'd go in after you anyway?"

"But Helen——" he protested, then stopped. "You'd do it, I know. And if you're going in, you'd at least be safer with me than alone."

"Then it's settled," she said swiftly. "The heat-armor suits are in father's laboratory."

JERRY HOLT followed her into Professor Newsom's long workroom. It was crowded with jagged black lava specimens and with geological and physical apparatus and equipment. The girl had gone to three strange suits that hung from a wall-rack.

Jerry examined them curiously. The suits were distinctly armor-like in appearance, being fabricated of black plates some two inches square. These plates were of super-insulating materials with asbestos-like texture welded and formed by terrific pressures. The joints between them and the armor's hands also were of a more flexible insulating material.

The head-portion of each suit was a close-fitting helmet-affair clamping into place in air-tight fashion. There were in it two eyeholes of heat-proof glass for vision and also a compact chemical apparatus that ceaselessly repurified the air inside the armor and thus made it needless to admit hotter air from outside for breathing.

"Father took his suit over to the fissure and put it on before he went inside," Helen Newsom was saying, and Jerry nodded.

"That'll be simplest," he said. "I'll take the suits—you bring two of those steel staffs and that flash-lamp."

Bearing this equipment they left the cabin and moved along the lava ledge toward the fissure's opening. As Jerry Holt led the way with the heavy burden of the two suits, he glanced down the slope and glimpsed his plane resting like a gleaming toy on the table-land below. But they were now at the fissure.

The fissure was ten feet wide at its bottom, at the ledge, and extended far upward in the volcano's side. A mere crack it was in the huge volcano's wall. Jerry Holt and Helen went closer, peered into its dark opening, the currents of hotter air from it striking their faces.

They could see the lava floor of the fissure extending downward out of sight in the darkness. There was no gleam of light down there but the puffs of hot air that rose from there were like those from an opened furnace door. There was a sulfurous smell in that superheated air.

Jerry Holt knew what must lie down there, the volcano's cavernous chambers, terrific heats and rushing hells of fiery gas.

"There's no use waiting here," he told the girl. "We'll just have to start and trust that this heat-armor will hold all right."

"I'm sure the heat-armor will hold," she said. "And we may not have to penetrate very far inside."

She showed him how to don the close-fitting dark suit of heat-armor, clamping the head-helmet tightly in place, and then he helped her to put on her own.

Jerry found that once inside the heat-armor he no longer felt the heat from the fissure's mouth. The air inside the armor had a chemical tang but was breathable and comparatively cool.

Through the heat-helmet's glass eyeholes he could see clearly, and when the girl spoke her voice reached his ears, muffled but audible.

"You're all ready?" she was saying. "Are you sure your armor is all right?"

"All right," he told her. "Keep close

behind me and keep a good hold on your staff. We'll have to go it carefully."

With his own steel staff in his armored right hand, the flash-lamp attached to his belt alight, Jerry started into the fissure. Helen followed in his steps. They seemed strange, glassy-eyed figures in the dark, close-fitting heat-armor.

THEY had gone but a little into the fissure's darkness when Helen's tug at his arm made Jerry turn. Her muffled voice reached him.

"Jerry, before we go on—if anything should happen, you understand how I feel——"

His armored hand closed on her arm. "I understand, Helen," he said.

They went on. The darkness inside the fissure was dense, but the flash-lamp's beam showed the way, the floor sloping downward, its jagged walls towering on either side. The fissure's mouth, a diminishing crack of daylight, disappeared behind them as they went on. The way led steadily downward into the volcano's depths, other fissures branching from it.

Jerry Holt was no geologist but he knew that these fissures were the paths by which the volcano's molten lava ascended from far beneath during its rare eruptions. A light haze of sulfurous smoke was about them and they knew they were passing down through heat that would have slain them instantly but for their heat-armor.

The fissures they followed turned this way and that, and Jerry kept a vigilant eye along all those branching from that they followed, turning the lamp's beams down them for some sign of Professor Newsom. They saw none such, but as they penetrated deeper into the maze of fissures they heard a dull roaring from ahead, and in moments more were confronted by a wall of rushing fire across their path.

It was a terrific sheet of fiery gas rushing ceaselessly upward from a crack in the fissure's floor. Jerry and Helen hesitated, despite their heat-armor, at this barrier of flame. Then, summoning their resolution, they ran forward, leapt through the wall of roaring fire, and cleared the crevice in the floor.

The heat-armor held, and they felt not even any uncomfortable warmth as they plunged through the roaring flames. As they went on they met with other sheets and pillars of fire, rushing ceaselessly upward through cracks by which the fiery gases found vent. They pressed on through these barriers, some of them veritable storms of flame.

It seemed strange to be walking unharmed through those annihilating flames. Jerry Holt found his flash-lamp half melted and useless, but their way was lit now by the glare of the uprushing fires. The two humans in their heat-armor were penetrating deeper into the mighty volcano's interior. The maze of fire-choked fissures they followed debouched soon into large inter-connecting fire-caverns.

These cavernous spaces were almost filled by the fiery gases that roared from crevices and mingled in great masses of unextinguishable flame. Jerry and Helen moved through these fiery caverns bewilderedly, dazed by the thunder of flames all about them. Finally in the rushing fires they stopped.

"It won't do for us to get lost in these fire-caverns," said Jerry Holt, "for that's what Professor Newsom may have——"

"Jerry, look there!" cried Helen suddenly. "Those things in the fires!"

She was pointing into the fire-flooded cavern ahead of them and he stared with her, stupefied. Great dark shapes were moving through those roaring flames!

For a moment he thought them masses of shifting lava-rock, and then as they lumbered closer in the fires he saw that they were great living beasts!

Living beasts, a half-dozen of them, moving through fires that would ordinarily annihilate any unprotected life that ventured into them! Yet these were beasts and living, huge and black and barrel-like bodies with four extremely short legs! Bodies that seemed not of ordinary animal flesh but of a black, stony flesh, a flesh that was mineral-like and inorganic!

These beasts of the fires had big bulbous heads; in each were two small eye-openings covered by a glassy protective film. Below these eye-openings were great jaws in which were set enormous teeth. The fire-beasts were lumbering ponderously through the flames, over the crumbling rock of the cavern's floor.

"Beasts here in the fires!" Helen was exclaiming stupefiedly, but Jerry, suddenly aware of their peril, swept her behind him.

"Helen, back! The things look as though they were going to attack us!"

Even as he spoke, the fire-beasts, with deep, bellowing roars that reverberated loudly, were charging through the flames toward the two heat-armored humans!

Jerry had no time to think, but acted instinctively. One of the fire-beasts was in advance of the rest, and Jerry brought up his long pointed steel staff and held it level until the monster's glassy eyes and gaping jaws were directly before him. Then he thrust the steel fiercely between the creature's jaws.

The steel staff drove through its open mouth into its body. The thing fell and thrashed wildly in the fires, while Jerry jerked his weapon out of it. As he faced the other charging fire-beasts the thought hammered in his brain that even though they were impervious to fire these creatures were not unkillable.

He thrust at the nearest of the onrushing fire-beasts, and as it fell, too, the other creatures drew back, bellowing in rage.

Jerry, eyeing them tensely with Helen still behind him, hoped that they would give over the attack, but they came on again. He felt his steel tear into another of the things, but this fire-beast was only wounded, and as it shied away with a terrific bellow, it tore the steel from Jerry's grasp!

The other fire-beasts were upon him and Helen—he heard the girl scream behind him—when they stopped and turned.

Two of the beasts had suddenly fallen in mid-charge. And now Jerry and Helen saw beyond them other and different black shapes approaching through the fires.

The newcomers were a dozen or more dark, *man-like* shapes! They did not wear heat-armor, yet did not seem more affected by the terrible fires than the fire-beasts. Like the fire-beasts, their bodies seemed of dark, stony flesh impervious to heat and flame. They were of human height and had human features, but their eyes were covered by a glassy protective film. They were clad in red harnesses of woven mineral-fibers and they carried gun-like weapons of metal, which they were aiming at the fire-beasts.

As another fire-beast fell beneath the gun-weapons of these newly arrived fire-men, the other monsters lumbered off in flight.

Jerry and Helen stared at the human-shaped fire-men. Jerry had recovered his steel staff.

"Fire people!" Jerry Holt exclaimed. "People able to walk and live in these fires without armor or protection!

"Men and beasts living and fighting

down in these fiery spaces of the volcano. Helen, it's——"

"Jerry, they've seen us!" Helen Newsom cried. "They're coming toward us!"

The fire-men had glimpsed the two humans, and now the whole party was running toward them through the flames.

"They don't look friendly to me!" Jerry cried, throwing up his steel staff again to a level position. "They're——"

Before he could finish the words or even fully comprehend what was happening, the group of fire-men ahead were rushing upon him and Helen with a shout of throaty voices. Jerry had time only to raise his steel staff and thrust at the fire-men as they rushed. The steel drove into one of them and he fell. Like the fire-beasts, these creatures were not unkillable. But the rest were grasping the two struggling humans.

Jerry stabbed so fiercely with his steel at the fire-men who leapt in to clutch him that they gave back, a second of them falling. He heard Helen's muffled cry and whirled to see two fire-men grasping her. Fire-men levelled their gun-weapons at him as he sprang to Helen's aid, and jets of what seemed concentrated air tore through the flames toward Jerry.

But Jerry was at the two who held the girl. He thrust, but one of them gripped the end of his steel staff and held it. He tore with frantic strength to free the steel and then heard Helen's warning cry, spun back around in time to see one of the fire-men behind him swinging a gun-weapon over his head. Even as he saw, the blow fell, and Jerry Holt crashed into black unconsciousness.

JERRY came out of that black senselessness with a dim knowledge that some one was shaking him. He sought to move his limbs, heard an anxious voice in his ears, and then suddenly remembered the fight with the fire-men. He struggled up to a sitting position, looking dazedly about.

He was in the raging fires of the same cavern where he and Helen Newsom had met fire-beasts and fire-men. Save for two dead ones, though, no fire-men were now in sight, nor were the bodies of the fire-beasts; but a figure in close-fitting heat-armor was bending over him, had been shaking him. Jerry Holt's heart leapt as he thought it Helen, but next instant he was disillusioned as he saw the eyes behind the heat-armor's glassed eye-holes.

"Newsom!" cried Jerry. "Newsom, it's you!"

"Jerry Holt!" Newsom exclaimed. "Jerry, how did you get down here? What brought you down here?"

"Helen and I came after you," Jerry choked. "We met those fire-beasts and then the fire-men — fought, and now Helen's gone——"

"Helen! God, do you mean that the fire-men took her?"

Jerry nodded. "They must have, Newsom. They stunned me and must have left me for dead. But what have you been doing down here, Newsom? Why didn't you return to the surface?"

Newsom seemed dazed by the news of Helen's capture. "Why didn't I return to the surface? Jerry, I meant to do so in a few hours, but when I got down here in these fiery spaces and saw those strange fire-beasts and fire-folk, I forgot all else in the marvel of them.

"Jerry, I've been down here all these hours, studying those creatures from hiding. I've seen scores of those fire-beasts, small herds, in fact; and I've seen parties of those strange fire-men hunting them with their weapons, taking away the carcasses of those they killed.

"They take the carcasses down farther

into whatever fiery spaces must lie beneath, and down there must be whatever strange communities the fire folk have. There must be more than one community of them, for I saw fire-men wearing red harnesses and others in blue ones, and once saw wearers of the red and blue fighting each other.

"It's evident enough that both races of fire-men come up here to hunt the fire-beasts. I watched them for hours in these caverns, as I say, marvelling that creatures of such intelligence could exist in these awful heats and fires. When I finally became conscious of how long I had stayed I started back up—and found you lying here in my way!"

Jerry Holt had reached his feet, and stood with Newsom in the roaring flames. He clutched the other's armored arm.

"Newsom, how can these fire-men and fire-beasts exist down here in the fires? It seems it can't be real!"

"The fire folk and fire-beasts are real enough, Jerry," Newsom said. "They're a form of life we of earth's surface have never dreamed might exist, life evolved in the volcanic fires inside earth and adapted to live in them—fire folk and fire-beasts adapted to these fiery spaces inside earth as we are adapted to earth's surface.

"Their bodies are of stony mineral tissues which yet are living, a thing almost incomprehensible to us. These tissues are impervious to fire and heat, can pass unharmed through these blasting flames. I'm not sure what nutrition their strange bodies require, but I saw fire-beasts rooting up and devouring certain kinds of crumbled rock, and undoubtedly the fire folk eat the fire-beasts they hunt.

"It's evident that life in these fiery spaces has followed much the same course as on earth's surface, producing man-like beings as its most intelligent creatures. And the fire-men must have considerable intelligence and scientific power, to devise those gun-like weapons with which they hunt the fire-beasts and fight each other.

"But why have neither fire-men nor fire-beasts ever emerged onto earth's surface, through the way we came down?" cried Jerry Holt.

"Jerry, they've never gone up to earth's surface because they'd die there of cold!" Newsom declared. "Adapted as they are to these terrific heats, the hottest day of earth's surface would be icy cold to them and would kill them instantly.

"The world will be staggered to hear of this strange fiery race existing inside earth, if we can get back up to tell it. But we can't go back up without Helen! We've got to get her out of those creatures' hands!"

Newsom stopped in despair. Jerry Holt strove to collect his dazed thoughts, he and Newsom forgetting in their talk that they stood in raging flames. At their feet lay the fire-men's bodies, unconsumed.

Jerry's mind now was working. "Newsom, you say you saw parties of fire-men with fire-beast carcasses going farther down into the caverns?"

Newsom nodded. "Yes, I glimpsed them from my hiding-place. I saw one just before I started upward."

"It must have been the party Helen and I met—the one that captured her!" Jerry exclaimed. "I wasn't unconscious long!"

"It may have been," Newsom said slowly. "If they had Helen with them I couldn't have told her in her dark heat-armor from the dark fire-men, at a little distance through the fires."

"That gives me an idea!" Jerry said. "We've got to go down after those fire-men to find Helen—why not disguised as fire-men ourselves? I mean, if we put on

the red harnesses of these two dead fire-men, at a little distance we'll pass for fire-men ourselves. It'll give us a better chance of following and finding Helen!"

"It might work," Newsom said, with some hope. "We can carry these weapons of theirs, too. But we'll have to keep in the fires as much as possible for concealment. I'm with you, Jerry."

WITHOUT further words they began stripping the red harnesses of woven mineral fibers from the two dead fire-men. When they had donned these over their heat-armor, they saw that from a little distance they did indeed resemble two of the red-harnessed fire-men. The resemblance was further enhanced when they picked up the gun-weapons of the two dead fire-men.

Newsom and Jerry found these simple in design, consisting of hollow metal stock and metal barrel. The hollow stock seemed insulated against heat. There was a small catch midway along the gun instead of a trigger, and when Jerry pointed his weapon into the fires and pressed the catch, there shot from the barrel, not any projectile, but a highly concentrated jet of air that tore through the flames for more than a hundred feet.

"Why, they seem just air-guns!" Jerry exclaimed. "Newsom, how could they expect to kill any one with these?"

Newsom had been examining his own. "Jerry, they're cold-air guns!" he exclaimed. "Their hollow, insulated stocks hold very cold air in highly compressed state, and each time the catch is pressed the gun releases a concentrated jet of this cold air."

"But what good would a jet of cold air be as a weapon?" Jerry asked.

"Don't you understand?" Newsom replied. "Cold air is fatal to these fire-beasts and fire folk; adapted as they are to these terrific heats, cold air slays them as instantly as superheated air slays us of earth's surface. These guns, with their jets of cold air, must be deadly against any of the fire-beasts or fire folk."

"They'd hardly be harmful to us in our insulating heat-armor," Jerry said.

Newsom nodded. "As long as we keep our heat-armor intact the cold air couldn't harm us. Once our heat-armor was pierced we'd die instantly of the awful heat about us, anyway."

The two tucked the cold-air guns under the arms as they had seen the fire-men carry them, and then Newsom looked quickly around.

"It was in the next cavern that I saw the party of fire-men going downward—the red-harnessed ones I saw last," Newsom said.

"Lead on," Jerry told him. "The sooner we're after them the better."

NEWSOM led the way through the cavern's raging fires toward and through the aperture connecting it with the next fire-cavern.

Once in the next cavern, Newsom moved with Jerry behind him through the flames to the cavern's farther side, then stopped at a fissure that opened downward from it.

"The party of fire-men I saw were going down into that fissure," he said. "If Helen were really with them, that's our way."

"Let's get going, then," said Jerry. "If we catch up to them we'll have at least a chance of finding her. If not——"

Neither Jerry nor Newsom could have dreamed a stranger journey than this journey of theirs on the trail of the fire-men, deeper and deeper into the far-stretching spaces beneath the volcano. They passed down and down through connecting fissures and cavernous spaces,

and everywhere in fissures and caverns were sheets and jets of uprushing fire through which they must pass, lighting the way onward and beating on their ears with an unceasing roar.

They could not be certain which way had gone the fire-men they followed, but chose always the main or bigger fissure when a choice of ways was given them. Jerry led, testing the floor for crevices with his cold-air gun, hurling himself through barriers of thundering flame, keeping to the way through the confusing fires. Professor Newsom followed close on his heels.

Deeper and ever deeper they went, into such an infernal underworld as nightmare might match, a succession of dense darkness and roaring fires, with here and there pools of molten lava or red-glowing rocks that they must avoid. Their brains reeled with the weirdness of this downward journey.

More than once, in the fire-shot fissures and caverns, they heard again the deep bellowing of fire-beasts and glimpsed their huge shapes lumbering through the flames, rooting up crumbling gray rocks that they crunched in their great jaws and devoured. Jerry and Newsom held their cold-air guns tighter, and avoided the formidable beasts of the flames in their downward journey.

Jerry was rapidly coming to believe, however, that he and Newsom had taken the wrong fissure and lost the fire-men's trail.

But his doubts were suddenly dissipated when they suddenly emerged into a vast, cavernous space that seemed to their first stunned glance unlimited in extent. A great underworld space that was illuminated by a quivering, glowing light!

They stopped, staring in awe. The huge hollow space that lay before them was at least twenty miles across. Its rock walls loomed almost perpendicularly to support a rocky roof more than a mile above. Just behind Jerry and Newsom was one of the walls, the fissure from which they had emerged being a great vertical crack in that wall.

Far across the great cavern they could glimpse the opposite looming wall. But neither walls nor roof were the most astonishing feature of this weird underworld. It held a sea, one that occupied two-thirds of its area! And it was a sea of liquid lava! A glowing sea of molten rock upon whose slow-rippling surface danced changing flames, and whose quivering light illuminated the whole huge cavernous space!

Jerry Holt and Professor Newsom stared awe-struck at this lava sea. Its shore lay a half-mile down a rock slope from them, curving away around the cavern's edge. As their eyes followed the curve of its shore they saw, several miles from them along the shore, a city.

A fire-city! It was an aggregation of square stone roofless structures, some of considerable size and one overtopping all others, which were situated between the fiery ocean of the lava sea and the cavern's enclosing wall. And a fire-city it truly was, for here and there in it and around it could be seen sheets and jets of uprushing fiery gas that were like gardens and forests of living flame.

Newsom pointed suddenly to a number of little figures near the distant fire-city. There were ten or twelve of them, dark, human-shaped figures moving along the shore of the lava sea toward the city. Jerry saw with straining eyes that they carried among them the bulky bodies of three fire-beasts, and that one among them walked with arms bound. He clutched Newsom's arm.

"Newsom, they're the fire-men we've

followed!" he cried. "And the bound one is Helen!"

"They're taking her to their city," Newsom said rapidly, his eyes brilliant with excitement behind his helmet-glasses. "Why?"

"No matter why, we'll follow," Holt asserted.

"We'll have to be careful," Newsom warned. "We'll keep close to the cavern wall where there's less chance of our being seen."

THEY started along the cavern wall, in the direction of the distant city of the red-harnessed fire-men.

Jerry thought he could make out, far on the other side of the lava sea, the distant mass of a second city. Was that the city of the blue-harnessed fire-men? he wondered.

He and Newsom struggled in their encumbering heat-armor, their eyes on the group of fire-men ahead, who with their captive were now entering their city.

Jerry, even with his mind upon Helen Newsom's peril, could not conquer his amazement at the spectacle of the huge cavern and the rippling, molten sea of lava.

"It's incredible," he said as they struggled on. "Fire-beasts and fire-men—a world of fires down here with a fiery sea!"

"The lava sea," Newsom told him, "is undoubtedly the source of the volcano's lava-flows. It's probably of incalculable depth, and the molten flood must rise in times of eruption up through the caverns and fissures we've come down through.

"It can't have risen so for long," he added, "for we know the volcano has not erupted for long. Also that city of the fire folk indicates the same thing—a rise in the lava sea would destroy it. No doubt it or similar cities of the fire-men have been destroyed before, but the fire folk could escape to crevices and when the lava sea had subsided could come out and rebuild their cities."

The two were now near enough to the city of the fire folk to see that in its streets moved crowds of the dark fire-people.

They could see too that the city contained several hundred of the crudely built square roofless buildings of black stone or lava, and that it extended from the cavern wall down to the lava sea's shore.

Back against the cavern wall rose the largest building they had already noted, a roughly built but impressive cubical roofless structure.

As Jerry's gaze moved from it down to the shore of the fiery sea, he saw what his eyes could hardly credit. There were boats out on the lava ocean, and fire-men in them!

He and Professor Newsom stopped to stare at the astonishing spectacle. The boats were of good size and of familiar flat-boat design with pointed prow and stern. In each boat sat two or three fire-men, and some of the boats were so far out on the lava ocean they were mere dots on its glowing molten surface.

"Boats on a lava sea!" cried Jerry. "Newsom, we're dreaming this!"

"They must be metal boats," Newsom exclaimed. "Many kinds of metal will float on molten lava as easily as wood on water, and not be affected by the flaming liquid. The fire folk probably have some means of propelling them, too."

"It's a different world down here, all right—a fire world," Jerry said. "But let's get on—Helen's somewhere in that city."

"Our best chance of finding Helen," Newsom said, "will be to go straight into the city, keeping inside the fires. We look enough like fire-men so that we may pass undiscovered."

"Then we'd better follow the shore of the lava sea," Jerry said. "The fires are more thick there—we can keep in them and go right into the city."

They left the wall and moved down toward the shore of the molten ocean; then, keeping in the thickets of uprushing flames, moved on toward the fire-city.

As they followed the lava ocean's shore, Jerry saw that it was no mere quiescent lake of lava but was traversed by waves. These must be caused by stirrings far beneath, he knew.

And he saw what astounded him even more, that there was life in the lava sea! Strange, stony-looking fish-things jumped sluggishly out in the molten flood, and splashed back into it again! Some were of considerable size. Jerry and Newsom wondered what strange monsters the depths of the lava sea might hide. Fire-beasts and intelligent fire folk—even fish-things of a fiery sea!

They drew closer to the fire-city, always keeping in the clumps of flames, moving carefully. Soon they were at the edge of the city's mass of buildings.

Fire folk began to pass them in the flames. Jerry and Newsom held their breath inside their heat-armor, but they were not noticed by the fire folk, so like fire-men did their own dark figures, wearing red harness and carrying cold-air guns, seem in the half-concealing flames.

Jerry and Newsom breathed more easily. Now they were in a street of the fire-city, one that ran along the edge of the lava sea like the shore-drive of one of earth's seaport cities. They moved along this, still keeping inside the shelter of the fires. For there were sheets and jets of uprushing fire all along the streets of the city. The fire folk moved through them unheeding.

Jerry and Newsom could see boats moored along the edge of the city in the molten ocean. They were of metal, as Newsom had guessed, flat, strange-looking craft of the same dull metal as that of the cold-air guns. There was at the stern of each boat a cubical shield of metal that seemed to cover the propulsion-mechanism, with a single control-handle.

The two humans saw some of these boats with fire-men in them coming in from the lava sea and tying up. The boats seemed propelled by jets of air shot backward from the propulsion-mechanism, controlled by turning the control-handle to right or left. Jerry and Newsom saw that the fire-men in the boats had masses of strange, stony-looking fish such as they had seen jumping in the lava sea. Fire-fishermen on a sea of fire!

Stunned as they were, their eyes were glancing everywhere for some sign of Helen Newsom. They saw nothing indicating her whereabouts.

"We'll have to go up through the other parts of the city, Newsom," Jerry told his companion.

Newsom nodded. "But keep in the fires, for God's sake!"

THEY moved up from the shore of the lava sea into the fire-city's other streets. Through these fire-choked streets moved many others, fire-men and women, even small children, going and coming in the terrific fires along the streets as casually as humans of earth's surface go and come through sunshine.

Jerry and Newsom, moving through the fires, saw that even in some of the buildings fire-sheets rushed upward! In some they saw fire-men working with large mechanisms. Fire-men pushed wheeled metal truck-vehicles through the streets, laden with stacked metal instruments, masses of black lava-rock, and other things they could not glimpse. They passed one place where a group of fire-

men were erecting a new building, using a strange big machine into which lava-rock was fed and which poured forth the same rock now molten and liquid to fall into metal wall-molds.

Jerry thought it all queerly similar to the cities of earth's surface, this fire-city and its activities. But where in it was Helen Newsom? He could see no trace of the girl and knew that they could not wander indefinitely through the fire-choked streets without being detected by some of the fire folk about them.

Jerry was turning to Newsom to say so when a sound rang out through the fire-city, like a great gong-note. It was repeated twice, emanating from the big roofed building at the city's wall-side.

At once the activities of the fire folk in the streets were laid aside and they began to stream through the fiery avenues toward that biggest building. All around Jerry and Newsom they were moving in that direction.

"There's something going on over at that big building!" Jerry declared. "Shall we go over there too, or try searching some of these places?"

Newsom hesitated. "We'd best go with the rest, Jerry. We've not found anything here and we'll be noticed sooner staying here than if we go there with the crowd."

They started through the streets with the crowding fire folk, keeping still in the flames and avoiding close contact with their neighbors in the streets.

When they neared the big roofed building that seemed set directly against the cavern's wall, they saw that before it was a terrace on which rested a strange transparent-walled box with an attached mechanism of metal. Below this terrace in the fires gathered the crowd of fire-folk, as though to witness some accustomed spectacle.

Jerry and Newsom, standing down in the fires below the terrace with the fire people crowding all around them, were hard put to it to keep the fire folk about them from rubbing shoulders with them. Luckily the attention of all in the crowd was centered on the building and terrace.

A single gong-note now sounded, and a party emerged from the big building onto the terrace. Foremost came three fire-men who seated themselves in a bench-like seat, and after them came guards with cold-air guns, escorting five figures, all with hands bound.

Four of these were fire-men, but instead of the red harness worn by all around them, they wore blue harness. Jerry was remembering what Newsom had said about those of the red and those of the blue being different and enemy races of fire folk, when he saw the fifth figure, a slender one in black heat-armor.

"Good God, it's Helen!" Jerry exclaimed. "Newsom, we've found her at last! But what are they going to do to her?"

Newsom too was staring up with eyes brilliant with excitement. "Quiet, Jerry!" he warned. "Your voice will give us away—we've got to wait and see what they intend."

The three seated fire-men seemed rulers or leaders, giving brief commands to the guards. Two of the latter sprang forward and took places at the mechanism attached to the big transparent box, while two others began conducting one of the captive fire-men in the blue harness toward the box. The captive fought but was dragged onward.

"Newsom, that transparent box is some instrument of death—I know it!" Jerry Holt cried. "Those are captives condemned to death, and Helen with them!"

Before Newsom could answer there came a throaty cry of alarm from a fire-

man close in the fires beside Jerry, the fellow pointing excitedly toward Holt as he uttered it. "He's discovered by my voice that I'm no fire-man!" Jerry exclaimed swiftly. "Newsom—I can't get away—get away from me before they get you too——"

Before he could finish, fire-men from all sides were rushing upon him. Newsom hesitated an instant, then slipped swiftly away from Jerry as the fire-men charged upon him.

Jerry had his cold-air gun up, was pressing the catch savagely as he swung the weapon. Jets of cold air tore from it through the fires, and what fire-men they struck staggered and fell dead. The whole crowd was in turmoil, the leaders up on the terrace shouting orders. Jerry in a moment more was borne by sheer weight of numbers to the ground.

He was held, his hands bound with metal cord, then jerked to his feet again. His red harness had been torn from him, and he was thrust by guards up onto the terrace. The three in authority surveyed him briefly, it being plain enough on the fire-free terrace that he was no fire-man like themselves. They gave an order, and he was jerked over to the other prisoners, to the side of the armored figure of Helen Newsom.

"Jerry!" she was crying to him. "I thought you were dead—I saw them leave you lying there when they took me——"

"Not dead yet," panted Jerry Holt. "Helen, I was found by Newsom—we came here after you."

"Father?" she exclaimed.

"He's living, Helen! He was down in that crowd with me a moment ago, but when they discovered me I made him separate from me. Newsom's all right for the moment, but what about you—what have they done to you?"

"They've not hurt me, Jerry—but they've condemned me, and now you too, to death! My appearance puzzled them, but they took it for granted, I suppose, that I was of another race of fire folk; for they put me with these prisoners of theirs and brought us out here for what seems to be a public execution."

"Look!" Jerry interrupted. "What are they doing with that prisoner?"

THE captive fire-man in blue harness was being dragged again toward the transparent box, since the turmoil of Jerry Holt's discovery and capture was subsiding. He was thrust into the box and its door closed; then a guard at the mechanism touched a valve and there was a sound as of air rushing into the box.

The fire-man inside it began to twist and writhe as though in agony. He seemed going through frightful tortures as the hissing of air into the box continued, and in a moment more fell limp and dead. Then the box was opened, the dead captive dragged out and his body placed on one of the wheeled truck-vehicles, and another captive thrust inside.

As he too twisted in agony as the air hissed into the box Jerry understood what was happening.

"Helen, it's cold air they're releasing into that box. Cold air kills these fire folks—you saw me with the cold-air gun there—and they use it here to execute their captives publicly."

"But they're going to put us in there—the cold air won't affect us in our heat-armor," Helen said.

"No, but it may give us a chance to get away," Jerry declared. "They must take the bodies of those killed outside the city—they'd not leave them about. If we pretend to be killed by the cold air in that box and feign death afterward we'll be taken out with the bodies—a chance to get away!"

"We'll try it!" exclaimed the girl with sudden hope. "But Jerry, if they discover we're not affected—not dead——"

"They'll know we're not fire folk at all and will probably pierce open our heat-armor, which would kill us instantly," Jerry finished. "But don't think of that now, Helen."

The guards were now putting the last of the blue-harnessed captives into the box, the bodies of the three others piled upon the wheeled truck. At each death of a captive the crowds in the fires below uttered throaty shouts of triumph. Jerry leaned to Helen as the fourth captive went through his death-throes.

"Remember to pretend you're suffering agonies before you feign death in the box, Helen. Everything depends on whether we can fool them."

She nodded. Jerry cast a glance down into the crowd in search of Newsom but could not make out the scientist in the half-visible crowding black shapes in the fires. He wondered if Newsom had left the fire-city. But the guards were coming toward Helen and him. . . .

The guards grasped Jerry. They thrust him into the box with hands still bound. He showed resistance to further his deception. He was thrust into the box and as its door closed the cold air hissed in from the attached apparatus.

Jerry felt nothing, but pretended sudden agony, twisting and beating against the box's sides, writhing until at last he fell prone and lay limp. He heard the exultant shouts of the fire folk below as the door was opened and he was dragged out. His limp form was piled with the others on the truck, and Helen Newsom was pulled in turn toward the transparent death-chamber.

He dared not turn or move in the slightest as he lay feigning death, but he could hear the hiss of air into the box and then the shout of the fire folk again. Then another form, that of Helen, was dropped onto the truck beside him, and as there came the sound of the crowd below dispersing, the guards were wheeling the truck and its burden of bodies down off the terrace into the fiery streets.

Jerry, lying prone in his heat-armor with Helen limp and motionless beside him, prayed fervently that the fire folk's custom was to deposit their dead somewhere outside the fire-city. It stood to reason, he told himself, that the fire people would not leave such bodies lying around their city but would take them out of it. Once left alone outside the city, he and Helen could soon sever their bonds against sharp rocks.

His hopes ran high as, through slightly opened lids, he saw that the two guards were pushing their wheeled charge through the fire-choked streets without stopping. He lay still, unmoving, not daring after that even to open his eyes inside his heat-armor lest the movement disclose that he was still living.

He heard the throaty voices of the guards as they conversed and the rattle of the metal truck. At last it stopped. There was a movement among the bodies, and Jerry, again opening his lids slightly, saw that the guards had lifted one of the dead fire-men off the truck. He heard a dull splash.

Jerry raised his head a trifle to see. What he saw made his blood suddenly cold. The guards had taken the truck of dead down to the city's edge at the shore of the lava sea. They were tossing the bodies into the molten flood of the lava ocean.

Already the guards had thrown two of the dead fire-men in and were now lifting a third. He or Helen would be next, Jerry knew. What was he to do? If he resisted he would soon be overpowered,

bound as he was; for besides the two guards there were fire-men coming and going in the fires along the lava sea's edge. He and Helen would be taken back and there would be no mistake a second time in killing them.

Yet if he did not resist, it meant death for them both, a terrible death! With hands bound, helpless, they would be thrown into the molten lava sea to sink helplessly to death in its fiery flood!

Jerry took the desperate resolve to attack the two guards with his bound hands when they picked him up. He knew it was hopeless, but at least it was better than being tossed unresistingly to death. As the two guards came back to the truck and bent over Helen and him, he tensed for the futile struggle that must ensue when they touched them.

But there came the hissing of a cold-air gun from close by and one of the guards staggered and fell. The other guard emitted a throaty yell of alarm, but as he did so the gun hissed again and he too fell.

Out of the fires in the street near by leapt a figure in heat-armor with a cold-air gun in its grasp, running swiftly toward Jerry and Helen!

"Father!" cried Helen.

"Newsom!" yelled Jerry. "You came just in time——"

"No time now for talk, Jerry!" panted Newsom, as Jerry and Helen scrambled from the truck. "Here they come!"

Fire-men were running along the streets in answer to the slain guard's alarm. There were throaty cries across the whole fire-city.

NEWSOM swiftly loosened the bonds from the hands of Jerry and Helen. He started to run along the shore of the lava sea.

"Come on, or they'll have us in a moment!" he cried. "If we can get back up to the caverns we may win to the surface."

"Wait!" Jerry cried. "They'll get us if we go along the shore the way we came. The boats here! In one of them we can short-cut across the lava sea to the fissure that leads upward."

Newsom stared an instant, then nodded swiftly and with Jerry and Helen sprang into one of the moored metal boats. While Newsom cast loose the metal mooring-line, Jerry fumbled frantically with the control-lever of the propulsion-apparatus at the boat's stern. Fire-men in scores were running along the shore toward them. The whole city was in uproar.

Jerry twisted the control-lever frenziedly to right and left but there was no result. He heard a cry from Helen. Cold-air jets from the approaching fire-men tore about them, struck their heat-armor without effect. The fire-men were near. . . .

A cry came from Jerry. He had thrust the control-lever inward, then had turned, and with a backward hiss of released air from its propulsion-apparatus, the metal boat shot out onto the lava sea.

Jerry turned the lever as far as it would go. The flat boat skimmed at surprizing speed over the molten lava flood, and the shore receded behind them. Fire-men hastened to the other moored boats. Jerry headed their craft across the lava sea's edge toward the distant wall of the great cavern and the fissure leading upward.

"They're after us!" Newsom was shouting to him. "But we'll win clear if we can keep this speed up!"

"If the power holds out we'll keep it up," Jerry answered grimly. "Keep down, Helen."

Their boat, speeding over the low waves of the molten sea, was flinging heavy drops of lava spray about them.

Some distance behind, a dozen boats were speeding after them, filled with fire-men, but they did not seem to gain upon the fleeing craft.

Jerry, clinging to the control-lever while Newsom and Helen crouched down to keep out of the molten spray, felt as though the whole scene was one of some frenzied nightmare—the vast, glowing-lit cavern-world about them — the huge ocean of molten lava over which pursued and pursuing boats sped—the fire-city dwindling at the shore behind as they fled from it.

Fire-fish of this molten sea jumped about the fleeing boat. Moments later the boat's prow grazed against some portentous black stony living bulk swimming through the lava flood, some huge living thing of the fiery sea that dived as the boat touched it and left great ripples. The boats of the fire-men behind came remorselessly on.

Jerry kept the crack of the upward-leading fissure, in the cavern-wall ahead, directly in line with the boat's prow.

They neared that wall and fissure, approached the molten sea's shore again after having cut in a straight line across a segment of that curving shore. Jerry looked behind. The pursuing boats were no closer.

"If we make it to shore all right we ought to be able to get up to the surface before they catch us," he told Newsom.

Newsom nodded. "We'll be at the shore in a minute."

The shore, indeed, was just ahead. Jerry held the boat straight toward it and in moments it ran onto the rocks of the shore with a grating jar.

Instantly the three were out of the boat and stumbling up toward the mighty cavern's wall, and toward the great vertical crack or fissure in that wall. Jerry, helping Helen onward, was aware that Newsom moved more weakly.

As they entered the fissure, comparatively dark after the glowing glare of the great cavern-world, Jerry looked back and saw the fire-men now beaching their boats, running up after them. He heard their throaty cries faintly.

Jerry and Helen and Newsom struggled upward through fire-shot fissures and caverns. Jerry sensed that Newsom's strength was waning, for his strides were weaker as he ran with them. He took Newsom's cold-air gun.

THEY burst into a cavern of roaring flame from which the dark mouth of an upward-leading fissure opened! As they reached the fissure, Jerry now helping Newsom along, a half-score of the fire-men raced into the cavern after them. Jerry spun and the air-jets from his gun sent two of the fire-men sprawling. But the yells of the rest were loud as the three flung themselves up the fissure.

As they struggled up through the fire-choked fissures the throaty cries behind were a chorus of hell in Jerry Holt's ears. He was almost lifting Newsom along at every step, and now Helen's strength seemed going too. They could hear the bellowing of fire-beasts. They plunged through the last of the fire-sheets in the fissures, and stumbled up through darkness now.

They must be near the surface, Jerry told himself. But the fire-men were nearer behind! The three staggered on, striving upward with their last strength, and then Newsom tripped and fell, lay without strength to rise.

"Go on!" he told Jerry and Helen frantically. "I can't make it, but you can."

"We'll not!" Jerry yelled hoarsely. "If we can't get out together none of us will!"

"Jerry—here they come!" cried Helen. The half-dozen fire-men closest after them were upon them!

Jerry levelled the cold-air gun but no air-jet came from it. "Empty!" he cried. He clubbed it in his hands as with throaty yells of triumph the fire-men reached the three.

He fought them fiercely, a momentary wild, swirling combat, then was suddenly aware that instead of grasping him the fire-men were swaying and staggering, their yells of triumph changing suddenly to cries of fear! They were falling, and those fire-men below who had been hurrying up after them were retreating down into the fissures again in sudden panic!

The fire-men who a moment before had been struggling with them now lay dead around them! Jerry, too dazed still to understand, stared until Newsom's cry explained.

"We're too near the surface! They followed us up too near the surface and the colder air here has killed them!"

"Then let's get on up while we can," said Jerry thickly.

"There's no danger now," Newsom said. "They thought where we could go they could go, but those down there have seen that to come up this far means death for them—they'll not follow."

"Just the same, let's get up to the surface while we can," Helen said.

With Jerry's arm supporting Newsom a little, they staggered on up through the fissures. The darkness soon was split by a crack of light ahead and above.

It grew broader as they went up and onward, widened into the fissure's mouth. They stumbled out onto the ledge outside it into the clear sunlight and stood with Mauna Loa's mighty slope slanting below and above them.

It was minutes before Newsom and Jerry had strength enough to struggle out of their heat-armor, to help Helen from hers. But strength poured back into them as they stood in the sunlight and breathed clean air.

"We made it!" Newsom was crying. "We're safe and we've found a world down there in the volcano's depths none ever suspected, a world and people and civilization of the fires!"

"A world of nightmare!" Jerry exclaimed. "Newsom, they'll never believe when we tell of that fiery world and its fire folk."

"They'll believe when they see for themselves," Newsom declared. "We'll organize expeditions, with heat-armor and with cold-air guns for weapons, go down and explore those fiery spaces and their fire people."

Helen Newsom straightened in Jerry's arm. "When you organize your expeditions you can leave two people out from the start," she told her father.

Jerry nodded corroboration to Newsom. "Yes," he said, "you can leave out Mr. and Mrs. Jerry Holt."

The Thing From the Grave

By HAROLD WARD

"I see myself taking life with my bare hands."

A goose-flesh story of the hideous fate that befell a judge who had sentenced a murderer to death

WE HAD finished dinner and were enjoying a bottle of Judge Thompson's excellent old port in front of the big, stone fireplace in the huge library. As is often the case when one has dined well, conversation had suddenly ceased and for several minutes we sat smoking in silence, each of us occupied with his own thoughts. A deep sigh from the judge stirred me from my revery and I looked up with a start. His kindly face had taken on a drawn and haggard look.

"Tired?" I demanded.

"Not particularly," he responded. Then: "Dudley, I'll bet every penny I've got against a plugged nickel that you can't guess what I was thinking about."

"Not taken," I smiled. "It must have

been serious, though, from the look on your face."

"Serious—damned serious," he said slowly. "I was wondering how long it would take me to choke you to death and whether your dying struggles would arouse the servants."

I looked at him curiously.

"Your humor has taken a new angle tonight," I said somewhat stiffly. "You surprize me——"

"I'm going to surprize you still more," he interrupted. "I invited you here tonight, doctor, not altogether as a guest, but more particularly because of your experience as a psychiatrist. You have testified in my court a great many times; I recognize you as one of the world's greatest authorities on mental diseases. I want you to listen to me. I must talk to some one. . . ."

He stopped suddenly. Leaning forward, he peered into my face as if wondering whether or not to continue. Then, as I nodded, he went on.

"It has taken me a long time to make up my mind to take this up with you. And now that you are here I—I hardly know where to commence."

"At the beginning," I said sharply, putting on my best professional manner. "Only by knowing everything can I diagnose your case."

Again there was a long, painful silence. Thompson slowly relighted his cigar and took a sip from the glass of port at his elbow.

"You psychologists tell us that every man has a phobia—a morbid dread of something," he said finally. "Mine is the thought that eventually I shall kill somebody."

"Nonsense!" I snapped.

"It may sound like nonsense to you, but to me it's plain reality," he growled. "I was telling you the truth when I said a moment ago that I was thinking of murdering you. Murder! Murder! God in heaven, doctor, the thing is never out of my thoughts! Day by day the—call it obsession if you will—is growing on me. Within my brain two ideas are constantly at war, one urging me to throw aside these wild imaginings and be my normal self, the other telling me that I am the victim of metempsychosis—that I am no longer Joseph J. Thompson, the jurist, but Jake Lauts, the arch-killer—the man I sent to the chair a few months ago and who now is, or should be, festering in his grave. And may God have mercy on my soul, the latter thought is slowly, but surely, gaining the ascendency."

"I want you to come to my office the first thing in the morning for a thorough physical examination," I said severely. "You are overworked——"

"Bosh!" he interrupted. "No judge is overworked. And to hell with your examination tomorrow. You're going to hear me out now—while I feel in the mood. Tomorrow——" He shrugged his shoulders. "Damn it!" he continued, "I've got to talk to somebody. Imagine, if you can, my mental condition. I'm not insane; I can diagnose my own condition well enough to make that statement positively. My nights are a succession of nightmares. I see myself taking life with my bare hands. I am throttling, stabbing, clubbing, shrieking with glee at the sight of the blood flowing from my victims. By day I sit in the security of my chambers and scan the newspaper accounts of every hellish crime, fearful that I will recognize some detail which will prove to me that my fearful imaginings are something more than dreams.

"Yes—and here is the worst of it all—I, who have always been one of the most kindly of men, am gradually longing to taste crime. Fight as hard as I will, I am

constantly haunted by the desire to kill, to rend, to feel a human form grow limp, beneath my throttling fingers. I gaze upon every man who is brought before me for trial and think of him as a potential victim. I envy the executioner who, for a paltry hundred dollars, pulls the switch which sends some poor wretch to eternity. I would gladly pay for the privilege of doing the job. What a satisfaction it would be to watch the dying struggles of a man strapped in the big, black chair and know—*know*—that it was my hand that caused him to twitch and squirm and writhe as the hot current shot through his body. . . ."

He arose and took a short turn about the room, his face twisted into a look of malignant ferocity.

"Doctor, you've got to drive these hellish thoughts out of my mind!" he exclaimed. "It's awful—horrible! Will you do it? Can you do it?"

"Certainly," I responded gruffly. "Your nerves are unstrung. I will write a prescription shortly and send one of the servants to get it filled. Meanwhile, let me question you a bit. Sit down. You mentioned Jake Lauts. I remember him very well; I was one of the medical experts called in during the trial. Tell me where he fits into the case."

JUDGE THOMPSON dropped wearily into his chair again and passed a trembling hand across his brow.

"I'm beginning to wonder whether I am really myself or whether I am Jake Lauts," he said with a groan. "I have a feeling that I am possessed—possessed of a devil—the one that was in Jake Lauts before I ordered him electrocuted. There are spirits, you know," he went on earnestly, "that belong neither to heaven nor to hell; perhaps they have escaped from the latter place. Be that as it may, these spirits must, in order to prolong their existence, seize upon the body of some one else when their abiding-place is taken by death. . . ."

"Nonsense!" I snapped. "Rubbish and superstition! You have been listening to some old woman's tale."

"Call it what you like," Thompson sighed. "I sentenced Jake Lauts to death and, standing in the courtroom, he shook his fist at me and swore to high heaven that he would come back from the grave in order to be revenged. I laughed at his threats and ordered the bailiffs to drag him from my presence. Dozens of other men have made similar statements. But Jake Lauts kept his word. Oh, hear me out"—as I raised a protesting hand—"then give me your opinion when I have finished.

"A few weeks after the execution of Jake Lauts, my wife and I attended a social function at the home of a friend. A part of the evening's entertainment was a spiritualistic demonstration. I will not bore you with the details. Suffice to say that, as usual, the room was in total darkness. We listened to ghostly voices and the like when, in the midst of a long-winded speech by one of the medium's so-called 'controls', the woman suddenly uttered a wild shriek.

" 'The lights! The lights!' she screamed.

"Our host turned the switch and the room was once more bathed in light.

" 'There is an alien presence here,' she asserted. 'I am a trumpet medium; my controls never materialize. Yet something touched against me in the darkness—something that was horrible, cold and clammy — something direct from the grave. It must be that one of you is psychic and that through you the materialization has been produced. I am afraid to continue. My experience tells me that

there are many, many things in the—shall I call it *Between World?*—which are better left alone.'

"There was a general demand that she continue, for her statement had naturally aroused our curiosity. I confess, however, that I considered the whole thing only a bit of flapdoodle, put on to give us a thrill. A single glance at the woman's face told me different, however. She was genuinely frightened. She argued with us for a long time, and it was only when our host demanded that she either continue or receive no fee that she finally agreed. Again we took our places in the circle and our host again turned off the lights.

"Almost immediately a prickling sensation swept over me—a feeling of coldness and terror. It seemed as if I was alone in some vast cavern or charnel-house. I tried to shake the feeling off, but it persisted. It was followed by a sort of lethargy. Yet I realized where I was and what was going on about me and, at the same time, I was unable to move; I was numb, paralyzed. I can't describe how I felt. Only I know that I was scared; great beads of perspiration gathered on my forehead and trickled slowly down over my cheeks. I tried to call out, but my lips were sealed.

"Then out of the darkness appeared a vague cloud. It floated toward me, growing plainer and plainer until it took on the shape of Jake Lauts. He was different from what he had been in life, yet there was no mistaking him. He stopped just in front of me and crouched to spring—a vermin-gray, slouching figure, bestial, macabre. He was dead; that was plain to be seen. His face was bloodless and bloated, dotted with dark spots where decomposition had set in and covered with the mold of the grave. His baleful eyes gleamed with a greenish-yellow phosphorescence; piggish little eyes, they were, filled with demoniac fury and blood-lust.

"He crept forward, almost on all fours, his blunt fingers working convulsively, his thick lips drawn back over his gangrenous fangs, a white, frothy slaver drooling from the corners. I tried to draw back—to shriek. But as I have already said, I was paralyzed. Suddenly he launched his great body at me. His fingers closed about my throat. They were cold and clammy—the fingers of a corpse.

"Something must have given the medium the power to see—or *feel.* She screamed. God, how she screamed! Her shriek brought the others to their feet. Our host jerked the light-switch just as I crashed backward beneath the weight of the ungodly thing.

"And when the lights came on there was nothing—positively nothing—there.

"The other guests crowded around us, plying us with questions. They could get nothing out of the medium. She was in hysterics and would not talk. As for myself—well, I didn't care to be taken for a fool, so I laughed the thing off. I told them that the affair had become boresome and that I had dropped asleep in the darkness and, losing my balance, had fallen backward.

"I could not, however, laugh off the horrible stench with which the room was filled. It was the smell of decomposition and death."

JUDGE THOMPSON stopped suddenly. For a moment we sat there. I noticed that the sweat was pouring from his face and that his hand shook as he reached for the wine-glass at his elbow and drank deeply. I was frightened in spite of myself. Yet I knew that he was merely suffering from hallucinations—that his nerves were shot to pieces. He got up and paced the floor with quick, agitated

strides. I waited for him to gain control over himself.

"Again and again during the next few days I had the feeling of some alien presence close beside me," he resumed, sitting down again. "You, perhaps, understand what I mean. You know how it is when you think some one is looking at you from behind. I tried my best to throw it off, but in vain.

"Then I was taken ill. You probably remember the time, although you were not called in. For days I tossed, mumbling and shrieking, my brain filled with weird, adumbral horrors. A consultation of physicians was held. They declared themselves baffled. But eventually I grew better until I was fully recovered. . . ."

He leaned forward, his eyes blazing with excitement.

"I said that I was fully recovered," he resumed. "Physically — yes. Mentally? . . . what shall I say? Since that illness I have never had that feeling of some one being near me. Instead, there commenced to creep over me this other sensation—this desire to kill—this phobia, if you want to call it that.

"Now do you understand? It was while I was sick—my brain filled with the maggots of fever—that the metempsychosis began to take place. Then it was that the devil that had been in Jake Lauts started to take possession of me. . . ."

Again he stopped. Then:

"Dudley," he said in a slow, impressive voice, "Jake Lauts, dead though he is, is gradually gaining the control over my mentality. My subconscious mind tells me so. But why? Is it my body that he desires? I answer yes. His spirit has failed to find an abiding-place either in heaven or in hell, and to perpetuate itself it must—*must,* I say—seize upon some living person. Eventually—and the time is not far distant — I shall be Judge Thompson in name only. In reality I shall be Jake Lauts. And when that awful day finally arrives I—I shall commit some foul crime. . . . God, what a revenge that will be for him! . . ."

I leaped to my feet. "Judge Thompson," I said severely, "this has gone far enough. I can enjoy a good yarn as much as anybody, but——"

"Damn your pig-headedness!" he roared, and glared at me balefully for an instant as if tempted to leap at me. Then he dropped back against the cushions again with a little sigh.

"I didn't expect you to believe me," he resumed. "But as God is my witness, what I am telling you is the truth—or, at least, I believe it to be the truth. Now will you permit me to finish?"

I grunted assent and sank back into my seat. The man was either stark mad or else he was trying to play a gigantic hoax upon me. I knew Judge Thompson well enough to believe the latter, and as a cold-blooded, hard-headed man of science, I resented it.

"It's hell—hell, I say," he went on. "It is getting so that I measure with my mind's eye the rounded throats of little children when they climb upon my knee. I want to take them between my hands and squeeze and squeeze until they are dead. Every nerve in my body twitches when I touch the warm flesh of the women with whom I dance. . . .

"I have sent my wife away on an extended visit lest I kill her while she sleeps. The thought has been with me a great deal of late. Night after night I have lain awake fighting back the desire to creep into her room and throttle her.

"I am afraid to trust myself alone with any one. Right now my butler is standing outside the door. Why? Because I—well, I was fearful of being alone in here with you. I have issued instructions that there

must always be two of my servants on duty at one time. They think that I am frightened because of the many threats that have been made against me. God, if they only knew! . . ."

He picked up his dead cigar and relighted it. For a moment he puffed at it nervously, then laid it down again.

"Last night," he said slowly, "something happened. . . . At the beginning I told you that I was haunted by the thought that *eventually* I would commit some atrocious crime. I know—*now*—that the horrible things I have dreamed about are not dreams at all. I am a night prowler, Dudley—a slinking creature of the darkness, preying on what I may devour. I am a murderer—a fiend!"

Stepping to his desk, he picked up a copy of *The Gazette* and pointed to an article on the front page. The screaming headlines told of the murder of a young woman in an obscure part of town. Her throat had been torn, her head battered to a pulp.

"I killed that girl!" he said slowly. "I am certain of it. Yet I can not prove it. Can I go before any group of sane men and tell them that I know I killed a woman because I dreamed it? No. This morning when I woke up my hands were covered with blood. There were scratches on them. Perhaps, you will say, the blood came from the scratches. How, then, did I get the scratches? And my shoes were muddy and soiled. Some time during the night I must have gotten up and——

"Yet I have no recollection of murdering her," he ended piteously. "I can not swear that I am guilty. But I am guilty—as guilty as hell."

THEN the lights went out.

It was then that I knew the meaning of fear. Something swept over me that set every nerve to tingling. I was engulfed in terror. For an instant it seemed as if my heart stopped beating as I sat there in the dark. I heard a rasping chuckle—cold, demoniacal, cruel. Two yellow eyes gleamed at me. . . .

"Judge!" I shrieked. "Judge Thompson!"

My only answer was that throaty chuckle again. The eyes were drawing closer to me. It seemed as if I could see a form crouching to spring. I tried to move; every faculty was paralyzed. Then it was upon me—a greenish-grayish horror with slavering jaws and red-rimmed, bloodshot eyes. Its foul talons seized me by the throat. . . .

Then the lights came on. Wilkins, the butler, stood in the doorway.

"Beg your pardon, sir, but a fuse blew out," he began.

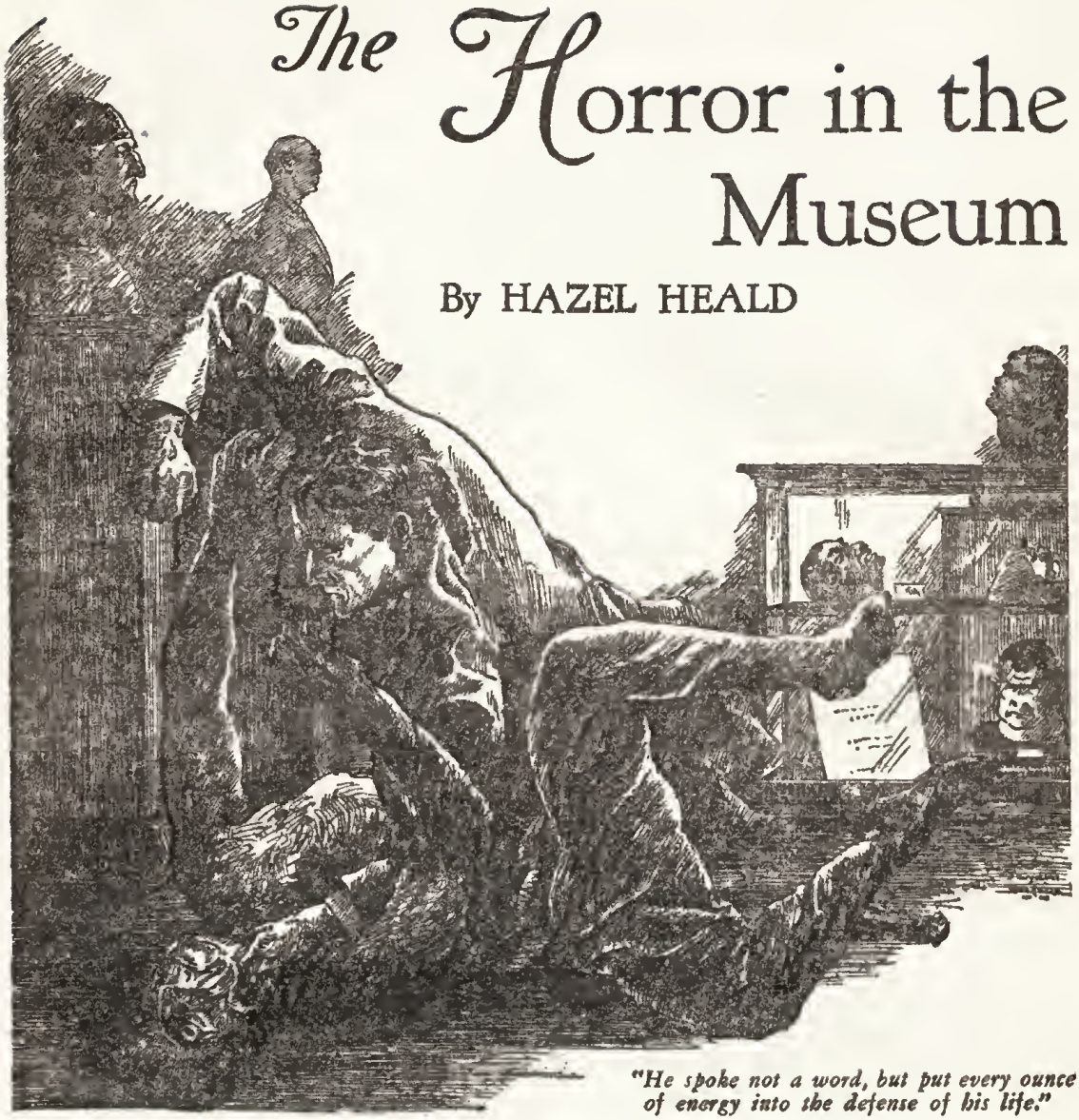
He stopped suddenly, his eyes fairly bulging from their sockets, his body stiffened, a look of horror creeping over his face. "The judge! The judge, sir!" he exclaimed.

I turned. Judge Thompson still sat where he had been seated when the lights went out. He was dead; that much was apparent. Even as I gazed, the process of dissolution was going on with terrible speed. His eyes, wide open, were sinking far into their sockets. His face was mottled. The room was filled with a horrible stench. . . .

Together, Wilkins and I ran shrieking from the room.

The Horror in the Museum

By HAZEL HEALD



"He spoke not a word, but put every ounce of energy into the defense of his life."

A shuddery tale of the elder gods, and the blasphemous monstrosity that slithered through the corridors of the waxworks museum

IT WAS languid curiosity which first brought Stephen Jones to Rogers' Museum. Some one had told him about the queer underground place in Southwark Street across the river, where waxen things so much more horrible than the worst effigies at Madame Tussaud's were shown, and he had strolled in one April day to see how disappointing he would find it. Oddly, he was not disappointed. There was something different and distinctive here, after all. Of course, the usual gory commonplaces were present—Landru, Doctor Crippen, Madame Demers, Rizzio, Lady Jane Grey, endless maimed victims of war and revolution, and monsters like Gilles de Rais and Marquis de Sade—but there were other things which had made him breathe faster and stay till the ringing of the closing bell. The man who had fashioned this collection could be no ordinary mountebank. There was imagination—even a kind of diseased genius—in some of this stuff.

Later he had learned about George Rogers. The man had been on the Tussaud staff, but some trouble had developed which led to his discharge. There were aspersions on his sanity and tales of his crazy forms of secret worship—though latterly his success with his own basement museum had dulled the edge of some criticisms while sharpening the insidious point of others. Teratology and the iconography of nightmare were his hobbies, and even he had had the prudence to screen off some of his worst effigies in a special alcove for adults only. It was this alcove which had fascinated Jones so much. There were lumpish hybrid things which only fantasy could spawn, molded with devilish skill, and colored in a horribly life-like fashion.

Some were the figures of well-known myth — gorgons, chimeras, dragons, cyclops, and all their shuddersome congeners. Others were drawn from darker and more furtively whispered cycles of subterranean legend—black, formless Tsathoggua, many-tentacled Cthulhu, proboscidian Chaugnar Faugn, and other rumored blasphemies from forbidden books like the *Necronomicon,* the *Book of Eibon,* or the *Unaussprechlichen Kulten* of von Junzt. But the worst were wholly original with Rogers, and represented shapes which no tale of antiquity had ever dared to suggest. Several were hideous parodies on forms of organic life we know, while others seemed taken from feverish dreams of other planets and other galaxies. The wilder paintings of Clark Ashton Smith might suggest a few—but nothing could suggest the effect of poignant, loathsome terror created by their great size and fiendishly cunning workmanship, and by the diabolically clever lighting conditions under which they were exhibited.

Stephen Jones, as a leisurely connoisseur of the bizarre in art, had sought out Rogers himself in the dingy office and workroom behind the vaulted museum chamber—an evil-looking crypt lighted dimly by dusty windows set slit-like and horizontal in the brick wall on a level with the ancient cobblestones of a hidden courtyard. It was here that the images were repaired—here, too, where some of them had been made. Waxen arms, legs, heads and torsos lay in grotesque array on various benches, while on high tiers of shelves matted wigs, ravenous-looking teeth, and glassy, staring eyes were indiscriminately scattered. Costumes of all sorts hung from hooks, and in one alcove were great piles of flesh-colored wax-cakes and shelves filled with paint-cans and brushes of every description. In the center of the room was a large melting-furnace used to prepare the wax for molding, its fire-box topped by a huge iron container on hinges, with a spout which permitted the pouring of melted wax with the merest touch of a finger.

Other things in the dismal crypt were less describable—isolated parts of problematical entities whose assembled forms were the phantoms of delirium. At one end was a door of heavy plank, fastened by an unusually large padlock and with a very peculiar symbol painted over it. Jones, who had once had access to the dreaded *Necronomicon,* shivered involuntarily as he recognized that symbol. This showman, he reflected, must indeed be a person of disconcertingly wide scholarship in dark and dubious fields.

Nor did the conversation of Rogers disappoint him. The man was tall, lean, and rather unkempt, with large black eyes which gazed combustively from a pallid and usually stubble-covered face. He did not resent Jones's intrusion, but seemed to welcome the chance of unburdening himself to an interested person. His voice

was of singular depth and resonance, and harbored a sort of repressed intensity bordering on the feverish. Jones did not wonder that many had thought him mad.

With every successive call—and such calls became a habit as the weeks went by—Jones had found Rogers more communicative and confidential. From the first there had been hints of strange faiths and practises on the showman's part, and later on these hints expanded into tales—despite a few odd corroborative photographs—whose extravagance was almost comic. It was some time in June, on a night when Jones had brought a bottle of good whisky and plied his host somewhat freely, that the really demented talk first appeared. Before that there had been wild enough stories—accounts of mysterious trips to Tibet, the African interior, the Arabian desert, the Amazon valley, Alaska, and certain little-known islands of the South Pacific, plus claims of having read such monstrous and half-fabulous books as the prehistoric Poakotic fragments and the Dhol chants attributed to malign and non-human Leng—but nothing in all this had been so unmistakably insane as what had cropped out that June evening under the spell of the whisky.

To be plain, Rogers began making vague boasts of having found certain things in nature that no one had found before, and of having brought back tangible evidences of such discoveries. According to his bibulous harangue, he had gone farther than any one else in interpreting the obscure and primal books he studied, and had been directed by them to certain remote places where strange survivals are hidden—survivals of eons and life-cycles earlier than mankind, and in some cases connected with other dimensions and other worlds, communication with which was frequent in the forgotten pre-human days. Jones marvelled at the fancy which could conjure up such notions, and wondered just what Rogers' mental history had been. Had his work amidst the morbid grotesqueries of Madame Tussaud's been the start of his imaginative flights, or was the tendency innate, so that his choice of an occupation was merely one of its manifestations? At any rate, the man's work was merely very closely linked with his notions. Even now there was no mistaking the trend of his blackest hints about the nightmare monstrosities in the screened-off "Adults only" alcove. Heedless of ridicule, he was trying to imply that not all of these demoniac abnormalities were artificial.

It was Jones's frank skepticism and amusement at these irresponsible claims which broke up the growing cordiality. Rogers, it was clear, took himself very seriously; for he now became morose and resentful, continuing to tolerate Jones only through a dogged urge to break down his wall of urbane and complacent incredulity. Wild tales and suggestions of rites and sacrifices to nameless elder gods continued, and now and then Rogers would lead his guest to one of the hideous blasphemies in the screened-off alcove and point out features difficult to reconcile with even the finest human craftsmanship. Jones continued his visits through sheer fascination, though he knew he had forfeited his host's regard. At times he would try to humor Rogers with pretended assent to some mad hint or assertion, but the gaunt showman was seldom to be deceived by such tactics.

The tension came to a head later in September. Jones had casually dropped into the museum one afternoon, and was wandering through the dim corridors whose horrors were now so familiar, when he heard a very peculiar sound from

the general direction of Rogers' workroom. Others heard it too, and started nervously as the echoes reverberated through the great vaulted basement. The three attendants exchanged odd glances; and one of them, a dark, taciturn, foreign-looking fellow who always served Rogers as a repairer and assistant designer, smiled in a way which seemed to puzzle his colleagues and which grated very harshly on some facet of Jones's sensibilities. It was the yelp or scream of a dog, and was such a sound as could be made only under conditions of the utmost fright and agony combined. Its stark, anguished frenzy was appalling to hear, and in this setting of grotesque abnormality it held a double hideousness. Jones remembered that no dogs were allowed in the museum.

He was about to go to the door leading into the workroom, when the dark attendant stopped him with a word and a gesture. Mr. Rogers, the man said in a soft, somewhat accented voice at once apologetic and vaguely sardonic, was out, and there were standing orders to admit no one to the workroom during his absence. As for that yelp, it was undoubtedly something out in the courtyard behind the museum. This neighborhood was full of stray mongrels, and their fights were sometimes shockingly noisy. There were no dogs in any part of the museum. But if Mr. Jones wished to see Mr. Rogers he might find him just before closing-time.

After this Jones had climbed the old stone steps to the street outside and examined the squalid neighborhood curiously. The leaning, decrepit buildings—once dwellings but now largely shops and warehouses — were very ancient indeed. Some of them were of a gabled type seeming to go back to Tudor times, and a faint miasmatic stench hung subtly about the whole region. Beside the dingy house whose basement held the museum was a low archway pierced by a dark cobbled alley, and this Jones entered in a vague wish to find the courtyard behind the workroom and settle the affair of the dog more comfortably in his mind. The courtyard was dim in the late afternoon light, hemmed in by rear walls even uglier and more intangibly menacing than the crumbling street façades of the evil old houses. Not a dog was in sight, and Jones wondered how the aftermath of such a frantic turmoil could have completely vanished so soon.

Despite the assistant's statement that no dog had been in the museum, Jones glanced nervously at the three small windows of the basement workroom—narrow, horizontal rectangles close to the grass-grown pavement, with grimy panes that stared repulsively and incuriously like the eyes of dead fish. To their left a worn flight of steps led to an opaque and heavily bolted door. Some impulse urged him to crouch low on the damp, broken cobblestones and peer in, on the chance that the thick green shades, worked by long cords that hung down to a reachable level, might not be drawn. The outer surfaces were thick with dirt, but as he rubbed them with his handkerchief he saw that there were no obscuring curtains in the way of his vision.

So shadowed was the cellar from the inside that not much could be made out, but the grotesque working paraphernalia now and then loomed up spectrally as Jones tried each of the windows in turn. It seemed evident at first that no one was within; yet when he peered through the extreme right-hand window—the one nearest the entrance alley—he saw a glow of light at the farther end of the apartment which made him pause in bewilderment. There was no reason why any light should be there. It was an inner side of the room, and he could not recall any gas

or electric fixture near that point. Another look defined the glow as a large vertical rectangle, and a thought occurred to him. It was in that direction that he had always noticed the heavy plank door with the abnormally large padlock — the door which was never opened, and above which was crudely smeared that hideous cryptic symbol from the fragmentary records of forbidden elder magic. It must be open now—and there was a light inside. All his former speculations as to where that door led, and as to what lay beyond it, were now renewed with trebly disquieting force.

JONES wandered aimlessly around the dismal locality till close to six o'clock, when he returned to the museum to make the call on Rogers. He could hardly tell why he wished so especially to see the man just then, but there must have been some subconscious misgivings about that terribly unplaceable canine scream of the afternoon, and about the glow of light in that disturbing and usually unopened inner doorway with the heavy padlock. The attendants were leaving as he arrived, and he thought that Orabona—the dark foreign-looking assistant—eyed him with something like sly, repressed amusement. He did not relish that look—even though he had seen the fellow turn it on his employer many times.

The vaulted exhibition room was ghoulish in its desertion, but he strode quickly through it and rapped at the door of the office and workroom. Response was slow in coming, though there were footsteps inside. Finally, in response to a second knock, the lock rattled, and the ancient six-panelled portal creaked reluctantly open to reveal the slouching, feverish-eyed form of George Rogers. From the first it was clear that the showman was in an unusual mood. There was a curious mixture of reluctance and actual gloating in his welcome, and his talk at once veered to extravagances of the most hideous and incredible sort.

Surviving elder gods—nameless sacrifices—the other than artificial nature of some of the alcove horrors—all the usual boasts, but uttered in a tone of peculiarly increasing confidence. Obviously, Jones reflected, the poor fellow's madness was gaining on him. From time to time Rogers would send furtive glances toward the heavy, padlocked inner door at the end of the room, or toward a piece of coarse burlap on the floor not far from it, beneath which some small object appeared to be lying. Jones grew more nervous as the moments passed, and began to feel as hesitant about mentioning the afternoon's oddities as he had formerly been anxious to do so.

Rogers' sepulchrally resonant bass almost cracked under the excitement of his fevered rambling.

"Do you remember," he shouted, "what I told you about that ruined city in Indo-China where the Tcho-Tchos lived? You had to admit I'd been there when you saw the photographs, even if you did think I made that oblong swimmer in darkness out of wax. If you'd seen it writhing in the underground pools as I did . . .

"Well, this is bigger still. I never told you about this, because I wanted to work out the later parts before making any claim. When you see the snapshots you'll know the geography couldn't have been faked, and I fancy I have another way of proving that *It* isn't any waxed concoction of mine. You've never seen it, for the experiments wouldn't let me keep It on exhibition."

The showman glanced queerly at the padlocked door.

"It all comes from that long ritual in the eighth Puahotic fragment. When I

got it figured out I saw it could have only one meaning. There were things in the north before the land of Lomar—before mankind existed—and this was one of them. It took us all the way to Alaska, and up the Nootak from Fort Morton, but the thing was there as we knew it would be. Great cyclopean ruins, acres of them. There was less left than we had hoped for, but after three million years what could one expect? And weren't the Eskimo legends all in the right direction? We couldn't get one of the beggars to go with us, and had to sledge all the way back to Nome for Americans. Orabona was no good up in that climate—it made him sullen and hateful.

"I'll tell you later how we found It. When we got the ice blasted out of the pylons of the central ruin the stairway was just as we knew it would be. Some carvings still there, and it was no trouble keeping the Yankees from following us in. Orabona shivered like a leaf—you'd never think it from the damned insolent way he struts around here. He knew enough of the Elder Lore to be properly afraid. The eternal light was gone, but our torches showed enough. We saw the bones of others who had been before us—eons ago, when the climate was warm. Some of these bones were of things you couldn't even imagine. At the third level down we found the ivory throne the fragments said so much about—and I may as well tell you it wasn't empty.

"The thing on that throne didn't move—and we knew then that It needed the nourishment of sacrifice. But we didn't want to wake It then. Better to get It to London first. Orabona and I went to the surface for the big box, but when we had packed it we couldn't get It up the three flights of steps. These steps weren't made for human beings, and their size bothered us. Anyway, It was devilish heavy. We had to have the Americans down to get It out. They weren't anxious to go into the place, but of course the worst thing was safely inside the box. We told them it was a batch of ivory carvings—archeological stuff; and after seeing the carved throne they probably believed us. It's a wonder they didn't suspect hidden treasure and demand a share. They must have told queer tales around Nome later on; though I doubt if they ever went back to those ruins, even for the ivory throne."

Rogers paused, felt around in his desk, and produced an envelope of good-sized photographic prints. Extracting one and laying it face down before him, he handed the rest to Jones. The set was certainly an odd one: ice-clad hills, dog sledges, men in furs, and vast tumbled ruins against a background of snow—ruins whose bizarre outlines and enormous stone blocks could hardly be accounted for. One flashlight view showed an incredible interior chamber with wild carvings and a curious throne whose proportion could not have been designed for a human occupant. The carvings on the gigantic masonry—high walls and peculiar vaulting overhead—were mainly symbolic, and involved both wholly unknown designs and certain hieroglyphs darkly cited in obscene legends. Over the throne loomed the same dreadful symbol which was now painted on the workroom wall above the padlocked plank door. Jones darted a nervous glance at the closed portal. Assuredly, Rogers had been to strange places and had seen strange things. Yet this mad interior picture might easily be a fraud—taken from a very clever stage setting. One must not be too credulous. But Rogers was continuing:

"Well, we shipped the box from Nome and got to London without any trouble. That was the first time we'd ever brought back anything that had a chance of com-

ing alive. I didn't put It on display, because there were more important things to do for It. It needed the nourishment of sacrifice, for It was a god. Of course I couldn't get It the sort of sacrifices which It used to have in Its day, for such things don't exist now. But there were other things which might do. The blood is the life, you know. Even the lemures and elementals that are older than the earth will come when the blood of men or beasts is offered under the right conditions."

THE expression on the narrator's face was growing very alarming and repulsive, so that Jones fidgeted involuntarily in his chair. Rogers seemed to notice his guest's nervousness, and continued with a distinctly evil smile.

"It was last year that I got It, and ever since then I've been trying rites and sacrifices. Orabona hasn't been much help, for he was always against the idea of waking It. He hates It—probably because he's afraid of what It will come to mean. He carries a pistol all the time to protect himself—fool, as if there were human protection against It! If I ever see him draw that pistol, I'll strangle him. He wanted me to kill It and make an effigy of It. But I've stuck by my plans, and I'm coming out on top in spite of all the cowards like Orabona and damned sniggering skeptics like you, Jones! I've chanted the rites and made certain sacrifices, *and last week the transition came.* The sacrifice was—received and enjoyed!"

Rogers actually licked his lips, while Jones held himself uneasily rigid. The showman paused and rose, crossing the room to the piece of burlap at which he had glanced so often. Bending down, he took hold of one corner as he spoke again.

"You've laughed enough at my work—now it's time for you to get some facts. Orabona tells me you heard a dog screaming around here this afternoon. *Do you know what that meant?*"

Jones started. For all his curiosity he would have been glad to get out without further light on the point which had so puzzled him. But Rogers was inexorable, and began to lift the square of burlap. Beneath it lay a crushed, almost shapeless mass which Jones was slow to classify. Was it a once-living thing which some agency had flattened, sucked dry of blood, punctured in a thousand places, and wrung into a limp, broken-boned heap of grotesqueness? After a moment Jones realized what it must be. It was what was left of a dog—a dog, perhaps of considerable size and whitish color. Its breed was past recognition, for distortion had come in nameless and hideous ways. Most of the hair was burned off as by some pungent acid, and the exposed, bloodless skin was riddled by innumerable circular wounds or incisions. The form of torture necessary to cause such results was past imagining.

Electrified with a pure loathing which conquered his mounting disgust, Jones sprang up with a cry.

"You damned sadist—you madman—you do a thing like this and dare to speak to a decent man!"

Rogers dropped the burlap with a malignant sneer and faced his oncoming guest. His words held an unnatural calm.

"Why, you fool, do you think *I* did this? Let us admit that the results are unbeautiful from our limited human standpoint. What of it? It is not human and does not pretend to be. To sacrifice is merely to offer. I gave the dog to *It.* What happened is Its work, not mine. It needed the nourishment of the offering, and took it in Its own way. But let me show you what It looks like."

As Jones stood hesitating, the speaker returned to his desk and took up the

photograph he had laid face down without showing. Now he extended it with a curious look. Jones took it and glanced at it in an almost mechanical way. After a moment the visitor's glance became sharper and more absorbed, for the utterly satanic force of the object depicted had an almost hypnotic effect. Certainly, Rogers had outdone himself in modelling the eldritch nightmare which the camera had caught. The thing was a work of sheer, infernal genius, and Jones wondered how the public would react when it was placed on exhibition. So hideous a thing had no right to exist—probably the mere contemplation of it, after it was done, had completed the unhinging of its maker's mind and led him to worship it with brutal sacrifices. Only a stout sanity could resist the insidious suggestion that the blasphemy was—or had once been—some morbid and exotic form of actual life.

The thing in the picture squatted or was balanced on what appeared to be a clever reproduction of the monstrously carved throne in the other curious photograph. To describe it with any ordinary vocabulary would be impossible, for nothing even roughly corresponding to it has ever come within the imagination of sane mankind. It represented something meant perhaps to be roughly connected with the vertebrates of this planet—though one could not be too sure of that. Its bulk was cyclopean, for even squatted it towered to almost twice the height of Orabona, who was shown beside it. Looking sharply, one might trace its approximations toward the bodily features of the higher vertebrates.

There was an almost globular torso, with six long, sinuous limbs terminating in crab-like claws. From the upper end a subsidiary globe bulged forward bubble-like; its triangle of three staring, fishy eyes, its foot-long and evidently flexible proboscis, and a distended lateral system analogous to gills, suggesting that it was a head. Most of the body was covered with what at first appeared to be fur, but which on closer examination proved to be a dense growth of dark, slender tentacles or sucking filaments, each tipped with a mouth suggesting the head of an asp. On the head and below the proboscis the tentacles tended to be longer and thicker, and marked with spiral stripes—suggesting the traditional serpent-locks of Medusa. To say that such a thing could have an *expression* seems paradoxical; yet Jones felt that that triangle of bulging fish-eyes and that obliquely poised proboscis all bespoke a blend of hate, greed, and sheer cruelty incomprehensible to mankind because mixed with other emotions not of the world or this solar system. Into this bestial abnormality, he reflected, Rogers must have poured at once all his malignant insanity and all his uncanny sculptural genius. The thing was incredible—and yet the photograph proved that it existed.

Rogers interrupted his reveries.

"Well—what do you think of It? Now do you wonder what crushed the dog and sucked it dry with a million mouths? It needed nourishment—and It will need more. It is a god, and I am the first priest of Its latter-day hierarchy. Iä! Shub-Niggurath! The Goat with a Thousand Young!"

Jones lowered the photograph in disgust and pity.

"See here, Rogers, this won't do. There are limits, you know. It's a great piece of work, and all that, but it isn't good for you. Better not see it any more—let Orabona break it up, and try to forget about it. And let me tear this beastly picture up, too."

With a snarl, Rogers snatched the photograph and returned it to the desk.

"Idiot—you—and you still think It's

all a fraud! You still think I made It, and you still think my figures are nothing but lifeless wax! Why, damn you, you're a worse clod than a wax image yourself! But I've got proof this time, and you're going to know! Not just now, for It is resting after the sacrifice—but later. Oh, yes—you will not doubt the power of It then."

As Rogers glanced toward the padlocked inner door Jones retrieved his hat and stick from a near-by bench.

"Very well, Rogers, let it be later. I must be going now, but I'll call around tomorrow afternoon. Think my advice over and see if it doesn't sound sensible. Ask Orabona what he thinks, too."

ROGERS actually bared his teeth in wild-beast fashion.

"Must be going now, eh? Afraid, after all! Afraid, for all your bold talk! You say the effigies are only wax, and yet you run away when I begin to prove that they aren't. You're like the fellows who take my standing bet that they daren't spend the night in the museum—they come boldly enough, but after an hour they shriek and hammer to get out! Want me to ask Orabona, eh? You two—always against me! You want to break down the coming earthly reign of It!"

Jones preserved his calm.

"No, Rogers—there's nobody against you. And I'm not afraid of your figures, either, much as I admire your skill. But we're both a bit nervous tonight, and I fancy some rest will do us good."

Again Rogers checked his guest's departure.

"Not afraid, eh?—then why are you so anxious to go? Look here—do you or don't you dare to stay alone here in the dark? What's your hurry if you don't believe in It?"

Some new idea seemed to have struck Rogers, and Jones eyed him closely.

"Why, I've no special hurry—but what would be gained by my staying here alone? What would *it* prove? My only objection is that it isn't very comfortable for sleeping. What good would it do either of us?"

This time it was Jones who was struck with an idea. He continued in a tone of conciliation.

"See here, Rogers—I've just asked you what it would prove if I stayed, when we both know. It would prove that your effigies are just effigies, and that you oughtn't to let your imagination go the way it's been going lately. Suppose I *do* stay. If I stick it out till morning, will you agree to take a new view of things—go on a vacation for three months or so and let Orabona destroy that new thing of yours? Come, now—isn't that fair?"

The expression on the showman's face was hard to read. It was obvious that he was thinking quickly, and that of sundry conflicting emotions, malign triumph was getting the upper hand. His voice held a choking quality as he replied.

"Fair enough! *If you do stick it out,* I'll take your advice. But stick you must. We'll go out for dinner and come back. I'll lock you in the display room and go home. In the morning I'll come down ahead of Orabona — he comes half an hour before the rest—and see how you are. But don't try it unless you are *very* sure of your skepticism. Others have backed out—you have that chance. And I suppose a pounding on the outer door would always bring a constable. You may not like it so well after a while—you'll be in the same building, though not in the same room with It."

As they left the rear door into the dingy courtyard, Rogers took with him the piece of burlap—weighted with a gruesome burden. Near the center of the court was

a manhole, whose cover the showman lifted quietly, and with a shuddersome suggestion of familiarity. Burlap and all, the burden went down to the oblivion of a cloacal labyrinth. Jones shuddered, and almost shrank from the gaunt figure at his side as they emerged into the street.

By unspoken mutual consent, they did not dine together, but agreed to meet in front of the museum at eleven.

Jones hailed a cab, and breathed more freely when he had crossed Waterloo Bridge and was approaching the brilliantly lighted Strand. He dined at a quiet café, and subsequently went to his home in Portland Place to bathe and get a few things. Idly he wondered what Rogers was doing. He had heard that the man had a vast, dismal house in the Walworth Road, full of obscure and forbidden books, occult paraphernalia, and wax images which he did not choose to place on exhibition. Orabona, he understood, lived in separate quarters in the same house.

At eleven Jones found Rogers waiting by the basement door in Southwark Street. Their words were few, but each seemed taut with a menacing tension. They agreed that the vaulted exhibition room alone should form the scene of the vigil, and Rogers did not insist that the watcher sit in the special adult alcove of supreme horrors. The showman, having extinguished all the lights with switches in the workroom, locked the door of that crypt with one of the keys on his crowded ring. Without shaking hands he passed out the street door, locked it after him, and stamped up the worn steps to the sidewalk outside. As his tread receded, Jones realized that the long, tedious vigil had commenced.

2

LATER, in the utter blackness of the great arched cellar, Jones cursed the childish *naïveté* which had brought him there. For the first half-hour he had kept flashing on his pocket-light at intervals, but now just sitting in the dark on one of the visitors' benches had become a more nerve-racking thing. Every time the beam shot out it lighted up some morbid, grotesque object—a guillotine, a nameless hybrid monster, a pasty-bearded face crafty with evil, a body with red torrents streaming from a severed throat. Jones knew that no sinister reality was attached to these things, but after that first half-hour he preferred not to see them.

Why he had bothered to humor that madman he could scarcely imagine. It would have been much simpler merely to have let him alone, or to have called in a mental specialist. Probably, he reflected, it was the fellow-feeling of one artist for another. There was so much genius in Rogers that he deserved every possible chance to be helped quietly out of his growing mania. Any man who could imagine and construct the incredibly lifelike things that he had produced was surely not far from actual greatness. He had the fancy of a Sime or a Doré joined to the minute, scientific craftsmanship of a Blatschka. Indeed, he had done for the world of nightmare what the Blatschkas with their marvelously accurate plant models of finely wrought and colored glass had done for the world of botany.

At midnight the strokes of a distant clock filtered through the darkness, and Jones felt cheered by the message from a still-surviving outside world. The vaulted museum chamber was like a tomb—ghastly in its utter solitude. Even a mouse would be cheering company; yet Rogers had once boasted that—for "certain reasons," as he said—no mice or even insects ever came near the place. That was very curious, yet it seemed to be true. The deadness and silence were virtually complete. If only something would make a

sound! He shuffled his feet, and the echoes came spectrally out of the absolute stillness. He coughed, but there was something mocking in the staccato reverberations. He could not, he vowed, begin talking to himself. That meant nervous disintegration. Time seemed to pass with abnormal and disconcerting slowness. He could have sworn that hours had elapsed since he last flashed the light on his watch, yet here was only the stroke of midnight.

He wished that his senses were not so preternaturally keen. Something in the darkness and stillness seemed to have sharpened them, so that they responded to faint intimations hardly strong enough to be called true impressions. His ears seemed at times to catch a faint, elusive susurrus which could not *quite* be identified with the nocturnal hum of the squalid streets outside, and he thought of vague, irrelevant things like the music of the spheres and the unknown, inaccessible life of alien dimensions pressing on our own. Rogers often speculated about such things.

The floating specks of light in his blackness-drowned eyes seemed inclined to take on curious symmetries of pattern and motion. He had often wondered about those strange rays from the unplumbed abyss which scintillate before us in the absence of all earthly illumination, but he had never known any that behaved just as these were behaving. They lacked the restful aimlessness of ordinary light-specks—suggesting some will and purpose remote from any terrestrial conception.

Then there was that suggestion of odd stirrings. Nothing was open, yet in spite of the general draftlessness Jones felt that the air was not uniformly quiet. There were intangible variations in pressure—not quite decided enough to suggest the loathsome pawings of unseen elementals. It was abnormally chilly, too. He did not like any of this. The air tasted salty, as if it were mixed with the brine of dark subterrene waters, and there was a bare hint of some odor of ineffable mustiness. In the daytime he had never noticed that the waxen figures had an odor. Even now that half-received hint was not the way wax figures ought to smell. It was more like the faint smell of specimens in a natural-history museum. Curious, in view of Rogers' claims that his figures were not all artificial—indeed, it was probably that claim which made one's imagination conjure up the olfactory suspicion. One must guard against excesses of the imagination—had not such things driven poor Rogers mad?

But the utter loneliness of this place was frightful. Even the distant chimes seemed to come from across cosmic gulfs. It made Jones think of that insane picture which Rogers had showed him—the wildly carved chamber with the cryptic throne which the fellow had claimed was part of a three-million-year-old ruin in the shunned and inaccessible solitudes of the Arctic. Perhaps Rogers had been to Alaska, but that picture was certainly nothing but stage scenery. It couldn't normally be otherwise, with all that carving and those terrible symbols. And that monstrous shape supposed to have been found on that throne—what a flight of diseased fancy! Jones wondered just how far he actually was from the insane masterpiece in wax—probably it was kept behind that heavy, padlocked plank door leading somewhere out of the workroom. But it would never do to brood about a waxen image. Was not the present room full of such things, some of them scarcely less horrible than the dreadful "IT"? And beyond a thin canvas screen on the left was the "Adults only" alcove with its nameless phantoms of delirium.

The proximity of the numberless waxen shapes began to get on Jones's nerves more and more as the quarter-hours wore on. He knew the museum so well that he could not get rid of their usual images even in the total darkness. Indeed, the darkness had the effect of adding to the remembered images certain very disturbing imaginative overtones. The guillotine seemed to creak, and the bearded face of Landru—slayer of his fifty wives—twisted itself into expressions of monstrous menace. From the severed throat of Madame Demers a hideous bubbling sound seemed to emanate, while the headless, legless victim of a trunk murder tried to edge closer and closer on its gory stumps. Jones began shutting his eyes to see if that would dim the images, but found it was useless. Besides, when he shut his eyes the strange, purposeful patterns of light-specks became more disturbingly pronounced.

Then suddenly he began trying to keep the hideous images he had formerly been trying to banish. He tried to keep them because they were giving place to still more hideous ones. In spite of himself his memory began reconstructing the utterly non-human blasphemies that lurked in the obscurer corners, and these lumpish hybrid growths oozed and wriggled toward him as though hunting him down in a circle. Black Tsathoggua molded itself from a toad-like gargoyle to a long, sinuous line with hundreds of rudimentary feet, and a lean, rubbery night-gaunt spread its wings as if to advance and smother the watcher. Jones braced himself to keep from screaming. He knew he was reverting to the traditional terrors of his childhood, and resolved to use his adult reason to keep the phantoms at bay. It helped a bit, he found, to flash the light again. Frightful as were the images it showed, these were not as bad as what his fancy called out of the utter blackness.

But there were drawbacks. Even in the light of his torch he could not help suspecting a slight, furtive trembling on the part of the canvas partition screening off the terrible "Adults only" alcove. He knew what lay beyond, and shivered. Imagination called up the shocking form of fabulous Yog-Sothoth—only a congeries of iridescent globes, yet stupendous in its malign suggestiveness. What was this accursed mass slowly floating toward him and bumping on the partition that stood in the way? A small bulge in the canvas far to the right suggested the sharp horn of Gnoph-keh, the hairy myth-thing of the Greenland ice, that walked sometimes on two legs, sometimes on four, and sometimes on six. To get this stuff out of his head Jones walked boldly toward the hellish alcove with torch burning steadily. Of course, none of his fears was true. Yet were not the long, facial tentacles of great Cthulhu actually swaying, slowly and insidiously? He knew they were flexible, but he had not realized that the draft caused by his advance was enough to set them in motion.

RETURNING to his former seat outside the alcove, he shut his eyes and let the symmetrical light-specks do their worst. The distant clock boomed a single stroke. Could it be only one? He flashed the light on his watch and saw that it was precisely that hour. It would be hard indeed waiting for morning. Rogers would be down at about eight o'clock, ahead of even Orabona. It would be light outside in the main basement long before that, but none of it could penetrate here. All the windows in this basement had been bricked up but the three small ones facing the court. A pretty bad wait, all told.

His ears were getting most of the hal-

lucinations now—for he could swear he heard stealthy, plodding footsteps in the workroom beyond the closed and locked door. He had no business thinking of that unexhibited horror which Rogers called "It." The thing was a contamination—it had driven its maker mad, and now even its picture was calling up imaginative terrors. It could not be in the workroom—it was very obviously beyond that padlocked door of heavy planking. Those steps were certainly pure imagination.

Then he thought he heard the key turn in the workroom door. Flashing on his torch, he saw nothing but the ancient six-panelled portal in its proper position. Again he tried darkness and closed eyes, but there followed a harrowing illusion of creaking—not the guillotine this time, but the slow, furtive opening of the workroom door. He would not scream. Once he screamed, he would be lost. There was a sort of padding or shuffling audible now, and it was slowly advancing toward him. He must retain command of himself. Had he not done so when the nameless brain-shapes tried to close in on him? The shuffling crept nearer, and his resolution failed. He did not scream but merely gulped out a challenge.

"Who goes there? Who are you? What do you want?"

There was no answer, but the shuffling kept on. Jones did not know which he feared most to do—turn on his flashlight or stay in the dark while the thing crept upon him. This thing was different, he felt profoundly, from the other terrors of the evening. His fingers and throat worked spasmodically. Silence was impossible, and the suspense of utter blackness was beginning to be the most intolerable of all conditions. Again he cried out hysterically—"Halt! Who goes there?"—as he switched on the revealing beams of his torch. Then, paralyzed by what he saw, he dropped the flashlight and screamed—not once but many times.

Shuffling toward him in the darkness was the gigantic, blasphemous form of a black thing not wholly ape and not wholly insect. Its hide hung loosely upon its frame, and its rugose, dead-eyed rudiment of a head swayed drunkenly from side to side. Its forepaws were extended, with talons spread wide, and its whole body was taut with murderous malignity despite its utter lack of facial expression. After the screams and the final coming of darkness it leaped, and in a moment had Jones pinned to the floor. There was no struggle, for the watcher had fainted.

Jones's fainting spell could not have lasted more than a moment, for the nameless thing was apishly dragging him through the darkness when he began recovering consciousness. What started him fully awake were the sounds which the thing was making—or rather, the voice with which it was making them. That voice was human, and it was familiar. Only one living being could be behind the hoarse, feverish accents which were chanting to an unknown horror.

"Iä! Iä!" it was howling. "I am coming, O Rhan-Tegoth, coming with the nourishment. You have waited long and fed ill, but now you shall have what was promised. That and more, for instead of Orabona it will be one of high degree who had doubted you. You shall crush and drain him, with all his doubts, and grow strong thereby. And ever after among men he shall be shown as a monument to your glory. Rhan-Tegoth, infinite and invincible, I am your slave and high-priest. You are hungry, and I provide. I read the sign and have led you forth. I shall feed you with blood, and you shall feed me with power. Iä! Shub-Niggurath! The Goat with a Thousand Young!"

In an instant all the terrors of the night dropped from Jones like a discarded cloak. He was again master of his mind, for he knew the very earthly and material peril he had to deal with. This was no monster of fable, but a dangerous madman. It was Rogers, dressed in some nightmare covering of his own insane designing, and about to make a frightful sacrifice to the devil-god he had fashioned out of wax. Clearly, he must have entered the workroom from the rear courtyard, donned his disguise, and then advanced to seize his neatly-trapped and fear-broken victim. His strength was prodigious, and if he was to be thwarted, one must act quickly. Counting on the madman's confidence in his unconsciousness he determined to take him by surprize, while his grasp was relatively lax. The feel of a threshold told him he was crossing into the pitch-black workroom.

With the strength of mortal fear Jones made a sudden spring from the half-recumbent posture in which he was being dragged. For an instant he was free of the astonished maniac's hands, and in another instant a lucky lunge in the dark had put his own hands at his captor's weirdly concealed throat. Simultaneously Rogers gripped him again, and without further preliminaries the two were locked in a desperate struggle of life and death. Jones's athletic training, without doubt, was his sole salvation; for his mad assailant, freed from every inhibition of fair play, decency, or even self-preservation, was an engine of savage destruction as formidable as a wolf or panther.

Guttural cries sometimes punctured the hideous tussle in the dark. Blood spurted, clothing ripped, and Jones at last felt the actual throat of the maniac, shorn of its spectral mask. He spoke not a word, but put every ounce of energy into the defense of his life. Rogers kicked, gouged, butted, bit, clawed, and spat—yet found strength to yelp out actual sentences at times. Most of his speech was in a ritualistic jargon full of references to "It" or "Rhan-Tegoth," and to Jones's overwrought nerves it seemed as if the cries echoed from an infinite distance of demoniac snortings and bayings. Toward the last they were rolling on the floor, overturning benches or striking against the walls and the brick foundations of the central melting-furnace. Up to the very end Jones could not be certain of saving himself, but chance finally intervened in his favor. A jab of his knee against Rogers' chest produced a general relaxation, and a moment later he knew he had won.

Though hardly able to hold himself up, Jones rose and stumbled about the walls seeking the light-switch—for his flashlight was gone, together with most of his clothing. As he lurched along he dragged his limp opponent with him, fearing a sudden attack when the madman came to. Finding the switch-box, he fumbled till he had the right handle. Then, as the wildly disordered workroom burst into sudden radiance, he set about binding Rogers with such cords and belts as he could easily find. The fellow's disguise—or what was left of it—seemed to be made of a puzzlingly queer sort of leather. For some reason it made Jones's flesh crawl to touch it, and there seemed to be an alien, rusty odor about it. In the normal clothes beneath it was Rogers' key-ring, and this the exhausted victor seized as his final passport to freedom. The shades at the small, slit-like windows were all securely drawn, and he let them remain so.

Washing off the blood of battle at a convenient sink, Jones donned the most ordinary-looking and least ill-fitting clothes he could find on the costume

hooks. Testing the door to the courtyard, he found it fastened with a spring-lock which did not require a key from the inside. He kept the key-ring, however, to admit him on his return with aid —for plainly, the thing to do was to call in an alienist. There was no telephone in the museum, but it would not take long to find an all-night restaurant or chemist's shop where one could be had. He had almost opened the door to go when a torrent of hideous abuse from across the room told him that Rogers—whose visible injuries were confined to a long, deep scratch down the left cheek—had regained consciousness.

"Fool! Spawn of Noth-Yidik and effluvium of K'thun! Son of the dogs that howl in the maelstrom of Azathoth! You would have been sacred and immortal, and now you are betraying It and Its priest! Beware—for It is hungry! It would have been Orabona—that damned treacherous dog ready to turn against me and It—but I gave you the first honor instead. Now you must both beware, for It is not gentle without Its priest.

"Iä! Iä! Vengeance is at hand! Do you know how you would have been immortal? Look at the furnace! There is a fire ready to light, and there is wax in the kettle. I would have done with you as I have done with other once living forms. Hei! You, who have vowed all my effigies are waxen, would have become a waxen effigy yourself! The furnace was all ready! When It had had its fill, and you were like that dog I showed you, I would have made your flattened, punctured fragments immortal! Wax would have done it. Haven't you said I'm a great artist? Wax in every pore—wax over every square inch of you—Iä! Iä! And ever after the world would have looked at your mangled carcass and wondered how I ever imagined and made such a thing! Hei! And Orabona would have come next, and others after him—and thus would my waxen family have grown!

"Dog—do you still think I *made* all my effigies? Why not say *preserved?* You know by this time the strange places I've been to, and the strange things I've brought back. Coward—you could never face the dimensional shambler whose hide I put on to scare you—the mere sight of it alive, or even the full-fledged thought of it, would kill you instantly with fright! Iä! Iä! It waits hungry for the blood that is the life!"

Rogers, propped against the wall, swayed to and fro in his bonds.

"See here, Jones—if I let you go will you let me go? It must be taken care of by Its high priest. Orabona will be enough to keep It alive—and when he is finished I will make his fragments immortal in wax for the world to see. It could have been you, but you have rejected the honor. I won't bother you again. Let me go, and I will share with you the power that It will bring me. Iä! Iä! Great is Rhan-Tegoth! Let me go! Let me go! It is starving down there beyond that door, and if It dies the Old Ones can never come back. Hei! Hei! Let me go!"

Jones merely shook his head, though the hideousness of the showman's imaginings revolted him. Rogers, now staring wildly at the padlocked plank door, thumped his head again and again against the brick wall and kicked with his tightly bound ankles. Jones was afraid he would injure himself, and advanced to bind him more firmly to some stationary object. Writhing, Rogers edged away from him and set up a series of frenetic ululations whose utter, monstrous unhumanness was appalling, and whose sheer volume was almost incredible. It seemed impossible that any human throat

could produce noises so loud and piercing, and Jones felt that if this continued there would be no need to telephone for aid. It could not be long before a constable would investigate, even granting that there were no listening neighbors in this deserted warehouse district.

"Wza-y'ei! Wza-y'ei!" howled the madman. *"Y'kaa haa bho—ii, Rhan-Tegoth—Cthulhu fthagn—Ei! Ei! Ei! Ei!—Rhan-Tegoth. Rhan-Tegoth, Rhan-Tegoth!"*

The tautly trussed creature, who had started squirming his way across the littered floor, now reached the padlocked plank door and commenced knocking his head thunderously against it. Jones dreaded the task of binding him further, and wished he were not so exhausted from the previous struggle. This violent aftermath was getting hideously on his nerves, and he began to feel a return of the nameless qualms he had felt in the dark. Everything about Rogers and his museum was so hellishly morbid and suggestive of black vistas beyond life! It was loathsome to think of the waxen masterpiece of abnormal genius which must at this very moment be lurking close at hand in the blackness beyond the heavy, padlocked door.

And now something happened which sent an additional chill down Jones's spine, and caused every hair—even the tiny growth on the backs of his hands—to bristle with a vague fright beyond classification. Rogers had suddenly stopped screaming and beating his head against the stout plank door, and was straining up to a sitting posture, head cocked on one side as if listening intently for something. All at once a smile of devilish triumph overspread his face, and he began speaking intelligibly again—this time in a hoarse whisper contrasting oddly with his former stentorian howling.

"Listen, fool! Listen hard! *It* has heard me, and is coming. Can't you hear It splashing out of Its tank down there at the end of the runway? I dug it deep, because there was nothing too good for It. It is amphibious, you know—you saw the gills in the picture. It came to the earth from lead-gray Yuggoth, where the cities are under the warm deep sea. It can't stand up in there—too tall—has to sit or crouch. Let me get my keys—we must let It out and kneel down before It. Then we will go out and find a dog or cat—or perhaps a drunken man—to give It the nourishment It needs."

IT WAS not what the madman said, but the way he said it, that disorganized Jones so badly. The utter, insane confidence and sincerity in that crazed whisper were damnably contagious. Imagination, with such a stimulus, could find an active menace in the devilish wax figure that lurked unseen just beyond the heavy planking. Eyeing the door in unholy fascination, Jones noticed that it bore several distinct cracks, though no marks of violent treatment were visible on this side. He wondered how large a room or closet lay behind it, and how the waxen figure was arranged. The maniac's idea of a tank and runway was as clever as all his other imaginings.

Then, in one terrible instant, Jones completely lost the power to draw a breath. The leather belt he had seized for Rogers' further strapping fell from his limp hands, and a spasm of shivering convulsed him from head to foot. He might have known the place would drive him mad as it had driven Rogers—and now he *was* mad. He was mad, for he now harbored hallucinations more weird than any which had assailed him earlier that night. The madman was bidding him hear the splashing of a mythical monster in a tank

beyond the door—and now, God help him, *he did hear it!*

Rogers saw the spasm of horror reach Jones's face and transform it to a staring mask of fear. He cackled.

"At last, fool, you believe! At last you know! You hear It and It comes! Get me my keys, fool—we must do homage and serve It!"

But Jones was past paying attention to any human words, mad or sane. Phobic paralysis held him immobile and half conscious, with wild images racing fantasmagorically through his helpless imagination. There *was* a splashing. There *was* a padding or shuffling, as of great wet paws on a solid surface. Something *was* approaching. Into his nostrils, from the cracks in that nightmare plank door, poured a noisome animal stench like and yet unlike that of the mammal cages at the zoölogical gardens in Regent's Park.

He did not know now whether Rogers was talking or not. Everything real had faded away, and he was a statue obsessed with dreams and hallucinations so unnatural that they became almost objective and remote from him. He thought he heard a sniffing or snorting from the unknown gulf beyond the door, and when a sudden baying, trumpeting noise assailed his ears he could not feel sure that it came from the tightly bound maniac whose image swam uncertainly in his shaken vision. The photograph of that accursed, unseen wax thing persisted in floating through his consciousness. Such a thing had no right to exist. Had it not driven him mad?

Even as he reflected, a fresh evidence of madness beset him. Something, he thought, was fumbling with the latch of the heavy padlocked door. It was patting and pawing and pushing at the planks. There was a thudding on the stout wood, which grew louder and louder. The stench was horrible. And now the assault on that door from the inside was a malign, determined pounding like the strokes of a battering-ram. There was an ominous cracking—a splintering—a welling fetor—a falling plank—*a black paw ending in a crab-like claw. . . .*

"Help! Help! God help me! . . . Aaaaaaa! . . ."

With intense effort Jones is today able to recall a sudden bursting of his fear-paralysis into the liberation of frenzied automatic flight. What he evidently did must have paralleled curiously the wild, plunging flights of maddest nightmares; for he seems to have leaped across the disordered crypt at almost a single bound, yanked open the outside door, which closed and locked itself after him with a clatter, sprung up the worn stone steps three at a time, and raced frantically and aimlessly out of that dank cobblestoned court and through the squalid streets of Southwark.

Here the memory ends. Jones does not know how he got home, and there is no evidence of his having hired a cab. Probably he raced all the way by blind instinct —over Waterloo Bridge, along the Strand and Charing Cross, and up Haymarket and Regent Street to his own neighborhood. He still had on the queer melange of museum costumes when he grew conscious enough to call the doctor.

A week later the nerve specialists allowed him to leave his bed and walk in the open air.

But he had not told the specialists much. Over his whole experience hung a pall of madness and nightmare, and he felt that silence was the only course. When he was up, he scanned intently all the papers which had accumulated since that hideous night, but found no reference to anything queer at the museum. How much, after all, had been reality?

Where did reality end and morbid dream begin? Had his mind gone wholly to pieces in that dark exhibition chamber, and had the whole fight with Rogers been a fantasm of fever? It would help to put him on his feet if he could settle some of these maddening points. He *must* have seen that damnable photograph of the wax image called "It", for no brain but Rogers' could ever have conceived such a blasphemy.

IT WAS a fortnight before he dared to enter Southwark Street again. He went in the middle of the morning, when there was the greatest amount of sane, wholesome activity around the ancient, crumbling shops and warehouses. The museum's sign was still there, and as he approached he saw that the place was open. The gateman nodded in pleasant recognition as he summoned up the courage to enter, and in the vaulted chamber below an attendant touched his cap cheerfully. Perhaps everything had been a dream. Would he dare to knock at the door of the workroom and look for Rogers?

Then Orabona advanced to greet him. His dark, sleek face was a trifle sardonic, but Jones felt that he was not unfriendly. He spoke with a trace of accent.

"Good morning, Mr. Jones. It is some time since we have seen you here. Did you wish Mr. Rogers? I'm sorry, but he is away. He had word of business in America, and had to go. Yes, it was very sudden. I am in charge now—here, and at the house. I try to maintain Mr. Rogers' high standard—till he is back."

The foreigner smiled—perhaps from affability alone. Jones scarcely knew how to reply, but managed to mumble out a few inquiries about the day after his last visit. Orabona seemed greatly amused by the questions, and took considerable care in framing his replies.

"Oh, yes, Mr. Jones—the 28th of last month. I remember it for many reasons. In the morning—before Mr. Rogers got here, you understand—I found the workroom in quite a mess. There was a great deal of—cleaning up—to do. There had been—late work, you see. Important new specimen given its secondary baking process. I took complete charge when I came.

"It was a hard specimen to prepare—but of course Mr. Rogers has taught me a great deal. He is, as you know, a very great artist. When he came he helped me complete the specimen—helped very materially, I assure you—but he left soon without even greeting the men. As I tell you, he was called away suddenly. There were important chemical reactions involved. They made loud noises—in fact, some teamsters in that court outside fancy they heard several pistol shots — very amusing idea!

"As for the new specimen—that matter is very unfortunate. It is a great masterpiece—designed and made, you understand, by Mr. Rogers. He will see about it when he gets back."

Again Orabona smiled.

"The police, you know. We put it on display a week ago, and there were two or three faintings. One poor fellow had an epileptic fit in front of it. You see, it is a trifle—stronger—than the rest. Larger, for one thing. Of course, it was in the adult alcove. The next day a couple of men from Scotland Yard looked it over and said it was too morbid to be shown. Said we'd have to remove it. It was a tremendous shame—such a masterpiece of art—but I didn't feel justified in appealing to the courts in Mr. Rogers' absence. He would not like so much publicity with the police now—but when he gets back—when he gets back——"

For some reason or other Jones felt a

mounting tide of uneasiness and repulsion. But Orabona was continuing.

"You are a connoisseur, Mr. Jones. I am sure I violate no law in offering you a private view. It may be—subject, of course, to Mr. Rogers' wishes—that we shall destroy the specimen some day—but that would be a crime."

Jones had a powerful impulse to refuse the sight and flee precipitately, but Orabona was leading him forward by the arm with an artist's enthusiasm. The adult alcove, crowded with nameless horrors, held no visitors. In the farther corner a large niche had been curtained off, and to this the smiling assistant advanced.

"You must know, Mr. Jones, that the title of this specimen is 'The sacrifice to Rhan-Tegoth.' "

Jones started violently, but Orabona appeared not to notice.

"The shapeless, colossal god is a feature in certain obscure legends which Mr. Rogers has studied. All nonsense, of course, as you've so often assured Mr. Rogers. It is supposed to have come from outer space, and to have lived in the Arctic three million years ago. It treated its sacrifices rather peculiarly and horribly, as you shall see. Mr. Rogers had made it fiendishly life-like—even to the face of the victim."

Now trembling violently, Jones clung to the brass railing in front of the curtained niche. He almost reached out to stop Orabona when he saw the curtain beginning to swing aside, but some conflicting impulse held him back. The foreigner smiled triumphantly.

"Behold!"

JONES reeled in spite of his grip on the railing.

"God!—great God!"

Fully ten feet high despite a shambling, crouching attitude expressive of infinite cosmic malignancy, a monstrosity of unbelievable horror was shown starting forward from a cyclopean ivory throne covered with grotesque carvings. In the central pair of its six legs it bore a crushed, flattened, distorted, bloodless thing, riddled with a million punctures, and in places seared as with some pungent acid. Only the mangled head of the victim, lolling upside down at one side, revealed that it represented something once human.

The monster itself needed no title for one who had seen a certain hellish photograph. That damnable print had been all too faithful; yet it could not carry the full horror which lay in the gigantic actuality. The globular torso—the bubble-like suggestion of a head—the three fishy eyes—the foot-long proboscis—the bulging gills—the monstrous capillation of asp-like suckers—the six sinuous limbs with their black paws and crab-like claws—God! the familiarity of that black paw ending in a crab-like claw! . . .

Orabona's smile was utterly damnable. Jones choked, and stared at the hideous exhibit with a mounting fascination which perplexed and disturbed him. What half-revealed horror was holding and forcing him to look longer and search out details? This had driven Rogers mad . . . Rogers, supreme artist . . . said they weren't artificial. . . .

Then he localized the thing that held him. It was the crushed waxen victim's lolling head, and something that it implied. This head was not entirely devoid of a face, and that face was familiar. It was like the mad face of poor Rogers. Jones peered closer, hardly knowing why he was driven to do so. Wasn't it natural for a mad egotist to mold his own features into his masterpiece? Was there anything more that subconscious vision had seized on and suppressed in sheer terror?

The wax of the mangled face had been handled with boundless dexterity. Those punctures—how perfectly they reproduced the myriad wounds somehow inflicted on that poor dog! But there was something more. On the left cheek one could trace an irregularity which seemed outside the general scheme—as if the sculptor had sought to cover up a defect of his first modelling. The more Jones looked at it, the more mysteriously it horrified him—and then, suddenly, he remembered a circumstance which brought his horror to a head. That night of hideousness—the tussle—the bound madman —*and the long, deep scratch down the left cheek of the actual living Rogers.* . . .

Jones, releasing his desperate clutch on the railing, sank in a total faint.

Orabona continued to smile.

Golden Blood

By JACK WILLIAMSON

A tale of weird adventures in the hidden land of Arabia, and a golden folk that ride upon a golden-yellow tiger and worship a golden snake

The Story Thus Far

DYNAMITING their schooner behind them upon the south coast of Arabia, a little band of desperate adventurers struck out into the hostile mystery of the Rub' Al Khali, cruelest and least-known desert of the earth. Their leaders were Price Durand, wealthy, world-weary American soldier of fortune, Jacob Garth, enigmatic Englishman, and Joao de Castro, unsavory Macanese.

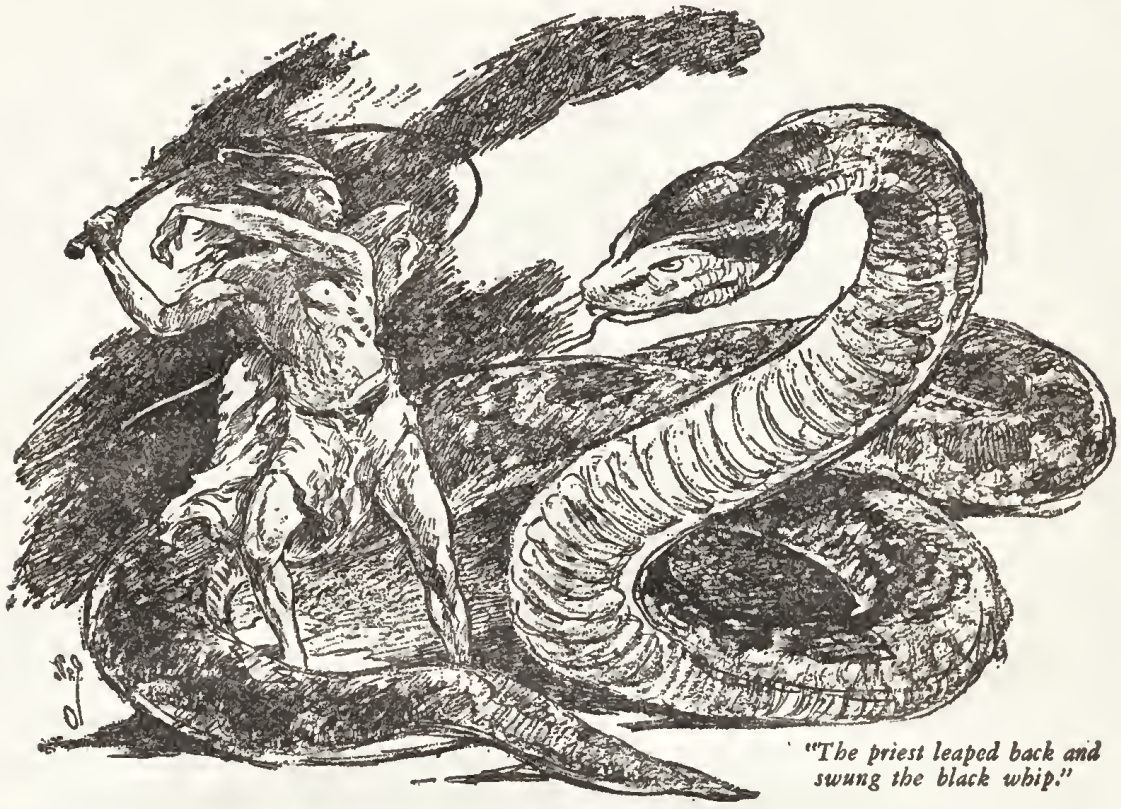
Equipped with an army tank, machine-guns, and mountain artillery, and acccompanied by the sheikh Fouad el Akmet and his renegade Bedouins, they are raiding the forbidden "golden land," which is guarded by the uncanny scientific powers of its weird rulers, the "golden folk"—a man, an exotic woman, a huge, domesticated tiger, and a gigantic snake, all four of which appear amazingly to be of eternal yellow metal, yet immortally alive.

Price Durand fell immediately in love with Aysa, a strange, lovely fugitive of the desert, whom he rescued from de Castro. When she was carried off by Malikar, the golden man, Price set out at once to recover her liberty.

He had armed himself with battle-ax, chain-mail, and shield of strangely tempered gold that he found in an ancient tomb, and he discovered that the Beni Anz, the Arabs of the lost oasis, thought him the reincarnation of their long-dead hero, Iru, to whom the golden armor had belonged.

The natives joined the invaders in an attack upon the mountain in which the golden folk dwelt, where Aysa had been taken. The attempt was defeated by the astounding scientific instrumentalities of the yellow beings—invisible rays of deadly cold, and the dread, hypnotic eyes of the golden serpent which appeared in an

This story began in WEIRD TALES for April



"The priest leaped back and swung the black whip."

inexplicable, mirage-like phenomenon. Price, recovering consciousness on the deserted field of battle, has just been attacked by a member of the cult of the golden snake.

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17. *The Slave of the Serpent*

AS PRICE DURAND stumbled to his feet, the world tilted and spun beneath him. His head drummed with pain. He reeled, and fought to keep his balance, while the stony *wadi* floor, strewn with the dead, whirled around him.

The black, basaltic mass of *Hajar Jehannum,* its gold-and-marble crown sullen in the red sunset, was first on one hand, then on the other. A wave of blackness rose about him, receded. Then the rocking desert steadied.

For a moment Price lost his attacker. Then he saw the Arab again, limping fiercely forward, whirling the *yataghan.* One leg half dragging, he came with a series of bounding hops. Half his face was a scarlet, grinning smear; in his eyes was the lust of the killer.

Price fought to master his dizziness, and staggered backward to gain time. The heavy golden ax lay on the ground behind him, but he had neither time to reach it, nor strength, at the moment, to wield it.

He stumbled on the rough lava, swayed, regaining his balance with difficulty. But a measure of his strength was returning.

In a flash the snake-man was upon him, silent, breathing with quick, hot gasps like a struggling animal, driven by savage, fanatic hate. The double-curved *yataghan* swung up, and Price darted forward beneath it, one hand rushing for the Arab's sword-arm.

The mad rush of the wounded man flung them together. Despite Price's guarding arm, the yellow blade came

against his side, rasping upon the linked golden mail he wore. Then his arms were around the snake-man, and they toppled together to the stony ground.

With demoniac energy the Arab tried to tear himself free, to use his wicked blade. Price clung desperately to his hold, biting his lip to keep back dizziness.

Suffering only from concussion and exhaustion, his muscles stiffened from his long period of unconsciousness, Price was steadily recovering his strength with activity. And the snake-man, having lost much blood, animated merely by blind, mad hatred, rapidly collapsed.

His struggles weakened, and suddenly he relaxed in Price's arms, unconscious. The wound in his thigh was bleeding, opened again by his struggles.

Appropriating the *yataghan,* Price moved a little away and stood, breathing hard, warily watching the snake-man.

"Mr. Durand?" Price started as the interrogative voice spoke unexpectedly behind him. He whirled, to see the tall, lank Kansan, Sam Sorrows, staggering up behind him, arms laden.

"Why, Sam!" he ejaculated.

"Thought it must be you, Mr. Durand, in that golden coat. I didn't know there was anybody else alive around here."

"I didn't either, Sam. But there were three of us."

"Three?"

Price pointed to the unconscious Arab.

"Tie him up," the Kansan said, "and come on over to the tank. I've some loot here, for supper." He nodded at the bundles in his arms.

Price bound the snake-man's wrists and ankles with *kafiyehs* taken from the dead Beni Anz warriors, roughly bandaged his bleeding thigh-wound, which was shallow and not serious, and followed Sam Sorrows to the side of the tank, where the old man was unloading his burden—small sacks of dried dates, coarse flour, and dried, powdered camel-flesh; and a full water-skin.

"Found these up in the trenches." He nodded across the *wadi.*

Squatting by the gray metal bulk looming in the dusk, they ate and drank.

"The mirrors got you, in the tank?" Price said after a time.

"Yes. Mawson was with me. The limey. He's dead. I was down driving. Guess I was better protected. But I must have been out quite a while.

"I was pretty sick when I came to. Cold as hell, shivering all over. And Mawson there, already stiff. I started to crawl out in the sunshine.

"I got my head out the manhole, and saw a lot of Arabs around the tank. Everything was quiet. All were looking up in the mirage, at that damned snake. The thing was swaying back and forth. Had them all charmed. I didn't more than glance at it, believe me!

"Then I saw the old tiger, standing there, big as an elephant, with the saddle on him. And a yellow man, down in front of him, stabbing those fellows that were looking in the mirage.

"Then you went at the yellow feller, and he knocked you out with a rock.

"About that time, I guess, some of the others were coming out of that damned spell. I heard the cannon go off a time or two, and shrapnel screaming over. The yellow man ran for his tiger again, and the Arabs broke and beat it. About that time I went under again."

"Jacob Garth?" demanded Price. "He got away?"

"I think so. Looked like they were packing up the guns when I went out again. Guess they'd had enough."

"What are you planning to do?"

"I was feeling pretty much knocked out when I came around again, an hour or so

ago." The old man laughed a little. "Went out to see about rations. Thought I'd sleep aboard tonight, and try running back to the oasis in the morning. That okay with you? We ought to make it by noon."

Price merely nodded. He was thinking.

RETURNING to his captive an hour later, Price found the snake-man conscious again. After a moment's effort against his bonds, he lay quiet, glaring up at Price with hate-filled eyes.

"Who are you?" Price asked, in the archaic Arabic of the Beni Anz.

He did not answer, but the stubborn movement of his head, in the moonlight, told Price that he had understood.

Price returned to the tank, where Sam Sorrows was tinkering with his motor in anticipation of an early start, and brought back a canteen half full of water. He sloshed it noisily beside the man and repeated the question.

After half an hour, the Arab moved, and a voice spoke from the red ruin of his face:

"I am Kreor, a slave of the snake, under Malikar, priest of the snake."

And he whimpered for the water.

"No," Price told him. "You must tell me more, and promise to help me, if you would drink again."

"I am sworn to the snake," the man hissed. "And you are Iru, the ancient enemy of the snake and of Malikar. The eyes of the snake will seek me out and slay me, if I betray it."

"I'll see you are *dakhile* [protected]," Price assured him. "Forget the snake, if you would drink, and serve me."

A long time the Arab was silent, staring scornfully up into the moon-swept sky. Price felt a surge of pity for him. He was near abandonment of his plan, when the snake-man whispered.

"So be it. I renounce the snake, and the service of Malikar under the snake. I am your slave, Iru. And *dakhile?*"

"*Dakhile,*" Price assured him again. But the voice of the Arab had a ring of cunning duplicity that he did not like. He wished that the moonlight were brighter, so that he could see the man's face.

"Now give me water, Lord Iru."

Price thrust back his feelings again.

"First you must prove yourself. Answer me this question: Where is the girl named Aysa, whom Malikar brought from Anz?"

The snake-man hesitated, spoke reluctantly: "Aysa sleeps in the mists of gold, in the serpent's lair."

"What's that? Where is the serpent's lair?"

"Under the mountain. In the temple above the abyss of the mists of gold."

"Asleep, you say. What does that mean?" Panic edged his voice. "You don't mean she's dead?"

"No. She sleeps the long sleep of the golden vapor. Malikar honors her. She becomes one of the golden folk."

"Better explain this a little," Price said, menacingly. "Tell a straight story, if you want to drink again. What's this about golden mist?"

Again the Arab hesitated, glaring at him with crafty eyes in which hate was not wholly dead. Price sloshed the canteen; the other yielded.

"In the caverns beneath the mountain rises the vapor of gold, the breath of life. They who breathe it sleep. And sleeping, they become golden, as Malikar is golden, and deathless."

"Aysa, then, is being turned into gold?" Price inquired, incredulous.

"Yes. Soon her blood will be golden.

When she wakes she will be priestess of the snake. And Vekyra indeed is wroth to know that Malikar has tired of *her.*"

"Vekyra?" Price queried. "Who's she?"

"She is the old priestess of the snake. A woman of gold. Priestess—and Malikar's mistress."

"She's the one we saw in the mirage, over the mountain."

"In the sky? Yes. She is mistress also of the shadow. Vekyra has power of her own. Malikar will not easily be rid of her."

Price did not trust the man. Truth was hardly to be expected from a bound, helpless prisoner, who had been at one's throat an hour before. Moreover, thinly veiled hatred and scorn crept again and again into his voice. But, obviously, the Arab did not want to die. Some aid, some true information might be got from him. It would be a game of wits between them.

Was Aysa actually being turned into another monster of gold, by some diabolical chemical? It might easily be a fantastic lie on the snake-man's part. But the tale had a certain grim plausibility that edged Price's nerves with alarm.

"Do you know any way," Price demanded, "that we could get secretly into the mountain? To where Aysa is? Is that tunnel always guarded?"

Kreor lay silent again; he trembled.

"Answer me!" Price demanded. "Tell me if you can lead me to where the girl is?"

"The wrath of the snake, and Malikar," the Arab muttered.

"Remember, you are *dakhile.*"

"But I am wounded," the snake-man protested. "I could never reach the mountain."

"Your wounds aren't serious," Price assured him. "You can walk tomorrow, though perhaps a bit painfully. Speak."

"You could never get past the gates. They are always locked, and guarded."

"Is there another way?"

Again the man hesitated, and squirmed on the ground.

"Another way there is, Lord Iru. But perilous indeed."

"What is it?"

"High on the north wall of the mountain is a crevice. It leads into a great cave. From the cave is a way into the passages that lead down into the golden mist. But great is the peril, Iru. The climb is not easy; above the place of the snake are guards."

"We are going there," Price told him levelly, "as soon as you can walk. And unlucky it will be for you if you haven't told the truth."

He let the man drink. Bringing food from the tank, he loosened his hands, so that he could eat, and then bound him again.

PRICE and Sam Sorrows slept and watched by turns that night. As Price sat, leaning against the tank through the long hours of his watch, with the keen desert air about him and the cool stars looking down, he thought a great deal about the course of his adventures in this lost world, about what he should do on the morrow.

In the morning he could ride back to El Yerim in the tank, and the adventure would be over. The Beni Anz, he was certain, would not be willing to fight again under his leadership; old Yarmud would be remembering that he had denied being Iru. And he could hardly join Jacob Garth's party again, Joao de Castro hating him as he did.

If he turned back, there would be nothing to do save procure a camel or two, and strike out for civilization. He could never solve the weird riddles that had con-

fronted him: the mystery of the mirage, of the golden folk. Infinitely worse, he would never see Aysa again.

On the other hand, he could remain with Kreor until the man recovered, and assault the mountain alone. It was a desperate plan. The Arab obviously hated him, would certainly betray him if opportunity presented. And opportunity was almost certain to appear.

The chance that he should ever leave the mountain alive appeared extremely slight. None the less, Price never really hesitated. The decision was inevitable.

"Back at camp by noon," lanky old Sam Sorrows predicted genially, as they breakfasted in the dawn.

"I'm not going with you," Price told him.

"What!"

"I'm going to try for the mountain on my own. Going to make that bird in the blue clothes guide me in. We'll hide around here until he can walk."

"But, Mr. Durand," the old man cried, "I—I don't like to see you try it, sir. I wouldn't trust that fellow. He's a—a snake!"

"I don't trust him. But he's the only shot."

Sam Sorrows stared at him, grinned and rose and shook his hand.

"Luck, Mr. Durand. A crazy thing to do, sir. But you might make it. I'll leave you the water-skin, and the grub. And you might find something more up in the trenches."

Half an hour later the tank went lumbering back toward the oasis. Fastening a halter-rope about his prisoner's neck, Price loosed his ankles and conducted him to a hiding-place among the tumbled masses of lava half a mile down the *wadi*. Kreor limped and grumbled, but he could walk.

Fastening him again, Price returned and searched the abandoned battlefield for food and water, finding all he could carry.

For two days Price kept the Arab bound, nursing his wounds with painful care. On the late afternoon of the second day, when Price was sleeping, the man worked loose his bonds.

Disturbed by some obscure warning of danger, perhaps some faint sound of the snake-man's footsteps or his breathing, Price looked up to see Kreor standing above him, a jagged mass of lava raised in both hands.

18. Frost of Gold

SNATCHING at the ancient battle-ax, which he kept always beside him, Price rolled over, away from the boulder in whose shadow he had been lying. The stone came crashing down where his head had been.

With a single gliding movement, Price was on his feet, swinging up the ax. The Arab made to leap forward, then, realizing his helplessness against the ax, stopped and folded his arms and stood staring at Price with mad hatred in his eyes.

Resolutely, Price met his eyes, motionless.

"Slay me, Iru," the Arab muttered. "Strike, that I may be gathered into the abyss of the snake."

"Nothing doing. But tonight you are going to take me to Aysa. If you are able to murder me you are able to walk. We have plenty of moonlight. If you try any tricks it will be time enough to split your head."

The man assented with an apparent meekness that Price found disturbing.

"Very well, Iru. Since the gods awakened you, I shall not attempt to betray you again."

Price knotted the halter-rope about the man's neck, to preclude any attempt at

flight. They finished the remaining water and food, and then set off across the lava-fields, toward the basaltic mass of the mountain, looming dark in the moonlight.

It was five miles directly to the mountain; perhaps eight or nine by the route they took around to the north cliffs. Price held the rope, forced his guide to walk in front. The man limped somewhat, and it was past midnight when they reached the precipice.

The moon was low; it was dark in the shadow of the mountain. It would be impossible, Kreor said, to make the climb in darkness. They lay down to rest on bare lava. The Arab breathed loudly, and seemed to sleep, while Price kept his grasp on the ax, and fought slumber.

He held the rope tight. Toward dawn it loosened; he knew Kreor was creeping upon him, and jerked the rope. The Arab sprawled on the rock beside him, protesting that he had risen merely to stretch his muscles.

With the first light of day they started inching a perilous way up a narrow chimney between basalt columns. The snake-man went first, Price following, the rope tied around his waist so that he could use both hands.

Half an hour of difficult climbing found them three hundred feet up the face of an almost vertical cliff. Kreor, above, gained a narrow edge where he could stand with hands free, and began a furious attempt to untie the knot at his throat.

Cunningly, he had chosen a moment when Price required all his fingers and toes to cling to the rock. It was a desperate race, with life for the stake; the rope untied, Kreor could readily push Price to a fall of several hundred feet.

Price drew himself up with reckless haste. The Arab loosened the first knot; but Price, in anticipation of something of the kind, had tied several.

At last, trembling and panting from his effort, Price reached a crevice where he could free a hand. He seized the rope, jerked on it, almost precipitating the snake-man from the ledge.

"Lead on," Price commanded. "And keep the rope tight."

Snarling with baffled hate, the Arab wriggled crabwise into a narrow crack above the ledge. Following him, but keeping the rope taut, Price reached the ledge, and slipped through the crevice into a tiny, gloomy cavern.

Kreor led the way from one damp, black chamber into another. Light of day was swiftly lost; the darkness became abysmal. Walls and roof and floor were rugged, uneven stone. Sometimes the passages were difficult to push through. Twice they had to crawl for a distance upon hands and knees.

Again and again Price warned his guide to keep the rope tight. He kept asking the man whispered questions, so that the answers would reveal his whereabouts.

They came at last into a larger cavern. Price could not estimate its size in the utter darkness, but the faint sounds of their movements came whispering back to straining ears as if from the walls of a vast chamber.

Price counted two hundred and sixty paces, as the Arab, at the end of the stretched rope, led him through mystic darkness. He was attempting to remember distances and direction of turns, so that if he indeed found Aysa, he could bring her safely out.

"Here we enter the passage, Iru," Kreor said.

"Will there be men near?"

"I think not. These passages are remote."

"Come back this way."

Price tugged at the rope, led the man back into the cavern. Kreor uttered a howling scream.

"Silence!" Price hissed. "I'm not going to kill you. Lie down!"

He struck a match to see that the man had obeyed. Then he gagged him, with a handkerchief in his mouth and a *kafiyeh* tied around his head.

"Get up," he ordered. "And lead on to Aysa. I'll turn you loose if I get out with her."

WITH sullen reluctance, Kreor led the way from the rugged cavern to a smooth-floored, narrow tunnel. Cool damp air flowed outward through it; it was, Price supposed, intended for ventilation.

A hundred and eighty paces, and the snake-man turned to the left. They entered a wider passage, still completely dark. With a sure step the Arab led the way down it.

Green light glowed suddenly on a black wall before them; shadows danced in it, magnified, fantastic.

With a jerk of the rope, Price stopped his guide.

"What's that?" he demanded. Then, realizing that Kreor could not reply: "Let's get out of sight. Quick!"

The man stood still. Price was helpless. He had no idea which way to seek safety. And any struggle to make the Arab do his bidding would alarm whoever was approaching.

Three men in hooded robes of blue entered the dark hall, fifty yards ahead, from an intersecting passage. Two carried long, yellow-bladed pikes; the third, a torch flaring with a queer, vivid green flame.

Kreor made a futile attempt to scream through his gag. Price jerked savagely on the rope, and fondled the helve of his ax.

The three paused in the tunnel, the torch-bearer speaking. The two pike-men laughed a little, as if at some idle jest. And then the three started on in the opposite direction.

The green light, flickering on walls and floor and roof, framed them. Dark figures in a little square of green. The square grew small. Then the light was gone; the passage had turned.

"Lead on," Price whispered. "And don't try again to give the alarm."

Again they were advancing in the darkness. The Arab seemed to require no light. Price kept the rope tight, counted paces. Kreor turned again to the left, into a passage that sloped sharply downward and curved smoothly to the left.

The slope, Price estimated, was one foot in four. By counting his paces, he could roughly calculate the amount of actual descent.

When he first became aware of the yellow light, they had descended eight hundred yards along the inclined passage. That meant that the spiral tunnel had carried them some six hundred feet downward, and perhaps three hundred feet below the level of the surrounding plain.

A vague, golden radiance, at first almost imperceptible. As they descended through the silent passage, the Arab leading sullenly at the end of his rope, it became denser, became a yellow fog of tiny, xanthic atoms, dancing endlessly.

He could see the walls of the passage, now, black basalt of the old volcano's core, smoothly chiseled, the tool marks almost undistinguishable. The tunnel was perhaps eight feet wide, somewhat higher, curving downward in a great spiral.

They were, by Price's estimate, two hundred feet lower in the yellow-lit pas-

sage, when they passed the end of a horizontal tunnel. When they were only a few yards beyond, Price heard voices from below. A man's and a woman's. Sharp, excited, angry.

"Come back," he snarled to Kreor.

He made the Arab enter the horizontal way. It was the same size as the other. Lucent, glistening yellow mist filled it with shadowless, xanthic radiance.

Golden mist. The phrase throbbed suddenly in Price's brain. The snake-man had told him that Aysa slept, deep in the mountain, in golden vapor that was changing her to living metal. Was this weird light his golden mist? Was his fantastic story true?

As Price followed the sullen Arab along the tunnel, he noticed an extraordinary thing about its walls. They were covered with yellow frost. Over the smoothly hewn, jet-black basalt was a rime of glittering crystals, a delicate tracery of golden flakes. Even the floor was dusted with it. Golden frost!

It was amazing. The gleaming crystals, he knew, must have been deposited from the yellow mist. That meant that the mist was some volatile compound of actual, metallic gold, formed, probably, in the natural laboratory of the volcanic fissures beneath the mountain.

Price roughly understood the process of petrification, in which every minutest cell and tissue of an animal may be perfectly replaced with mineral, to endure as geologic records for a million years. It was easy enough to see how such a process might turn an animal—or a human being—into gold.

But could it take place without destroying life?

Obviously not, if the tissues were replaced with pure gold. But this yellow vapor was not pure gold. To exist in the form of vapor at such temperatures, it must be roughly as volatile as water.

Water is the basis of life, of all protoplasmic compounds. Was this yellow mist a compound of gold, distilled in the vast natural retort of the volcano, that could replace the water in the body, without upsetting any chemical balance? The idea was astonishing, but not impossible.

Busy with this conjecture, Price had almost forgotten the gagged man at the end of his rope. And suddenly he discovered that the rope was slack in his hands. He had come out of the tunnel, upon a narrow, stone-railed balcony. Beyond and below was sheer space, gold-misted.

From beside the tunnel's entrance, the snake-man leapt upon him with silent ferocity.

19. For the Mastery of the Serpent

IT WAS sheer instinct for Price to drop the end of the rope tied to the Arab's neck, as he leapt back before that unexpected attack, and swung up the great ax to defend himself. And Kreor must have been expecting something of the kind, for he turned suddenly from the suicidal charge and bolted up the gold-frosted passage, coiling the rope as he ran.

Price sprang into instant pursuit, but the snake-man's limp seemed miraculously cured. He dashed back along the passage, gaining steadily, and disappeared where it gave into the spiral way.

Reaching the sloping tunnel only a few moments later, Price peered up and down through dancing golden mists. The Arab had vanished, soundlessly.

Cursing his carelessness in allowing Kreor to escape, Price could not help a certain admiration for his late prisoner. To be sure, the Arab was the acolyte of the insidious Malikar, the branded adher-

ent of an evil snake-cult; he had tried to murder Price at every opportunity. It was his very determination and ruthless enterprise that had won him Price's regard as a worthy opponent.

While Price knew the man would hasten to spread an alarm, he could not be wholly sorry to see him escape.

For a moment Price stood at the end of the passage, uncertain whether to return to the balcony where Kreor had escaped, or to go on down the slanting way. Curiosity drew him back to the balcony; it was a strange and wonderful sight he had glimpsed from it in the brief second before the Arab's flight and his own pursuit.

The balcony was twenty feet wide and twice as long, with a low stone railing. Beyond the railing was a Cyclopean space, a circular room, fully four hundred feet in diameter, hewn in the living rock. The roof was a vast, unbroken dome, yellow-crusted, like the walls, with frost of gold.

That colossal, rock-hewn room was filled with sparkling yellow mist. The immensity and strangeness of it awed Price. Almost timidly he crept to the edge of the high gallery and looked over the railing.

The floor was hundreds of feet below. Frosted, like the walls, with a glitter of yellow crystals, it filled a great half-circle, opposite him. The side of the amazing room directly below the gallery had no floor. The gold-rimed rock ended in a ragged line. Below was cavernous space, a far-flung void filled with xanthic mist. Mile upon awesome mile—or so it seemed—it fell beneath him, golden-green with depth upon illimitable depth.

The circular room was hewn in the basalt, above the great cave. And half the room had only that cave for a floor. A colossal temple it was, above the natural laboratory in whose volcanic crucibles was born the puzzling golden vapor.

Leaning over the gold-frosted stone parapet, Price saw the bridge, a narrow span of black stone, flung across that sheer, golden-green abyss. From the wall, directly under his gallery, it leapt across to meet the ragged edge of the floor, near the center of the vast room. Incredibly narrow, it was little more than a black line from his point of view.

The room was like a theater. The half a floor was the stage. The abyss that the narrow bridge spanned was the orchestra pit—with the bottom fallen out. The high balcony upon which Price stood was a lone box.

PRICE was still looking over the railing when the actors came upon that stage, to perform a weird and amazing drama.

Side by side they strode from the square opening of a rock-hewn passage, out upon the yellow-crusted floor. Malikar and Vekyra. So far below they looked like puppets.

Malikar, the golden man whom Price had twice fought. Thick-bodied, yellow-bearded, robed in crimson and wearing a red skull-cap. Coiled in one great hand was a thick, long whip.

Price had not seen Vekyra before, save in those extraordinary projections upon the sky. Her exotic beauty, wild and passionate, was almost startling. Slim, yellow-limbed, her body was cased in green. Red-golden hair was bound with a wide black band. Lids of oblique, tawny-green eyes were darkened; lips and cheeks and fingers reddened.

The two walked a little apart, and they seemed to be quarreling; Price knew at once that it was their voices he had heard upon the spiral way. Their voices reached him, Vekyra's high and clear, even in anger; Malikar's harshly unpleasant.

The words of their conversation, however, Price did not understand. They

spoke rapidly; the sound was swallowed in the ringing echoes of the vast room. He was not sure even that they spoke a familiar language.

The woman ran suddenly away from Malikar, and up the ramp that led to a stone platform, suggestive of an altar, set within a niche at the end of the great stage.

Price had not noticed the platform in detail before. Now, for the first time, he saw the snake. The real golden reptile whose dread reflection he had seen in the mirage. Huge, motionless, golden scales gleaming in the unshadowed light. Coiled in a heap of gleaming, undulating loops, the graceful pillar of its bright neck lifted in the center.

Vekyra stopped on the edge of the altar before it, and began to sing. She flung up bare yellow arms in the golden light. Her voice was keen, liquidly and tantalizingly sweet. And the song had a queer, archaic rhythm.

The evil, triangular head of the serpent swayed in time to Vekyra's singing, and the purple-black eyes watched her, smoldering with immemorial flames. Slowly the head was thrust out toward Vekyra, sank to the level of her shoulders.

The song stopped, then, and she ran up to it. Her yellow arms slipped around the motionless, horizontal column of the neck, in strange caress. She stroked the flat golden head.

Then Price heard Malikar's angry shout. Evidently displeased with what was happening, he was stalking belligerently toward the platform, swinging the heavy whip.

Springing suddenly away from the serpent, Vekyra ran down the ramp to meet him, calling out to the snake behind her with a strange, pealing shout.

The snake uncoiled its bright, undulating length; it glided after her down the ramp. It was, Price saw, fully the size of the largest boa; its length, he estimated, was at least fifty feet.

Vekyra stopped at the foot of the ramp, and the snake swept past her, toward Malikar. The triangular head was high, mouth yawning, bright tongue flickering, twin golden fangs gleaming evilly. And the snake hissed as it struck at Malikar; a sibilant, menacing roar, astonishingly loud, reverberating eerily in the vast temple.

Malikar stood boldly in its path, shouted with a voice like a brazen clang.

The serpent stopped, arrested, before him. Still it hissed, angrily, tempestuously. Vekyra ran after it, calling out in a high, urgent tone. The snake struck, drove its fanged head at Malikar.

With surprizing alertness, the priest leapt back, and swung the black whip. It cracked like a pistol. The flat head recoiled, as if hurt. Malikar strode forward, brandishing the whip. He began to shout at the serpent, his voice brazen, ringing.

The snake writhed back before him, its hiss sinking to an uncertain whisper of hate.

Vekyra ran in beside it. Her slim yellow arms caressed its scales again. Her voice rose in silver, liquid peals.

The serpent stopped its retreat. The broad head whipped back and rubbed against the woman's golden body, caressingly. She stroked it.

Malikar came on. Vekyra spoke to the snake, appealingly, cajolingly, commandingly. The golden wedge of the head left her body and struck again at Malikar, but hesitantly, doubtfully.

Still the priest was shouting. The snake seemed to shrink from his harsh, brazen tones; the hate-filled hissing died. It started to writhe away. Malikar bellowed savagely; it stopped.

He strode up to its shrinking coils, stood roaring at it. He struck it with the whip. A tremor ran along its glistening length; the weird, purple-black eyes remained fixed upon him. Again he lashed it, and it did not stir.

Vekyra ran up to it, began caressing its coils again, her voice eloquent with golden pleading. It paid her no heed; the black eyes remained upon Malikar.

At length the priest dropped his whip, boomed a harsh command. Slowly, hesitantly, the flat, yellow-scaled head was thrust out at him, its fanged mouth closed. With heavy open hand he slapped it a dozen times, so hard that Price, in his high gallery, heard the blows.

Then Malikar shouted a harsh order at it. The great head moved toward the woman. She cried out, silvery tones shaken, plainly terrified. The slow movement did not cease. The snake hissed again, with the whisper of a far wind.

Vekyra screamed brokenly, as if with extreme terror. She fled across the yellow-frosted floor, toward the passage through which she and Malikar had come. After her the great serpent glided swiftly, hissing.

She vanished. The snake stopped. Malikar called to it, and it came undulating back to him, silent. Before him it drew into a mound of shimmering golden coils and lowered its flat head, watching the priest with purple-black eyes.

Malikar began to lash it.

The whip was long, and thick as his wrist at the butt, tapering. He swung it expertly. The thin tip touched the snake with explosive reports. It quivered; uneasy undulations ran along its bright coils, but the purple-black eyes did not cease their unwinking gaze. Sometimes the yellow man chuckled, thickly, evilly, as if he got a sadistic pleasure from the torture.

At last he stopped, and stood motionless a long time, staring at the snake. Then he pointed with the butt of the whip at the altar-like platform, shouted brazenly. The yellow, gleaming serpent glided back up the ramp, coiled itself in the niche again, unmoving.

Malikar coiled the whip. Swinging it in one hand, he crossed the floor to the brink of the golden-green abyss, and started over the narrow bridge. Fully two hundred feet long, unrailed, the bridge was no more than two feet wide. Beneath was the giddy void, luminous, xanthic green, vast as the gulf between suns.

With steady stride, the red-robed priest walked the dizzy bridge, until he was midway across the awful pit. Suddenly he halted. Price thought at first that he must have been overcome with vertigo. But he casually transferred the coiled black whip to his left hand, and absently, unconcernedly, scratched his head.

Then Malikar turned hastily, as if he had forgotten something. He walked back to the ragged edge of the floor, and across it, and vanished along the way Vekyra had taken.

20. *The Sleeper in the Mist*

THE strange duel of Vekyra and Malikar, for control of the golden serpent, had held Price engrossed. For the moment he had completely forgotten his escaped prisoner, Kreor, who was certain to return as soon as he could find aid. As Malikar went out of view Price awoke to the fact that he must quit the gallery quickly if he wished to continue his free adventures in the mountain.

A glance told him there was only one way to leave the gallery: the passage through which he had come. He hastened back along it, resolving, as he went, to

carry on his exploration of the yellow-lit corridors.

Kreor had told him that Aysa lay somewhere down here, sleeping. Price had no belief in the snake-man's veracity. The story had an element of weird incredibility; but at least, he supposed, the girl was as likely to be here as anywhere else.

Price had reached the spiral passage, started cautiously downward, when he heard footsteps ahead of him, and angry, low-voiced muttering. Retreating hastily to the end of the horizontal passage, he entered it and flattened himself against the wall.

Malikar strode past in a moment, a scowl on his yellow face, grumbling under his breath. Wondering how soon he would return, Price waited until all sound from him had ceased, then entered the sloping way again, and ran down it, ears straining for sound of the alarm that Kreor must be spreading.

The quivering golden atoms in the air became thicker as he descended, until he moved through pallid wraiths of shining xanthic mist. Even then he noticed an odd tickling sensation in his nostrils, a slight breathlessness. But in his preoccupation with other perils he disregarded the menace of the yellow mist.

The tunnel became straight, level. Price followed it into the great, circular room he had surveyed from the high gallery. Curving, gold-frosted walls rose about him, to the dome hundreds of feet above. High under the dome he made out the balcony, through golden haze.

The ragged edge of the yellow-dusted floor was two hundred feet away. Beyond that edge was sheer space, with the single narrow span of the bridge leaping across to the wall beneath the high gallery. At the end of the bridge, he saw a great niche in the wall, a wide shelf above the abyss.

On his right, eighty yards across the floor, was the altar-like dais, with the glittering length of the gold serpent upon it. At first realization that he had come into the lair of the snake, Price started back apprehensively into the passage.

But the yellow reptile's flat head was resting quietly upon the bright coils. The dread, purple-black eyes were closed. It seemed unaware of his entrance.

The slender bridge drew Price with a sort of fascination. He feared to set foot upon it; knew that he could not easily keep his head above that stupendous chasm of green-gold vapor. But he had a sudden conviction that Aysa must be in the niche beyond it.

It was not a time to hesitate. Malikar, for all he knew, might return at any moment. Kreor would doubtless soon be back with a party to search for him. Worse, the gigantic snake might discover his presence.

Without pausing for any deliberate consideration of his position, Price slipped as silently as he could across the great floor, to its uneven edge at the center of the room. The snake remained motionless. He reached the bridge, set out across it.

Smooth, unrailed, the walk was less than two feet wide. Below was the sheer and awful void, shining immensities golden-green with dizzying depth.

A professional acrobat, with trained sense of balance, would have found the crossing no feat at all. But Price reeled. He felt a moment of nausea, had to shut his eyes to recover his balance.

He tried not to look into the pit, tried to keep his eyes on the yellow-rimed stone at his feet. But the abyss drew his gaze with a sinister fascination.

He hurried, sometimes half running. His stomach was queerly light. Cold sweat pearled his face. He was panting,

gripping his fists until nails cut into palms.

Dizziness seized him again, a sickening wave of it. He stopped to recover himself. Fiercely he willed to forget the yawning, misty void. He tried to think of Aysa. Of the night the Arabs had captured her and bartered her to Joao de Castro. Of their midnight escape from the caravan. Of their sweet, brief days in the hidden garden of Anz.

Head clear again, he hastened on.

PRICE was midway across the gulf when he was first definitely aware of the sleep descending upon him. When he first came into the thicker golden vapor he had noticed a curious tickling in his nostrils, a shortness of breath.

Now sleep was overcoming him like a rising sea. His limbs were suddenly weary, leaden-heavy. Weights pressed down his eyelids. His brain was slow and confused.

Alarmed, he stumbled on through xanthic fog.

With a sigh of vague relief, he staggered across a gold-frosted floor, safely beyond the chasm. He had gained the niche. But the sleep of the thick yellow mist was beating upon him in waves. Beating him down . . . down . . . down. . . .

With chill certainty of dread, he knew that he could not keep awake to cross that fearsome bridge again, where a single false step would send him hurtling into limitless space.

He tried to pull himself together, surveyed the great niche. Its floor was semicircular, with a radius of perhaps forty feet; and black, yellow-frosted rock arched above the recess.

Within it stood four great oblong slabs of gold-rimed stone, like massive tables. Three of them were empty. But on the fourth lay a sleeping figure, wrapped in garments that glittered with fine crystals of gold.

An eager, poignant pain in his heart, Price ran to the slab, and looked fearfully down at the quietly breathing figure.

The sleeper was Aysa.

The girl's lovely face, like her garments, was covered with fine crystals of yellow frost. His heart checked with sudden despair, Price tenderly brushed one cheek. To his vast relief, the dust of gold came away, leaving soft white skin.

Perhaps she was being slowly transformed to living metal. But if so, the uncanny change was not yet apparent.

"Aysa! Aysa! Wake up!" he called, and shook her; but she did not stir.

The aureate vapor was obviously somniferous. The girl was sunk in the same unnatural slumber that he felt descending upon himself.

He lifted her body. It was completely relaxed, surrendered to oblivion. She was warm, breathing regularly. But he could not wake her.

Black despair fell upon him, made only keener by the possession of the lovely girl in his arms. He had found her—only to find with her inevitable defeat. But for the increasing influence of the soporific vapor, he could have carried her out and up to clear air, where she might wake normally. But he dared not set out across the narrow bridge, with the frightful risk that his abnormal slumber would hurl them both to death.

Price was still standing beside the slab of stone, Aysa's shoulders lifted in his arms, fighting the sinister sleep of the golden mist, and staring across the bridge he did not dare attempt to cross, when he saw Malikar.

The black whip still coiled in his hand, the red-robed priest was striding across

the floor beyond the abyss, toward the end of the bridge.

Price's first impulse was to drop the girl, try to hide. Then he was sure that the golden man must already have seen him. And, if not, he would immediately observe that Aysa had been moved, the yellow dust brushed from her face.

Carefully he laid the unconscious girl back upon the rock table. He waited at the end of it, standing, fingers on the helve of the ancient ax. Malikar reached the bridge and started across.

Grim despair rose in Price's breast, and mute, helpless rage at fate. Why must this insidious sleep steal upon him, just when he had won his way to the girl? Why must Malikar return just now, to crown disaster? The Durand luck—was it mocking him?

His body felt very heavy. His breathing was slow, difficult; the yellow mist still tickled his nostrils. His eyes were leaden. And waves of sleep beat about him, long slow breakers from the ocean of oblivion.

He fought to keep his eyes open, focussed on the burly yellow priest striding so confidently across the bridge. He struggled for mastery over his body, even to deal one blow with Iru's ax. But the breakers of sleep rolled higher . . . flowed over him . . . drew him down into oblivion.

21. At the Mercy of Malikar

FROM the sleep of the yellow fog, Price woke upon utter darkness. Stripped naked, he lay upon a little pile of straw or coarse grass, that was painful to his skin. Leaping up in uncomprehending alarm, he drove his head against a low stone ceiling.

Dazed, he sank back to his knees, and explored the narrow space about him with his hands. It was a narrow dungeon, some four feet wide and seven long, the roof so low that he could not stand. The walls were cold stone, roughly hewn. The door was a metal grating, through which breathed stagnant, vitiated air. His exploring fingers found nothing in the cell save the pile of moldy straw.

Sickness of despair settled upon him. He was the helpless captive of Malikar. The fact that his misfortune might have been foreseen from the beginning of his mad adventure in the mountain made it no easier to accept.

He tried to shake the metal grille. It seemed immovable; he could not even rattle it. He shouted through it, then. His voice echoed strangely through dark corridors, until it was swallowed in silence.

Baffled, helpless, he flung himself down again on the straw. He was hungry. His mouth was dry and bitter with thirst.

He was entombed within the mountain, apparently forgotten. A man marooned upon an alien planet would not be more completely isolated, he thought — and would at least have the advantage of interesting surroundings to divert his attention.

Time crept past, unnumbered weary hours, while he endured the torture of thirst and hunger, and plumbed the ultimate desolation of despair.

He slept again, and green light awakened him, streaming through the bars. Three blue-robed men were without, armed with pikes and *yataghans,* one carrying a green-flaring torch.

One of them unlocked the grille, pushed through two pottery bowls, of which one held water, the other a stew of meat thickened with flour. While the men waited, Price drained the one, avidly attacked the other.

When the bowls were empty, the snake-

men unlocked the door again; one commanded harshly: "Come!"

They conducted him along the dark corridor, up a sloping, spiral way like that he had followed down to the serpent's lair, and finally through a wide, arched passage into an amazing room. A long chamber, hewn from the mountain's black volcanic mass. A score of feet wide, three times that long, with high, vaulted ceiling. The first thing about it that struck Price as strange was that it was illuminated by shaded electric lamps.

Along either wall stood a dozen snake-men, in blue, rigid, staring straight before them, armed with pikes and *yataghans*.

In the farther end of the room sat Malikar. Beneath a cluster of frosted electric globes, he sat behind a heavy mahogany desk, that might have come from some Manhattan office. Upon the desk was an electric fan, whirring noisily, and beside it lay the long black whip with which the priest had castigated the snake.

In crimson robe and skull-cap, the yellow man sat with thick golden hands resting on the desk. The strange eyes in his harsh face, shallow, tawny, watched Price from the moment of his entrance.

Along the stone wall behind Malikar were green-painted steel filing-cabinets, bookcases filled with volumes bound in the Occidental style, and a long bench scattered with scientific instruments—compound microscope, balances, test-tubes, reagents, camera, brass telescope.

Above was a large wall-map of the world, dated 1921, with the imprint of a famous American publishing house.

Those scraps of Western civilization were as amazing to Price as any of the weird wonders he had encountered in the hidden land. And Malikar seemed to read his astonishment, as the snake-men stopped him before the desk.

"SURPRIZED to find me a cosmopolitan, eh?" the yellow priest asked, in his hard, dead voice. And the language was English.

"Yes," Price said. "I'm surprized."

"You are English, aren't you?"

"American."

"Ah. I visited New York ten years ago. An interesting city."

Price stared at him.

"I've been going abroad rather frequently, since about the time of the fall of Rome," the yellow man added. "My last trip was in 1921-22. I spent a few months at Oxford and Heidelberg, to acquaint myself with the latest developments of your crude civilization, and returned home around the world, by way of your country. I use a disguise, of course, that I don't find necessary here.

"By the way, I believe you followed my route in here from the sea?"

"You mean the road of skulls?"

"Precisely. The human skull is an enduring marker, with high visibility.—But now I'd like some information about yourself, and the circumstances to which I am indebted for your call."

Price flushed at the mocking irony in his dead, cold tones.

"What's your name?"

"Price Durand."

"You are aware that you have been mistaken for an ancient ruler named Iru—whose tomb you appear to have rifled?"

"Perhaps so."

The shallow, tawny eyes regarded Price fixedly.

"Mr. Durand, you might explain the purpose of your visit."

Price hesitated, decided to speak. There was no need of caution; nothing could make his circumstances any more hopeless.

"I was looking for Aysa. The girl you abducted."

"I am glad you are honest, at least," the golden man mocked him. "But, unfortunately for you, the young woman has been selected to fill a higher destiny than you planned for her. She is to be priestess of the snake—and my consort."

"Are you turning her to gold?" Price demanded flatly, controlling his anger.

"The snake would accept no ordinary human as its priestess," Malikar informed him, tauntingly. "She must be of the golden blood.

"Don't you understand the transformation? The yellow mist in the lair of the snake is a rare auriferous compound, formed in the volcanic heart of the earth. Condensing upon the walls of the temple, it forms yellow frost.

"When inhaled into a living body, this compound replaces the water in the protoplasm, forming a living substance, the color of gold, that is far stronger and more enduring than common flesh."

"And you expect Aysa to give herself to you?" Price angrily demanded. "You know she hates you—deservedly!"

"I fear her regard for me is not of the kindest," Malikar leered. "But once of the golden blood, she will not easily escape me. She can not seek death. Taming her may be pleasant sport—and time is nothing to the lucky immortals. She will learn to love me."

Malikar leaned forward, chuckling throatily, evilly. He picked up the heavy black whip on the desk, ran the thin lash of it through his yellow fingers, gloatingly, suggestively.

Red rage flared up in Price at thought of lovely Aysa, locked in a golden body from which she could not escape, the slave and plaything of this leering yellow demon.

He glared at Malikar, speechless with anger, longing savagely to sink his fingers into the yellow priest's thick neck.

Suddenly the golden man bent, opened a drawer of the desk, and produced a delicate brush and a small bottle of what appeared to be liquid, flowing gold. Setting brush and vial on the desk, he looked up at Price with flat, inscrutable, yellowish eyes.

"Mr. Durand," he said suavely, "I am going to offer you an unusual opportunity. I can make use of your services in exterminating the foolish gold-seekers that came with you in here."

"Will you free Aysa——" Price began eagerly.

"No," Malikar grated shortly. "But I give you one chance to save your pitiful life."

"And that is——"

"Here is your choice: Swear allegiance to the snake, and to me, priest of the snake. I will paint the symbol of the snake upon your forehead, spare your life to the service of the snake."

"I'll do nothing of the kind——"

"This is your choice," repeated Malikar, with grim irony. "Become slave of the snake, and live. Or you shall be the slave of *this* snake"—he lifted the black coils of the whip—"and die in the dungeon!"

The gloating, jeering cruelty of the hard, flat voice snapped Price's control of himself. Red anger swept him. Naked as he was, he turned upon the snake-man beside him, snatched the golden-bladed pike from his dumfounded grasp, and leapt savagely toward the red-robed man behind the desk.

Two guards seized him before he had moved three steps.

Malikar sprang from behind the big desk, chuckling unpleasantly and drawing the whip's thin lash through his fingers.

"Loose the dog," he snapped at the guards, in Arabic.

They released Price, leapt back to the walls.

Again he darted forward, the pike uplifted.

The thin black length of the whip reached out, writhing like a living tentacle. It did not touch Price; it wrapped around the wooden haft of the pike.

The weapon was snatched from Price's hand, flung across the floor. Still he ran forward, fists clenching, driven by blind, mad rage at this suave, taunting golden demon.

Again the whip leapt out, with a sharp report. In his red anger Price was unconscious of the pain. But the skin on his chest was slashed open as if with a knife.

Still he ran on, fists doubled to drive into Malikar's body.

As if endowed with malignant life, the whip reached out again, coiled around his ankles. Tripped by it, he stumbled, fell heavily.

As he staggered to his feet, the lash drew a cold line of pain across his naked back. Again he stumbled forward.

The long lash went round and round his body, pinioning his arms. Malikar jerked it, sent him spinning once more to the floor.

As Price dragged himself to his feet, he saw that the golden tiger had entered the long hall behind him. In its black *howdah* sat Vekyra, the yellow woman, watching him with slanted, tawny-green eyes—detached, impersonal, pitiless.

Again the lash fell across his shoulders, like a slashing blade. Price heard Malikar chuckle thickly, in evil, sadistic pleasure. He turned and ran reeling back at the priest, grasping with vain hands at the living, torturing whip.

The astonishing adventures of Price in the hall of illusion will be fascinatingly told in next month's WEIRD TALES, on sale August 1.

Pirates' Cave

By ALFRED I. TOOKE

Some say jewels, and some say gold.
I found a skeleton covered with mold.
I had a candle, flickering low;
Shadows of pirates danced in its glow—
Shadows of pirates long since dead;
One of them danced though he lacked a head—
Guarding the jewels, guarding the gold,
Guarding the skeleton covered with mold.

"Keep your treasures! Keep your dead!"
I told the shadow that lacked a head.
The others beckoned, but I didn't stay.
My candle was flickering. I came away.

"The hideous crone seized Gilman by the shoulder, yanking him out of bed and into empty space."

The Dreams in the Witch-House

By H. P. LOVECRAFT

A story of mathematics, witchcraft and Walpurgis Night, in which the horror creeps and grows—a new tale by the author of "The Rats in the Walls"

WHETHER the dreams brought on the fever or the fever brought on the dreams Walter Gilman did not know. Behind everything crouched the brooding, festering horror of the ancient town, and of the moldy, unhallowed garret gable where he wrote and studied and wrestled with figures and formulæ when he was not tossing on the meager iron bed. His ears were growing sensitive to a preternatural and intolerable degree, and he had long ago stopped the cheap mantel clock whose ticking had come to seem like a thunder of artillery. At night the subtle stirring of the black city outside, the sinister scurrying of rats in the wormy partitions, and the creaking of hidden timbers in the centuried house, were enough to give him a sense of strident pandemonium. The darkness always teemed with unexplained sound—and yet he sometimes shook with fear lest the noises he heard should subside and allow him to hear certain other, fainter noises which he suspected were lurking behind them.

He was in the changeless, legend-haunted city of Arkham, with its clustering gambrel roofs that sway and sag over attics where witches hid from the King's men in the dark, olden days of the Province. Nor was any spot in that city more steeped in macabre memory than the gable room which harbored him—for it was this house and this room which had likewise harbored old Keziah Mason, whose flight from Salem Jail at the last no one was ever able to explain. That was in 1692—the jailer had gone mad and babbled of a small white-fanged furry thing which scuttled out of Keziah's cell, and not even Cotton Mather could explain the curves and angles smeared on the gray stone walls with some red, sticky fluid.

Possibly Gilman ought not to have studied so hard. Non-Euclidean calculus and quantum physics are enough to stretch any brain; and when one mixes them with folklore, and tries to trace a strange background of multi-dimensional reality behind the ghoulish hints of the Gothic tales and the wild whispers of the chimney-corner, one can hardly expect to be wholly free from mental tension. Gilman came from Haverhill, but it was only after he had entered college in Arkham that he began to connect his mathematics with the fantastic legends of elder magic. Something in the air of the hoary town worked obscurely on his imagination. The professors at Miskatonic had urged him to slacken up, and had voluntarily cut down his course at several points. Moreover, they had stopped him from consulting the dubious old books on forbidden secrets that were kept under lock and key in a vault at the university library. But all these precautions came late in the day, so that Gilman had some terrible hints from the dreaded *Necronomicon* of Abdul Alhazred, the fragmentary *Book of Eibon*, and the suppressed *Unaussprechlichen Kulten* of von Junzt to correlate with his abstract formulæ on the properties of space and the linkage of dimensions known and unknown.

He knew his room was in the old Witch-House—that, indeed, was why he had taken it. There was much in the Essex County records about Keziah Mason's trial, and what she had admitted under pressure to the Court of Oyer and Terminer had fascinated Gilman beyond all reason. She had told Judge Hathorne of lines and curves that could be made to point out directions leading through the walls of space to other spaces beyond, and had implied that such lines and curves were frequently used at certain midnight meetings in the dark valley of the white stone beyond Meadow Hill and on the unpeopled island in the river. She had spoken also of the Black Man, of her oath, and of her new secret name of Nahab. Then she had drawn those devices on the walls of her cell and vanished.

Gilman believed strange things about Keziah, and had felt a queer thrill on learning that her dwelling was still standing after more than 235 years. When he heard the hushed Arkham whispers about Keziah's persistent presence in the old house and the narrow streets, about the irregular human tooth-marks left on certain sleepers in that and other houses, about the childish cries heard near May-Eve and Hallowmass, about the stench often noted in the old house's attic just after those dreaded seasons, and about the small, furry, sharp-toothed thing which haunted the moldering structure and the town and nuzzled people curiously in the black hours before dawn, he resolved to live in the place at any cost. A room was easy to secure; for the house was unpopular, hard to rent, and long given over to cheap lodgings. Gilman could not have

told what he expected to find there, but he knew he wanted to be in the building where some circumstance had more or less suddenly given a mediocre old woman of the Seventeenth Century an insight into mathematical depths perhaps beyond the utmost modern delvings of Planck, Heisenberg, Einstein, and de Sitter.

He studied the timber and plaster walls for traces of cryptic designs at every accessible spot where the paper had peeled, and within a week managed to get the eastern attic room where Keziah was held to have practised her spells. It had been vacant from the first—for no one had ever been willing to stay there long—but the Polish landlord had grown wary about renting it. Yet nothing whatever happened to Gilman till about the time of the fever. No ghostly Keziah flitted through the somber halls and chambers, no small furry thing crept into his dismal eyrie to nuzzle him, and no record of the witch's incantations rewarded his constant search. Sometimes he would take walks through shadowy tangles of unpaved musty-smelling lanes where eldritch brown houses of unknown age leaned and tottered and leered mockingly through narrow, small-paned windows. Here he knew strange things had happened once, and there was a faint suggestion behind the surface that everything of that monstrous past might not—at least in the darkest, narrowest, and most intricately crooked alleys—have utterly perished. He also rowed out twice to the ill-regarded island in the river, and made a sketch of the singular angles described by the moss-grown rows of gray standing stones whose origin was so obscure and immemorial.

GILMAN'S room was of good size but queerly irregular shape; the north wall slanting perceptibly inward from the outer to the inner end, while the low ceiling slanted gently downward in the same direction. Aside from an obvious rat-hole and the signs of other stopped-up ones, there was no access—nor any appearance of a former avenue of access—to the space which must have existed between the slanting wall and the straight outer wall on the house's north side, though a view from the exterior showed where a window had been boarded up at a very remote date. The loft above the ceiling—which must have had a slanting floor—was likewise inaccessible. When Gilman climbed up a ladder to the cobwebbed level loft above the rest of the attic he found vestiges of a bygone aperture tightly and heavily covered with ancient planking and secured by the stout wooden pegs common in Colonial carpentry. No amount of persuasion, however, could induce the stolid landlord to let him investigate either of these two closed spaces.

As time wore along, his absorption in the irregular wall and ceiling of his room increased; for he began to read into the odd angles a mathematical significance which seemed to offer vague clues regarding their purpose. Old Keziah, he reflected, might have had excellent reasons for living in a room with peculiar angles; for was it not through certain angles that she claimed to have gone outside the boundaries of the world of space we know? His interest gradually veered away from the unplumbed voids beyond the slanting surfaces, since it now appeared that the purpose of those surfaces concerned the side he was already on.

The touch of brain-fever and the dreams began early in February. For some time, apparently, the curious angles of Gilman's room had been having a strange, almost hypnotic effect on him; and as the bleak winter advanced he had found him-

self staring more and more intently at the corner where the down-slanting ceiling met the inward-slanting wall. About this period his inability to concentrate on his formal studies worried him considerably, his apprehensions about the mid-year examinations being very acute. But the exaggerated sense of hearing was scarcely less annoying. Life had become an insistent and almost unendurable cacophony, and there was that constant, terrifying impression of *other* sounds—perhaps from regions beyond life—trembling on the very brink of audibility. So far as concrete noises went, the rats in the ancient partitions were the worst. Sometimes their scratching seemed not only furtive but deliberate. When it came from beyond the slanting north wall it was mixed with a sort of dry rattling; and when it came from the century-closed loft above the slanting ceiling Gilman always braced himself as if expecting some horror which only bided its time before descending to engulf him utterly.

The dreams were wholly beyond the pale of sanity, and Gilman felt that they must be a result, jointly, of his studies in mathematics and in folklore. He had been thinking too much about the vague regions which his formulæ told him must lie beyond the three dimensions we know, and about the possibility that old Keziah Mason—guided by some influence past all conjecture—had actually found the gate to those regions. The yellowed county records containing her testimony and that of her accusers were so damnably suggestive of things beyond human experience—and the descriptions of the darting little furry object which served as her familiar were so painfully realistic despite their incredible details.

That object—no larger than a good-sized rat and quaintly called by the townspeople "Brown Jenkin"—seemed to have been the fruit of a remarkable case of sympathetic herd-delusion, for in 1692 no less than eleven persons had testified to glimpsing it. There were recent rumors, too, with a baffling and disconcerting amount of agreement. Witnesses said it had long hair and the shape of a rat, but that its sharp-toothed, bearded face was evilly human while its paws were like tiny human hands. It took messages betwixt old Keziah and the devil, and was nursed on the witch's blood, which it sucked like a vampire. Its voice was a kind of loathsome titter, and it could speak all languages. Of all the bizarre monstrosities in Gilman's dreams, nothing filled him with greater panic and nausea than this blasphemous and diminutive hybrid, whose image flitted across his vision in a form a thousandfold more hateful than anything his waking mind had deduced from the ancient records and the modern whispers.

Gilman's dreams consisted largely in plunges through limitless abysses of inexplicably colored twilight and bafflingly disordered sound; abysses whose material and gravitational properties, and whose relation to his own entity, he could not even begin to explain. He did not walk or climb, fly or swim, crawl or wriggle; yet always experienced a mode of motion partly voluntary and partly involuntary. Of his own condition he could not well judge, for sight of his arms, legs, and torso seemed always cut off by some odd disarrangement of perspective; but he felt that his physical organization and faculties were somehow marvelously transmuted and obliquely projected—though not without a certain grotesque relationship to his normal proportions and properties.

The abysses were by no means vacant, being crowded with indescribably angled masses of alien-hued substance, some of which appeared to be organic while others seemed inorganic. A few of the organic

objects tended to awake vague memories in the back of his mind, though he could form no conscious idea of what they mockingly resembled or suggested. In the later dreams he began to distinguish separate categories into which the organic objects appeared to be divided, and which seemed to involve in each case a radically different species of conduct-pattern and basic motivation. Of these categories one seemed to him to include objects slightly less illogical and irrelevant in their motions than the members of the other categories.

All the objects—organic and inorganic alike—were totally beyond description or even comprehension. Gilman sometimes compared the inorganic matter to prisms, labyrinths, clusters of cubes and planes, and cyclopean buildings; and the organic things struck him variously as groups of bubbles, octopi, centipedes, living Hindoo idols, and intricate arabesques roused into a kind of ophidian animation. Everything he saw was unspeakably menacing and horrible; and whenever one of the organic entities appeared by its motions to be noticing him, he felt a stark, hideous fright which generally jolted him awake. Of how the organic entities moved, he could tell no more than of how he moved himself. In time he observed a further mystery—the tendency of certain entities to appear suddenly out of empty space, or to disappear totally with equal suddenness. The shrieking, roaring confusion of sound which permeated the abysses was past all analysis as to pitch, timbre or rhythm; but seemed to be synchronous with vague visual changes in all the indefinite objects, organic and inorganic alike. Gilman had a constant sense of dread that it might rise to some unbearable degree of intensity during one or another of its obscure, relentlessly inevitable fluctuations.

But it was not in these vortices of complete alienage that he saw Brown Jenkin. That shocking little horror was reserved for certain lighter, sharper dreams which assailed him just before he dropped into the fullest depths of sleep. He would be lying in the dark fighting to keep awake when a faint lambent glow would seem to shimmer around the centuried room, showing in a violet mist the convergence of angled planes which had seized his brain so insidiously. The horror would appear to pop out of the rat-hole in the corner and patter toward him over the sagging, wide-planked floor with evil expectancy in its tiny, bearded human face; but mercifully, this dream always melted away before the object got close enough to nuzzle him. It had hellishly long, sharp, canine teeth. Gilman tried to stop up the rat-hole every day, but each night the real tenants of the partitions would gnaw away the obstruction, whatever it might be. Once he had the landlord nail tin over it, but the next night the rats gnawed a fresh hole, in making which they pushed or dragged out into the room a curious little fragment of bone.

GILMAN did not report his fever to the doctor, for he knew he could not pass the examinations if ordered to the college infirmary when every moment was needed for cramming. As it was, he failed in Calculus D and Advanced General Psychology, though not without hope of making up lost ground before the end of the term.

It was in March when the fresh element entered his lighter preliminary dreaming, and the nightmare shape of Brown Jenkin began to be companioned by the nebulous blur which grew more and more to resemble a bent old woman. This addition disturbed him more than he could account for, but finally he decided that it was like

an ancient crone whom he had twice actually encountered in the dark tangle of lanes near the abandoned wharves. On those occasions the evil, sardonic, and seemingly unmotivated stare of the beldame had set him almost shivering—especially the first time, when an overgrown rat darting across the shadowed mouth of a neighboring alley had made him think irrationally of Brown Jenkin. Now, he reflected, those nervous fears were being mirrored in his disordered dreams.

That the influence of the old house was unwholesome he could not deny, but traces of his early morbid interest still held him there. He argued that the fever alone was responsible for his nightly fantasies, and that when the touch abated he would be free from the monstrous visions. Those visions, however, were of absorbing vividness and convincingness, and whenever he awaked he retained a vague sense of having undergone much more than he remembered. He was hideously sure that in unrecalled dreams he had talked with both Brown Jenkin and the old woman, and that they had been urging him to go somewhere with them and to meet a third being of greater potency.

Toward the end of March he began to pick up in his mathematics, though other studies bothered him increasingly. He was getting an intuitive knack for solving Riemannian equations, and astonished Professor Upham by his comprehension of fourth-dimensional and other problems which had floored all the rest of the class. One afternoon there was a discussion of possible freakish curvatures in space, and of theoretical points of approach or even contact between our part of the cosmos and various other regions as distant as the farthest stars or the trans-galactic gulfs themselves—or even as fabulously remote as the tentatively conceivable cosmic units beyond the whole Einsteinian space-time continuum. Gilman's handling of this theme filled every one with admiration, even though some of his hypothetical illustrations caused an increase in the always plentiful gossip about his nervous and solitary eccentricity. What made the students shake their heads was his sober theory that a man might—given mathematical knowledge admittedly beyond all likelihood of human acquirement—step deliberately from the earth to any other celestial body which might lie at one of an infinity of specific points in the cosmic pattern.

Such a step, he said, would require only two stages; first, a passage out of the three-dimensional sphere we know, and second, a passage back to the three-dimensional sphere at another point, perhaps one of infinite remoteness. That this could be accomplished without loss of life was in many cases conceivable. Any being from any part of three-dimensional space could probably survive in the fourth dimension; and its survival of the second stage would depend upon what alien part of three-dimensional space it might select for its re-entry. Denizens of some planets might be able to live on certain others—even planets belonging to other galaxies, or to similar dimensional phases of other space-time continua — though of course there must be vast numbers of mutually uninhabitable even though mathematically juxtaposed bodies or zones of space.

It was also possible that the inhabitants of a given dimensional realm could survive entry to many unknown and incomprehensible realms of additional or indefinitely multiplied dimensions—be they within or outside the given space-time continuum—and that the converse would be likewise true. This was a matter for speculation, though one could be fairly certain that the type of mutation involved

in a passage from any given dimensional plane to the next higher plane would not be destructive of biological integrity as we understand it. Gilman could not be very clear about his reasons for this last assumption, but his haziness here was more than overbalanced by his clearness on other complex points. Professor Upham especially liked his demonstration of the kinship of higher mathematics to certain phases of magical love transmitted down the ages from an ineffable antiquity—human or pre-human—whose knowledge of the cosmos and its laws was greater than ours.

Around the first of April Gilman worried considerably because his slow fever did not abate. He was also troubled by what some of his fellow-lodgers said about his sleep-walking. It seemed that he was often absent from his bed, and that the creaking of his floor at certain hours of the night was remarked by the man in the room below. This fellow also spoke of hearing the tread of shod feet in the night; but Gilman was sure he must have been mistaken in this, since shoes as well as other apparel were always precisely in place in the morning. One could develop all sorts of aural delusions in this morbid old house—for did not Gilman himself, even in daylight, now feel certain that noises other than rat-scratching came from the black voids beyond the slanting wall and above the slanting ceiling? His pathologically sensitive ears began to listen for faint footfalls in the immemorially sealed loft overhead, and sometimes the illusion of such things was agonizingly realistic.

However, he knew that he had actually become a somnambulist; for twice at night his room had been found vacant, though with all his clothing in place. Of this he had been assured by Frank Elwood, the one fellow-student whose poverty forced him to room in this squalid and unpopular house. Elwood had been studying in the small hours and had come up for help on a differential equation, only to find Gilman absent. It had been rather presumptuous of him to open the unlocked door after knocking had failed to rouse a response, but he had needed the help very badly and thought that his host would not mind a gentle prodding awake. On neither occasion, though, had Gilman been there; and when told of the matter he wondered where he could have been wandering, barefoot and with only his nightclothes on. He resolved to investigate the matter if reports of his sleep-walking continued, and thought of sprinkling flour on the floor of the corridor to see where his footsteps might lead. The door was the only conceivable egress, for there was no possible foothold outside the narrow window.

As APRIL advanced, Gilman's fever-sharpened ears were disturbed by the whining prayers of a superstitious loom-fixer named Joe Mazurewicz, who had a room on the ground floor. Mazurewicz had told long, rambling stories about the ghost of old Keziah and the furry, sharp-fanged, nuzzling thing, and had said he was so badly haunted at times that only his silver crucifix—given him for the purpose by Father Iwanicki of St. Stanislaus' Church—could bring him relief. Now he was praying because the Witches' Sabbath was drawing near. May Eve was Walpurgis Night, when hell's blackest evil roamed the earth and all the slaves of Satan gathered for nameless rites and deeds. It was always a very bad time in Arkham, even though the fine folks up in Miskatonic Avenue and High and Saltonstall Streets pretended to know nothing about it. There would be bad doings, and a child or two would probably be missing.

Joe knew about such things, for his grandmother in the old country had heard tales from her grandmother. It was wise to pray and count one's beads at this season. For three months Keziah and Brown Jenkin had not been near Joe's room, nor near Paul Choynski's room, nor anywhere else—and it meant no good when they held off like that. They must be up to something.

Gilman dropped in at the doctor's office on the 16th of the month, and was surprized to find his temperature was not as high as he had feared. The physician questioned him sharply, and advised him to see a nerve specialist. On reflection, he was glad he had not consulted the still more inquisitive college doctor. Old Waldron, who had curtailed his activities before, would have made him take a rest —an impossible thing now that he was so close to great results in his equations. He was certainly near the boundary between the known universe and the fourth dimension, and who could say how much farther he might go?

But even as these thoughts came to him he wondered at the source of his strange confidence. Did all of this perilous sense of imminence come from the formulæ on the sheets he covered day by day? The soft, stealthy, imaginary footsteps in the sealed loft above were unnerving. And now, too, there was a growing feeling that somebody was constantly persuading him to do something terrible which he could not do. How about the somnambulism? Where did he go sometimes in the night? And what was that faint suggestion of sound which once in a while seemed to trickle through the confusion of identifiable sounds even in broad daylight and full wakefulness? Its rhythm did not correspond to anything on earth, unless perhaps to the cadence of one or two unmentionable Sabbat-chants, and sometimes he feared it corresponded to certain attributes of the vague shrieking or roaring in those wholly alien abysses of dream.

The dreams were meanwhile getting to be atrocious. In the lighter preliminary phase the evil old woman was now of fiendish distinctness, and Gilman knew she was the one who had frightened him in the slums. Her bent back, long nose, and shrivelled chin were unmistakable, and her shapeless brown garments were like those he remembered. The expression on her face was one of hideous malevolence and exultation, and when he awaked he could recall a croaking voice that persuaded and threatened. He must meet the Black Man, and go with them all to the throne of Azathoth at the center of ultimate chaos. That was what she said. He must sign the book of Azathoth in his own blood and take a new secret name now that his independent delvings had gone so far. What kept him from going with her and Brown Jenkin and the other to the throne of Chaos where the thin flutes pipe mindlessly was the fact that he had seen the name "Azathoth" in the *Necronomicon*, and knew it stood for a primal evil too horrible for description.

The old woman always appeared out of thin air near the corner where the downward slant met the inward slant. She seemed to crystallize at a point closer to the ceiling than to the floor, and every night she was a little nearer and more distinct before the dream shifted. Brown Jenkin, too, was always a little nearer at the last, and his yellowish-white fangs glistened shockingly in that unearthly violet phosphorescence. Its shrill loathsome tittering stuck more and more in Gilman's head, and he could remember in the morning how it had pronounced the words "Azathoth" and "Nyarlathotep."

In the deeper dreams everything was

likewise more distinct, and Gilman felt that the twilight abysses around him were those of the fourth dimension. Those organic entities whose motions seemed least flagrantly irrelevant and unmotivated were probably projections of life-forms from our own planet, including human beings. What the others were in their own dimensional sphere or spheres he dared not try to think. Two of the less irrelevantly moving things—a rather large congeries of iridescent, prolately spheroidal bubbles and a very much smaller polyhedron of unknown colors and rapidly shifting surface angles—seemed to take notice of him and follow him about or float ahead as he changed position among the titan prisms, labyrinths, cube-and-plane clusters and quasi-buildings; and all the while the vague shrieking and roaring waxed louder and louder, as if approaching some monstrous climax of utterly unendurable intensity.

DURING the night of April 19-20th the new development occurred. Gilman was half involuntarily moving about in the twilight abysses with the bubble-mass and the small polyhedron floating ahead, when he noticed the peculiarly regular angles formed by the edges of some gigantic neighboring prism-clusters. In another second he was out of the abyss and standing tremulously on a rocky hillside bathed in intense, diffused green light. He was barefooted and in his night-clothes, and when he tried to walk discovered that he could scarcely lift his feet. A swirling vapor hid everything but the immediate sloping terrain from sight, and he shrank from the thought of the sounds that might surge out of that vapor.

Then he saw the two shapes laboriously crawling toward him—the old woman and the little furry thing. The crone strained up to her knees and managed to cross her arms in a singular fashion, while Brown Jenkin pointed in a certain direction with a horribly anthropoid fore-paw which it raised with evident difficulty. Spurred by an impulse he did not originate, Gilman dragged himself forward along a course determined by the angle of the old woman's arms and the direction of the small monstrosity's paw, and before he had shuffled three steps he was back in the twilight abysses. Geometrical shapes seethed around him, and he fell dizzily and interminably. At last he woke in his bed in the crazily angled garret of the eldritch old house.

He was good for nothing that morning, and stayed away from all his classes. Some unknown attraction was pulling his eyes in a seemingly irrelevant direction, for he could not help staring at a certain vacant spot on the floor. As the day advanced, the focus of his unseeing eyes changed position, and by noon he had conquered the impulse to stare at vacancy. About two o'clock he went out for lunch, and as he threaded the narrow lanes of the city he found himself turning always to the southeast. Only an effort halted him at a cafeteria in Church Street, and after the meal he felt the unknown pull still more strongly.

He would have to consult a nerve specialist after all—perhaps there was a connection with his somnambulism — but meanwhile he might at least try to break the morbid spell himself. Undoubtedly he could still manage to walk away from the pull; so with great resolution he headed against it and dragged himself deliberately north along Garrison Street. By the time he had reached the bridge over the Miskatonic he was in a cold perspiration, and he clutched at the iron railing as he gazed upstream at the ill-regarded island whose regular lines of ancient

standing stones brooded sullenly in the afternoon sunlight.

Then he gave a start. For there was a clearly visible living figure on that desolate island, and a second glance told him it was certainly the strange old woman whose sinister aspect had worked itself so disastrously into his dreams. The tall grass near her was moving, too, as if some other living thing were crawling close to the ground. When the old woman began to turn toward him he fled precipitately off the bridge and into the shelter of the town's labyrinthin waterfront alleys. Distant though the island was, he felt that a monstrous and invincible evil could flow from the sardonic stare of that bent, ancient figure in brown.

The southeastward pull still held, and only with tremendous resolution could Gilman drag himself into the old house and up the rickety stairs. For hours he sat silent and aimless, with his eyes shifting gradually westward. About six o'clock his sharpened ears caught the whining prayers of Joe Mazurewicz two floors below, and in desperation he seized his hat and walked out into the sunset-golden streets, letting the now directly southward pull carry him where it might. An hour later darkness found him in the open fields beyond Hangman's Brook, with the glimmering spring stars shining ahead. The urge to walk was gradually changing to an urge to leap mystically into space, and suddenly he realized just where the source of the pull lay.

It was in the sky. A definite point among the stars had a claim on him and was calling him. Apparently it was a point somewhere between Hydra and Argo Navis, and he knew that he had been urged toward it ever since he had awaked soon after dawn. In the morning it had been underfoot, and now it was roughly south but stealing toward the west. What was the meaning of this new thing? Was he going mad? How long would it last? Again mustering his resolution, Gilman turned and dragged himself back to the sinister old house.

MAZUREWICZ was waiting for him at the door, and seemed both anxious and reluctant to whisper some fresh bit of superstition. It was about the witch-light. Joe had been out celebrating the night before—it was Patriots' Day in Massachusetts—and had come home after midnight. Looking up at the house from outside, he had thought at first that Gilman's window was dark, but then he had seen the faint violet glow within. He wanted to warn the gentleman about that glow, for everybody in Arkham knew it was Keziah's witch-light which played near Brown Jenkin and the ghost of the old crone herself. He had not mentioned this before, but now he must tell about it because it meant that Keziah and her long-toothed familiar were haunting the young gentleman. Sometimes he and Paul Choynski and Landlord Dombrowski thought they saw that light seeping out of cracks in the sealed loft above the young gentleman's room, but they had all agreed not to talk about that. However, it would be better for the gentleman to take another room and get a crucifix from some good priest like Father Iwanicki.

As the man rambled on, Gilman felt a nameless panic clutch at his throat. He knew that Joe must have been half drunk when he came home the night before; yet the mention of a violet light in the garret window was of frightful import. It was a lambent glow of this sort which always played about the old woman and the small furry thing in those lighter, sharper dreams which prefaced his plunge into unknown abysses, and the thought that a wakeful second person could see the

dream-luminance was utterly beyond sane harborage. Yet where had the fellow got such an odd notion? Had he himself talked as well as walked around the house in his sleep? No, Joe said, he had not—but he must check up on this. Perhaps Frank Elwood could tell him something, though he hated to ask.

Fever—wild dreams—somnambulism—illusions of sounds—a pull toward a point in the sky—and now a suspicion of insane sleep-talking! He must stop studying, see a nerve specialist, and take himself in hand. When he climbed to the second story he paused at Elwood's door but saw that the other youth was out. Reluctantly he continued up to his garret room and sat down in the dark. His gaze was still pulled to the southward, but he also found himself listening intently for some sound in the closed loft above, and half imagining that an evil violet light seeped down through an infinitesimal crack in the low, slanting ceiling.

That night as Gilman slept, the violet light broke upon him with heightened intensity, and the old witch and small furry thing, getting closer than ever before, mocked him with inhuman squeals and devilish gestures. He was glad to sink into the vaguely roaring twilight abysses, though the pursuit of that iridescent bubble-congeries and that kaleidoscopic little polyhedron was menacing and irritating. Then came the shift as vast converging planes of a slippery-looking substance loomed above and below him—a shift which ended in a flash of delirium and a blaze of unknown, alien light in which yellow, carmine, and indigo were madly and inextricably blended.

He was half lying on a high, fantastically balustraded terrace above a boundless jungle of outlandish, incredible peaks, balanced planes, domes, minarets, horizontal disks poised on pinnacles, and numberless forms of still greater wildness—some of stone and some of metal—which glittered gorgeously in the mixed, almost blistering glare from a polychromatic sky. Looking upward he saw three stupendous disks of flame, each of a different hue, and at a different height above an infinitely distant curving horizon of low mountains. Behind him tiers of higher terraces towered aloft as far as he could see. The city below stretched away to the limits of vision, and he hoped that no sound would well up from it.

The pavement from which he easily raised himself was of a veined, polished stone beyond his power to identify, and the tiles were cut in bizarre-angled shapes which struck him as less asymmetrical than based on some unearthly symmetry whose laws he could not comprehend. The balustrade was chest-high, delicate, and fantastically wrought, while along the rail were ranged at short intervals little figures of grotesque design and exquisite workmanship. They, like the whole balustrade, seemed to be made of some sort of shining metal whose color could not be guessed in the chaos of mixed effulgences, and their nature utterly defied conjecture. They represented some ridged barrel-shaped object with thin horizontal arms radiating spoke-like from a central ring and with vertical knobs or bulbs projecting from the head and base of the barrel. Each of these knobs was the hub of a system of five long, flat, triangularly tapering arms arranged around it like the arms of a starfish—nearly horizontal, but curving slightly away from the central barrel. The base of the bottom knob was fused to the long railing with so delicate a point of contact that several figures had been broken off and were missing. The figures were about four and a half inches in height, while the

spiky arms gave them a maximum diameter of about two and a half inches.

When Gilman stood up, the tiles felt hot to his bare feet. He was wholly alone, and his first act was to walk to the balustrade and look dizzily down at the endless, cyclopean city almost two thousand feet below. As he listened he thought a rhythmic confusion of faint musical pipings covering a wide tonal range welled up from the narrow streets beneath, and he wished he might discern the denizens of the place. The sight turned him giddy after a while, so that he would have fallen to the pavement had he not clutched instinctively at the lustrous balustrade. His right hand fell on one of the projecting figures, the touch seeming to steady him slightly. It was too much, however, for the exotic delicacy of the metal-work, and the spiky figure snapped off under his grasp. Still half dazed, he continued to clutch it as his other hand seized a vacant space on the smooth railing.

But now his over-sensitive ears caught something behind him, and he looked back across the level terrace. Approaching him softly though without apparent furtiveness were five figures, two of which were the sinister old woman and the fanged, furry little animal. The other three were what sent him unconscious; for they were living entities about eight feet high, shaped precisely like the spiky images on the balustrade, and propelling themselves by a spider-like wriggling of their lower set of starfish-arms.

GILMAN awaked in his bed, drenched by a cold perspiration and with a smarting sensation in his face, hands and feet. Springing to the floor, he washed and dressed in frantic haste, as if it were necessary for him to get out of the house as quickly as possible. He did not know where he wished to go, but felt that once more he would have to sacrifice his classes. The odd pull toward that spot in the sky between Hydra and Argo had abated, but another of even greater strength had taken its place. Now he felt that he must go north — infinitely north. He dreaded to cross the bridge that gave a view of the desolate island in the Miskatonic, so went over the Peabody Avenue bridge. Very often he stumbled, for his eyes and ears were chained to an extremely lofty point in the blank blue sky.

After about an hour he got himself under better control, and saw that he was far from the city. All around him stretched the bleak emptiness of salt marshes, while the narrow road ahead led to Innsmouth — that ancient, half-deserted town which Arkham people were so curiously unwilling to visit. Though the northward pull had not diminished, he resisted it as he had resisted the other pull, and finally found that he could almost balance the one against the other. Plodding back to town and getting some coffee at a soda fountain, he dragged himself into the public library and browsed aimlessly among the lighter magazines. Once he met some friends who remarked how oddly sunburned he looked, but he did not tell them of his walk. At three o'clock he took some lunch at a restaurant, noting meanwhile that the pull had either lessened or divided itself. After that he killed the time at a cheap cinema show, seeing the inane performance over and over again without paying any attention to it.

About nine at night he drifted homeward and shuffled into the ancient house. Joe Mazurewicz was whining unintelligible prayers, and Gilman hastened up to his own garret chamber without pausing to see if Elwood was in. It was when he turned on the feeble electric light that

the shock came. At once he saw there was something on the table which did not belong there, and a second look left no room for doubt. Lying on its side—for it could not stand up alone—was the exotic spiky figure which in his monstrous dream he had broken off the fantastic balustrade. No detail was missing. The ridged, barrel-shaped center, the thin radiating arms, the knobs at each end, and the flat, slightly outward-curving starfish-arms spreading from those knobs—all were there. In the electric light the color seemed to be a kind of iridescent gray veined with green; and Gilman could see amidst his horror and bewilderment that one of the knobs ended in a jagged break, corresponding to its former point of attachment to the dream-railing.

Only his tendency toward a dazed stupor prevented him from screaming aloud. This fusion of dream and reality was too much to bear. Still dazed, he clutched at the spiky thing and staggered downstairs to Landlord Dombrowski's quarters. The whining prayers of the superstitious loom-fixer were still sounding through the moldy halls, but Gilman did not mind them now. The landlord was in, and greeted him pleasantly. No, he had not seen that thing before and did not know anything about it. But his wife had said she found a funny tin thing in one of the beds when she fixed the rooms at noon, and maybe that was it. Dombrowski called her, and she waddled in. Yes, that was the thing. She had found it in the young gentleman's bed—on the side next the wall. It had looked very queer to her, but of course the young gentleman had lots of queer things in his room—books and curios and pictures and markings on paper. She certainly knew nothing about it.

So Gilman climbed upstairs again in mental turmoil, convinced that he was either still dreaming or that his somnambulism had run to incredible extremes and led him to depredations in unknown places. Where had he got this outré thing? He did not recall seeing it in any museum in Arkham. It must have been somewhere, though; and the sight of it as he snatched it in his sleep must have caused the odd dream-picture of the balustraded terrace. Next day he would make some very guarded inquiries—and perhaps see the nerve specialist.

Meanwhile he would try to keep track of his somnambulism. As he went upstairs and across the garret hall he sprinkled about some flour which he had borrowed—with a frank admission as to its purpose — from the landlord. He had stopped at Elwood's door on the way, but had found all dark within. Entering his room, he placed the spiky thing on the table, and lay down in complete mental and physical exhaustion without pausing to undress. From the closed loft above the slanting ceiling he thought he heard a faint scratching and padding, but he was too disorganized even to mind it. That cryptical pull from the north was getting very strong again, though it seemed now to come from a lower place in the sky.

In the dazzling violet light of dream the old woman and the fanged, furry thing came again and with a greater distinctness than on any former occasion. This time they actually reached him, and he felt the crone's withered claws clutching at him. He was pulled out of bed and into empty space, and for a moment he heard a rhythmic roaring and saw the twilight amorphousness of the vague abysses seething around him. But that moment was very brief, for presently he was in a crude, windowless little space with rough beams and planks rising to a peak just above his head, and with a curious slanting floor underfoot. Propped level

on that floor were low cases full of books of every degree of antiquity and disintegration, and in the center were a table and bench, both apparently fastened in place. Small objects of unknown shape and nature were ranged on the tops of the cases, and in the flaming violet light Gilman thought he saw a counterpart of the spiky image which had puzzled him so horribly. On the left the floor fell abruptly away, leaving a black triangular gulf out of which, after a second's dry rattling, there presently climbed the hateful little furry thing with the yellow fangs and bearded human face.

The evilly grinning beldame still clutched him, and beyond the table stood a figure he had never seen before—a tall, lean man of dead black coloration but without the slightest sign of negroid features; wholly devoid of either hair or beard, and wearing as his only garment a shapeless robe of some heavy black fabric. His feet were indistinguishable because of the table and bench, but he must have been shod, since there was a clicking whenever he changed position. The man did not speak, and bore no trace of expression on his small, regular features. He merely pointed to a book of prodigious size which lay open on the table, while the beldame thrust a huge gray quill into Gilman's right hand. Over everything was a pall of intensely maddening fear, and the climax was reached when the furry thing ran up the dreamer's clothing to his shoulders and then down his left arm, finally biting him sharply in the wrist just below his cuff. As the blood spurted from this wound Gilman lapsed into a faint.

HE AWAKED on the morning of the 22nd with a pain in his left wrist, and saw that his cuff was brown with dried blood. His recollections were very confused, but the scene with the black man in the unknown space stood out vividly. The rats must have bitten him as he slept, giving rise to the climax of that frightful dream. Opening the door, he saw that the flour on the corridor floor was undisturbed except for the huge prints of the loutish fellow who roomed at the other end of the garret. So he had not been sleep-walking this time. But something would have to be done about those rats. He would speak to the landlord about them. Again he tried to stop up the hole at the base of the slanting wall, wedging in a candlestick which seemed of about the right size. His ears were ringing horribly, as if with the residual echoes of some horrible noise heard in dreams.

As he bathed and changed clothes he tried to recall what he had dreamed after the scene in the violet-litten space, but nothing definite would crystallize in his mind. That scene itself must have corresponded to the sealed loft overhead, which had begun to attack his imagination so violently, but later impressions were faint and hazy. There were suggestions of the vague, twilight abysses, and of still vaster, blacker abysses beyond them—abysses in which all fixed suggestions were absent. He had been taken there by the bubble-congeries and the little polyhedron which always dogged him; but they, like himself, had changed to wisps of mist in this farther void of ultimate blackness. Something else had gone on ahead—a larger wisp which now and then condensed into nameless approximations of form—and he thought that their progress had not been in a straight line, but rather along the alien curves and spirals of some ethereal vortex which obeyed laws unknown to the physics and mathematics of any conceivable cosmos. Eventually there had been a hint of vast,

leaping shadows, of a monstrous, half-acoustic pulsing, and of the thin, monotonous piping of an unseen flute—but that was all. Gilman decided he had picked up that last conception from what he had read in the *Necronomicon* about the mindless entity Azathoth, which rules all time and space from a curiously enviroined black throne at the center of Chaos.

When the blood was washed away the wrist wound proved very slight, and Gilman puzzled over the location of the two tiny punctures. It occurred to him that there was no blood on the bedspread where he had lain—which was very curious in view of the amount on his skin and cuff. Had he been sleep-walking within his room, and had the rat bitten him as he sat in some chair or paused in some less rational position? He looked in every corner for brownish drops or stains, but did not find any. He had better, he thought, sprinkle flour within the room as well as outside the door—though after all no further proof of his sleep-walking was needed. He knew he did walk—and the thing to do now was to stop it. He must ask Frank Elwood for help. This morning the strange pulls from space seemed lessened, though they were replaced by another sensation even more inexplicable. It was a vague, insistent impulse to fly away from his present situation, but held not a hint of the specific direction in which he wished to fly. As he picked up the strange spiky image on the table he thought the older northward pull grew a trifle stronger; but even so, it was wholly overruled by the newer and more bewildering urge.

He took the spiky image down to Elwood's room, steeling himself against the whines of the loom-fixer which welled up from the ground floor. Elwood was in, thank heaven, and appeared to be stirring about. There was time for a little conversation before leaving for breakfast and college; so Gilman hurriedly poured forth an account of his recent dreams and fears. His host was very sympathetic, and agreed that something ought to be done. He was shocked by his guest's drawn, haggard aspect, and noticed the queer, abnormal-looking sunburn which others had remarked during the past week. There was not much, though, that he could say. He had not seen Gilman on any sleep-walking expedition, and had no idea what the curious image could be. He had, though, heard the French-Canadian who lodged just under Gilman talking to Mazurewicz one evening. They were telling each other how badly they dreaded the coming of Walpurgis Night, now only a few days off; and were exchanging pitying comments about the poor, doomed young gentleman. Desrochers, the fellow under Gilman's room, had spoken of nocturnal footsteps shod and unshod, and of the violet light he saw one night when he had stolen fearfully up to peer through Gilman's keyhole. He had not dared to peer, he told Mazurewicz, after he had glimpsed that light through the cracks around the door. There had been soft talking, too—and as he began to describe it his voice had sunk to an inaudible whisper.

Elwood could not imagine what had set these superstitious creatures gossiping, but supposed their imaginations had been roused by Gilman's late hours and somnolent walking and talking on the one hand, and by the nearness of traditionally-feared May-Eve on the other hand. That Gilman talked in his sleep was plain, and it was obviously from Desrocher's keyhole-listenings that the delusive notion of the violet dream-light had got abroad. These simple people were quick to imagine they had seen any odd thing they had heard about. As for a plan of action—

Gilman had better move down to Elwood's room and avoid sleeping alone. Elwood would, if awake, rouse him whenever he began to talk or rise in his sleep. Very soon, too, he must see the specialist. Meanwhile they would take the spiky image around to the various museums and to certain professors; seeking identification and stating that it had been found in a public rubbish-can. Also, Dombrowski must attend to the poisoning of those rats in the walls.

BRACED up by Elwood's companionship, Gilman attended classes that day. Strange urges still tugged at him, but he could sidetrack them with considerable success. During a free period he showed the queer image to several professors, all of whom were intensely interested, though none of them could shed any light upon its nature or origin. That night he slept on a couch which Elwood had had the landlord bring to the second-story room, and for the first time in weeks was wholly free from disquieting dreams. But the feverishness still hung on, and the whines of the loom-fixer were an unnerving influence.

During the next few days Gilman enjoyed an almost perfect immunity from morbid manifestations. He had, Elwood said, showed no tendency to talk or rise in his sleep; and meanwhile the landlord was putting rat-poison everywhere. The only disturbing element was the talk among the superstitious foreigners, whose imaginations had become highly excited. Mazurewicz was always trying to make him get a crucifix, and finally forced one upon him which he said had been blessed by the good Father Iwanicki. Desrochers, too, had something to say; in fact, he insisted that cautious steps had sounded in the now vacant room above him on the first and second nights of Gilman's absence from it. Paul Choynski thought he heard sounds in the halls and on the stairs at night, and claimed that his door had been softly tried, while Mrs. Dombrowski vowed she had seen Brown Jenkin for the first time since All-Hallows. But such naïve reports could mean very little, and Gilman let the cheap metal crucifix hang idly from a knob on his host's dresser.

For three days Gilman and Elwood canvassed the local museums in an effort to identify the strange spiky image, but always without success. In every quarter, however, interest was intense; for the utter alienage of the thing was a tremendous challenge to scientific curiosity. One of the small radiating arms was broken off and subjected to chemical analysis. Professor Ellery found platinum, iron and tellurium in the strange alloy; but mixed with these were at least three other apparent elements of high atomic weight which chemistry was absolutely powerless to classify. Not only did they fail to correspond with any human element, but they did not even fit the vacant places reserved for probable elements in the periodic system. The mystery remains unsolved to this day, though the image is on exhibition at the museum of Miskatonic University.

ON THE morning of April 27th a fresh rat-hole appeared in the room where Gilman was a guest, but Dombrowski tinned it up during the day. The poison was not having much effect, for scratchings and scurryings in the walls were virtually undiminished.

Elwood was out late that night, and Gilman waited up for him. He did not wish to go to sleep in a room alone—especially since he thought he had glimpsed in the evening twilight the repellent old woman whose image had become so horribly transferred to his dreams. He won-

dered who she was, and what had been near her rattling the tin cans in a rubbish-heap at the mouth of a squalid courtyard. The crone had seemed to notice him and leer evilly at him — though perhaps this was merely his imagination.

The next day both youths felt very tired, and knew they would sleep like logs when night came. In the evening they drowsily discussed the mathematical studies which had so completely and perhaps harmfully engrossed Gilman, and speculated about the linkage with ancient magic and folklore which seemed so darkly probable. They spoke of old Keziah Mason, and Elwood agreed that Gilman had good scientific grounds for thinking she might have stumbled on strange and significant information. The hidden cults to which these witches belonged often guarded and handed down surprizing secrets from elder, forgotten eons; and it was by no means impossible that Keziah had actually mastered the art of passing through dimensional gates. Tradition emphasizes the uselessness of material barriers in halting a witch's motions, and who can say what underlies the old tales of broomstick rides through the night?

Whether a modern student could ever gain similar powers from mathematical research alone, was still to be seen. Success, Gilman added, might lead to dangerous and unthinkable situations; for who could foretell the conditions pervading an adjacent but normally inaccessible dimension? On the other hand, the picturesque possibilities were enormous. Time could not exist in certain belts of space, and by entering and remaining in such a belt one might preserve one's life and age indefinitely; never suffering organic metabolism or deterioration except for slight amounts incurred during visits to one's own or similar planes. One might, for example, pass into a timeless dimension and emerge at some remote period of the earth's history as young as before.

Whether anybody had ever managed to do this, one could hardly conjecture with any degree of authority. Old legends are hazy and ambiguous, and in historic times all attempts at crossing forbidden gaps seem complicated by strange and terrible alliances with beings and messengers from outside. There was the immemorial figure of the deputy or messenger of hidden and terrible powers—the "Black Man" of the witch-cult, and the "Nyarlathotep" of the *Necronomicon*. There was, too, the baffling problem of the lesser messengers or intermediaries—the quasi-animals and queer hybrids which legend depicts as witches' familiars. As Gilman and Elwood retired, too sleepy to argue further, they heard Joe Mazurewicz reel into the house half drunk, and shuddered at the desperate wildness of his whining prayers.

That night Gilman saw the violet light again. In his dream he had heard a scratching and gnawing in the partitions, and thought that some one fumbled clumsily at the latch. Then he saw the old woman and the small furry thing advancing toward him over the carpeted floor. The beldame's face was alight with inhuman exultation, and the little yellow-toothed morbidity tittered mockingly as it pointed at the hearty-sleeping form of Elwood on the other couch across the room. A paralysis of fear stifled all attempts to cry out. As once before, the hideous crone seized Gilman by the shoulders, yanking him out of bed and into empty space. Again the infinitude of the shrieking abysses flashed past him, but in another second he thought he was in a dark, muddy, unknown alley of fetid odors with the rotting walls of ancient houses towering up on every hand.

Ahead was the robed black man he had seen in the peaked space in the other dream, while from a lesser distance the old woman was beckoning and grimacing imperiously. Brown Jenkin was rubbing itself with a kind of affectionate playfulness around the ankles of the black man, which the deep mud largely concealed. There was a dark open doorway on the right, to which the black man silently pointed. Into this the grinning crone started, dragging Gilman after her by his pajama sleeves. There were evil-smelling staircases which creaked ominously, and on which the old woman seemed to radiate a faint violet light; and finally a door leading off a landing. The crone fumbled with the latch and pushed the door open, motioning to Gilman to wait, and disappearing inside the black aperture.

The youth's over-sensitive ears caught a hideous strangled cry, and presently the beldame came out of the room bearing a small, senseless form which she thrust at the dreamer as if ordering him to carry it. The sight of this form, and the expression on its face, broke the spell. Still too dazed to cry out, he plunged recklessly down the noisome staircase and into the mud outside; halting only when seized and choked by the waiting black man. As consciousness departed he heard the faint, shrill tittering of the fanged, rat-like abnormality.

ON THE morning of the 29th Gilman awaked into a maelstrom of horror. The instant he opened his eyes he knew something was terribly wrong, for he was back in his old garret room with the slanting wall and ceiling, sprawled on the now unmade bed. His throat was aching inexplicably, and as he struggled to a sitting posture he saw with growing fright that his feet and pajama bottoms were brown with caked mud. For the moment his recollections were hopelessly hazy, but he knew at least that he must have been sleep-walking. Elwood had been lost too deeply in slumber to hear and stop him. On the floor were confused muddy prints, but oddly enough they did not extend all the way to the door. The more Gilman looked at them, the more peculiar they seemed; for in addition to those he could recognize as his there were some smaller, almost round markings — such as the legs of a large chair or a table might make, except that most of them tended to be divided into halves. There were also some curious muddy rat-tracks leading out of a fresh hole and back into it again. Utter bewilderment and the fear of madness racked Gilman as he staggered to the door and saw that there were no muddy prints outside. The more he remembered of his hideous dream the more terrified he felt, and it added to his desperation to hear Joe Mazurewicz chanting mournfully two floors below.

Descending to Elwood's room he roused his still-sleeping host and began telling of how he had found himself, but Elwood could form no idea of what might really have happened. Where Gilman could have been, how he got back to his room without making tracks in the hall, and how the muddy, furniture-like prints came to be mixed with his in the garret chamber, were wholly beyond conjecture. Then there were those dark, livid marks on his throat, as if he had tried to strangle himself. He put his hands up to them, but found that they did not even approximately fit. While they were talking, Desrochers dropped in to say that he had heard a terrific clattering overhead in the dark small hours. No, there had been no one on the stairs after midnight, though just before midnight he had heard faint

footfalls in the garret, and cautiously descending steps he did not like. It was, he added, a very bad time of year for Arkham. The young gentleman had better be sure to wear the crucifix Joe Mazurewicz had given him. Even the daytime was not safe, for after dawn there had been strange sounds in the house—especially a thin, childish wail hastily choked off.

Gilman mechanically attended classes that morning, but was wholly unable to fix his mind on his studies. A mood of hideous apprehension and expectancy had seized him, and he seemed to be awaiting the fall of some annihilating blow. At noon he lunched at the University Spa, picking up a paper from the next seat as he waited for dessert. But he never ate that dessert; for an item on the paper's first page left him limp, wild-eyed, and able only to pay his check and stagger back to Elwood's room.

There had been a strange kidnapping the night before in Orne's Gangway, and the two-year-old child of a clod-like laundry worker named Anastasia Wolejko had completely vanished from sight. The mother, it appeared, had feared the event for some time; but the reasons she assigned for her fear were so grotesque that no one took them seriously. She had, she said, seen Brown Jenkin about the place now and then ever since early in March, and knew from its grimaces and titterings that little Ladislas must be marked for sacrifice at the awful Sabbat on Walpurgis Night. She had asked her neighbor Mary Czanek to sleep in the room and try to protect the child, but Mary had not dared. She could not tell the police, for they never believed such things. Children had been taken that way every year ever since she could remember. And her friend Pete Stowacki would not help because he wanted the child out of the way.

But what threw Gilman into a cold perspiration was the report of a pair of revellers who had been walking past the mouth of the gangway just after midnight. They admitted they had been drunk, but both vowed they had seen a crazily dressed trio furtively entering the dark passageway. There had, they said, been a huge robed negro, a little old woman in rags, and a young white man in his nightclothes. The old woman had been dragging the youth, while around the feet of the negro a tame rat was rubbing and weaving in the brown mud.

GILMAN sat in a daze all the afternoon, and Elwood—who had meanwhile seen the papers and formed terrible conjectures from them—found him thus when he came home. This time neither could doubt but that something hideously serious was closing in around them. Between the fantasms of nightmare and the realities of the objective world a monstrous and unthinkable relationship was crystallizing, and only stupendous vigilance could avert still more direful developments. Gilman must see a specialist sooner or later, but not just now, when all the papers were full of this kidnapping business.

Just what had really happened was maddeningly obscure, and for a moment both Gilman and Elwood exchanged whispered theories of the wildest kind. Had Gilman unconsciously succeeded better than he knew in his studies of space and its dimensions? Had he actually slipped outside our sphere to points unguessed and unimaginable? Where—if anywhere—had he been on those nights of demoniac alienage? The roaring twilight abysses — the green hillside — the blistering terrace—the pulls from the stars — the ultimate black vortex — the black man — the muddy alley and the

stairs — the old witch and the fanged, furry horror — the bubble-congeries and the little polyhedron—the strange sunburn—the wrist wound—the unexplained image—the muddy feet—the throat-marks —the tales and fears of the superstitious foreigners—what did all this mean? To what extent could the laws of sanity apply to such a case?

There was no sleep for either of them that night, but next day they both cut classes and drowsed. This was April 30th, and with the dusk would come the hellish Sabbat-time which all the foreigners and the superstitious old folk feared. Mazurewicz came home at six o'clock and said people at the mill were whispering that the Walpurgis-revels would be held in the dark ravine beyond Meadow Hill where the old white stone stands in a place queerly devoid of all plant life. Some of them had even told the police and advised them to look there for the missing Wolejko child, but they did not believe anything would be done. Joe insisted that the poor young gentleman wear his nickel-chained crucifix, and Gilman put it on and dropped it inside his shirt to humor the fellow.

Late at night the two youths sat drowsing in their chairs, lulled by the praying of the loom-fixer on the floor below. Gilman listened as he nodded, his preternaturally sharpened hearing seeming to strain for some subtle, dreaded murmur beyond the noises in the ancient house. Unwholesome recollections of things in the *Necronomicon* and the *Black Book* welled up, and he found himself swaying to infandous rhythms said to pertain to the blackest ceremonies of the Sabbat and to have an origin outside the time and space we comprehend.

Presently he realized what he was listening for—the hellish chant of the celebrants in the distant black valley. How did he know so much about what they expected? How did he know the time when Nahab and her acolyte were due to bear the brimming bowl which would follow the black cock and the black goat? He saw that Elwood had dropped asleep, and tried to call out and waken him. Something, however, closed his throat. He was not his own master. Had he signed the black man's book after all?

Then his fevered, abnormal hearing caught the distant, wind-borne notes. Over miles of hill and field and alley they came, but he recognized them none the less. The fires must be lit, and the dancers must be starting in. How could he keep himself from going? What was it that had enmeshed him? Mathematics —folklore—the house—old Keziah— Brown Jenkin . . . and now he saw that there was a fresh rat-hole in the wall near his couch. Above the distant chanting and the nearer praying of Joe Mazurewicz came another sound—a stealthy, determined scratching in the partitions. He hoped the electric lights would not go out. Then he saw the fanged, bearded little face in the rat-hole—the accursed little face which he at last realized bore such a shocking, mocking resemblance to old Keziah's—and heard the faint fumbling at the door.

The screaming twilight abysses flashed before him, and he felt himself helpless in the formless grasp of the iridescent bubble-congeries. Ahead raced the small, kaleidoscopic polyhedron, and all through the churning void there was a heightening and acceleration of the vague tonal pattern which seemed to foreshadow some unutterable and unendurable climax. He seemed to know what was coming—the monstrous burst of Walpurgis-rhythm in whose cosmic timbre would be concentrated all the primal, ultimate space-time seethings which lie behind the massed

spheres of matter and sometimes break forth in measured reverberations that penetrate faintly to every layer of entity and give hideous significance throughout the worlds to certain dreaded periods.

But all this vanished in a second. He was again in the cramped, violet-litten peaked space with the slanting floor, the low cases of ancient books, the bench and table, the queer objects, and the triangular gulf at one side. On the table lay a small white figure—an infant boy, unclothed and unconscious—while on the other side stood the monstrous, leering old woman with a gleaming, grotesque-hafted knife in her right hand, and a queerly proportioned pale metal bowl covered with curiously chased designs and having delicate lateral handles in her left. She was intoning some croaking ritual in a language which Gilman could not understand, but which seemed like something guardedly quoted in the *Necronomicon*.

As THE scene grew clear he saw the ancient crone bend forward and extend the empty bowl across the table—and unable to control his own motions, he reached far forward and took it in both hands, noticing as he did so its comparative lightness. At the same moment the disgusting form of Brown Jenkin scrambled up over the brink of the triangular black gulf on his left. The crone now motioned him to hold the bowl in a certain position while she raised the huge, grotesque knife above the small white victim as high as her right hand could reach. The fanged, furry thing began tittering a continuation of the unknown ritual, while the witch croaked loathsome responses. Gilman felt a gnawing, poignant abhorrence shoot through his mental and emotional paralysis, and the light metal bowl shook in his grasp. A second later the downward motion of the knife broke the spell completely, and he dropped the bowl with a resounding bell-like clangor while his hands darted out frantically to stop the monstrous deed.

In an instant he had edged up the slanting floor around the end of the table and wrenched the knife from the old woman's claws; sending it clattering over the brink of the narrow triangular gulf. In another instant, however, matters were reversed; for those murderous claws had locked themselves tightly around his own throat, while the wrinkled face was twisted with insane fury. He felt the chain of the cheap crucifix grinding into his neck, and in his peril wondered how the sight of the object itself would affect the evil creature. Her strength was altogether superhuman, but as she continued her choking he reached feebly in his shirt and drew out the metal symbol, snapping the chain and pulling it free.

At sight of the device the witch seemed struck with panic, and her grip relaxed long enough to give Gilman a chance to break it entirely. He pulled the steel-like claws from his neck, and would have dragged the beldame over the edge of the gulf had not the claws received a fresh access of strength and closed in again. This time he resolved to reply in kind, and his own hands reached out for the creature's throat. Before she saw what he was doing he had the chain of the crucifix twisted about her neck, and a moment later he had tightened it enough to cut off her breath. During her last struggle he felt something bite at his ankle, and saw that Brown Jenkin had come to her aid. With one savage kick he sent the morbidity over the edge of the gulf and heard it whimper on some level far below.

Whether he had killed the ancient crone he did not know, but he let her rest

on the floor where she had fallen. Then, as he turned away, he saw on the table a sight which nearly snapped the last thread of his reason. Brown Jenkin, tough of sinew and with four tiny hands of demoniac dexterity, had been busy while the witch was throttling him, and his efforts had been in vain. What he had prevented the knife from doing to the victim's chest, the yellow fangs of the furry blasphemy had done to a wrist—and the bowl so lately on the floor stood full beside the small lifeless body.

In his dream-delirium Gilman heard the hellish alien-rhythmed chant of the Sabbat coming from an infinite distance, and knew the black man must be there. Confused memories mixed themselves with his mathematics, and he believed his subconscious mind held the *angles* which he needed to guide him back to the normal world alone and unaided for the first time. He felt sure he was in the immemorially sealed loft above his own room, but whether he could ever escape through the slanting floor or the long-stopped egress he doubted greatly. Besides, would not an escape from a dream-loft bring him merely into a dream-house—an abnormal projection of the actual place he sought? He was wholly bewildered as to the relation betwixt dream and reality in all his experiences.

The passage through the vague abysses would be frightful, for the Walpurgis-rhythm would be vibrating, and at last he would have to hear that hitherto-veiled cosmic pulsing which he so mortally dreaded. Even now he could detect a low, monstrous shaking whose tempo he suspected all too well. At Sabbat-time it always mounted and reached through to the worlds to summon the initiate to nameless rites. Half the chants of the Sabbat were patterned on this faintly overheard pulsing which no earthly ear could endure in its unveiled spatial fullness. Gilman wondered, too, whether he could trust his instincts to take him back to the right part of space. How could he be sure he would not land on that green-litten hillside of a far planet, on the tessellated terrace above the city of tentacled monsters somewhere beyond the galaxy, or in the spiral black vortices of that ultimate void of Chaos where reigns the mindless demon-sultan Azathoth?

Just before he made the plunge the violet light went out and left him in utter blackness. The witch — old Keziah — Nahab — that must have meant her death. And mixed with the distant chant of the Sabbat and the whimpers of Brown Jenkin in the gulf below he thought he heard another and wilder whine from unknown depths. Joe Mazurewicz — the prayers against the Crawling Chaos now turning to an inexplicably triumphant shriek—worlds of sardonic actuality impinging on vortices of febrile dream—Iä! Shub-Niggurath! The Goat with a Thousand Young. . . .

THEY found Gilman on the floor of his queerly-angled old garret room long before dawn, for the terrible cry had brought Desrochers and Choynski and Dombrowski and Mazurewicz at once, and had even wakened the soundly sleeping Elwood in his chair. He was alive, and with open, staring eyes, but seemed largely unconscious. On his throat were the marks of murderous hands, and on his left ankle was a distressing rat-bite. His clothing was badly rumpled, and Joe's crucifix was missing. Elwood trembled, afraid even to speculate on what new form hs friend's sleep-walking had taken. Mazurewicz seemed half dazed because of a "sign" he said he had had in response to his prayers, and he crossed himself frantically when the squealing

and whimpering of a rat sounded from beyond the slanting partition.

When the dreamer was settled on his couch in Elwood's room they sent for Doctor Malkowski—a local practitioner who would repeat no tales where they might prove embarrassing—and he gave Gilman two hypodermic injections which caused him to relax in something like natural drowsiness. During the day the patient regained consciousness at times and whispered his newest dream disjointedly to Elwood. It was a painful process, and at its very start brought out a fresh and disconcerting fact.

Gilman—whose ears had so lately possessed an abnormal sensitiveness—was now stone-deaf. Doctor Malkowski, summoned again in haste, told Elwood that both ear-drums were ruptured, as if by the impact of some stupendous sound intense beyond all human conception or endurance. How such a sound could have been heard in the last few hours without arousing all the Miskatonic Valley was more than the honest physician could say.

Elwood wrote his part of the colloquy on paper, so that a fairly easy communication was maintained. Neither knew what to make of the whole chaotic business, and decided it would be better if they thought as little as possible about it. Both, though, agreed that they must leave this ancient and accursed house as soon as it could be arranged. Evening papers spoke of a police raid on some curious revellers in a ravine beyond Meadow Hill just before dawn, and mentioned that the white stone there was an object of age-long superstitious regard. Nobody had been caught, but among the scattering fugitives had been glimpsed a huge negro. In another column it was stated that no trace of the missing child Ladislas Wolejko had been found.

The crowning horror came that very night. Elwood will never forget it, and was forced to stay out of college the rest of the term because of the resulting nervous breakdown. He had thought he heard rats in the partitions all the evening, but paid little attention to them. Then, long after both he and Gilman had retired, the atrocious shrieking began. Elwood jumped up, turned on the lights, and rushed over to his guest's couch. The occupant was emitting sounds of veritably inhuman nature, as if racked by some torment beyond description. He was writhing under the bedclothes, and a great red stain was beginning to appear on the blankets.

Elwood scarcely dared to touch him, but gradually the screaming and writhing subsided. By this time Dombrowski, Choynski, Desrochers, Mazurewicz, and the top-floor lodger were all crowding into the doorway, and the landlord had sent his wife back to telephone for Doctor Malkowski. Everybody shrieked when a large rat-like form suddenly jumped out from beneath the ensanguined bedclothes and scuttled across the floor to a fresh, open hole close by. When the doctor arrived and began to pull down those frightful covers Walter Gilman was dead.

It would be barbarous to do more than suggest what had killed Gilman. There had been virtually a tunnel through his body—something had eaten his heart out. Dombrowski, frantic at the failure of his rat-poisoning efforts, cast aside all thought of his lease and within a week had moved with all his older lodgers to a dingy but less ancient house in Walnut Street. The worst thing for a while was keeping Joe Mazurewicz quiet; for the brooding loom-fixer would never stay sober, and was constantly whining and muttering about spectral and terrible things.

It seems that on that last hideous night

Joe had stooped to look at the crimson rat-tracks which led from Gilman's couch to the near-by hole. On the carpet they were very indistinct, but a piece of open flooring intervened between the carpet's edge and the baseboard. There Mazurewicz had found something monstrous—or thought he had, for no one else could quite agree with him despite the undeniable queerness of the prints. The tracks on the flooring were certainly vastly unlike the average prints of a rat, but even Choynski and Desrochers would not admit that they were like the prints of four tiny human hands.

The house was never rented again. As soon as Dombrowski left it the pall of its final desolation began to descend, for people shunned it both on account of its old reputation and because of the new fetid odor. Perhaps the ex-landlord's rat-poison had worked after all, for not long after his departure the place became a neighborhood nuisance. Health officials traced the smell to the closed spaces above and beside the eastern garret room, and agreed that the number of dead rats must be enormous. They decided, however, that it was not worth their while to hew open and disinfect the long-sealed spaces; for the fetor would soon be over, and the locality was not one which encouraged fastidious standards. Indeed, there were always vague local tales of unexplained stenches upstairs in the Witch-House just after May-Eve and Hallowmass. The neighbors acquiesced in the inertia—but the fetor none the less formed an additional count against the place. Toward the last the house was condemned as a habitation by the building inspector.

Gilman's dreams and their attendant circumstances have never been explained. Elwood, whose thoughts on the entire episode are sometimes almost maddening, came back to college the next autumn and graduated in the following June. He found the spectral gossip of the town much diminished, and it is indeed a fact that—notwithstanding certain reports of a ghostly tittering in the deserted house which lasted almost as long as that edifice itself—no fresh appearances either of Old Keziah or of Brown Jenkin have been muttered of since Gilman's death. It is rather fortunate that Elwood was not in Arkham in that later year when certain events abruptly renewed the local whispers about elder horrors. Of course he heard about the matter afterward and suffered untold torments of black and bewildered speculation; but even that was not as bad as actual nearness and several possible sights would have been.

IN MARCH, 1931, a gale wrecked the roof and great chimney of the vacant Witch-House, so that a chaos of crumbling bricks, blackened, moss-grown shingles, and rotting planks and timbers crashed down into the loft and broke through the floor beneath. The whole attic story was choked with debris from above, but no one took the trouble to touch the mess before the inevitable razing of the decrepit structure. That ultimate step came in the following December, and it was when Gilman's old room was cleared out by reluctant, apprehensive workmen that the gossip began.

Among the rubbish which had crashed through the ancient slanting ceiling were several things which made the workmen pause and call in the police. Later the police in turn called in the coroner and several professors from the university. There were bones — badly crushed and splintered, but clearly recognizable as human—whose manifestly modern date conflicted puzzlingly with the remote period at which their only possible lurking place, the low, slant-floored loft over-

head, had supposedly been sealed from all human access. The coroner's physician decided that some belonged to a small child, while certain others—found mixed with shreds of rotten brownish cloth—belonged to a rather undersized, bent female of advanced years. Careful sifting of debris also disclosed many tiny bones of rats caught in the collapse, as well as older rat-bones gnawed by small fangs in a fashion now and then highly productive of controversy and reflection.

Other objects found included the mangled fragments of many books and papers, together with a yellowish dust left from the total disintegration of still older books and papers. All, without exception, appeared to deal with black magic in its most advanced and horrible forms; and the evidently recent date of certain items is still a mystery as unsolved as that of the modern human bones. An even greater mystery is the absolute homogeneity of the crabbed, archaic writing found on a wide range of papers whose conditions and watermarks suggest age differences of at least 150 to 200 years. To some, though, the greatest mystery of all is the variety of utterly inexplicable objects—objects whose shapes, materials, types of workmanship, and purposes baffle all conjecture — found scattered amidst the wreckage in evidently diverse states of injury. One of these things—which excited several Miskatonic professors profoundly —is a badly damaged monstrosity plainly resembling the strange image which Gilman gave to the college museum, save that it is larger, wrought of some peculiar bluish stone instead of metal, and possessed of a singularly angled pedestal with undecipherable hieroglyphics.

Archeologists and anthropologists are still trying to explain the bizarre designs chased on a crushed bowl of light metal whose inner side bore ominous brownish stains when found. Foreigners and credulous grandmothers are equally garrulous about the modern nickel crucifix with broken chain mixed in the rubbish and shiveringly identified by Joe Mazurewicz as that which he had given poor Gilman many years before. Some believe this crucifix was dragged up to the sealed loft by rats, while others think it must have been on the floor in some corner of Gilman's old room all the time. Still others, including Joe himself, have theories too wild and fantastic for sober credence.

When the slanting wall of Gilman's room was torn out, the once sealed triangular space between that partition and the house's north wall was found to contain much less structural debris, even in proportion to its size, than the room itself; though it had a ghastly layer of older materials which paralyzed the wreckers with horror. In brief, the floor was a veritable ossuary of the bones of small children—some fairly modern, but others extending back in infinite gradations to a period so remote that crumbling was almost complete. On this deep bony layer rested a knife of great size, obvious antiquity, and grotesque, ornate, and exotic design—above which the debris was piled.

In the midst of this debris, wedged between a fallen plank and a cluster of cemented bricks from the ruined chimney, was an object destined to cause more bafflement, veiled fright, and openly superstitious talk in Arkham than anything else discovered in the haunted and accursed building. This object was the partly crushed skeleton of a huge diseased rat, whose abnormalities of form are still a topic of debate and source of singular reticence among the members of Miskatonic's department of comparative anatomy. Very little concerning this skeleton has leaked out, but the workmen who

found it whisper in shocked tones about the long, brownish hairs with which it was associated.

The bones of the tiny paws, it is rumored, imply prehensile characteristics more typical of a diminutive monkey than of a rat, while the small skull with its savage yellow fangs is of the utmost anomalousness, appearing from certain angles like a miniature, monstrously degraded parody of a human skull. The workmen crossed themselves in fright when they came upon this blasphemy, but later burned candles of gratitude in St. Stanislaus' Church because of the shrill, ghostly tittering they felt they would never hear again.

The Dance of the Dead

By ROBERT B. GRAY

When the moon grows thin with his ribald grin
  And rots ere he yet may die,
When the fetid clouds like Death's own shrouds
  Weave grave-cloths for the sky,
And the pulsing bane of Hell's red rain
  Goes drumming and fifing by,

Then the graveyards yawn, and the devil's spawn
  Come grinning forth to their dance:
Lipless, they kiss—but a horrid hiss
  Keeps time with their jolting prance,
While sockets deep with Death's black sleep
  Give shadowy glance for glance.

In the gloom and the murk, and with fearsome smirk,
  They dance the Hallowtide through,—
Lost souls who default the creditor vault
  And cheat old Death of his due.
They range the girth of a shuddering earth,
  This ghastly, carrion crew,

Till the moon grows dim, and the dawnlight grim
  Leers that the night must die.
Then the revels pall as the dank graves call—
  While slinking back to the sky,
The dire refrain of Hell's red rain
  Goes drumming and fifing by!

Ubbo-Sathla

By CLARK ASHTON SMITH

A bizarre fantasy—a crystal-gazer goes back through time to attain the beginning of all things

. . . For Ubbo-Sathla is the source and the end. Before the coming of Zhothaqquah or Yok-Zothoth or Kthulhut from the stars, Ubbo-Sathla dwelt in the steaming fens of the new-made Earth: a mass without head or members, spawning the gray, formless efts of the prime and the grisly prototypes of terrene life. . . . And all earthly life, it is told, shall go back at last through the great circle of time to Ubbo-Sathla.

—*The Book of Eibon.*

PAUL TREGARDIS found the milky crystal in a litter of oddments from many lands and eras. He had entered the shop of the curio-dealer through an aimless impulse, with no particular object in mind, other than the idle distraction of eyeing and fingering a miscellany of far-gathered things. Looking desultorily about, his attention had been drawn by a dull glimmering on one of the tables; and he had extricated the queer orb-like stone from its shadowy, crowded position between an ugly little Aztec idol, the fossil egg of a dinornis, and an obscene fetish of black wood from the Niger.

The thing was about the size of a small orange and was slightly flattened at the ends, like a planet at its poles. It puzzled Tregardis, for it was not like an ordinary crystal, being cloudy and changeable, with an intermittent glowing in its heart, as if it were alternately illumed and darkened from within. Holding it to the wintry window, he studied it for awhile without being able to determine the secret of this singular and regular alternation. His puzzlement was soon complicated by a dawning sense of vague and irrecognizable familiarity, as if he had seen the thing before under circumstances that were now wholly forgotten.

He appealed to the curio-dealer, a dwarfish Hebrew with an air of dusty antiquity, who gave the impression of being lost to commercial considerations in some web of cabalistic revery.

"Can you tell me anything about this?"

The dealer gave an indescribable, simultaneous shrug of his shoulders and his eyebrows.

"It is very old—palægean, one might say. I can not tell you much, for little is known. A geologist found it in Greenland, beneath glacial ice, in the Miocene strata. Who knows? It may have belonged to some sorcerer of primeval Thule. Greenland was a warm, fertile region beneath the sun of Miocene times. No doubt it is a magic crystal; and a man might behold strange visions in its heart, if he looked long enough."

Tregardis was quite startled; for the dealer's apparently fantastic suggestion had brought to mind his own delvings in a branch of obscure lore; and, in particular, had recalled *The Book of Eibon,* that strangest and rarest of occult forgotten volumes, which is said to have come down through a series of manifold translations from a prehistoric original written in the lost language of Hyperborea. Tregardis, with much difficulty, had obtained the mediæval French version—a copy that had been owned by many generations of sorcerers and Satanists—but had never been able to find the Greek manuscript from which the version was derived.

The remote, fabulous original was sup-

posed to have been the work of a great Hyperborean wizard, from whom it had taken its name. It was a collection of dark and baleful myths, of liturgies, rituals and incantations both evil and esoteric. Not without shudders, in the course of studies that the average person would have considered more than singular, Tregardis had collated the French volume with the frightful *Necronomicon* of the mad Arab, Abdul Alhazred. He had found many correspondences of the blackest and most appalling significance, together with much forbidden data that was either unknown to the Arab or omitted by him . . . or by his translators.

Was this what he had been trying to recall, Tregardis wondered—the brief, casual reference, in *The Book of Eibon*, to a cloudy crystal that had been owned by the wizard Zon Mezzamalech, in Mhu Thulan? Of course, it was all too fantastic, too hypothetic, too incredible—but Mhu Thulan, that northern portion of ancient Hyperborea, was supposed to have corresponded roughly with modern Greenland, which had formerly been joined as a peninsula to the main continent. Could the stone in his hand, by some fabulous fortuity, be the crystal of Zon Mezzamalech?

TREGARDIS smiled at himself with inward irony for even conceiving the absurd notion. Such things did not occur —at least, not in present-day London; and in all likelihood, *The Book of Eibon* was sheer superstitious fantasy, anyway. Nevertheless, there was something about the crystal that continued to tease and inveigle him. He ended by purchasing it, at a fairly moderate price. The sum was named by the seller and paid by the buyer without bargaining.

With the crystal in his pocket, Paul Tregardis hastened back to his lodgings instead of resuming his leisurely saunter. He installed the milky globe on his writing-table, where it stood firmly enough on one of its oblate ends. Then, still smiling at his own absurdity, he took down the yellow parchment manuscript of *The Book of Eibon* from its place in a somewhat inclusive collection of récherché literature. He opened the vermiculated leather cover with hasps of tarnished steel, and read over to himself, translating from the archaic French as he read, the paragraph that referred to Zon Mezzamalech:

"This wizard, who was mighty among sorcerers, had found a cloudy stone, orb-like and somewhat flattened at the ends, in which he could behold many visions of the terrene past, even to the Earth's beginning, when Ubbo-Sathla, the unbegotten source, lay vast and swollen and yeasty amid the vaporing slime. . . . But of that which he beheld, Zon Mezzamalech left little record; and people say that he vanished presently, in a way that is not known; and after him the cloudy crystal was lost."

Paul Tregardis laid the manuscript aside. Again there was something that tantalized and beguiled him, like a lost dream or a memory forfeit to oblivion. Impelled by a feeling which he did not scrutinize or question, he sat down before the table and began to stare intently into the cold, nebulous orb. He felt an expectation which, somehow, was so familiar, so permeative a part of his consciousness, that he did not even name it to himself.

Minute by minute he sat, and watched the alternate glimmering and fading of the mysterious light in the heart of the crystal. By imperceptible degrees, there stole upon him a sense of dream-like duality, both in respect to his person and his surroundings. He was still Paul Tregardis—and yet he was some one else; the room was his London apartment—and a chamber in some foreign but well-known place. And in both milieus he peered stedfastly into the same crystal.

After an interim, without surprize on the part of Tregardis, the process of re-identification became complete. He knew that he was Zon Mezzamalech, a sorcerer of Mhu Thulan, and a student of all lore anterior to his own epoch. Wise with dreadful secrets that were not known to Paul Tregardis, amateur of anthropology and the occult sciences in latter-day London, he sought by means of the milky crystal to attain an even older and more fearful knowledge.

He had acquired the stone in dubitable ways, from a more than sinister source. It was unique and without fellow in any land or time. In its depths, all former years, all things that have ever been, were supposedly mirrored, and would reveal themselves to the patient visionary. And through the crystal, Zon Mezzamalech had dreamt to recover the wisdom of the gods who died before the Earth was born. They had passed to the lightless void, leaving their lore inscribed upon tablets of ultra-stellar stone; and the tablets were guarded in the primal mire by the formless, idiotic demiurge, Ubbo-Sathla. Only by means of the crystal could he hope to find and read the tablets.

FOR the first time, he was making trial of the globe's reputed virtues. About him an ivory-panelled chamber, filled with his magic books and paraphernalia, was fading slowly from his consciousness. Before him, on a table of some dark Hyperborean wood that had been graven with grotesque ciphers, the crystal appeared to swell and deepen, and in its filmy depth he beheld a swift and broken swirling of dim scenes, fleeting like the bubbles of a mill-race. As if he looked upon an actual world, cities, forests, mountains, seas and meadows flowed beneath him, lightening and darkening as with the passage of days and nights in some weirdly accelerated stream of time.

Zon Mezzamalech had forgotten Paul Tregardis—had lost the remembrance of his own entity and his own surroundings in Mhu Thulan. Moment by moment, the flowing vision in the crystal became more definite and distinct, and the orb itself deepened till he grew giddy, as if he were peering from an insecure height into some never-fathomed abyss. He knew that time was racing backward in the crystal, was unrolling for him the pageant of all past days; but a strange alarm had seized him, and he feared to gaze longer. Like one who has nearly fallen from a precipice, he caught himself with a violent start and drew back from the mystic orb.

Again, to his gaze, the enormous whirling world into which he had peered was a small and cloudy crystal on his rune-wrought table in Mhu Thulan. Then, by degrees, it seemed that the great room with sculptured panels of mammoth ivory was narrowing to another and dingier place; and Zon Mezzamalech, losing his preternatural wisdom and sorcerous power, went back by a weird regression into Paul Tregardis.

And yet not wholly, it seemed, was he able to return. Tregardis, dazed and wondering, found himself before the writing-table on which he had set the oblate sphere. He felt the confusion of one who has dreamt and has not yet fully awakened from the dream. The room puzzled him vaguely, as if something were wrong with its size and furnishings; and his remembrance of purchasing the crystal from a curio-dealer was oddly and discrepantly mingled with an impression that he had acquired it in a very different manner.

He felt that something very strange had happened to him when he peered into the crystal; but just what it was he could not seem to recollect. It had left him in the sort of psychic muddlement

that follows a debauch of hashish. He assured himself that he was Paul Tregardis, that he lived on a certain street in London, that the year was 1933; but such commonplace verities had somehow lost their meaning and their validity; and everything about him was shadow-like and insubstantial. The very walls seemed to waver like smoke; the people in the streets were phantoms of phantoms; and he himself was a lost shadow, a wandering echo of something long forgot.

He resolved that he would not repeat his experiment of crystal-gazing. The effects were too unpleasant and equivocal. But the very next day, by an unreasoning impulse to which he yielded almost mechanically, without reluctation, he found himself seated before the misty orb. Again he became the sorcerer Zon Mezzamalech in Mhu Thulan; again he dreamt to retrieve the wisdom of the antemundane gods; again he drew back from the deepening crystal with the terror of one who fears to fall; and once more—but doubtfully and dimly, like a failing wraith—he was Paul Tregardis.

Three times did Tregardis repeat the experience on successive days; and each time his own person and the world about him became more tenuous and confused than before. His sensations were those of a dreamer who is on the verge of waking; and London itself was unreal as the lands that slip from the dreamer's ken, receding in filmy mist and cloudy light. Beyond it all, he felt the looming and crowding of vast imageries, alien but half familiar. It was as if the fantasmagoria of time and space were dissolving about him, to reveal some veritable reality—or another dream of space and time.

THERE came, at last, the day when he sat down before the crystal—and did not return as Paul Tregardis. It was the day when Zon Mezzamalech, boldly disregarding certain evil and portentous warnings, resolved to overcome his curious fear of falling bodily into the visionary world that he beheld—a fear that had hitherto prevented him from following the backward stream of time for any distance. He must, he assured himself, conquer this fear if he were ever to see and read the lost tablets of the gods. He had beheld nothing more than a few fragments of the years of Mhu Thulan immediately posterior to the present—the years of his own lifetime; and there were inestimable cycles between these years and the Beginning.

Again, to his gaze, the crystal deepened immeasurably, with scenes and happenings that flowed in a retrograde stream. Again the magic ciphers of the dark table faded from his ken, and the sorcerously carven walls of his chamber melted into less than dream. Once more he grew giddy with an awful vertigo as he bent above the swirling and milling of the terrible gulfs of time in the world-like orb. Fearfully, in spite of his resolution, he would have drawn away; but he had looked and leaned too long. There was a sense of abysmal falling, a suction as of ineluctable winds, of maelstroms that bore him down through fleet unstable visions of his own past life into antenatal years and dimensions. He seemed to endure the pangs of an inverse dissolution; and then he was no longer Zon Mezzamalech, the wise and learned watcher of the crystal, but an actual part of the weirdly racing stream that ran back to reattain the Beginning.

He seemed to live unnumbered lives, to die myriad deaths, forgetting each time the death and life that had gone before. He fought as a warrior in half-legendary battles; he was a child playing in the ruins of some olden city of Mhu Thulan; he was the king who had reigned when the city was in its prime, the proph-

et who had foretold its building and its doom. A woman, he wept for the bygone dead in necropoli long-crumbled; an antique wizard, he muttered the rude spells of earlier sorcery; a priest of some pre-human god, he wielded the sacrificial knife in cave-temples of pillared basalt. Life by life, era by era, he retraced the long and groping cycles through which Hyperborea had risen from savagery to a high civilization.

He became a barbarian of some troglodytic tribe, fleeing from the slow, turreted ice of a former glacial age into lands illumed by the ruddy flare of perpetual volcanoes. Then, after incomputable years, he was no longer man but a manlike beast, roving in forests of giant fern and calamite, or building an uncouth nest in the boughs of mighty cycads.

Through eons of anterior sensation, of crude lust and hunger, of aboriginal terror and madness, there was someone—or something—that went ever backward in time. Death became birth, and birth was death. In a slow vision of reverse change, the earth appeared to melt away, to slough off the hills and mountains of its latter strata. Always the sun grew larger and hotter above the fuming swamps that teemed with a crasser life, with a more fulsome vegetation. And the thing that had been Paul Tregardis, that had been Zon Mezzamalech, was a part of all the monstrous devolution. It flew with the claw-tipped wings of a pterodactyl, it swam in tepid seas with the vast, winding bulk of an ichthyosaurus, it bellowed uncouthly with the armored throat of some forgotten behemoth to the huge moon that burned through Liassic mists.

At length, after eons of immemorial brutehood, it became one of the lost serpent-men who reared their cities of black gneiss and fought their venomous wars in the world's first continent. It walked undulously in ante-human streets, in strange crooked vaults; it peered at primeval stars from high, Babelian towers; it bowed with hissing litanies to great serpent-idols. Through years and ages of the ophidian era it returned, and was a thing that crawled in the ooze, that had not yet learned to think and dream and build. And the time came when there was no longer a continent, but only a vast, chaotic marsh, a sea of slime, without limit or horizon, that seethed with a blind writhing of amorphous vapors.

There, in the gray beginning of Earth, the formless mass that was Ubbo-Sathla reposed amid the slime and the vapors. Headless, without organs or members, it sloughed from its oozy sides, in a slow, ceaseless wave, the amebic forms that were the archetypes of earthly life. Horrible it was, if there had been aught to apprehend the horror; and loathsome, if there had been any to feel loathing. About it, prone or tilted in the mire, there lay the mighy tablets of star-quarried stone that were writ with the inconceivable wisdom of the premundane gods.

And there, to the goal of a forgotten search, was drawn the thing that had been—or would sometime be—Paul Tregardis and Zon Mezzamalech. Becoming a shapeless eft of the prime, it crawled sluggishly and obliviously across the fallen tablets of the gods, and fought and ravened blindly with the other spawn of Ubbo-Sathla.

OF ZON MEZZAMALECH and his vanishing, there is no mention anywhere, save the brief passage in *The Book of Eibon*. Concerning Paul Tregardis, who also disappeared, there was a curt notice in several London papers. No one seems to have known anything about him: he is gone as if he had never been; and the crystal, presumably, is gone too. At least, no one has found it.

The Man on the Ground

By ROBERT E. HOWARD

An eery story of a feud to the death between two cowpunchers—by the author of "The Shadow Kingdom"

CAL REYNOLDS shifted his tobacco quid to the other side of his mouth as he squinted down the dull blue barrel of his Winchester. His jaws worked methodically, their movement ceasing as he found his bead. He froze into rigid immobility; then his finger hooked on the trigger. The crack of the shot sent the echoes rattling among the hills, and like a louder echo came an answering shot. Reynolds flinched down, flattening his rangy body against the earth, swearing softly. A gray flake jumped from one of the rocks near his head, the ricocheting bullet whining off into space. Reynolds involuntarily shivered. The sound was as deadly as the singing of an unseen rattler.

He raised himself gingerly high enough to peer out between the rocks in front of him. Separated from his refuge by a broad level grown with mesquite-grass and prickly-pear, rose a tangle of boulders similar to that behind which he crouched. From among these boulders floated a thin wisp of whitish smoke. Reynolds' keen eyes, trained to sun-scorched distances, detected a small circle of dully gleaming blue steel among the rocks. That ring was the muzzle of a rifle, and Reynolds well knew who lay behind that muzzle.

The feud between Cal Reynolds and Esau Brill had been long, for a Texas feud. Up in the Kentucky mountains family wars may straggle on for generations, but the geographical conditions and human temperament of the Southwest were not conducive to long-drawn-out hostilities. There feuds were generally concluded with appalling suddenness and finality. The stage was a saloon, the streets of a little cow-town, or the open range. Sniping from the laurel was exchanged for the close-range thundering of six-shooters and sawed-off shotguns which decided matters quickly, one way or the other.

The case of Cal Reynolds and Esau Brill was somewhat out of the ordinary. In the first place, the feud concerned only themselves. Neither friends nor relatives were drawn into it. No one, including the participants, knew just how it started. Cal Reynolds merely knew that he had hated Esau Brill most of his life, and that Brill reciprocated. Once as youths they had clashed with the violence and intensity of rival young catamounts. From that encounter Reynolds carried away a knife scar across the edge of his ribs, and Brill a permanently impaired eye. It had decided nothing. They had fought to a bloody gasping deadlock, and neither had felt any desire to "shake hands and make up." That is a hypocrisy developed in civilization, where men have no stomach for fighting to the death. After a man has felt his adversary's knife grate against his bones, his adversary's thumb gouging at his eyes, his adversary's boot-heels stamped into his mouth, he is scarcely inclined to forgive and forget,

regardless of the original merits of the argument.

So Reynolds and Brill carried their mutual hatred into manhood, and as cowpunchers riding for rival ranches, it followed that they found opportunities to carry on their private war. Reynolds rustled cattle from Brill's boss, and Brill returned the compliment. Each raged at the other's tactics, and considered himself justified in eliminating his enemy in any way that he could. Brill caught Reynolds without his gun one night in a saloon at Cow Wells, and only an ignominious flight out the back way, with bullets barking at his heels, saved the Reynolds scalp.

Again Reynolds, lying in the chaparral, neatly knocked his enemy out of his saddle at five hundred yards with a .30-30 slug, and, but for the inopportune appearance of a line-rider, the feud would have ended there, Reynolds deciding, in the face of this witness, to forego his original intention of leaving his covert and hammering out the wounded man's brains with his rifle butt.

Brill recovered from his wound, having the vitality of a longhorn bull, in common with all his sun-leathered iron-thewed breed, and as soon as he was on his feet, he came gunning for the man who had waylaid him.

Now after these onsets and skirmishes, the enemies faced each other at good rifle range, among the lonely hills where interruption was unlikely.

For more than an hour they had lain among the rocks, shooting at each hint of movement. Neither had scored a hit, though the .30-30's whistled perilously close.

In each of Reynolds' temples a tiny pulse hammered maddeningly. The sun beat down on him and his shirt was soaked with sweat. Gnats swarmed about his head, getting into his eyes, and he cursed venomously. His wet hair was plastered to his scalp; his eyes burned with the glare of the sun, and the rifle barrel was hot to his calloused hand. His right leg was growing numb and he shifted it cautiously, cursing at the jingle of the spur, though he knew Brill could not hear. All his discomfort added fuel to the fire of his wrath. Without process of conscious reasoning, he attributed all his suffering to his enemy. The sun beat dazingly on his sombrero, and his thoughts were slightly addled. It was hotter than the hearthstone of hell among those bare rocks. His dry tongue caressed his baked lips.

Through the muddle of his brain burned his hatred of Esau Brill. It had become more than an emotion: it was an obsession, a monstrous incubus. When he flinched from the whip-crack of Brill's rifle, it was not from fear of death, but because the thought of dying at the hands of his foe was an intolerable horror that made his brain rock with red frenzy. He would have thrown his life away recklessly, if by so doing he could have sent Brill into eternity just three seconds ahead of himself.

He did not analyze these feelings. Men who live by their hands have little time for self-analysis. He was no more aware of the quality of his hate for Esau Brill than he was consciously aware of his hands and feet. It was part of him, and more than part: it enveloped him, engulfed him; his mind and body were no more than its material manifestations. He *was* the hate; it was the whole soul and spirit of him. Unhampered by the stagnant and enervating shackles of sophistication and intellectuality, his instincts rose sheer from the naked primitive. And from them crystallized an almost tangible abstraction—a hate too

strong for even death to destroy; a hate powerful enough to embody itself in itself, without the aid or the necessity of material substance.

For perhaps a quarter of an hour neither rifle had spoken. Instinct with death as rattlesnakes coiled among the rocks soaking up poison from the sun's rays, the feudists lay each waiting his chance, playing the game of endurance until the taut nerves of one or the other should snap.

IT WAS Esau Brill who broke. Not that his collapse took the form of any wild madness or nervous explosion. The wary instincts of the wild were too strong in him for that. But suddenly, with a screamed curse, he hitched up on his elbow and fired blindly at the tangle of stones which concealed his enemy. Only the upper part of his arm and the corner of his blue-shirted shoulder were for an instant visible. That was enough. In that flash-second Cal Reynolds jerked the trigger, and a frightful yell told him his bullet had found its mark. And at the animal pain in that yell, reason and life-long instincts were swept away by an insane flood of terrible joy. He did not whoop exultantly and spring to his feet; but his teeth bared in a wolfish grin and he involuntarily raised his head. Waking instinct jerked him down again. It was chance that undid him. Even as he ducked back, Brill's answering shot cracked.

Cal Reynolds did not hear it, because, simultaneously with the sound, something exploded in his skull, plunging him into utter blackness, shot briefly with red sparks.

The blackness was only momentary. Cal Reynolds glared wildly around, realizing with a frenzied shock that he was lying in the open. The impact of the shot had sent him rolling from among the rocks, and in that quick instant he realized that it had not been a direct hit. Chance had sent the bullet glancing from a stone, apparently to flick his scalp in passing. That was not so important. What was important was that he was lying out in full view, where Esau Brill could fill him full of lead. A wild glance showed his rifle lying close by. It had fallen across a stone and lay with the stock against the ground, the barrel slanting upward. Another glance showed his enemy standing upright among the stones that had concealed him.

In that one glance Cal Reynolds took in the details of the tall, rangy figure: the stained trousers sagging with the weight of the holstered six-shooter, the legs tucked into the worn leather boots; the streak of crimson on the shoulder of the blue shirt, which was plastered to the wearer's body with sweat; the tousled black hair, from which perspiration was pouring down the unshaven face. He caught the glint of yellow tobacco-stained teeth shining in a savage grin. Smoke still drifted from the rifle in Brill's hands.

These familiar and hated details stood out in startling clarity during the fleeting instant while Reynolds struggled madly against the unseen chains which seemed to hold him to the earth. Even as he thought of the paralysis a glancing blow on the head might induce, something seemed to snap and he rolled free. Rolled is hardly the word: he seemed almost to dart to the rifle that lay across the rock, so light his limbs felt.

Dropping behind the stone he seized the weapon. He did not even have to lift it. As it lay it bore directly on the man who was now approaching.

His hand was momentarily halted by Esau Brill's strange behavior. Instead of firing or leaping back into cover the man

came straight on, his rifle in the crook of his arm, that damnable leer still on his unshaven lips. Was he mad? Could he not see that his enemy was up again, raging with life, and with a cocked rifle aimed at his heart? Brill seemed not to be looking at him, but to one side, at the spot where Reynolds had just been lying.

Without seeking further for the explanation of his foe's actions, Cal Reynolds pulled the trigger. With the vicious spang of the report a blue shred leaped from Brill's broad breast. He staggered back, his mouth flying open. And the look on his face froze Reynolds again. Esau Brill came of a breed which fights to its last gasp. Nothing was more certain than that he would go down pulling the trigger blindly until the last red vestige of life left him. Yet the ferocious triumph was wiped from his face with the crack of the shot, to be replaced by an awful expression of dazed surprize. He made no move to lift his rifle, which slipped from his grasp, nor did he clutch at his wound. Throwing out his hands in a strange, stunned, helpless way, he reeled backward on slowly buckling legs, his features frozen into a mask of stupid amazement that made his watcher shiver with its cosmic horror.

Through the opened lips gushed a tide of blood, dyeing the damp shirt. And like a tree that sways and rushes suddenly earthward, Esau Brill crashed down among the mesquite-grass and lay motionless.

CAL REYNOLDS rose, leaving the rifle where it lay. The rolling grass-grown hills swam misty and indistinct to his gaze. Even the sky and the blazing sun had a hazy unreal aspect. But a savage content was in his soul. The long feud was over at last, and whether he had taken his death-wound or not, he had sent Esau Brill to blaze the trail to hell ahead of him.

Then he started violently as his gaze wandered to the spot where he had rolled after being hit. He glared; were his eyes playing him tricks? Yonder in the grass Esau Brill lay dead—yet only a few feet away stretched another body.

Rigid with surprize, Reynolds glared at the rangy figure, slumped grotesquely beside the rocks. It lay partly on its side, as if flung there by some blind convulsion, the arms outstretched, the fingers crooked as if blindly clutching. The short-cropped sandy hair was splashed with blood, and from a ghastly hole in the temple the brains were oozing. From a corner of the mouth seeped a thin trickle of tobacco juice to stain the dusty neck-cloth.

And as he gazed, an awful familiarity made itself evident. He knew the feel of those shiny leather wrist-bands; he knew with fearful certainty whose hands had buckled that gun-belt; the tang of that tobacco juice was still on his palate.

In one brief destroying instant he knew he was looking down at his own lifeless body. And with the knowledge came true oblivion.

Green Tea

By J. SHERIDAN LE FANU

1. Doctor Hesselius Relates How He Met the Rev. Mr. Jennings

THE Rev. Mr. Jennings is tall and thin. He is middle-aged, and dresses with a natty, old-fashioned, high-church precision. He is naturally a little stately, but not at all stiff. His features, without being handsome, are well formed, and their expression extremely kind, but also shy.

I met him one evening at Lady Mary Heyduke's. The modesty and benevolence of his countenance are extremely prepossessing.

We were but a small party, and he joined agreeably enough in the conversation. He seems to enjoy listening very much more than contributing to the talk; but what he says is always to the purpose and well said. He is a great favorite of Lady Mary's, who, it seems, consults him upon many things, and thinks him the most happy and blessed person on earth. Little knows she about him.

The Rev. Mr. Jennings is a bachelor, and has, they say, sixty thousand pounds in the funds. He is a charitable man. He is most anxious to be actively employed in his sacred profession, and yet though always tolerably well elsewhere, when he goes down to his vicarage in Warwickshire, to engage in the actual duties of his sacred calling, his health soon fails him, and in a very strange way. So says Lady Mary.

There is no doubt that Mr. Jennings' health does break down, in generally a sudden and mysterious way, sometimes in the very act of officiating in his old and pretty church at Kenlis. It may be his heart, it may be his brain. But so it has happened three or four times, or oftener, that after proceeding a certain way in the service, he has on a sudden stopped short, and after a silence, apparently quite unable to resume, he has fallen into solitary, inaudible prayer, his hands and his eyes uplifted, and then, pale as death, and in the agitation of a strange shame and horror, descended trembling, and got into the vestry-room, leaving his congregation, without explanation, to themselves. This occurred when his curate was absent. When he goes down to Kenlis now, he always takes care to provide a clergyman to share his duty, and to supply his place

on the instant should he become thus suddenly incapacitated.

When Mr. Jennings breaks down quite, and beats a retreat from the vicarage, and returns to London, where, in a dark street off Piccadilly, he inhabits a very narrow house, Lady Mary says that he is always perfectly well. I have my own opinion about that. There are degrees, of course. We shall see.

Mr. Jennings is a perfectly gentlemanlike man. People, however, remark something odd. There is an impression a little ambiguous. One thing which certainly contributes to it, people I think don't remember, or don't distinctly remark. But I did, almost immediately. Mr. Jennings has a way of looking sidelong upon the carpet, as if his eye followed the movements of something there. This occurs only now and then, but often enough to give a certain oddity to his manner, and in this glance travelling along the floor there is something both shy and anxious.

A medical philosopher, as you are good enough to call me, elaborating theories by the aid of cases sought out by himself, and by him watched and scrutinized with more time at command, and consequently infinitely more minuteness than the ordinary practitioner can afford, falls insensibly into habits of observation, which accompany him everywhere, and are exercised, as some people would say, impertinently, upon every subject that presents itself with the least likelihood of rewarding inquiry.

There was a promise of this kind in the slight, timid, kindly, but reserved gentleman, whom I met for the first time at this agreeable little evening gathering. I observed, of course, more than I here set down; but I reserve all that borders on the technical for a strictly scientific paper.

I may remark, that when I here speak of medical science, I do so in a much more comprehensive sense than its generally material treatment would warrant. I believe the entire natural world is but the ultimate expression of that spiritual world from which, and in which alone, it has its life. I believe that the essential man is a spirit, that the spirit is an organized substance, but as different in point of material from what we ordinarily understand by matter, as light or electricity is; that the material body is, in the most literal sense, a vesture, and death consequently no interruption of the living man's existence, but simply his extrication from the natural body—a process which commences at the moment of what we term death, and the completion of which, at furthest a few days later, is the resurrection "in power."

In pursuance of my habit, I was covertly observing Mr. Jennings, with all my caution—I think he perceived it—and I saw plainly that he was as cautiously observing me. Lady Mary happening to address me by name, as Doctor Hesselius, I saw that he glanced at me more sharply, and then became thoughtful for a few minutes.

After this, as I conversed with a gentleman at the other end of the room, I saw him look at me more steadily, and with an interest which I thought I understood. I then saw him take an opportunity of chatting with Lady Mary, and was, as one always is, perfectly aware of being the subject of a distant inquiry and answer.

THIS tall clergyman approached me by and by; and in a little time we had got into conversation. When two people, who like reading, and know books and places, having travelled, wish to discourse, it is very strange if they can't find topics. It was not accident that brought him near me, and led him into conversa-

tion. He knew German, and had read my *Essays on Metaphysical Medicine,* which suggest more than they actually say.

This courteous man, gentle, shy, plainly a man of thought and reading, who, moving and talking among us, was not altogether of us, was cautiously weighing in his own mind the idea of taking a certain step with regard to me. I penetrated his thoughts without his being aware of it, and was careful to say nothing which could betray to his sensitive vigilance my suspicions respecting his position, or my surmises about his plans respecting myself.

We chatted upon indifferent subjects for a time, but at last he said:

"I was very much interested by some papers of yours, Doctor Hesselius, upon what you term metaphysical medicine—I read them in German, ten or twelve years ago—have they been translated?"

"No, I'm sure they have not—I should have heard. They would have asked my leave, I think."

"I asked the publishers here, a few months ago, to get the book for me in the original German; but they tell me it is out of print."

"So it is, and has been for some years; but it flatters me as an author to find that you have not forgotten my little book, although," I added, laughing, "ten or twelve years is a considerable time to have managed without it; but I suppose you have been turning the subject over again in your mind, or something has happened lately to revive your interest in it."

At this remark, accompanied by a glance of inquiry, a sudden embarrassment disturbed Mr. Jennings, analogous to that which makes a young lady blush and look foolish. He dropped his eyes, and folded his hands together uneasily, and looked oddly, and you would have said, guiltily, for a moment.

I helped him out of his awkwardness in the best way, by appearing not to observe it, and going straight on, I said: "Those revivals of interest in a subject happen to me often; one book suggests another, and often sends me back on a wild-goose chase over an interval of twenty years. But if you still care to possess a copy, I shall be only too happy to provide you; I still have two or three by me—and if you allow me to present one I shall be very much honored."

"You are very good indeed," he said, quite at his ease again, in a moment: "I almost despaired—I don't know how to thank you."

"Pray don't say a word; the thing is really so little worth that I am only ashamed of having offered it, and if you thank me any more I shall throw it into the fire in a fit of modesty."

Mr. Jennings laughed. He inquired where I was staying in London, and after a little more conversation on a variety of ubjects, he took his departure.

2. *The Doctor Questions Lady Mary, and She Answers*

"I LIKE your vicar so much, Lady Mary," said I, as soon as he was gone. "He has read, travelled, and thought, and having also suffered, he ought to be an accomplished companion."

"So he is, and, better still, he is a really good man," said she. "His advice is invaluable about my schools, and all my little undertakings at Dawlbridge, and he's so painstaking, he takes so much trouble—you have no idea—wherever he thinks he can be of use: he's so good-natured and so sensible."

"It is pleasant to hear so good an account of his neighborly virtues. I can only testify to his being an agreeable and

gentle companion, and in addition to what you have told me, I think I can tell you two or three things about him," said I.

"Really!"

"Yes, to begin with, he's unmarried."

"Yes, that's right—go on."

"He has been writing, that is he *was,* but for two or three years perhaps, he has not gone on with his work, and the book was upon some rather abstract subject—perhaps theology."

"Well, he was writing a book, as you say; I'm not quite sure what it was about, but only that it was nothing that I cared for; very likely you are right, and he certainly did stop—yes."

"And although he only drank a little coffee here tonight, he likes tea, at least, did like it, extravagantly."

"Yes, that's *quite* true."

"He drank green tea a good deal, didn't he?" I pursued.

"Well, that's very odd! Green tea was a subject on which we used almost to quarrel."

"But he has quite given that up," said I.

"So he has."

"And now, one more fact. His mother or his father, did you know them?"

"Yes, both; his father is only ten years dead, and their place is near Dawlbridge. We knew them very well," she answered.

"Well, either his mother or his father—I should rather think his father—saw a ghost," said I.

"Well, you really are a conjurer, Doctor Hesselius."

"Conjurer or no, haven't I said right?" I answered merrily.

"You certainly have, and it *was* his father: he was a silent, whimsical man, and he used to bore my father about his dreams, and at last he told him a story about a ghost he had seen and talked with, and a very odd story it was. I remember it particularly, because I was so afraid of him. This story was long before he died—when I was quite a child—and his days were so silent and moping, and he used to drop in sometimes, in the dusk, when I was alone in the drawing-room, and I used to fancy there were ghosts about him."

I smiled and nodded.

"And now, having established my character as a conjurer, I think I must say good-night," said I.

"But how *did* you find it out?"

"By the planets, of course, as the gipsies do," I answered, and so, gayly, we said good-night.

Next morning I sent the little book he had been inquiring after, and a note to Mr. Jennings, and on returning late that evening, I found that he had called at my lodgings, and left his card. He asked whether I was at home, and asked at what hour he would be most likely to find me.

Does he intend opening his case, and consulting me "professionally," as they say? I hope so. I have already conceived a theory about him. It is supported by Lady Mary's answers to my parting questions. I should like much to ascertain from his own lips. But what can I do consistently with good breeding to invite a confession? Nothing. I rather think he meditates one. At all events, I shan't make myself difficult of access; I mean to return his visit tomorrow. Perhaps something may come of it.

3. *Doctor Hesselius Picks Up Something in Latin Books*

WELL, I have called at Blank Street. On my inquiring at the door, the servant told me that Mr. Jennings was engaged very particularly with a clergyman from Kenlis, his parish in the country. Intending to reserve my privilege, and to call again, I merely intimated that I should try another time, and had turned

to go, when the servant begged my pardon, and asked me, looking at me a little more attentively than well-bred persons of his order usually do, whether I was Doctor Hesselius; and, on learning that I was, he said, "Perhaps then, sir, you would allow me to mention it to Mr. Jennings, for I am sure he wishes to see you."

The servant returned in a moment, with a message from Mr. Jennings, asking me to go into his study, which was in effect his back drawing-room, promising to be with me in a very few minutes.

This was really a study—almost a library. The room was lofty, with two tall slender windows, and rich dark curtains. It was much larger than I had expected, and stored with books on every side, from the floor to the ceiling. The upper carpet—for to my tread it felt that there were two or three—was a Turkey carpet. My steps fell noiselessly. The bookcases standing out, placed the windows, particularly narrow ones, in deep recesses. The effect of the room was, although extremely comfortable, decidedly gloomy, and aided by the silence, almost oppressive. Perhaps, however, I ought to have allowed something for association. My mind had connected peculiar ideas with Mr. Jennings. I stepped into this perfectly silent room, of a very silent house, with a peculiar foreboding; and its darkness, and solemn clothing of books, helped this somber feeling.

While awaiting Mr. Jennings' arrival, I amused myself by looking into some of the books with which his shelves were laden. Not among these, but immediately under them, with their backs upward, on the floor, I lighted upon a complete set of Swedenborg's *Arcana Cælestia,* in the original Latin, a very fine folio set, bound in the natty livery which theology affects, pure vellum, namely, gold letters, and carmine edges. There were paper markers in several of these volumes. I raised and placed them, one after the other, upon the table, and opening where these papers were placed, I read in the solemn Latin phraseology, a series of sentences indicated by a pencilled line at the margin. Of these I copy here a few, translating them into English.

"When man's interior sight is opened, which is that of his spirit, then there appear the things of another life, which can not possibly be made visible to the bodily sight. . . .

"By the internal sight it has been granted me to see the things that are in the other life, more clearly than I see those that are in the world. From these considerations, it is evident that external vision exists from interior vision, and this from a vision still more interior, and so on. . . .

"There are with every man at least two evil spirits. . . .

"The evil spirits associated with man are, indeed, from the hells, but when with man they are not then in hell, but are taken out thence. The place where they then are, is in the midst between heaven and hell, and is called the world of spirits —when the evil spirits who are with man, are in that world, they are not in any infernal torment, but in every thought and affection of the man, and so, in all that the man himself enjoys. But when they are remitted into their hell, they return to their former state. . . .

"If evil spirits could perceive that they were associated with man, and yet that they were spirits separate from him, and if they could flow in into the things of his body, they would attempt by a thousand means to destroy him; for they hate man with a deadly hatred. . . .

"The delight of hell is to do evil to man, and to hasten his eternal ruin."

A long note, written with a very sharp

and fine pencil, in Mr. Jennings' neat hand, at the foot of the page, caught my eye. Expecting his criticism upon the text, I read a word or two, and stopped, for it was something quite different, and began with these words, *Deus misereatur mei* — "May God compassionate me." Thus warned of its private nature, I averted my eyes, and shut the book, replacing all the volumes as I had found them, except one which interested me, and in which, as men studious and solitary in their habits will do, I grew so absorbed as to take no cognizance of the outer world, nor to remember where I was.

I was reading some pages which refer to "representatives" and "correspondents," in the technical language of Swedenborg, and had arrived at a passage, the substance of which is, that evil spirits, when seen by other eyes than those of their infernal associates, present themselves, by "correspondence," in the shape of the beast *(fera)* which represents their particular lust and life, in aspect direful and atrocious. This is a long passage, and particularizes a number of those bestial forms.

4. *Four Eyes Were Reading the Passage*

I WAS running the head of my pencil-case along the line as I read it, and something caused me to raise my eyes.

Directly before me was one of the mirrors I have mentioned, in which I saw reflected the tall shape of my friend, Mr. Jennings, leaning over my shoulder, and reading the page at which I was busy, and with a face so dark and wild that I should hardly have known him.

I turned and rose. He stood erect also, and with an effort laughed a little, saying:

"I came in and asked you how you did, but without succeeding in awaking you from your book; so I could not restrain my curiosity, and very impertinently, I'm afraid, peeped over your shoulder. This is not your first time of looking into those pages. You have looked into Swedenborg, no doubt, long ago?"

"Oh dear, yes! I owe Swedenborg a great deal; you will discover traces of him in the little book on Metaphysical Medicine, which you were so good as to remember."

Although my friend affected a gayety of manner, there was a slight flush in his face, and I could perceive that he was inwardly much perturbed.

"I'm scarcely yet qualified, I know so little of Swedenborg. I've only had them a fortnight," he answered, "and I think they are rather likely to make a solitary man nervous—that is, judging from the very little I have read—I don't say that they have made me so," he laughed; "and I'm so very much obliged for the book. I hope you got my note?"

I made all proper acknowledgments and modest disclaimers.

"I never read a book that I go with, so entirely, as that of yours," he continued. "I saw at once there is more in it than is quite unfolded. Do you know Doctor Harley?" he asked, rather abruptly.

I did, having had letters to him, and had experienced from him great courtesy and considerable assistance during my visit to England.

"I think that man one of the very greatest fools I ever met in my life," said Mr. Jennings.

This was the first time I had ever heard him say a sharp thing of anybody, and such a term applied to so high a name a little startled me.

"Really! and in what way?" I asked.

"In his profession," he answered.

I smiled.

"I mean this," he said: "he seems to me, one half, blind—I mean one half of

all he looks at is dark—preternaturally bright and vivid all the rest; and the worst of it is, it seems *wilful*. I can't get him—I mean he won't—I've had some experience of him as a physician, but I look on him as, in that sense, no better than a paralytic mind, an intellect half dead. I'll tell you—I know I shall some time—all about it," he said with a little agitation. "You stay some months longer in England. If I should be out of town during your stay for a little time, would you allow me to trouble you with a letter?"

"I should be only too happy," I assured him.

"Very good of you. I am so utterly dissatisfied with Harley."

"A little leaning to the materialistic school," I said.

"A *mere* materialist," he corrected me; "you can't think how that sort of thing worries one who knows better. You won't tell any one—any of my friends you know—that I am hippish; now, for instance, no one knows—not even Lady Mary—that I have seen Doctor Harley, or any other doctor. So pray don't mention it; and, if I should have any threatening of an attack, you'll kindly let me write, or, should I be in town, have a little talk with you."

I was full of conjecture, and unconsciously I found I had fixed my eyes gravely on him, for he lowered his for a moment, and he said:

"I see you think I might as well tell you now, or else you are forming a conjecture; but you may as well give it up. If you were guessing all the rest of your life, you will never hit on it."

He shook his head smiling, and over that wintry sunshine a black cloud suddenly came down, and he drew his breath in through his teeth as men do in pain.

"Sorry, of course, to learn that you apprehend occasion to consult any of us; but, command me when and how you like, and I need not assure you that your confidence is sacred."

He then talked of quite other things, and in a comparatively cheerful way, and after a little time, I took my leave.

5. *Doctor Hesselius Is Summoned to Richmond*

We parted cheerfully, but he was not cheerful, nor was I. There are certain expressions of that powerful organ of spirit — the human face — which, although I have seen them often, and possess a doctor's nerve, yet disturb me profoundly. One look of Mr. Jennings haunted me. It had seized my imagination with so dismal a power that I changed my plans for the evening, and went to the opera, feeling that I wanted a change of ideas.

I heard nothing of or from him for two or three days, when a note in his hand reached me. It was cheerful, and full of hope. He said that he had been for some little time so much better—quite well, in fact—for he was going to make a little experiment, and run down for a month or so to his parish, to try whether a little work might not quite set him up. There was in it a fervent religious expression of gratitude for his restoration, as he now almost hoped he might call it.

A day or two later I saw Lady Mary, who repeated what his note had announced, and told me that he was actually in Warwickshire, having resumed his clerical duties at Kenlis; and she added, "I begin to think that he is really perfectly well, and that there never was anything the matter, more than nerves and fancy; we are all nervous, but I fancy there is nothing like a little hard work for that kind of weakness, and he has made up his mind to try it. I should not

be surprized if he did not come back for a year."

Notwithstanding all this confidence, only two days later I had this note, dated from his house off Piccadilly:

Dear Sir,—I have returned disappointed. If I should feel at all able to see you, I shall write to ask you kindly to call. At present, I am too low, and, in fact, simply unable to say all I wish to say. Pray don't mention my name to my friends. I can see no one. By and by, please God, you shall hear from me. I mean to take a run into Shropshire, where some of my people are. God bless you! May we, on my return, meet more happily than I can now write."

About a week after this I saw Lady Mary at her own house, the last person, she said, left in town, and just on the wing for Brighton, for the London season was quite over. She told me that she had heard from Mr. Jennings' niece, Martha, in Shropshire. There was nothing to be gathered from her letter, more than that he was low and nervous. In those words, of which healthy people think so lightly, what a world of suffering is sometimes hidden!

Nearly five weeks had passed without any further news of Mr. Jennings. At the end of that time I received a note from him. He wrote:

"I have been in the country, and have had change of air, change of scene, change of faces, change of everything and in everything—but *myself*. I have made up my mind, so far as the most irresolute creature on earth can do it, to tell my case fully to you. If your engagements will permit, pray come to me today, tomorrow, or the next day; but, pray defer as little as possible. You know not how much I need help. I have a quiet house at Richmond, where I now am. Perhaps you can manage to come to dinner, or to luncheon, or even to tea. You shall have no trouble in finding me out. The servant at Blank Street, who takes this note, will have a carriage at your door at any hour you please; and I am always to be found. You will say that I ought not to be alone. I have tried everything. Come and see."

I called up the servant, and decided on going out the same evening, which accordingly I did.

He would have been much better in a lodging-house, or hotel, I thought, as I drove up through a short double row of somber elms to a very old-fashioned brick house, darkened by the foliage of these trees, which overtopped, and nearly surrounded it. It was a perverse choice, for nothing could be imagined more triste and silent. The house, I found, belonged to him. He had stayed for a day or two in town, and, finding it for some cause insupportable, had come out here, probably because being furnished and his own, he was relieved of the thought and delay of selection, by coming here.

The sun had already set, and the red reflected light of the western sky illuminated the scene with the peculiar effect with which we are all familiar. The hall seemed very dark, but, getting to the back drawing-room, whose windows command the west, I was again in the same dusky light.

I sat down, looking out upon the richly wooded landscape that glowed in the grand and melancholy light which was every moment fading. The corners of the room were already dark; all was growing dim, and the gloom was insensibly toning my mind, already prepared for what was sinister. I was waiting alone for his arrival, which soon took place. The door communicating with the front room opened, and the tall figure of Mr. Jennings, faintly seen in the ruddy twilight, came, with quiet, stealthy steps, into the room.

We shook hands, and, taking a chair to the window, where there was still light enough to enable us to see each other's faces, he sat down beside me, and, placing his hand upon my arm, with scarcely a word of preface began his narrative.

6. *How Mr. Jennings Met His Companion*

THE faint glow of the west, the pomp of the then lonely woods of Richmond, were before us, behind and about us the darkening room, and on the stony

face of the sufferer—for the character of his face, though still gentle and sweet, was changed—rested that dim, odd glow which seems to descend and produce, where it touches, lights, sudden though faint, which are lost, almost without gradation, in darkness. The silence, too, was utter; not a distant wheel, or bark, or whistle from without; and within the depressing stillness of an invalid bachelor's house.

I guessed well the nature, though not even vaguely the particulars of the revelations I was about to receive from that fixed face of suffering that so oddly stood out, like a portrait of Schalken's, before its background of darkness.

"It began," he said, "on the 15th of October, three years and eleven weeks ago, and two days—I keep very accurate count, for every day is torment. If I leave anywhere a chasm in my narrative tell me.

"About four years ago I began a work, which had cost me very much thought and reading. It was upon the religious metaphysics of the ancients.

"I wrote a great deal; I wrote late at night. I was always thinking on the subject, walking about, wherever I was, everywhere. It thoroughly infected me. You are to remember that all the material ideas connected with it were more or less of the beautiful, the subject itself delightfully interesting, and I, then, without a care."

He sighed heavily.

"I believe that every one who sets about writing in earnest does his work, as a friend of mine phrased it, *on* something—tea, or coffee, or tobacco. I suppose there is a material waste that must be hourly supplied in such occupations, or that we should grow too abstracted, and the mind, as it were, pass out of the body, unless it were reminded often of the connection by actual sensation. At all events, I felt the want, and I supplied it. Tea was my companion—at first the ordinary black tea, made in the usual way, not too strong: but I drank a good deal, and increased its strength as I went on. I never experienced an uncomfortable symptom from it. I began to take a little green tea. I found the effect pleasanter, it cleared and intensified the power of thought so. I had come to take it frequently, but not stronger than one might take it for pleasure.

"I wrote a great deal out here, it was so quiet, and in this room. I used to sit up very late, and it became a habit with me to sip my tea—green tea—every now and then as my work proceeded. I had a little kettle on my table, that swung over a lamp, and made tea two or three times between eleven o'clock and two or three in the morning, my hours of going to bed. I used to go into town every day. I was not a monk, and, although I spent an hour or two in a library, hunting up authorities and looking out lights upon my theme, I was in no morbid state as far as I can judge. I met my friends pretty much as usual and enjoyed their society, and, on the whole, existence had never been, I think, so pleasant before.

"I had met with a man who had some odd old books, German editions in mediæval Latin, and I was only too happy to be permitted access to them. This obliging person's books were in the city, a very out-of-the-way part of it. I had rather out-stayed my intended hour, and, on coming out, seeing no cab near, I was tempted to get into the omnibus which used to drive past this house. It was darker than this by the time the bus had reached an old house you may have remarked, with four poplars at each side of the door, and there the last passenger but myself got out. We drove along rather faster. It was twilight now. I leaned

back in my corner next the door ruminating pleasantly.

"The interior of the omnibus was nearly dark. I had observed in the corner opposite to me at the other side, and at the end next the horses, two small circular reflections, as it seemed to me, of a reddish light. They were about two inches apart, and about the size of those small brass buttons that yachting men used to put upon their jackets. I began to speculate, as listless men will, upon this trifle, as it seemed. From what center did that faint but deep red light come, and from what—glass beads, buttons, toy decorations—was it reflected? We were lumbering along gently, having nearly a mile still to go. I had not solved the puzzle, and it became in another minute more odd, for these two luminous points, with a sudden jerk, descended nearer the floor, keeping still their relative distance and horizontal position, and then, as suddenly, they rose to the level of the seat on which I was sitting and I saw them no more.

"My curiosity was now really excited, and, before I had time to think, I saw again these two dull lamps, again together near the floor; again they disappeared, and again in their old corner I saw them.

"So, keeping my eyes upon them, I edged quietly up my own side, toward the end at which I still saw these tiny disks of red.

"There was very little light in the bus. It was nearly dark. I leaned forward to aid my endeavor to discover what these little circles really were. They shifted their position a little as I did so. I began now to perceive an outline of something black, and I soon saw, with tolerable distinctness, the outline of a small black monkey, pushing its face forward in mimicry to meet mine; those were its eyes, and I now dimly saw its teeth grinning at me.

"I drew back, not knowing whether it might not meditate a spring. I fancied that one of the passengers had forgot this ugly pet, and wishing to ascertain something of its temper, though not caring to trust my fingers to it, I poked my umbrella softly toward it. It remained immovable—up to it—*through* it. For through it, and back and forward it passed, without the slightest resistance.

"I can't, in the least, convey to you the kind of horror that I felt. When I had ascertained that the thing was an illusion, as I then supposed, there came a misgiving about myself and a terror that fascinated me in impotence to remove my gaze from the eyes of the brute for some moments. As I looked, it made a little skip back, quite into the corner, and I, in a panic, found myself at the door, having put my head out, drawing deep breaths of the outer air, and staring at the lights and trees we were passing, too glad to reassure myself of reality.

"I stopped the bus and got out. I perceived the man look oddly at me as I paid him. I dare say there was something unusual in my looks and manner, for I had never felt so strangely before.

7. *The Journey: First Stage*

"WHEN the omnibus drove on, and I was alone upon the road, I looked carefully round to ascertain whether the monkey had followed me. To my indescribable relief I saw it nowhere. I can't describe easily what a shock I had received, and my sense of genuine gratitude on finding myself, as I supposed, quite rid of it.

"I had got out a little before we reached this house, two or three hundred steps. A brick wall runs along the foot-

path, and inside the wall is a hedge of yew, or some dark evergreen of that kind, and within that again the row of fine trees which you may have remarked as you came.

"This brick wall is about as high as my shoulder, and happening to raise my eyes I saw the monkey, with that stooping gait, on all fours, walking or creeping, close beside me on top of the wall. I stopped, looking at it with a feeling of loathing and horror. As I stopped so did it. It sat up on the wall with its long hands on its knees looking at me. There was not light enough to see it much more than in outline, nor was it dark enough to bring the peculiar light of its eyes into strong relief. I still saw, however, that red foggy light plainly enough. It did not show its teeth, nor exhibit any sign of irritation, but seemed jaded and sulky, and was observing me steadily.

"I drew back into the middle of the road. It was an unconscious recoil, and there I stood, still looking at it. It did not move.

"With an instinctive determination to try something—anything—I turned about and walked briskly toward town with askance look, all the time, watching the movements of the beast. It crept swiftly along the wall, at exactly my pace.

"Where the wall ends, near the turn of the road, it came down, and with a wiry spring or two brought itself close to my feet, and continued to keep up with me as I quickened my pace. It was at my left side, so close to my leg that I felt every moment as if I should tread upon it.

"The road was quite deserted and silent, and it was darker every moment. I stopped, dismayed and bewildered, turning as I did so, the other way—I mean, toward this house, away from which I had been walking. When I stood still, the monkey drew back to a distance of, I suppose, about five or six yards, and remained stationary, watching me.

"I had been more agitated than I have said. I had read, of course, something about 'spectral illusions', as you physicians term the phenomena of such cases. I considered my situation, and looked my misfortune in the face.

"These affections, I had read, are sometimes transitory and sometimes obstinate. I had read of cases in which the appearance, at first harmless, had, step by step, degenerated into something direful and insupportable, and ended by wearing its victim out. Still as I stood there, but for my bestial companion, quite alone, I tried to comfort myself by repeating again and again the assurance, 'The thing is purely disease, a well-known physical affection, as distinctly as smallpox or neuralgia. Doctors are all agreed on that, philosophy demonstrates it. I must not be a fool. I've been sitting up too late, and I dare say my digestion is quite wrong, and, with God's help, I shall be all right, and this is but a symptom of nervous dyspepsia.' Did I believe all this? Not one word of it, no more than any other miserable being ever did who is once seized in this satanic captivity. Against my convictions, I might say my knowledge, I was simply bullying myself into a false courage.

"I now walked homeward. I had only a few hundred yards to go. I had forced myself into a sort of resignation, but I had not got over the sickening shock and the flurry of the first certainty of my misfortune.

"I made up my mind to pass the night at home. The brute moved close beside me, and I fancied there was the sort of anxious drawing toward the house which one sees in tired horses or dogs, sometimes, as they come toward home.

"I was afraid to go into town, I was

(Please turn to page 135)

THE EYRIE

LETTERS continue to come in to the Eyrie opposing or upholding our policy of printing one or two weird-scientific stories in each issue. Some of you want half the magazine to be devoted to pseudo-scientific tales; others ask that we bar out all science stories; but the preponderance of letters on this subject is in favor of a small percentage of pseudo-scientific tales, requesting only that such tales be truly weird. This seems to be a reasonable request, and we shall heed it.

Writes Carl J. Smith, of Port Felix, Nova Scotia, in a letter to the Eyrie: "I want to say a few words re interplanetary stories before it's all over. Interplanetary yarns are all right if they're written that way. Surely no one could want a weirder story than *On a Far World* by Wilford Allen, or *When the Green Star Waned* by Nictzin Dyalhis, or *A Message from Space* by J. Schlossel, and weren't they interplanetary? It seems to me this is the big point most of your readers have missed in the controversy re this type of story. I dislike interplanetary stories as much as any one, if you mean the Interstellar Patrol stories or *Buccaneers of Venus,* but I think there's a lot of difference between them and the first ones I mentioned."

J. W. Hammond, of Alexandria, Virginia, writes to the Eyrie: "I have been a constant reader of WEIRD TALES ever since it has been on the market, and I think it is the prince of all magazines. I wish to cast my vote in favor of weird-scientific and interplanetary stories. I want more stories by Otis Adelbert Kline. *Buccaneers of Venus* was wonderful. Hats off to Jack Williamson's serial, *Golden Blood.*"

A letter from Katharine Buoy, of Grants Pass, Oregon, says: "I read WEIRD TALES every month, with more interest than I can express. Clark Ashton Smith, Edmond Hamilton and Seabury Quinn are among my favorites. I like stories of interplanetary space, reincarnation, vampires, and such stories as those of carnivorous plants and trees—I have really felt a sense of oppressive fear at times, when in deep wood, dim swamps, and in desert places where there seems to be an unseen sentience that watches one. Fancy?—yes, but the mystery is there."

Ian C. Knox writes from London, England: "Since you ask for readers' opinions regarding interplanetary stories in your magazine, here is mine. By all means have them. 'Variety is the spice of life,' you know."

"I have been a constant reader of WEIRD TALES since 1926, and since then I have not been without a copy of this truly wonderful magazine," writes Paul MacMeekim, of San Mateo, California. "I have just finished the May issue, and I congratulate you on your fine new serial by Jack Williamson, *Golden Blood*. It prom-

ises to be your greatest serial. By all means keep on printing serials. Two other superb stories in the May issue are *Spawn of the Sea* by Donald Wandrei, and *Dead Man's Belt* by Hugh B. Cave. Let's have more stories of these types. I would like to see more haunted castles and vampires in WT."

Mrs. J. T. McCrorey, of Hollywood, California, writes to the Eyrie: "Your May number is one of the best yet. One thing you have been needing is a woman writer's delicate touch to offset Howard's and Quinn's virile style. Mary Counselman supplied this in her story, *The Girl with the Green Eyes,* which I thought was the epitome of weirdness. *Dead Man's Belt* is my second choice, and *The Wheel* is also a fine example of the super-quality stories you publish. Anent the interplanetary controversy, please let me add my vote against stories of this type. Give us supernatural fiction and I, for one, will continue to look forward eagerly for the next issue."

Writes Donald Allgeier, of Mountain Grove, Missouri: "Allow me to congratulate you on the May issue of WT. All the stories were excellent, and *Golden Blood* is superb. Jack Williamson is a *real* writer. I can hardly wait for the next installment. *Dead Man's Belt* by Hugh Cave is a truly different story—gruesome and gripping."

Richard Dodson, of Kirksville, Missouri, writes: "I wish to drop a note to the Eyrie of appreciation and commendation for the work of one of your authors, who, I believe, is not yet fully appreciated—Clark Ashton Smith. I have never seen such a consistently excellent WEIRD TALES author. His strange, beautifully worded stories can not be equaled for weird, fantastic atmosphere. Clark Ashton Smith looms superior to any other of your regular contributors. You can not give us too many stories by him. Please don't discontinue the reprint section. Reprint more of the short stories from earlier issues of the magazine. I am sure they would be appreciated by all, especially by your more recent readers. Clark Ashton Smith has published four volumes of poetry; couldn't you induce him to write some for WT?" [We share Mr. Dodson's liking for Clark Ashton Smith's verse, and we have already printed eighteen of his poems in this magazine.—THE EDITORS.]

"Selecting a favorite story in the May WEIRD TALES is a very easy task," writes J. D. Arden, of Detroit. "*Dead Man's Belt* by Hugh B. Cave stands out prominently from the other stories (which are all excellent). Naturally, I vote it first place. Mr. Cave has firmly established himself with me as a ranking favorite, taking his place along with Howard, Quinn, Lovecraft, Hamilton, and Smith. Second place belongs to Donald Wandrei for his *Spawn of the Sea,* which contains enough shivers to satisfy the most hardened 'horror' favorite."

Writes James B. Lynch, Jr., of Pittsburgh: "My favorite authors are Clark Ashton Smith and Carl Jacobi. Smith is the invulnerable master of his work. His stories are a rich blending of literary perfection and inexhaustible imagination. Jacobi's masterpiece, *Revelations in Black,* is one of the best stories I have seen in WT for a score of months. This writer is exceedingly accurate, like Smith, in delving beneath the common plot and technicalities in most stories, and bringing out a new literary quality, a new theory set to a new type of writing. Your reprint features are exceptional gems and add to the variety of stories in WT. A few issues ago

I came across a reprint called *The Night Wire.* To many readers, I presume, it established itself as a short, fairly interesting story; but to me it was one of the best stories I have ever read."

"My favorite story in the May WEIRD TALES is *The Girl with the Green Eyes,*" writes Mrs. C. G. McDowell, of Los Angeles. "Some time ago I wrote asking for witchcraft stories, and that tale certainly fills the bill! It is well written and full of action from beginning to end. I hope to see more stories by Mary Elizabeth Counselman. *The Carven Image* by Derleth and Schorer runs a close second—it is a very fine piece of work."

"*Dead Man's Belt* by Hugh B. Cave is without doubt one of the finest pieces of work that WEIRD TALES has published in a long time," writes J. C. Koekler, of Annandale, Minnesota. "The story has power and craftsmanship and suspense. It easily takes first place in the May issue. Please keep Clark Ashton Smith and Seabury Quinn busy writing stories for you, and let's have another tale by Carl Jacobi soon."

J. L. Grillo, of San Francisco, makes the following suggestion: "Enlarge the Eyrie into a more complete department. Print the letters of the readers in their entirety, a sort of exchange idea."

Writes Gustave W. Buley, of Everett, Washington: "I have enjoyed many an evening with your unique publication; it is by far the best edited and written in the field. I hope that it continues to meet with the success which it richly deserves."

Readers, what is your favorite story in this issue? The second installment of Jack Williamson's eery serial, *Golden Blood,* won your votes as the most popular story in the May issue, and Hugh B. Cave's unusual ghost-story, *Dead Man's Belt,* won second place in your esteem.

My favorite stories in the July WEIRD TALES are:

Story	Remarks
(1)----------	----------
(2)----------	----------
(3)----------	----------

I do not like the following stories:

(1)----------	Why?----------
(2)----------	----------

It will help us to know what kind of stories you want in Weird Tales if you will fill out this coupon and mail it to The Eyrie, Weird Tales, 840 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill.

Reader's name and address:

Green Tea

(Continued from page 131)

afraid of any one's seeing and recognizing me. I was conscious of an irrepressible agitation in my manner. Also, I was afraid of any violent changes in my habits, such as going to a place of amusement, or walking from home in order to fatigue myself. At the hall door it waited till I mounted the steps, and when the door was opened entered with me.

"I drank no tea that night. I got cigars and some brandy and water. My idea was that I should act upon my material system, and by living for a while in sensation apart from thought, send myself forcibly, as it were, into a new groove.

"I came up here to this drawing-room. I sat just here. The monkey then got upon a small table that then stood *there*. It looked dazed and languid. An irrepressible uneasiness as to its movements kept my eyes always upon it. Its eyes were half closed, but I could see them glow. It was looking steadily at me. In all situations, at all hours, it is awake and looking at me. That never changes.

"I shall not continue in detail my narrative of this particular night. I shall describe, rather, the phenomena of the first year, which never varied, essentially. I shall describe the monkey as it appeared in daylight. In the dark, as you shall presently hear, there are peculiarities. It is a small monkey, perfectly black. It had only one peculiarity—a character of malignity—unfathomable malignity. During the first year it looked sullen and sick. But this character of intense malice and vigilance was always underlying that surly languor. During all that time it acted as if on a plan of giving me as little trouble as was consistent with watching me. Its eyes were never off me. I have never lost sight of it, except in my sleep,

light or dark, day or night, since it came here, excepting when it withdraws for some weeks at a time, unaccountably.

"In total dark it is visible as in daylight. I do not mean merely its eyes. It is *all* visible distinctly in a halo that resembles a glow of red embers, and which accompanies it in all its movements.

"When it leaves me for a time, it is always at night, in the dark, and in the same way. It grows at first uneasy, and then furious, and then advances toward me, grinning and shaking, its paws clenched, and at the same time there comes the appearance of fire in the grate. I never have any fire, I can't sleep in the room where there is any; and it draws nearer and nearer to the chimney, quivering, it seems, with rage, and when its fury rises to the highest pitch, it springs into the grate, and up the chimney, and I see it no more.

"When first this happened, I thought I was released. I was now a new man. A day passed—a night—and no return, and a blessed week—a week—another week. I was always on my knees, Doctor Hesselius, always, thanking God and praying. A whole month passed of liberty, but on a sudden, it was with me again.

8. *The Second Stage*

"It was with me, and the malice which before was torpid under a sullen exterior, was now active. It was perfectly unchanged in every other respect. This new energy was apparent in its activity and its looks, and soon in other ways.

"For a time, you will understand, the change was shown only in an increased vivacity, and an air of menace, as if it was always brooding over some atrocious plan. Its eyes, as before, were never off me."

"Is it here now?" I asked.

"No," he replied, "it has been absent exactly a fortnight and a day—fifteen days. It has sometimes been away so long as nearly two months, once for three. Its absence always exceeds a fortnight, although it may be but by a single day. Fifteen days having passed since I saw it last, it may return now at any moment."

"Is its return," I asked, "accompanied by any peculiar manifestation?"

"Nothing—no," he said. "It is simply with me again. On lifting my eyes from a book, or turning my head, I see it, as usual, looking at me, and then it remains, as before, for its appointed time. I have never told so much and so minutely before to any one."

I perceived that he was agitated, and looking like death, and he repeatedly applied his handkerchief to his forehead; I suggested that he might be tired, and told him that I would call, with pleasure, in the morning, but he said:

"No, if you don't mind hearing it all now. I have got so far, and I should prefer making one effort of it. When I spoke to Doctor Harley, I had nothing like so much to tell. You are a philosophic physician. You give spirit its proper rank. If this thing is real——"

He paused, looking at me with agitated inquiry.

"We can discuss it by and by, and very fully. I will give you all I think," I answered, after an interval.

"Very well. If it is anything real, I say, it is prevailing, little by little, and drawing me more interiorly into hell. Optic nerves, he talked of. Ah! well—there are other nerves of communication. May God Almighty help me! You shall hear.

"Its power of action, I tell you, had increased. Its malice became, in a way, aggressive. About two years ago, some questions that were pending between me and the bishop having been settled, I went down to my parish in Warwickshire,

anxious to find occupation in my profession. I was not prepared for what happened, although I have since thought I might have apprehended something like it.

"But I will first tell you about Kenlis, my parish.

"It was with me when I left this place for Dawlbridge. It was my silent travelling companion, and it remained with me at the vicarage. When I entered on the discharge of my duties, another change took place. The thing exhibited an atrocious determination to thwart me. It was with me in the church—in the reading-desk—in the pulpit—within the communion rails. At last it reached this extremity, that while I was reading to the congregation, it would spring upon the open book and squat there, so that I was unable to see the page. This happened more than once.

"I left Dawlbridge for a time. I placed myself in Doctor Harley's hands. I did everything he told me. He gave my case a great deal of thought. It interested him, I think. He seemed successful. For nearly three months I was perfectly free from a return. I began to think I was safe. With his full assent I returned to Dawlbridge.

"I travelled in a chaise. I was in good spirits. I was more—I was happy and grateful. I was returning, as I thought, delivered from a dreadful hallucination, to the scene of duties which I longed to enter upon. It was a beautiful sunny evening, everything looked serene and cheerful, and I was delighted. I remember looking out of the window to see the spire of my church at Kenlis among the trees, at the point where one has the earliest view of it. It is exactly where the little stream that bounds the parish passes under the road by a culvert, and where it emerges at the roadside, a stone with an

old inscription is placed. As we passed this point, I drew my head in and sat down, and in the corner of the chaise was the monkey.

"For a moment I felt faint, and then quite wild with despair and horror. I called to the driver, and got out, and sat down at the roadside, and prayed to God silently for mercy. A despairing resignation supervened. My companion was was me as I re-entered the vicarage. The same persecution followed. After a short struggle I submitted, and soon I left the place.

"I told you," he said, "that the beast had before this become in certain ways aggressive. I will explain a little. It seemed to be actuated by intense and increasing fury, whenever I said my prayers, or even meditated prayer. It amounted at last to a dreadful interruption. You will ask, how could a silent immaterial phantom effect that? It was thus, whenever I meditated praying; it was always before me, and nearer and nearer.

"It used to spring on a table, on the back of a chair, on the chimney-piece, and slowly to swing itself from side to side, looking at me all the time. There is in its motion an indefinable power to dissipate thought, and to contract one's attention to that monotony, till the ideas shrink, as it were, to a point, and at last to nothing—and unless I started up and shook off the catalepsy, I have felt as if my mind were on the point of losing itself. There are other ways," he sighed heavily; "thus, for instance, while I pray with my eyes closed, it comes closer and closer, and I see it. I know it is not to be accounted for physically, but I do actually see it, though my lids are closed, and so it rocks my mind, as it were, and overpowers me, and I am obliged to rise from my knees. If you had ever yourself known this, you would be acquainted with desperation.

9. *The Third Stage*

"THEY talk of the optic nerves, and of spectral illusions, as if the organ of sight was the only point assailable by the influences that have fastened upon me —I know better. For two years in my direful case that limitation prevailed. But as food is taken in softly at the lips, and then brought under the teeth, as the tip of the little finger caught in a mill crank will draw in the hand, and the arm, and the whole body, so the miserable mortal who has been once caught firmly by the end of the finest fiber of his nerve, is drawn in and in, by the enormous machinery of hell, until he is as I am. Yes, Doctor, as *I* am, for while I talk to you, and implore relief, I feel that my prayer is for the impossible, and my pleading with the inexorable."

I endeavored to calm his visibly increasing agitation, and hold him that he must not despair.

While we talked, the night had overtaken us. The filmy moonlight was wide over the scene which the window commanded, and I said:

"Perhaps you would prefer having candles. This light, you know, is odd. I should wish you, as much as possible, under your usual conditions while I make my diagnosis."

"All lights are the same to me," he said, "except when I read or write; I care not if night were perpetual. I am going to tell you what happened about a year ago. The thing began to speak to me."

"Speak! How do you mean—speak as a man does?"

"Yes; speak in words and consecutive sentences, with perfect coherence and ar-

(Please turn to page 140)

Coming Next Month

"IS IT to be a duel?" Costello asked.

"More like an execution—but not of the death sentence; that would be too easy," the Frenchman answered. "Now go and leave me to my work.

"En garde!" he ordered sharply as the officers went out with their prisoners. "Karowli Singh, thou son and grandson of a stinking camel, if you defeat me you go free; if not I take such vengeance as is just!"

Like savage cats they faced each other, circling slowly round, eyes gleaming with as pitiless a glint as that their weapons caught from the uncertain lamplight.

Suddenly the rajah charged, simitar swinging like a whirling windmill—I heard the curved blade whistle through the air. De Grandin gave ground rapidly, skipped lightly back, making no attempt to meet his adversary's steel.

The Hindoo's white teeth flashed in a snarling smile. "Coward, poltroon, craven!" he taunted. "The gods fight with me; I, their chosen one——"

"Will choose no more to torture helpless beasts and women, I damn think!" the Frenchman interrupted. *"Cochon va!"*

The trick was worked so quickly that I could not follow it; but it seemed as if he drove straight forward with his blade, then slacked his thrust in mid-stab and cut a slashing S-shaped gash in the air before the other's face. Whatever the technique, the result was instant, for the rajah's sword seemed to fly from his hand as though he flung it from him, and a second later . . .

You can not afford to miss this blood-chilling story of venomous cobras, Hindoo vengeance and a beautiful dancing-girl. This tale about a brilliant exploit of Jules de Grandin will be published complete in next month's WEIRD TALES:

The Chosen of Vishnu

By SEABURY QUINN

—ALSO—

DEAD MEN WALK

By HAROLD WARD

A gripping, spine-freezing story of evil occult powers and fearsome happenings at Sinister Lake —a powerful story of Black Magic.

THE SUPERIOR JUDGE

By J. PAUL SUTER

The author of "Beyond the Door" tells an unusual and compelling story of the days when an eight-year-old child could be hanged by English law for hitting a court official with a stone.

THE OWL

By F. A. M. WEBSTER

A shivery story of one who had delved into forbidden murders and hidden lore—a tale of occult evil.

THE VAMPIRE AIRPLANE

By ARLTON EADIE

Count von Felhagen died gloriously, shot down from the sky in heroic battle—but what was that thing in his likeness that shattered the peace and quiet of an English country home?

August WEIRD TALES Out August 1

(Continued from page 138)

ticulation; but there is a peculiarity. It is not like the tone of a human voice. It is not by my ears it reaches me—it comes like a singing through my head.

"This faculty, the power of speaking to me, will be my undoing. It won't let me pray, it interrupts me with dreadful blasphemies. I dare not go on, I could not. Oh! Doctor, can the skill, and thought, and prayers of man avail me nothing?"

"You must promise me, my dear sir, not to trouble yourself with unnecessarily exciting thoughts; confine yourself strictly to the narrative of *facts;* and recollect, above all, that even if the thing that infests you be, you seem to suppose, a reality with an actual independent life and will, yet it can have no power to hurt you, unless it be given from above: its access to your senses depends mainly upon your physical condition—this is, under God, your comfort and reliance: we are all alike environed. It is only that in your case, the *'paries'*, the veil of the flesh, the screen, is a little out of repair, and sights and sounds are transmitted. We must enter on a new course, sir—be encouraged. I'll give tonight to the careful consideration of the whole case."

"You are very good, sir; you think it worth trying, you don't give me quite up; but, sir, you don't know, it is gaining such an influence over me: it orders me about, it is such a tyrant, and I'm growing so helpless. May God deliver me!"

"It orders you about—of course you mean by speech?"

"Yes, yes; it is always urging me to crimes, to injure others, or myself. You see, Doctor, the situation is urgent, it is indeed. When I was in Shropshire, a few weeks ago" (Mr. Jennings was speaking rapidly and trembling now, holding my arm with one hand, and looking in my face), "I went out one day with a party of friends for a walk: my persecutor, I tell you, was with me at the time. I lagged behind the rest: the country near the Dee, you know, is beautiful. Our path happened to lie near a coal mine, and at the verge of the wood is a perpendicular shaft, they say, a hundred and fifty feet deep. My niece had remained behind with me—she knows, of course, nothing of the nature of my sufferings. She knew, however, that I had been ill, and was low, and she remained to prevent my being quite alone. As we loitered slowly on together, the brute that accompanied me was urging me to throw myself down the shaft. I tell you now—oh, sir, think of it!—the one consideration that saved me from that hideous death was the fear lest the shock of witnessing the occurrence should be too much for the poor girl. I asked her to go on and take her walk with her friends, saying that I could go no further. She made excuses, and the more I urged her the firmer she became. She looked doubtful and frightened. I suppose there was something in my looks or manner that alarmed her; but she would not go, and that saved me. You had no idea, sir, that a living man could be made so abject a slave of Satan," he said, with a ghastly groan and a shudder.

There was a pause here, and I said, "You *were* preserved nevertheless. It was the act of God. You are in His hands and in the power of no other being: be therefore confident for the future."

10. Home

I MADE him have candles lighted, and saw the room looking cheery and inhabited before I left him. I told him that he must regard his illness strictly as one dependent on physical, though *subtle* physical causes. I told him that he had evidence of God's care and love in the

deliverance which he had just described, and that I had perceived with pain that he seemed to regard its peculiar features as indicating that he had been delivered over to spiritual reprobation. Than such a conclusion nothing could be, I insisted, less warranted; and not only so, but more contrary to facts, as disclosed in his mysterious deliverance from that murderous influence during his Shropshire excursion. First, his niece had been retained by his side without his intending to keep her near him; and, secondly, there had been infused into his mind an irresistible repugnance to execute the dreadful suggestion in her presence.

As I reasoned this point with him, Mr. Jennings wept. He seemed comforted. One promise I exacted, which was that should the monkey at any time return, I should be sent for immediately; and, repeating my assurance that I would give neither time nor thought to any other subject until I had thoroughly investigated his case, and that tomorrow he should hear the result, I took my leave.

Before getting into the carriage I told the servant that his master was far from well, and that he should make a point of frequently looking into his room.

My own arrangements I made with a view to being quite secure from interruption. I merely called at my lodgings, and with a travelling-desk and carpet-bag, set off in a hackney carriage for an inn about two miles out of town, called "The Horns," a very quiet and comfortable house, with good thick walls. And there I resolved, without the possibility of intrusion or distraction, to devote some hours of the night, in my comfortable sitting-room, to Mr. Jennings' case, and so much of the morning as it might require.

I left town for the inn where I slept last night at half-past nine, and did not

arrive at my room in town until one o'clock this afternoon. I found a letter in Mr. Jennings' hand upon my table. It had not come by post, and, on inquiry, I learned that Mr. Jennings' servant had brought it, and on learning that I was not to return until today, and that no one could tell him my address, he seemed very uncomfortable, and said that his orders from his master were that he was not to return without an answer.

I opened the letter and read:

Dear Doctor Hesselius,—It is here. You had not been an hour gone when it returned. It is speaking. It knows all that has happened. It knows everything—it knows you, and is frantic and atrocious. It reviles. I send you this. It knows every word I have written—I write. This I promised, and I therefore write, but I fear very confused, very incoherently. I am so interrupted, disturbed.

"Ever yours, sincerely yours,

"ROBERT LYNDER JENNINGS."

"When did this come?" I asked.

"About eleven last night: the man was here again, and has been here three times today. The last time is about an hour since."

Thus answered, and with the notes I had made upon his case in my pocket, I was in a few minutes driving toward Richmond, to see Mr. Jennings.

I by no means despaired of Mr. Jennings' case. He had himself remembered and applied, though quite in a mistaken way, the principle which I lay down in my *Metaphysical Medicine*, and which governs all such cases. I was about to apply it in earnest. I was profoundly interested, and very anxious to see and examine him while the "enemy" was actually present.

I DROVE up to the somber house, and ran up the steps, and knocked. The door, in a little time, was opened by a tall woman in black silk. She looked ill, and as if she had been crying. She curtseyed, and heard my question, but she did not answer. She turned her face away, extending her hand toward two men who were coming downstairs; and thus having tacitly made me over to them, she passed through a side-door.

I at once accosted the man who was nearest the hall, but I was shocked to see that both his hands were covered with blood. I drew back a little, and the man, passing downstairs, merely said in a low tone, "Here's the servant, sir."

The servant had stopped on the stairs, confounded and dumb at seeing me. He was rubbing his hands in a handkerchief, and it was steeped in blood.

"Jones, what is it? What has happened?" I asked, while a sickening suspicion overpowered me.

The man asked me to come up to the lobby. I was beside him in a moment, and, frowning and pallid, with contracted eyes, he told me the horror which I already half guessed.

His master had made away with himself.

I went upstairs with him to the room—what I saw there I won't tell you. He had cut his throat with his razor. It was a frightful gash. The two men had laid him on the bed, and composed his limbs. It had happened, as the immense pool of blood on the floor declared, at some distance between the bed and the window. In this somber and now terrible room, one of the great elms that darkened the house was slowly moving the shadow of one of its great boughs upon this dreadful floor.

I beckoned to the servant, and we went downstairs together. I turned off the hall into an old-fashioned panelled room, and there standing, I heard all the servant had to tell. It was not a great deal.

"I concluded, sir, from your words and looks, sir, as you left last night, that you thought my master seriously ill. I thought it might be that you were afraid of a fit, or something. So I attended very

close to your directions. He sat up late, till past three o'clock. He was not writing or reading. He was talking a great deal to himself, but that was nothing unusual. At about that hour I assisted him to undress, and left him in his slippers and dressing-gown. I went back softly in about half an hour. He was in his bed, quite undressed, and a pair of candles lighted on the table beside his bed. He was leaning on his elbow, and looking out at the other side of the bed when I came in. I asked him if he wanted anything, and he said 'No.'

"I don't know whether it was what you said to me, sir, or something a little unusual about him, but I was uneasy, uncommon uneasy about him last night.

"In another half-hour, or it might be a little more, I went up again. I did not hear him talking as before. I opened the door a little. The candles were both out, which was not usual. I had a bedroom candle, and I let the light in, a little bit, looking softly round. I saw him sitting in that chair beside the dressing-table with his clothes on again. He turned round and looked at me. I thought it strange he should get up and dress, and put out the candles to sit in the dark, that way. But I only asked him again if I could do anything for him. He said, 'No,' rather sharp, I thought. I asked if I might light the candles, and he said, 'Do as you like, Jones.' So I lighted them, and I lingered about the room, and he said, 'Tell me truth, Jones; why did you come again—you did not hear any one cursing?' 'No, sir,' I said, wondering what he could mean.

" 'No,' said he, after me, 'of course, no,' and I said to him, 'Wouldn't it be well, sir, you went to bed? It's just five o'clock,' and he said nothing but, 'Very likely; good-night, Jones.' So I went, sir, but in less than an hour I came again.

The door was fast, and he heard me, and called as I thought from the bed to know what I wanted, and he desired me not to disturb him again. I lay down and slept for a little.

"It must have been between six and seven when I went up again. The door was still fast, and he made no answer, so I did not like to disturb him, and thinking he was asleep, I left him till nine. It was his custom to ring when he wished me to come, and I had no particular hour for calling him. I tapped very gently, and getting no answer, I stayed away a good while, supposing he was getting some rest then. It was not till eleven o'clock I grew really uncomfortable about him—for at the latest he was never, that I could remember, later than half-past ten. I got no answer. I knocked and called, and still no answer. So not being able to force the door, I called Thomas from the stables, and together we forced it, and found him in the shocking way you saw."

Jones had no more to tell. Poor Mr. Jennings was very gentle, and very kind. All his people were fond of him. I could see that the servant was very much moved.

So, dejected and agitated, I passed from that terrible house, and its dark canopy of elms, and I hope I shall never see it more. While I write, I feel like a man who has but half waked from a frightful and monotonous dream. My memory rejects the picture with incredulity and horror. Yet I know it is true. It is the story of the process of a poison, a poison which excites the reciprocal action of spirit and nerve, and paralyzes the tissue that separates those cognate functions of the senses, the external and the interior. Thus we find strange bed-fellows, and the mortal and immortal prematurely make acquaintance.

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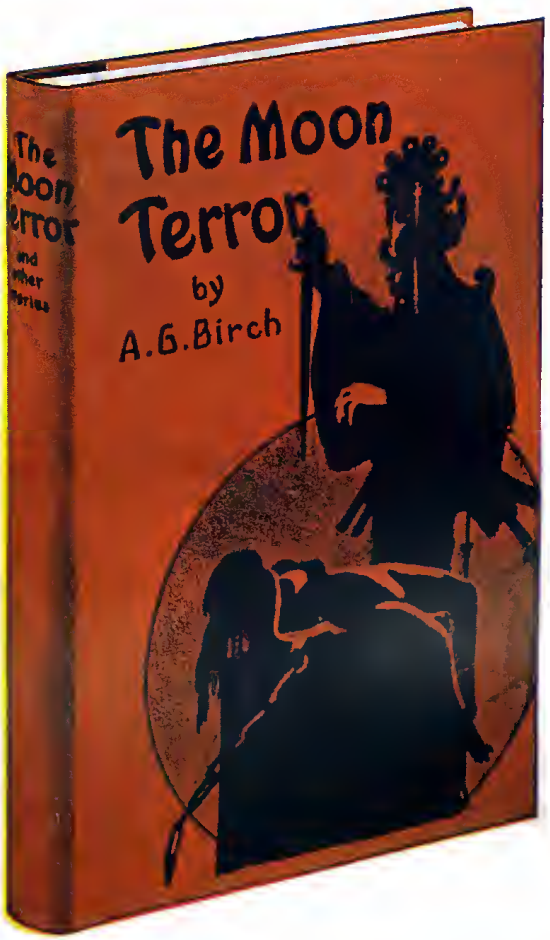

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