# Weird Tales

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## QUEEN OF THE LILIN

the story of a gloriously beautiful and evil ghost-woman

By E. HOFFMANN PRICE

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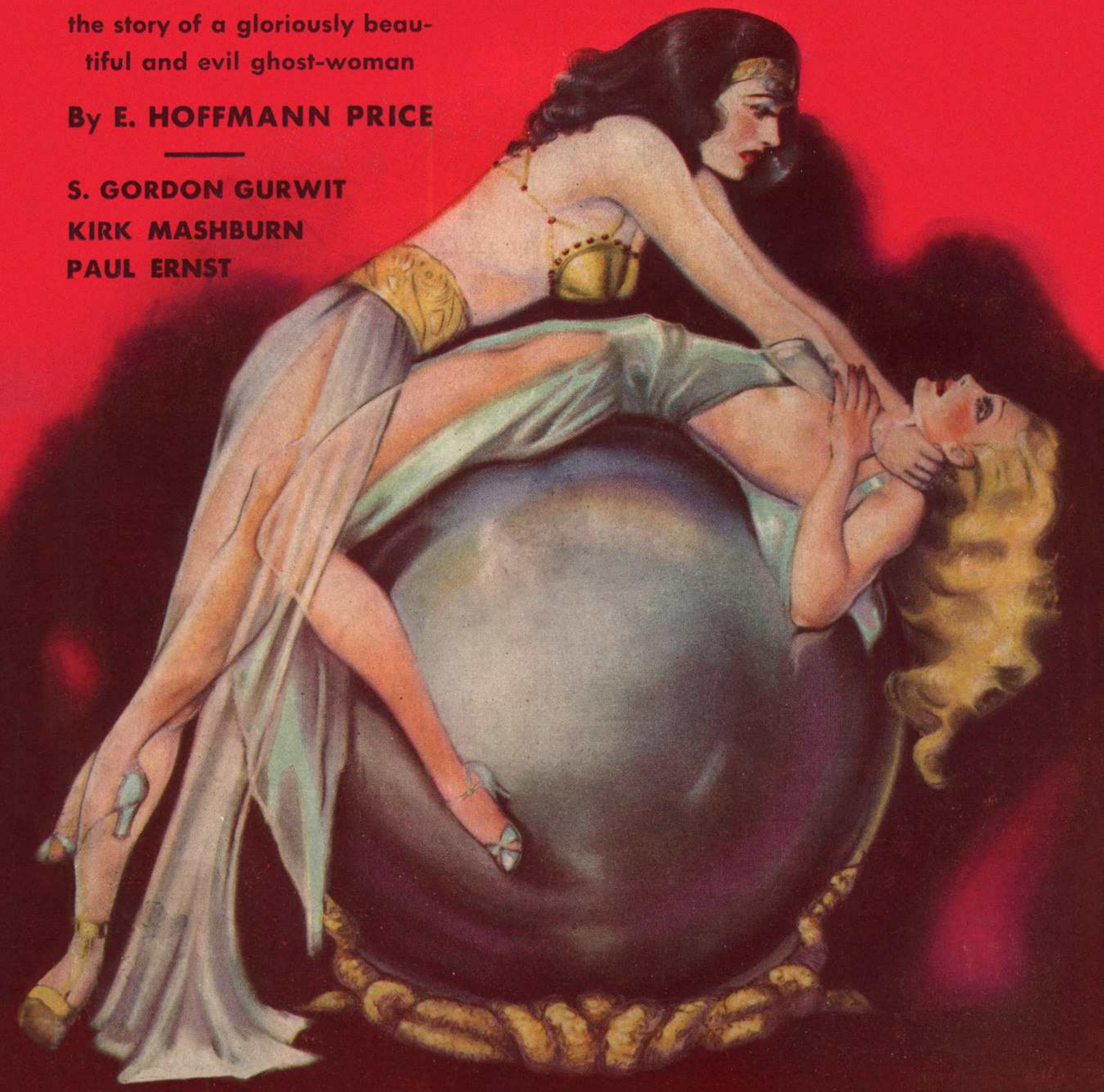

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# Weird Tales

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WEIRD TALES ISSUED 1st OF EACH MONTH

"At the middle of the pentacle stood a woman of incredible loveliness."


# Queen of the Lilin

By E. HOFFMANN PRICE

*Out of the womb of Time, across the dusty centuries, came a gloriously beautiful but evil woman—a tale of Lilith, and the five adepts who sat at the corners of a weird pentagon*

## 1. *The Lurking Menace*

"FIRST a slater's hammer slides from a roof and comes within a hair of braining me. The next day a bust of Napoleon falls from its pedestal and narrowly misses me—and then one of my brother's collection of swords joins the conspiracy of inanimate things and—*mon Dieu!* It's only a miracle that I wasn't beheaded!"

Diane Livaudais sighed wearily and made a despairing gesture. Glenn Farrell's bronzed, rugged features contracted in a frown, and his gray eyes narrowed

as he pondered on the sequence of accidents that had made Diane's past few days a nightmare. He turned to his old friend and host, Pierre d'Artois, a retired soldier whose scholarly pursuits had not obliterated his military bearing.

"That does seem to wrench the long arm of coincidence entirely out of joint," Farrell admitted. He no longer marvelled that Diane's dark eyes were haunted, and that her gestures were abrupt and nervous; but her next remark was too much for Farrell's practical mind to digest.

"And the worst of it is," d'Artois' lovely visitor continued, "I'm certain that those weren't accidents——"

*"Eh, comment?"* demanded d'Artois, leaning forward and twisting his fierce gray mustache. "If I'm not mistaken, you just said——"

"I've sensed a malicious presence lurking about me for the past week," Diane resumed. Then, noting Farrell's silent but unconcealed amazement, "Oh, I know it sounds insane! But I caught a glimpse of a shadowy figure which faded almost the instant I turned to confront it—and I know she's responsible."

Diane paused, regarded them with a touch of defiance, challenging Farrell and his host to dispute her sanity. Farrell stroked his square chin and said nothing. He could not very well declare that Diane Livaudais was the victim of delusions and hallucinations; but such was his conviction, and he thus disposed, somewhat regretfully, of the most attractive girl he had met during his few weeks in southern France. D'Artois' reply, however, caught Farrell like a hammer stroke.

"And so there's an apparition following you around, making heavy objects fall in your direction . . . hmmm . . . very well—I will summon this pestilential specter here and now!"

"Good Lord!" was Farrell's unspoken comment as he saw that d'Artois was serious. "He's as bad as she is!"

They were sitting in d'Artois' study on the second floor of a Thirteenth Century tower that commanded the foot of rue Tour de Sault in the old city of Bayonne. The afternoon was young; but artificial illumination was needed to augment the sunlight that filtered feebly through the narrow casements that cleft the yard-thick masonry walls of the restored and modernized ruin in which d'Artois lived.

THE old scholar snapped the switch of the tall Damascus brass floor-lamp, leaving the circular room a somber depth of gloom unbroken save for the patch of sunlight that played on the wine-red Boukhara rug.

"We will see what manner of phantom is following you around," he continued. "Sit back in your chair, *Mademoiselle* . . . relax . . . forget your fear and your worry . . . do not fight it . . . it can not harm you . . . I am watching. . . ."

Diane's dark eyes became fixed and staring as she relaxed in response to that soporific murmuring. Farrell noted with wonder that though but a moment ago Diane had been not only wide awake but with nerves keyed to the snapping-point, she was now almost asleep. She was breathing very slowly and regularly; her long lashes drooped, masking the lower eyelids.

Such long lashes. . . . Farrell himself felt the spell of that solemn, droning voice. He realized in a vague way that d'Artois was hypnotizing his distracted caller. Then Farrell frowned, shook his head perplexedly, glanced at d'Artois, and marvelled . . . but only for a moment—and then Farrell perceived something which made him start violently, catch his breath with a gasp, and sit rigidly erect, hands clutching the arms of his chair.

In the shadows of that ancient tower-room he saw what seemed to be a tenuous, wavering streak which despite its semblance to a wisp of smoke was throbbing and pulsing as though it were alive. Moment by moment it became more dense. Farrell knew that a fourth personality had entered the room; a newcomer whose presence he could feel more distinctly than he could see. A cold thrill raced up his spine, and he shivered as though an icy wind had displaced the blood in his veins.

D'Artois' eyes were fixed, and his brow was furrowed with a frown of intense concentration. His lips moved inaudibly, and his lean hands gestured as to a slow, unheard rhythm.

The presence was becoming a transparent, clearly defined feminine form of exquisite proportion. On her head was a tall diadem of archaic workmanship; and her smile was a curved menace as evilly alluring as the loveliness of her delicate, haughty features. She was colorless, a mere luminous form; yet Farrell sensed that her hair should be black, with bluish highlights, and that the slightly aquiline face and graciously curved shoulders and slender arms should be a warm, olive hue.

Yet for all her loveliness, the presence was an evil brooding in the shadows. The tension in that somber circular room moment by moment became more acute. Farrell felt perspiration trickling down his cheeks, and wondered how much longer he could endure the uncanny menace that had taken form before his eyes. But d'Artois broke the spell. He sharply clapped his hands.

"Wake up!" he commanded bruskly.

Diane started, regarded them both with eyes wide open and amazed. And when Farrell's glance, for an instant distracted from the darkness behind Diane, shifted back toward the spot where the presence had appeared, he saw but a thin thread of silver mist which vanished even as he stared.

"Oh! Did I fall asleep? I'm sorry——"

Diane's bewilderment was obvious. Farrell knew that she had been utterly unaware of the strange shadow-figure at her shoulder.

"Now I remember," she continued, collecting her wits. "We were discussing an apparition; and——"

"It was here, and it left," replied d'Artois. "But let us talk about something else. Tell me about those objects that came so near to killing you. What's their history?"

Diane closed her eyes for a moment, and frowned.

"Well . . . really, I don't know," she said, speaking very slowly, "except that Graf Erich gave me the bust of Napoleon not long ago, and gave my brother that Moro kampilan. But——"

"Graf Erich?" interrupted d'Artois. "*Mordieu!* Your choice of playmates!"

"Why, what's wrong with him?" wondered Diane. "He's perfectly fascinating, and he's been ever so attentive."

D'Artois nodded, and pondered for a moment. Farrell saw that while his friend had apparently gathered another loose end, the riddle had at the same time become more complex.

"Suppose," suggested d'Artois, "that you ask Graf Erich to invite me and Monsieur Farrell to his château this evening at almost any convenient hour after dinner. Offer him any plausible pretext. And you will of course accompany us."

"Why . . . but yes, certainly," Diane agreed, although she was as puzzled as Farrell. "But did you really see—do tell me——"

D'Artois smiled and shook his head.

"Before I commit myself, I prefer to see Graf Erich. And now run along and leave me to my studies. In the meanwhile, do be careful of falling objects. We don't want a tile or coping-stone to drop and kill you before I can get to the bottom of this riddle."

Diane knew the futility of persistence. Acknowledging Farrell's bow with a smile, she allowed d'Artois to escort her to the door at the ground floor.

FARRELL perforce restrained his curiosity until d'Artois returned.

"How did you predict the appearance of that phantom?" he demanded.

D'Artois chuckled as he seated himself and struck light to a cigarette.

"I didn't predict it—and neither did I conjure it up. It follows Diane around——"

"Good Lord!" exclaimed Farrell. "Why—that's worse than if you'd actually evoked it. Do you mean that the girl is actually *haunted?*"

"In a way, yes," replied the old man. "And the evidence of our eyes is corroborated by those unusual accidents. Some personal, directed intelligence is working against Diane.

"By hypnotizing Diane, I subdued her conscious resistance and thus allowed the spectral companion to materialize by appropriating some of Diane's etheric double. A glance at any work on occultism will explain that to you."

Farrell shuddered, then resumed, "But where does Graf What's-His-Name come in?"

"I don't know, exactly," admitted d'Artois. "But consider for a moment: Graf Erich gave her the bronze bust. He gave her brother, who is a collector of arms, a Moro kampilan. And every object which has featured in these uncanny accidents—excepting the slater's hammer—has passed through Graf Erich's hands. Simple, *n'est-ce pas?*"

"Yes, certainly—very simple indeed!" admitted Farrell with elaborate irony. "And so, very logically, a heathenish, Queen of Sheba sort of female ghost follows Diane around and makes a personal appearance when you do your hocus-pocus. Exceedingly clear, Pierre. I get it perfectly."

"Let it go at that," chuckled d'Artois. "I already begin to see a light; and tonight we may learn why all inanimate creation is conspiring to kill Diane."

### 2. *A Twisted Wire*

GRAF ERICH'S château was not much more than two kilometers beyond the Mousserole Gate. It crowned one of the knolls that were the advance guard of the Pyrenees. The salon, with its tapestried walls, its beamed ceiling and its ornate, massive chandeliers, reminded Farrell of a miniature of the dining-room of Henri IV at Pau.

Graf Erich received his guests in person. He made no reference to the lack of servants, and left it to his callers to decide whether poverty or eccentricity accounted for the absence of the servitors that should second the somber richness of the appointments.

"A fighting man," was Farrell's first thought as he grasped the Count's extended hand and met the unwavering regard of his dark eyes. And then Farrell shifted his gaze. He was disconcerted as at an unintentional eavesdropping, or spying. Graf Erich's eyes were too expressive for Farrell's entire comfort. In them he saw misery and regret, and an iron will that was equal to the terrific struggle that was branded in deep lines on his lean cheeks, and the droop of his mouth.

"He spends his time in the shadow of

the ax," was Farrell's thought. "Good God, what has he on his mind? . . ."

Diane, the first to acknowledge Graf Erich's greeting, had insisted that she would be quite content to leave her hat and coat in the Count's study, which was at the end of a low, vaulted passage that led from the salon.

"The light is just as good, and I have my own mirror," she assured him, as she declined his offer to escort her to a dressing-room. "And it's a day's journey from any one to any other part of this house."

Diane was in higher spirits than she had been that afternoon. Her laugh was light, and her eyes sparkled as she went on with her comments concerning architects who design a château that is a place of magnificent distances. Then she turned to step toward the study.

Farrell saw that a cluster of heavy Persian maces and battle-axes adorned the crown of the archway through which she proposed passing, and knew that Diane was stepping into line with peril from overhead. An instant later he caught her eye.

The mirth was gone. She also had seen. Farrell, while replying to Graf Erich's courtesies, shook his head. Diane's change of expression showed how plainly she had read his thought. She paused for an instant, then advanced.

"Going to fight it, eh? That's the spirit!" was his unspoken thought; but Farrell could barely resist his impulse to detain her.

"Er . . . beg your pardon, Count," he said, seeking to palm off his moment of inattention as a lapse in his actually excellent understanding of French. "My ear's a shade thick, you know—just landed on this side a week ago. . . ."

Even as he spoke, his eyes shifted to follow Diane's advance. Then he saw it happening, and could no longer doubt.

Nervous tension brings an abnormal sharpness of the senses, and an accompanying illusion of the cessation of time.

The flexible picture-wire that bound the cluster of heavy weapons together had parted. He plainly saw that the ends of the stranded wire were separating, knew that their deadly burden was about to fall. But there was plenty of time. Those heavy, skull-crushing weapons had to drop three feet before they struck her . . . and they had not yet started falling . . . but they would, soon—now, they were dropping . . . and faster. . . .

Farrell's fingers closed about Diane's shoulder and yanked her backward just a split instant before the burnished steel flashed down and rang crashing against the tiles.

"Oh-h-h! *Mon Dieu,* again!" cried Diane.

Graf Erich's dark face had become paper-white as he and d'Artois leaped forward.

"Look, *Monsieur!*" commanded d'Artois. His finger pointed accusingly at the ends of the stranded wire.

Graf Erich started violently. *"Was für Teufelei!"* he exclaimed in wrathful dismay. "That wire has been broken!"

"Broken? Are you sure it wasn't *cut?*" demanded Farrell.

*"Mais non!"* exclaimed d'Artois as he drew forward a chair and leaped to the seat. "Look! You can see how each strand has a sharp bend. *That wire was broken by repeated twisting, not by cutting."*

"Oh, good Lord!" interposed Diane, who now trembled violently from the reaction of the shock. "Did you say someone broke the wires that secured those weapons to the wall? How—but what do you—it just couldn't——"

"Someone, or something," said d'Artois, regarding Graf Erich with stern, unwavering eyes.

The Count started. His swarthy features darkened.

"Just what do you mean by saying *someone?*"

"That wire," countered d'Artois, "could not have kinked itself. My meaning should be quite obvious."

Wrath and dismay struggled for the supremacy of Graf Erich's features.

"Impossible! How could any person have timed the breaking of that wire?—who, for that matter, knew that she would pass through that door, instead of going to the rear of the building, and up a flight? How——"

"Do not misunderstand me," interrupted d'Artois. "This is not a personal accusation. Nevertheless, *Monsieur le Comple,*" he continued with a hard glitter in his blue eyes, "be pleased to correct me if I am wrong in saying that you might, with careful study, account for this fourth member of a series of coincidences."

Farrell saw Graf Erich's eyes suddenly drop before d'Artois' cold, unblinking gaze.

"Oh, what ever can you be hinting?" exclaimed Diane.

"Do not misunderstand me," repeated d'Artois. "I do not mean that you are *consciously* concealing anything. But ponder on this succession of busts, and kampilans and Persian maces and battle-axes that have dropped for no reason at all. And now, *Monsieur,* with your permission, I will escort Mademoiselle Diane back to the city. Later, perhaps, we can discuss this at greater length."

Graf Erich regarded d'Artois for an interval that was becoming perilously close to a painful silence. Then he bent over Diane's hand, and bowed formally to d'Artois and Farrell.

THEY drove in silence from the château. Farrell was communing with a growing conviction that Graf Erich could have explained why that heavy ax and heavier mace had dropped from their support; yet he was equally certain that Graf Erich was on the verge of desperation.

"Naturally, he'd be shaken," reasoned Farrell as they approached the Mousserole Gate. "Sure. But he looked as if he'd seen a ghost *that he was expecting to see.*"

D'Artois presently brought the Daimler to a smooth halt at the door of Diane's apartment on rue Lachepaillet.

Diane waved farewell as d'Artois headed the long car down the incline toward the old guardhouse at the Gate of Spain. Then, passing rue d'Espagne on the left, he skirted the city wall and drove toward the Nive and the little, square courtyard on which the d'Artois tower faced.

D'Artois pounded the massive brazen knocker that adorned the iron-bound and iron-studded oaken door to summon his man Raoul, who admitted them, then took the wheel of the Daimler and drove it to the garage.

"Now that we can speak our minds freely," began d'Artois as he led the way to the study, "what do you make of this last accident?"

"Someone twisted that wire and broke it," replied Farrell. "But how could anyone time the trap so that it would spring at the very instant? Why, it just doesn't make any sense!"

"I am not so sure of that," maintained d'Artois. "You heard Graf Erich's exclamation—*was für Teufelei!* That may have been nothing but an expression of wrath; but I believe he meant it literally. Deviltry. Graf Erich has been up to something that is now kicking back at him. That harassed look of his could not have been so deeply branded in a week.

"And just to give you food for thought," continued d'Artois, "I will now mention something which I withheld to avoid prematurely influencing you. *Graf Erich is and has for several years been noted as a dabbler in thaumaturgy.*"

"Thaumaturgy . . . thaumaturgy . . ." muttered Farrell. "Miracle or wonder worker, eh? Or is that just an impressive word for fakery?"

"Your first definition is correct," said d'Artois. "Although thaumaturgy at times descends well into the last named, surprizing results often flash forth from the quackery that clouds occult research. Graf Erich has started something he's lost control of. But, *mordieu*, what is it that he has started? To wipe out that interrogation is our present problem. And in the meanwhile, I am certain that our charming young friend, Diane, is in much graver peril than she realizes."

### 3. *Lilith*

GRAF ERICH, immediately upon the departure of his guests, stalked toward the great fireplace at the far end of the salon. He halted at the hearthstone, glanced sharply about him—an instinctive precaution that had not yet given way to the security resulting from the absence of servants—and then knelt just clear of its edge. He fingered a tile which was nearest the foot of the andiron he faced. The hearth-slab swung silently on pivots, exposing a narrow flight of stairs that led into cavernous depths far below.

Graf Erich took from his pocket a small flashlamp and by its slender pencil of light illuminated his descent into the subterranean blackness. At the foot of the stairs he pressed a button. The click of the wall switch was followed by a glow of bluish-violet, wavering light.

He was standing in an alcove in the wall of a circular vault not more than five yards in diameter. Seated cross-legged about the curved wall were five men, each with his arms crossed on his breast; and the head of each was inclined as in sleep, or profound meditation. Their eyes were open, but they stared as though fixed in the contemplation of something that was beyond the sight of normal, human eyes. The posture and the drape of their robes suggested adepts from High Asia.

They sat at the vertices of a pentacle inscribed in cinnabar, whose orange streak glowed fiery-golden in the violet light. Each squatted in a small circle whose center coincided with the vertex which he commanded; and in the center of the pentacle was another circle, this one scarcely more than a yard in diameter.

"It's there . . . always there, now," muttered Graf Erich, as he stared somberly at the phosphorescent haze that throbbed and pulsed with rhythmical beat in the center of the cabalistical pentacle. "I'll never get rid of her. It's too late. . . ."

He shook his head wearily, and sighed. Then he stepped from the alcove into which the staircase opened, and passed along the wall until he came to a station marked on the periphery that was circumscribed about the interlaced triangles of the pentacle. He halted there, facing the prime vertex; then, extending his arms, he bowed his head for a moment.

At first he spoke in low, hurried syllables, his voice scarcely more than a murmur; but as he warmed up to his recital, he assumed a more commanding tone until at last he was intoning a resonant mantra that rolled and thundered as though, besides reverberating through the vault, it also surged through caverns and passages that reached into the uttermost depths of the earth.

In response to Graf Erich's chanting came the low, sweet voice of a woman who basks in a perfumed garden and

purrs contentedly as a cat before the luxury of a fire. It was an amorous, caressing voice in whose suave, mellow murmur was the quintessential sweetness of all women who had ever been, and who ever would be: it was the voice of not any one woman, but rather a hierarchy of women, from dusky slave-girls to diademed queens.

*"Baali,"* said that sighing, luminous mist, "Lord and Master, I warned you, but you would not heed. I have failed four times, now, but the Power is increasing. *Baali*——"

The voice addressed Graf Erich by that Semitic word which signified *lord* and implied *husband*.

"Abandon your attempts!" interrupted Graf Erich in a low, hoarse voice. "And from now on—from this very moment—I will never see her. I promise that as the price of her life."

The laughter of that shimmering, sentient haze was bitter and mocking and poison-sweet; and a breath of perfume heavier than jasmine and the roses of Shiraz was exhaled through the crypt.

"Too late," murmured the voice as the laughter subsided. "With your dark magic, and your knowledge of the True Name, and your command of Powers and Presences, you called me from the forgotten blacknesses of Time's beginning. You lured me from oblivion. And ears that for uncounted centuries had not heard the voice of adoration again thrilled to those solemn words which mocked Time and the higher gods and the laws that were ordained.

*"Baali,* I rose from the perished memories of uncounted lovers. From the dust of their dead brains and from the lingering traces of their time-bleached souls—bleached gray in the home of the cheerless dead—there came once more a memory of me, and I lived.

"You chanted like Lucifer singing to the Morning Star on the crest of Zagros. You sang like Lucifer crying his defiance across the vast gulf. And now that I am here, you are seeking her in preference to me. . . ."

She laughed, that woman's voice, with ominous sweetness.

"I am here. Even I, Lilith—Daughter of the Dancer, the Queen of the *Lilin*—and you thought that I would stand aside for any earth-woman? Whoever summons me must have thought for no other."

"You devil! I'll send you back——" Graf Erich choked with wrath.

The phosphorescent presence in the center of the mist column laughed again: low, musical, and withal, a bitter laugh.

"You can not send me back, *Baali.*" The voice enunciated that appellation of respect with a finely modulated note of defiance.

Graf Erich's dark eyes flashed somberly, and shifted from the shadow presence to the bronzed, inscrutable faces of the five who, squatting at the vertices of the pentacle, stared with their fixed gaze beyond the Border.

"You dare not," murmured the voice of the iridescent mist. "You know that you dare not use that weapon against me," reiterated the softly speaking doom. "Even you would stop short of such infamy. They are your disciples in dark magic. Even to save *her,* you would lack the courage to attempt that hideous treason. And you know that!"

The mist presence was becoming momentarily more substantial, until finally at the middle of the pentacle a woman of incredible loveliness stood in the place of the luminous haze-column. And from the half-parted lips of the solemn-faced hierophants came faint wisps of vapor that were drawn toward the center, even as

cigarette smoke is drawn to an air-vent by the draft of an exhaust fan. The Presence—Queen of the Lilin—was now transparent . . . now translucent . . . finally opaque, solid, and despite her fantasmal origin, seemingly of flesh and blood. Her exquisite, exotic features were lovely with a beauty that the world has not dreamed or fancied for uncounted years. Lilith who smiled from the pentacle was a loveliness too long forgotten even to exist as a remote memory; Lilith, the everlasting Queen of all moonlit nights, the Queen of the Lilin, who danced before Suleiman, upon whom be prayer, and the peace!

She smiled a slow, carmine sorcery. The dark, long-lashed eyes were without fear. Her slender arms gestured like twin serpents of nacre as she patted the midnight of her elaborately dressed, long hair.

"You prefer me to all earthly women, *Baali*. . . . And even though you did not . . . you could not kill those five acolytes . . . could not buy her safety at the cost of such infamy. . . . *Baali*, am I not lovely? . . ."

### 4. *Two Long-Haired Women*

FARRELL and d'Artois in the meanwhile had been pondering on the events of the evening, and seeking to devise a wedge to split the solid front of contradictions that opposed them.

"The fact that in three cases the falling object which almost struck Diane," said d'Artois, "came from the house of Graf Erich is certainly significant. But on the other hand, I can scarcely imagine his wishing to harm Diane."

"Yet it must track back to him," persisted Farrell. "Consider, the strongest manifestation: that of flexing a wire until it snapped and released its deadly burden."

"*Pardieu*, you have right," admitted d'Artois. "Graf Erich's château must be the focal point where maximum intensity is developed."

Farrell stared somberly into the glowing coals of the grate. D'Artois paced slowly back and forth, each trip marking the length of the wine-colored Boukhara rug that filled the center of the study. Suddenly he halted, and flung open the casement.

"Look!" he commanded, making a sweeping gesture of his arm.

Farrell gazed across the moon-drenched wilderness of roofs. It seemed for a moment that he stood in the tower of some mediæval necromancer, looking into a vista of freshly opened hyper-space and across the roofs of a dead city of enchantment.

Wraith-like mists were slowly marching from the Nive, and along the dry moat that girdled the walls, and up into the citadel, to clamor at the heavily armored door at the ground level. Farrell felt a sudden chill flash down his spine, despite the warmth of the study.

"Like a Chinese dream," he muttered. "Old, and evil, and beautiful . . . like some pearl-gray sphinx smiling through her veils of mystery. . . . Lord, but it's old—I never realized, till just now——"

"Old? Old indeed, *mon ami*," said d'Artois solemnly; "old when the Moslem conquerors took the city by assault; old when the Roman legions drove the stakes of their first encampment on the banks of the Nive. And beneath this citadel there are passages and crypts. . . ."

Farrell sharply regarded his friend and noted the stern, hard lines about his mouth and the glitter of his eyes.

"Do you mean to say," demanded Farrell in a low, hoarse whisper, "that you think that some elemental has emerged from the everlasting midnight of the

vaults beneath this city to destroy Diane?"

D'Artois shrugged, slowly shook his head, and smiled somberly. Then his eyes shifted for a moment toward the open casement. He ceased smiling.

"Pierre," Farrell abruptly resumed, "I've got a whim, and I'm going to humor it, whether you think I'm goofy or not. I'm going for a walk, along rue Lachepaillet—to see the moonlight advance across the parkway, down below."

D'Artois' eyes narrowed as he scrutinized his friend.

"Me, I will go with you," he announced. "Unless——"

"Glad to have you," assured Farrell. Then, as he picked up his hat and jammed it well down on his head, "I've had the creeps for the past hour. And it's been getting worse ever since we left Diane. Now, if you must laugh——"

"But no, I refuse to find anything humorous about the thought," protested d'Artois. "Your interest in the young lady, while a trifle sudden, is certainly warranted."

"You've got me all wrong. *She* doesn't interest me. It's just that I've got a hunch. That ever increasing force! Just as we were saying——"

"Precisely," agreed d'Artois. "In fact, no one was contradicting you." Then, with a malicious grin, "Which contentions on your part prove indubitably that you are not one damned bit interested in Mademoiselle Diane."

D'ARTOIS selected a Malacca stick from his collection, then led the way to the door; but he had scarcely crossed the threshold when the telephone rang.

*"C'est moi,* d'Artois," he assured the speaker. Then, "But yes—we will see you at once. With pleasure. *À bientôt!"*

"Diane?" wondered Farrell.

"Certainly none other," said d'Artois.

"No, there is nothing wrong, yet. She sought to explain, but I gave her no chance, lest she end by explaining herself into a state of mind. You two, it seems, have had a hunch, yes? Dignifying it by the name of telepathy or intuition is hardly necessary."

D'Artois paused at his desk and took from a compartment a small device in the shape of a Greek letter *tau* with a circular handle where the cross-bar joined the stem. He shook his head in response to Farrell's query, and thrust the silver symbol into his pocket.

"A *crux ansata,"* he said. "Later, perhaps, I will explain."

They walked briskly up rue Tour de Sault toward the head of rue d'Espagne, where the latter reaches out toward the breach in the fortification. From there they turned to their right and followed the Lachepaillet wall for two short blocks to Diane's door.

"I've been so terribly uneasy," Diane explained as she admitted Farrell and d'Artois. "Ever since Graf Erich phoned——"

"Eh, what's that?" demanded Farrell. Mention of the Count abruptly jarred him from his preliminary survey of the exquisite effect of apricot-hued negligée and coral *lamé* mules worn by a girl of Diane's coloring. "When was that?"

"A little over half an hour ago," said Diane as she ushered them into the living-room. "He seemed terribly agitated, and hinted that I might expect a repetition of the accident at the château. But I couldn't get him to be explicit about it; and that's what alarmed me. I fancied it must have been because he was worried about those accidents, and particularly the one of tonight. So——"

She made a quick, nervous gesture of her hand.

"So, as you see, I've taken down the

pictures and bric-a-brac and everything that could possibly fall. But that's not why I called you. It was something Graf Erich said tonight: before he hung up, he insisted that I should cut my hair."

*"Comment?"* demanded d'Artois. *"Cut your hair?"*

"Yes," replied Diane. "He hinted to that effect shortly after that bust fell down and nearly struck me as I lay on the chaise-longue, over there in the corner. At the time I fancied that he was teasing me about my whim of wearing long hair. But his mentioning it again tonight, and insisting on it, despite his agitation about the possibility of something falling——"

She stopped short, shook her head, and made a gesture of perplexity.

"It seems to me that our friend Graf Erich is plumb loco!" declared Farrell. "Good egg and all that, but just off his chump! Worried about a succession of uncanny accidents, and then kicking about the way Diane wears her hair."

D'Artois shook his head.

*"Au contraire,"* he said, "I fear that Graf Erich is only too well balanced. Tell me, did you say that you would cut your hair?"

"But yes," replied Diane. "Anything to please him, he sounded so upset. And as soon as I agreed, he hung up."

"My dear," said d'Artois, "suppose that you get a pair of scissors."

Diane and Farrell regarded him with amazement.

"Good Lord!" exclaimed Farrell, "now *you've* got it!"

D'Artois stifled the retort that was on his lips. He considered for a moment the sleek, blue-black coiffure, then smiled mirthlessly.

"Perhaps it would be hasty to sacrifice such exceptionally lovely long hair in this day and age—still—but suppose that I call Graf Erich and see if I can get some sense out of his incoherence. That one is far from irrational. There is something in what he says; and right now I will find out!"

He glanced about him, seeking the telephone. Farrell stroked his chin and regarded d'Artois with wonder and a tinge of alarm. Diane indicated the adjoining room. But as d'Artois rose, a bell rang.

"Perhaps," he said, stopping short, "it is Graf Erich calling back."

Diane shook her head.

"That's the door-bell, not the telephone. Excuse me—just a moment, please."

As Diane left the living-room, d'Artois caught Farrell's eye.

*"Mon vieux,* I am not demented," he protested.

"But why cut her hair?" persisted Farrell, scrutinizing d'Artois as though he expected to find symptoms of delirium.

D'Artois shrugged. "To be frank, I don't know—*yet*. But I do know Graf——"

A scream at the front door cut d'Artois' remarks short. Then another: an agonized shriek that betokened an outraged mind rather than a wounded body.

"Good Lord!" exclaimed Farrell, as he sprang toward the door, and started down the hallway. "Diane!"

*"Mordieu! It's* after her!" And d'Artois followed.

THE front door was wide open. They saw Diane on the sidewalk, struggling hand to hand with a slender, sinuous woman who sought to drive home a long, frostily glittering dagger. Diane, straining and gasping, strove to wrench back and break the grip of the woman who relentlessly menaced her with that deadly slip of steel.

Farrell halted for an instant in utter amazement. Like Diane, the other woman was dark and long-haired and exceed-

ingly lovely; and like her, arrayed in a shimmering, silky fabric which, conspiring with river mists and moonlight, lent an unreal, almost terrible beauty to the swaying, lithe forms that struggled for the icy splinter of a blade.

The enemy's features were branded with a venomous smile that made her crimson lips seem like a fresh wound.

All in a glance; all in one fleeting instant which can be longer than a lifetime.

Farrell leaped forward and seized the enemy's wrist.

He gasped in dismayed horror as his fingers closed about the exquisite, nacreously gleaming arm. She was serpent-cold; yet an electric thrill numbed his arm all the way to the shoulder.

"Oh, Glenn!" panted Diane as she caught her breath and renewed her efforts.

*"Tenez!"* snapped the voice of d'Artois as Farrell extended his arm again. He clapped his hands sharply, then continued in a brusk, dominant tone, *"Lilitu! Agrat bat Mahhat!"*

The smile vanished from the crimson lips as d'Artois pronounced those strange words. The dagger wavered in her grasp. She suddenly wrenched her wrist free from Diane's grip, but instead of striking, she turned to confront d'Artois. The lovely features were menacing, but they were also clouded with apprehension.

Farrell, his arm still tingling from the uncanny contact, supported Diane, who shrank away from the diabolically lovely enemy.

D'Artois again addressed the stranger. He stood firm and erect, and looked her full in the eye. His right hand flashed from his coat pocket. He grasped the silver *crux ansata.*

Once more he pronounced, *"Lilîtu!"*

Then he began intoning in a language that Farrell dimly recognized as an archaic Semitic tongue. His voice rolled and thundered like a distant surf; it crackled and snapped sulfurously, and his fierce old eyes were frosty cold as he intently regarded that evil beauty whose luminous loveliness seemed to be a concentration of solidified moonbeams rather than any aggregation of flesh and blood.

"Who is that woman?" muttered Farrell as Diane clung to him. "A human snake? Look!"

Then, before Diane could turn her head from his shoulder, *"No, don't look!"*

The nacreous gleaming arms and shoulders and the imperious features were becoming diffused and misty. Farrell heard a low, wrathful cry, and the tinkle of steel against masonry.

"Where is she?" he demanded, seeking to collect his outraged senses. "Where——"

As d'Artois turned, Farrell saw that the lean, leathery features were drawn and haggard, and that the old man's brow glistened with sweat. The outstretched arms dropped wearily back to his sides. One hand still clutched the silver *crux ansata.*

"Back in whatever unknown hell hatched her," said d'Artois.

Farrell started at Diane's half-articulate cry.

"I'm all right," she said. "Only . . . *mon Dieu!* . . . where did she——"

Farrell shook his head. "I thought——"

But Farrell's thought had been too wild for expression. So he abruptly cut his speech; and then, seeing a glitter on the paving, stooped to pick up a dagger whose jeweled hilt glowed and flamed in the moonlight.

"It seems so ghastly and unreal, now that I look back at it . . . as though it happened years instead of just seconds ago," said Diane as she led the way back to the living-room. "I greeted her, and then she said something in a language I

couldn't understand. Instead of asking her in, I leaned forward and asked her to repeat. And before I knew it, she had seized me by the shoulder, pulled me off my balance—she was terribly strong, in spite of her slight figure——"

D'Artois and Farrell had exchanged glances during Diane's remarks; and from long association, they understood each other's moods without the aid of spoken words. Farrell yielded the floor to d'Artois.

"The strength of madness," said d'Artois as his eyes shifted from Farrell to Diane. "If you'd seen how she slipped clear of me! Too bad that anyone so beautiful would be so utterly insane."

D'Artois paused to note the effect of his bit of fiction, and saw that Diane was accepting his story at its face value; which, in view of her fright, and distracted attention, was reasonable enough.

"Now run along to bed, *chère petite*," continued d'Artois. "I'm certain she won't be back tonight."

Diane rose from her chair, and would have protested.

D'Artois shook his head.

"We must go. I will explain later. Wake Félice and have her sit up with you. She'll grumble, but pay no attention to that."

"I will——" began Farrell.

"Of verity, I know that you would," replied d'Artois. "But you and I have to find that poor demented girl. And in the meanwhile," he continued, again addressing Diane, "do not admit *anyone*. When we return, we will ring two long and two short; but before you open the door, first peep out the window and identify us."

Diane made no further effort to detain them.

D'ARTOIS turned to Farrell as they reached the paving.

"Monstrous blockhead!" he exclaimed. "I was wondering just when you would declare that that accursed creature vanished in a wisp of fog—and then you insisted on remaining to guard the roost!"

"But," protested Farrell, "it seems that leaving Diane there with old Félice, the cook——"

"Would I have left her alone if there were reason to fear danger? This creature lured Diane to the door because she could not bring a material thing like a dagger into the house in the same manner in which she herself could have appeared therein. Had she materialized in the house, she could not have injured Diane with her bare hands. Do you understand?"

"Perfectly," assured Farrell with elaborate irony. "Among other things, who was she, and what happened to her? I'd have sworn that she vanished in a puff of mist. Can you——"

"She did indeed so vanish," said d'Artois. "And let me see that dagger which you picked up."

They were close to the old guardhouse now, and about to turn down rue Tour de Sault.

"Ah . . . just as I expected," muttered d'Artois as he examined the dagger and its sapphire-sparkling hilt. "I suspected it from Graf Erich's warning Diane."

"How does he fit into it?" demanded Farrell impatiently.

"This," declared d'Artois, "is a dagger from his collection. I know it well indeed. A rare and distinctive piece."

"Good Lord!" gasped Farrell. "And we thought he wasn't mixed up—at least, not——"

"We'll soon know!" interrupted d'Artois.

"But I'd still like to know what hap-

pened to that girl," persisted Farrell. "That was an illusion, or else——"

"You were so certain that it was an illusion that you suddenly checked your speech so as to avoid alarming Diane, yes?" D'Artois chuckled mirthlessly.

"Graf Erich's devil-mongering?" hazarded Farrell.

D'Artois nodded.

"Well, what was she—it—that creature?" demanded Farrell. "And did you or didn't you begin talking to her in what sounded something like the Arabic you hear in Nejd?"

"I did," replied d'Artois. "I solemnly commanded her to leave. I presented the *crux ansata,* a very ancient symbol of power. And she left. My will against hers. None of what you call hocus-pocus. I called her by her proper designation; at least, by one of her names. That is an essential in any ritual of exorcism. I guessed, but not blindly, when I called her *Agrat bat Mahhat,* the Daughter of the Dancer."

Farrell perplexedly shook his head.

"How did you know—where did you ever meet——"

"She had exceptionally long, heavy hair, if one were to judge by her curious coiffure. So had Diane. Then she is *Agrat bat Mahhat,* said I. Very simple."

"Pierre, this is getting to be a madhouse!" despaired Farrell. "Even a bit of common sense would help——"

"Wait till we see Graf Erich," countered d'Artois grimly. "Then you'll understand."

### 5. *The Vengeance of Lilith*

THEY found Graf Erich sitting at a table in the circle of illumination cast by the single chandelier that burned in the salon. As he rose to greet them, they saw that his dark features were wan, and his eyes haggard and feverish. Farrell and d'Artois sensed that Graf Erich was on the verge of making a monstrous confession, and was nerving himself for the plunge.

His half-coherent hints, his jerky and meaningless gestures, his nervous glances about him as he sought to anticipate and, at times, evade d'Artois' questions made it plain that Graf Erich was indeed being driven to death by some terror of his own evocation.

"You, *Monsieur,*" he finally said, jabbing his forefinger like a sword-thrust at d'Artois, "doubtless know already what I have sought to hint. Look at this."

He reached into a drawer and produced a sheet of paper on which were drawn astrological charts and cabalistical figures.

"An experiment in an ancient magic," continued Graf Erich. "I need not name those symbols. You understand them. And you"—he glanced at Farrell—"would do well *not* to understand."

Farrell nodded his whole-hearted agreement, and shivered as he caught the full force of Graf Erich's glance.

"In a word, I evoked her. Lilith, the Demon Queen of Zemargad."

*"Diable!"* exclaimed d'Artois. "But why did she attempt to assassinate Mademoiselle Diane? *And with this dagger!* Yours, Graf Erich!"

The Count turned paper-white at d'Artois' accusing words and gesture.

"Jealousy," he replied in a low voice. "Insane jealousy of Diane, to whom I recently began paying my respects.

"As to the method of evocation? I assembled five adepts, and caused them to put themselves into a state of catalepsy induced by auto-hypnosis. You understand the principle and purpose?"

"Quite," assured d'Artois.

"She is their thought-image," continued Graf Erich. "Thought is in the last analysis electrical energy. And all matter

is, ultimately, electrical energy. They—the Five—concentrated, all on the same image and same concept, and achieved what you might call resonance.

"You know what resonance will do in electrical circuits. Further comment on my part would be insulting to your intelligence; not so?"

D'Artois nodded his agreement. Farrell felt that his intelligence would be none the worse for a bit of additional insult, but he held his peace.

"At all events, she materialized. And at first, she subsisted only on their vital force. She told me of those ancient days when bearded kings built monstrous *ziggurâts* on the plains of Babîl. She spoke of Naram-sin of Agade. She spoke——"

Graf Erich shivered as though an icy blast had been deflected into his marrow, and made a despairing gesture.

*"Herr Gott!* And she spoke of other things. I listened . . . too long . . . and finally believed her outrageous claims. No living woman——"

"I know," muttered d'Artois. "Beautiful as no human woman ever could be. Like that one they still speak of as *Bint el Kafir* . . . others call her *Agrat bat Mahhat*. Many titles, but the same entity."

Farrell's eyes widened at the ominous, half-understood names d'Artois and the dark Count pronounced in awed whispers, like the mutterings exchanged when a pair of necromancers encounter each other.

"And then Diane entered the picture," resumed Graf Erich. "You know the rest. Lilith—or a thought-image resembling that which Lilith was supposed to be—became wildly jealous of Diane. I tried to induce Diane to cut her long hair. But I dared not tell her why; and she laughed merrily and ignored my whim."

"Her hair?" wondered Farrell.

But d'Artois, nodding, silenced him with a glance.

"I knew, tonight, that that ax——" Graf Erich's voice failed. He muttered inarticulately, then raised his head from his hands and regarded d'Artois with a somber, smoldering glare.

"And now—yes, I knew, even before you showed me that dagger. *She* told me how you had beaten her, flayed her with words of power, driven her into the night——"

The Count paused and looked at d'Artois with wonder and respect.

"But she defied me and challenged me to use the sole way that remains to send her back into the shadows."

"And that is?" wondered d'Artois.

"Killing those adepts. Fellow students and disciples who trust me to the uttermost."

"Why not awaken them?" asked Farrell.

Graf Erich shook his head.

"At first she existed but as a figment of their imaginations; but their concentration became so intense that even when they are awakened from their trance, she will continue to exist. She is now not only their materialized thought-form, but also an *accretion of disembodied energy and matter that has been attracted by the terrific vortex of power we have set up.*"

"Good God!" muttered Farrell in dismay as he caught the full import of Graf Erich's statement, and its implication of independent life created by thought-concentration.

"Something," said d'Artois in a low, solemn tone, "must be done. And at once." He slid the dagger slowly across the table toward Graf Erich. "You are responsible for the existence of this terrible creature from the shadows who not many minutes ago sought to murder Diane, and who would even now be re-

peating the attempt if her meeting with me had not sapped most of her energy. You must send her back to that nethermost hell where she belongs. And quickly!"

"But how?—*Herr Gott!*—how?" despaired Graf Erich. He leaped to his feet, thrusting back his chair. For a moment he regarded d'Artois steadily; then he paled, losing the color he had somewhat regained. His eyes stared vacantly, through and past the old man.

"I can not command you to kill your disciples," said d'Artois slowly. "Neither can I permit you to hold your hand. . . ."

The evening was becoming a vortex of horror, whose center was the tense face of Graf Erich. His deep-set eyes shifted, and stared at the sparkling pommel of the dagger that lay on the table.

Finally he spoke. His face was grim with a terrible determination.

"I will settle it. Here and now."

He strode across the salon, knelt at the great fireplace, and fingered for an instant an embossed tile in the hearth. As the slab sank out of sight, Graf Erich descended the stairs that it had concealed.

Farrell regarded d'Artois intently for a moment.

"Is he crazy, or are we? Are there really——" He gestured, indicating the floor, and the foundations of the château. "Is he going to——"

D'Artois nodded.

"Yes. All five of them," he affirmed, slowly shaking his head. "It is horrible, damnably so . . . his acolytes . . . his friends . . . but if he doesn't——"

D'Artois' voice and gesture were remorseless, without pity, or passion, or prejudice. Farrell, now whiter than his shirt-front, sat poised on the edge of his chair.

"Isn't there any other way?" Farrell muttered. He leaped to his feet.

"Idiot!" snapped d'Artois, as he seized him by the arm. "If you stopped him, you would condemn her to death. If this horrifies you, remember that before you are many hours older—many minutes, perhaps—this will seem a pleasure excursion. . . ."

Farrell resumed his chair.

THEY heard Graf Erich's footsteps ring hollowly in some subterranean vault at the foot of the stairs. They heard a faint, metallic tinkle . . . then no sound at all—only the breathing of an awful silence, and the presence of fivefold death.

Then at last came a familiar *swish,* and the impact of steel driven home. A heavier, likewise familiar sound. . . .

"*Un . . . deux . . .*" d'Artois counted; "*trois . . .* steady, there! *quatre. . . .*"

"Good Lord," muttered Farrell, wondering whether the fifth stroke would ever fall.

"*Dieu de Dieu!* He is collecting his courage, poor devil . . . they were his friends . . . *cinq!*"

With a deep, weary sigh d'Artois sank back into his chair. They exchanged glances; and each saw the pallor of the other's tanned features. Then d'Artois rose.

"Five men have died so that Diane may live," he said solemnly, and bowed his gray head for a moment, then added, "*Grâce à Dieu!*"

But before Farrell could second the older man's words of gratitude, there came from that subterranean slaughter-vault a voice whose amorous sweetness was an outrage and a blasphemy to ears that had heard the impact of steel on flesh, and the sound of bodies as they toppled one by one across the flags. That woman's voice was the ultimate mockery.

It told d'Artois and Farrell that Graf Erich's terrible decision had been in vain.

"*Baali,*" she was saying, "I know now beyond any doubt that you planned to drive me back again into unending darkness—me, Lilith, Queen of Zemargad."

Her laughter was crystal-clear and poison-sweet.

"*Cordieu,*" muttered d'Artois, speaking as one stunned by a severe cudgelling, "even *that* failed. . . . And now that female fiend is free and unhampered."

"Is she out of control?" demanded Farrell.

D'Artois nodded. "Yes. She is living in her own right. Malignant, vengeful, satanically jealous. Human malice, and superhuman power--you saw her an hour ago."

The voice was speaking again:

"Look at them, *Baali!* Lying in their blood. Sprawled across that pentacle at whose center I appeared when their old magic evoked me from the shadows of time and from the ghosts of memory. And now I shall go on with my plan."

D'Artois started violently as he caught the sinister implication.

"Quick!" he snapped. "Before it's too late."

And Farrell, crossing the room in three great bounds, charged after d'Artois, and into the violet glow of the circular vault that was at the foot of the steep staircase.

He stared in horrified bewilderment as he sought to convince himself that his first glance had not been a hideous illusion.

Graf Erich, red-handed, shrank against the curved wall of the vault. He stared at the luminescent figure of a woman whose long, ornately dressed dark hair sparkled with bluish highlights, and whose imperiously carried head was crowned with a tall, curiously wrought diadem. Her jewels and her costume and her dark eyes suggested an antiquity that no living creature could have; and in that insane, purple light, she seemed even more unreal than in the moonlight and mists on the Lachepaillet wall as she sought Diane with a dagger.

At Graf Erich's feet lay the sword that had done its vain, red work.

D'Artois was advancing across the floor, seeking to avoid touching those whose heads and blood had become so terribly intermingled. As he stepped forward, he gestured with his hands, and chanted.

That dark, imperious woman for an instant shrank before the fierce eyes of d'Artois; and then she smiled as if in sudden remembrance.

"Meddler," she murmured in low, clean-cut syllables, "that will not work a second time. I have gained too much strength for you, as well as for him."

Her laugh was mocking as she became a shimmering haze that thinned and spread, dividing like the tentacles of an octopus. D'Artois, seeing the enemy flowing away in a five-branched mist, halted, lowered his arms, and ceased his chant. He was bewildered by the defiance and mockery that had accompanied the apparent surrender of the apparition.

As the last trace of luminous vapor flattened out, and writhed serpent-like among those who lay on the floor, the evening's horror reached its apex. There was a rustling and a sighing, and an unbelievable stirring among those dead forms sprawled across the dark, slippery tiles.

D'Artois turned to Graf Erich.

"What kind of deviltry is this?" he demanded. "Quick! Tell me, before it's too late!"

Graf Erich's reply was an inarticulate groan, and a despairing gesture. Farrell, as he saw those dead forms stir and

twitch, wondered if his own face was as stricken as that of the Count.

The vault had become a swamp of dark blood and darker things which paddled about in it. Then, as their motion became more directed and more terribly distinct, Farrell saw the pattern of the devilish manifestation: *they were closing in on Graf Erich to exact their vengeance.*

Farrell stooped and snatched the curved sword from the floor. In the extremity of his terror he scarcely realized what he did.

They were on their feet now, tottering, but momentarily becoming more steady. Horrible, blood-drenched headless trunks, guided by some omniscience toward their slayer, were closing in on him. Their hands were flexing, opening and closing as if to test their newly gained strength. A faint, luminous cloud of mist enveloped the monstrously animated dead, and supported them when they faltered, guided their steps, directed those lifeless hands.

Yet Farrell's terror did not reach its climax until he heard Graf Erich's outcry as they closed in, seeking remorselessly to tear him limb from limb. Then he heard no more. He lashed out with his blade, hacking, hewing, slashing with a blind, outraged frenzy. The curved simitar bit and sheared through flesh and bone; but Farrell saw that his sweeping cuts were vain. The portions that he had shorn off persisted in their awful advance, twitching, crawling, squirming with diabolical animation as though Farrell's devastating cuts had been puffs of wind; and then they closed in and joined those that had escaped the shearing steel.

The time of the ghastly mêlée could scarcely have been more than a few seconds; but each of those seconds was a lingering lifetime of red horror to Farrell, whose blade rose and fell with no result other than to multiply the grotesque, sanguinary morsels that were clutching at Graf Erich.

"Stand clear!" d'Artois cried. And as the red blade sank again, d'Artois leaped in from the rear, pinioned the sword-arm, and dragged Farrell from his futile task. "You can't save him."

Farrell stared at that which had overwhelmed Graf Erich.

"Look! *They* are dying now."

A hand relaxed its death-grip, and dropped. Other fragments one by one subsided from their unnatural motion.

"Let's get out of here," added Farrell.

*"Tais-toi,"* replied d'Artois, shortly. "There is something worse in the wind. She dematerialized in order to destroy Graf Erich. Now the next move——"

"Lord! Look at that!" interrupted Farrell.

A misty exhalation was creeping from the gory butchery that concealed the hapless Count. It was as though the ghosts of serpents were writhing and twining, seeking in the farthest dim nooks of the vault a refuge from the violet glow.

"Quick! Do you drive as though the devil were after you!" exclaimed d'Artois as he saw the eery manifestation. "Arouse Diane, and bring her here, at once!"

"But why——"

"Because she—it—that fiend will be seeking Diane in her apartment. By taking Diane away, you will gain time, since materialization is not instantaneous—but hurry! I'll wait here."

D'Artois led the way upstairs to the salon.

"He has books and charts here," explained d'Artois as he took the steps three at a bound. "I will study this thing out. It fooled him. But I know now that the death of those five adepts has nothing to do with her. Thus one fatal side-issue is eliminated—hurry, *mon ami!* I have the hunch!"

D'Artois, softly cursing, tore out one drawer after another of the tables and cabinets in the salon.

*"Grâce à Dieu!"* he muttered as he heard the Daimler crunch down the driveway and start thundering down the river road. Then he proceeded with his search, leaving the salon, and working his way into the study of Graf Erich.

A bed of coals glowed sullenly in the grate at the farther end. By the red glare d'Artois saw that the walls of the study were hung with black arras embroidered in silver to depict the monstrous and unhallowed images of obscure Asian myths. One medallion represented a woman mounted on a lion, and receiving the adoration of three bearded kings. Another depicted a woman who drove a chariot drawn by a quadriga of grotesque monsters that no sane artist could have limned; and on the mantel was a chrysoprase statuette of Agrat bat Mahhat in all her evil loveliness.

All at a glance: then d'Artois found the wall switch, snapped on the lights, and continued his search for the saving clue that might yet thwart that vengeful demon-beauty before she found and killed Diane.

### 6. *The Chrysoprase Statuette*

SOME fifteen minutes later d'Artois heard the Daimler drawing up in front of the château. He went to the door to meet Farrell and Diane.

"Do tell me what this is all about! As if I've not had my fill of mystery for tonight, with that nightmare of a woman!"

Diane had quite recovered from the shock of her encounter with what she supposed was a madwoman who waylaid her on her front steps. Then, as they stepped into the study, "Where's Graf Erich?"

"He has been detained," said d'Artois, "and presents his regrets. You were right. Those seeming accidents were the work of a malignant entity bent on your destruction."

"Aren't you consoling!" exclaimed Diane. Her laugh, however, was forced. "And was she—oh, where did he get *that?* The very image of her!"

"Where?" wondered Farrell.

"That little green statuette," replied Diane. "Why, it's an absolute likeness of that girl that tried to stab me!"

"Coincidence, my dear," declared d'Artois. "And now let's get to work."

He indicated with a gesture the heap of diagrams and manuscripts he had been studying during Farrell's absence, then thrust aside the table at the center of the room and rolled up several small Persian rugs that masked the tiled floor. He took a lump of chalk and laid out a circle, which he divided into quadrants. Each quadrant was then marked with cabalistical symbols, some drawn from memory, others from consultation of the scrolls and heavily bound vellum books he had selected from their cases and laid out for reference.

"What in the world is he doing?" whispered Diane, after having watched d'Artois in silent wonder.

Farrell, still horrified by the memory of what he had seen, and the older man's hints about what might be seen before the evening was over, shook his head.

A bowl of beaten copper served as an improvised censer, which d'Artois filled with coals from the grate. He added a handful of incense which he had found in a compartment of one of the cabinets; and as the fumes rose in thick, bluish clouds, pervading the room with a stifling, resinous sweetness, d'Artois said, "Step into those quadrants. That's right. Number two, and number four. I'll occupy number one, and then command her to

materialize in the remaining sector, and, *pardieu,* I'll cook her to a turn!"

A low, soft laugh interrupted d'Artois' remarks.

"Ah . . . but I prefer to elect my own time, *Baali,*" said a voice, "when I will not be bound by any conditions of yours."

In a dim corner of the room a spot of misty luminescence was elongating to a spindle of quivering light. Then it expanded, and solidified. The materialization was more rapid than before.

"Getting stronger," muttered d'Artois. "She has absorbed additional energy." Then, to the presence, "Lilith, back to the darkness of forgotten midnight! All those who evoked you from the ghosts of memories and from the shadows of ancient prayers are dust and less than the dust of those who loved you long ago!"

From his waistcoat pocket d'Artois drew the silver *crux ansata,* which he advanced at arm's length as he paced deliberately toward the Presence, stepping to the cadence of the adjuration which he pronounced.

"Go therefore in peace; Ardat Lilî!

"Go in peace, Queen of the Lilin!

"Go in peace, and trouble no longer the living. For he is dead, and so also are his friends, and for you there is neither vengeance nor hope, Queen of Zemargad! Go therefore to the shadows and the early dawn of time, and to the dust of those whose fancy gave you life anew!"

Diane and Farrell, standing in their quadrants, thrilled as they heard d'Artois' sonorous voice intoning as he advanced toward that malignant beauty whose wondrous body had become firm and substantial in the dim glow, and half shrouded in a diaphanous mist that served her as a gown.

Again that poison-sweet, evil laugh; but instead of shrinking or retreating as she had done earlier in the evening, she stepped forward to meet d'Artois. Her smile mocked him, but her phosphorescent eyes regarded Diane from beneath their long lashes with a cold, deadly stare.

D'Artois halted. He was baffled. His solemn command had failed. For an instant his shoulders slumped hopelessly. Then he reasserted his will. His teeth clicked grimly together, and he extended his arms. But the diabolically lovely enemy evaded his grasp as though she were a wisp of haze drifting in the wind. Farrell, seeing d'Artois' futile gesture, leaped clear of his quadrant and sought to intercept the demoniac beauty who slipped forward like a panther to seize Diane. She evaded Farrell's grasp, and closed in.

An instant later, d'Artois and Farrell vainly sought to break her deadly hold on Diane's throat. The phantom woman's strength was great, and her limbs, seemingly solid flesh and blood, were flexible and yielding and elusive as writhing serpents.

Diane's desperately won gasps of breath told how those relentless, slender fingers sank home, mocking the strong hands that tried to break her fierce grip. The phantom snarled in bestial fury, and thwarted the efforts of the two men striving with her as vainly as though they were wrestling with eels.

Farrell snatched a knife.

"God!" he gasped in despair. "She's not human——"

Even in that extremity, he instinctively paused to justify the use of force against such a radiant, feminine beauty, evil though it was.

*"Tenez!"* cried d'Artois, seizing his wrist. "The blade will go through her and stab Diane."

D'Artois stepped clear. He was baffled and beaten. She—Lilith—Queen of the Lilin—had stolen the energy of five adepts whose mangled bodies lay in the

vault below; she had summoned from out of space bit after bit of disembodied force; her strength had become superhuman.

Diane had ceased to struggle. The slender, deadly fingers were sinking remorselessly home. The scarlet lips were twisted in a sneer that was made all the more terrible by the beauty of Lilith.

D'Artois flung the silver *crux ansata* into a corner with a wrathful, despairing gesture. Then with a triumphant cry, he saw and recognized his last hope: the image of green chrysoprase. He snatched it from the mantel.

His lips moved soundlessly as he smote the image against an andiron, fracturing the lovely throat, so that the head rolled across the floor. He struck again, cracking the faultless body.

Farrell stared for an instant; then, "Bust it again, Pierre! Look!" he shouted.

He shrieked the last word in a frenzy of exultation.

The phantom woman was becoming misty . . . almost transparent.

Smash! Another spattering of fragments as they glanced off the column that buttressed the fireplace.

Farrell turned just in time to catch Diane, who, no longer supported by the spectral slayer, was about to collapse.

"A last-minute guess. And it worked," muttered d'Artois. He glanced about for a moment as if to reassure himself that vengeful Lilith had indeed vanished. Then he continued, "Let me give you a hand. Get Diane out of here—quickly!"

WHEN Diane regained consciousness, the grayness of early dawn was making the electric lights of her apartment a sickly, yellowish glow. She sat up among the cushions of the chaise-longue, smiled wearily, and declined the glass of brandy d'Artois offered her.

"My throat's terribly bruised, but otherwise I'm all right," she said. "And now tell me what it was all about."

Farrell and d'Artois exchanged glances. They remembered all too well the horrors of the night just past. Diane sensed their thought.

"I wasn't so nearly unconscious as you supposed," she resumed, "and I heard what you two said. So tell me the rest—I mean, the reasons."

"All of our memories, our thoughts, our emotions," began d'Artois, "are vibrations in the ether, similar, perhaps, to radio waves. And the occultists agree that a thought vibration, however attenuated it may become, never actually dies out. And just as by amplification a radio wave can be increased a millionfold, so also by harmonious mental concentration can a thought be infinitely strengthened.

"Graf Erich's five adepts by their contemplation of the chrysoprase statuette summoned from the vast limbo of undying thought-forms an entity that had once been associated with the green image. That entity was Lilith—*Ardat Lilî*—*Agrat bat Mahhat*—whatever name you wish. They all imply a female demon.

"She should have vanished with the death of Graf Erich and his adepts; but the accretions of countless disembodied entities, human and otherwise, that were attracted by the thought vortex created by the intense concentration, were all assimilated by the personality whose materialization became strong enough to strangle Diane.

"That chrysoprase statuette was the focal point of the concentration; it was the model for the visualization of the adepts, so that they would have an absolute unity that could not have been gained from verbal description. I noted this fact from the records I studied, but did not

get its full significance until the very last and almost fatal moment.

"My plan was to force the demon to materialize in the circle, and then command her to depart for ever—but she thwarted me by materializing of her own volition, thus evading the compulsion I intended to exercise.

"And the last, and perhaps the strangest feature of this grotesque tragedy, is the apparition herself——"

"You've confused us," interposed Farrell, "by using so many names in addressing her and speaking of her."

D'Artois laughed and struck light to a cigarette.

"Different designations for the same entity. Most of the terms I used are not proper names but class designations. According to Assyrian tradition, Lilith is the head of a hierarchy of female demons or *lilin*. She is Queen of Zemargad, *Agrat bat Mahhat,* Daughter of the Dancer, who roams about at night with myriads of *lilin,* whom Solomon is said to have summoned to appear and dance before him.

"Graf Erich, poor devil, tried to perform a similar feat, and fell afoul of the vengeance of Lilith."

"But how about cutting my hair?" wondered Diane. "What in the world——"

"The old tradition," said d'Artois, "describes Lilith as *'a seductive woman with long hair.'* To use an awkward expression, long-hairedness is an essential of the Lilith-image or concept.

"Graf Erich, therefore, wanted you to cut your hair so as to destroy that which you had in common with her. In other words, divested of your exceptionally long hair, you would be degraded in the eyes of Lilith and thus beneath her jealousy. Again, you might have lost your identity as Diane, the rival."

"But why didn't you get scissors instead of drawing that circle and making the other preparations?" wondered Diane.

"Lilith had become too strong," explained d'Artois. "First, you recollect, she had but enough power to cause a hammer to slide from a steep roof. Later, she appeared in person to stab you; and finally, she gathered enough strength to throttle you with her bare hands, and to resist our efforts to overpower her. And, anticipating such an increase, I recognized the need for more desperate measures than the sacrifice of your hair."

"A terrible sacrifice," interposed Farrell, as he admiringly regarded Diane. Then, seating himself at the foot of the chaise-longue, "And now that you're through diverting us with demonology, I'm going to quote a modern author, on an old theme: *'Diane is a seductive woman with——'*"

*"Pardieu!"* interrupted d'Artois, "if that is what you call the lay of the land, there is nothing for an old man but to go home and get some much-needed sleep, and leave you to the mercy of this seductive, long-haired woman!"

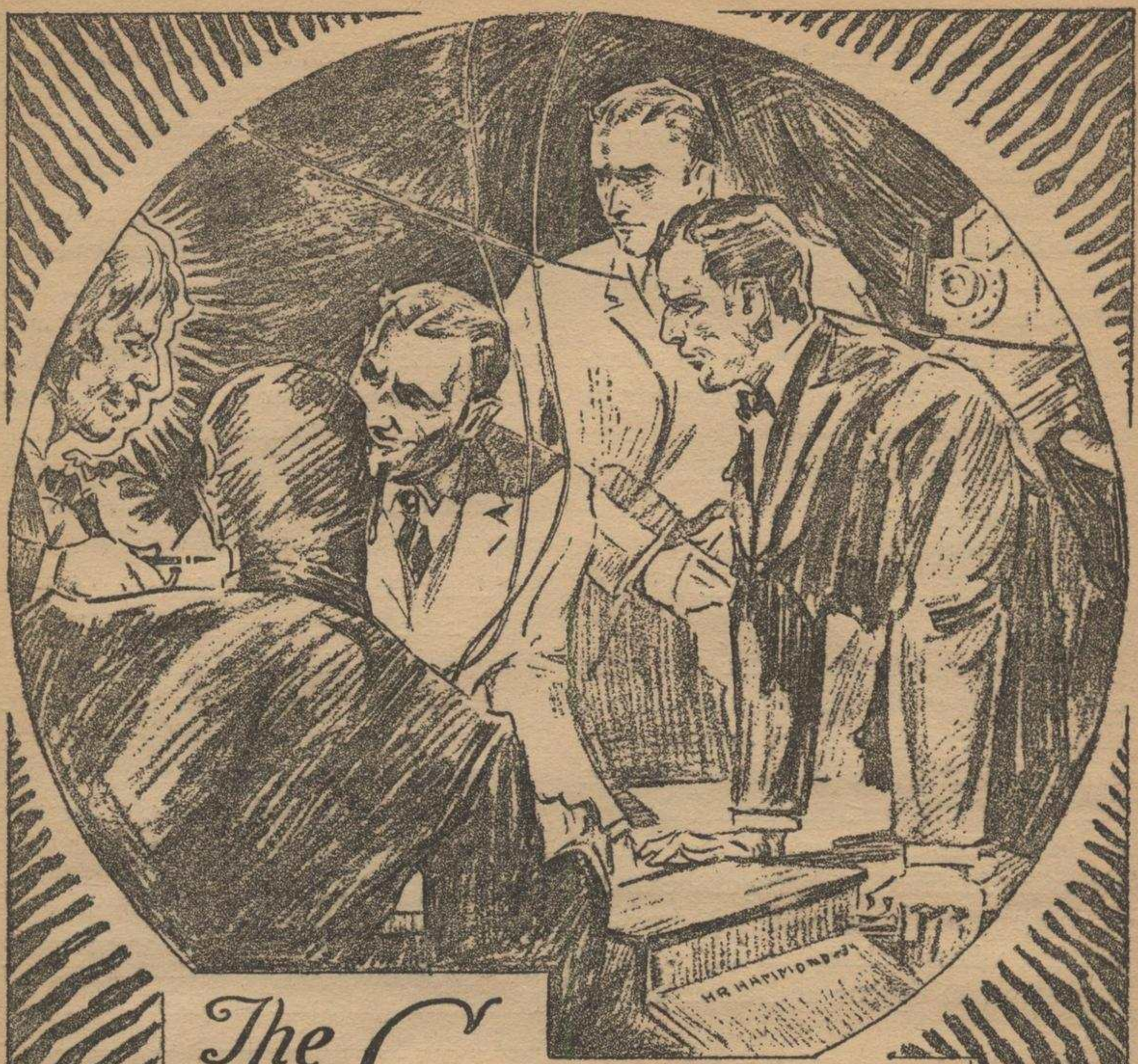
"I think," said Diane with a smile and a gesture toward her blue-black hair, "that I'll ask the *coiffeur* to take the biggest, sharpest scissors the first thing in the morning, and——"

"Over my dead body!" protested Farrell.

D'Artois paused at the entrance of the hallway, twisted his mustache, and grinned broadly.

"By the rod, *Monsieur,* if you do not this afternoon return with worthwhile amendments to an ancient Assyrian tradition, you are an oaf, a mouse, and an uncouth fellow! *Cordieu!* Were I but your age!"

"There was no noise, no electrical display, but the results were devastating."



# The Golden Glow

By S. GORDON GURWIT

*An amazing story of a scientist who fought four great nations single-handed in an attempt to end war for all time*

## 1. A Queer Assignment

THE amazing events that took place in the summer of 1942 are now part of history. Few people, however, have heard the inside story.

The editors and the publisher of the *Evening Star* have now given me their permission to tell it all. If you find it hard to credit, just recall the events of last summer! You know what happened as well as I do.

To begin this strange tale, I must tell you that for ten years I was a member of the editorial staff of the *New York Star*. I began work there in 1932—over ten years ago.

Those were trying times at home and abroad. Japan, at that time, had captured

Shanghai and annexed Manchuria. You will undoubtedly recall the unofficial war that raged for months and the ultimate decision that followed; the fighting that continued and the many innocent people who were killed.

Well, in June of 1942, as most people will recall, Japan again attempted the capture of the rebuilt Shanghai and the ocean ports, convinced that this time the opportunity was ripe—especially with the backing and the might of France behind her.

Naturally, an event like this thrills a newspaper office. It is front page copy. We went wild. Because I knew Shanghai and had a comprehensive knowledge of the city and its surroundings, I "rewrote" the war news—padded out the brief flashes—at the request of our managing editor, Ted Dorgan.

You will recall that Russia suddenly appeared with a mighty army to oppose Japan and capture Manchuria; and that France suddenly affirmed a secret treaty with Japan and backed her aims in the Far East. Then the German government declared war upon Russia. It began to look like another world war.

The future of the United States was threatened as mistress of the Pacific; England was worried, but her hands were tied by the revolution in India which had been raging for years without any hope of a victory on either side.

It was in the midst of all this excitement that Dorgan, our editor, called me into his office one day and sent me on the mission that was to change the entire world—but neither of us knew it at the time, of course. In fact, I kicked like a steer at being sent away from the office at such a time, with the wires and radio hot with war news—but it was no use.

"There's something damned queer going on in Colorado," grumbled Dorgan, looking over some "flashes" he held in his hand. "People out there can't seem to make any sense out of it. I want you to take the *Star's* plane, beat it out there and see what's going on."

"What's it all about?" I asked. "Can't you send some one else, Ted—at a time like this——"

"I want *you* to go out there," he interrupted. "Everybody is so busy with war news that they are forgetting everything else. Listen to this flash: 'A faint, golden glow has been observed hovering over the Continental Divide. Old-time residents are puzzled by it and can not

**● S. Gordon Gurwit, author, man of the world, globe-trotter, and brilliant raconteur, has been called an idea-factory. This would be an excellent description, except that the word "factory" seems incongruous when applied to a man so human as Mr. Gurwit. He is an amazing conversationalist, who has built up a fascinating personal philosophy of life from his wide experiences in all parts of the world. Thousands of you have read his writings under various pen-names in the so-called quality magazines. "The Golden Glow," which is presented herewith under Mr. Gurwit's own name, is an astonishing novelette of unusual power, a story that will hold your breathless interest as it carries you along in the sweep of its world-shaking events. It is the story of a mild-looking, bespectacled scientist, who, from his eyrie in the mountains of Colorado, bent the great powers of the world to his will, in a supreme effort to bring about universal peace. You will find this story well worth reading.**

account for it——' Here's another: 'The entire lighting system of Denver failed last night for no apparent reason, and, despite anything that repair men could do, the city remained dark until midnight. It was noticed by several citizens that a faint golden mist appeared in the heavens and the stars were completely shut out from view. At midnight, the mist suddenly disappeared and the lights went on. There seems to be no explanation for the phenomenon.' "

"So what?" I asked. "Are you going to send me out to Colorado at a time like this to investigate a local electrical disturbance, when the entire world is catching fire in the Far East——"

"Listen to me, you idiot!" Dorgan actually snarled the words. "This is a newspaper you're working for! Does that penetrate your skull? Has it struck you that there might be some relation between the two events?"

I was sarcastic. "What has a golden mist over the Rockies to do with the fighting in Shanghai?"

He shook his shaggy head impatiently. "Don't be a sap all your life! Maybe it hasn't—but something tells me that there is more to this mist than appears on the surface. And I want to know what, why and how."

"Japanese spies, with a stronghold in the Rockies, I suppose!" I ventured sarcastically. "Just a little bit too thick!"

"Like your ornamental skull!" he growled. "We'll get the war news rehashed without you, Gordon. You get out there and see if you can find out what it's all about. These Associated Press dispatches are reliable. After you read 'em all over, come and tell me if you don't think we ought to look into the matter."

"Granted! But why pick on me? I've got a date with the swellest little blond for Saturday night——"

"Read these over," he interrupted, throwing the bunch of flashes into my lap. "You'll notice that these mists began about the same time that the fighting started in the Far East." He stalked out of the room, hands full of papers.

I LIT a cigarette and began looking over the flashes. Right here and now I want to pay tribute to the news sense of this same Dorgan. He has it developed to the *nth* degree.

As far as I could gather from a reading of the reports, a faint, golden mist had been seen over various parts of Colorado and Utah; and whenever it appeared—it was most noticeable at night—the lights and electrical equipment of the city went dead. Several scientists of the local universities had made an attempt to explain it without much conviction or success; others confessed that they did not know what it was, where it came from, or why it happened.

The Government, too, had sent several men to investigate, but they had no explanation for the phenomenon. I shrugged. Undoubtedly it was some natural phenomenon, possibly occasioned by the huge ore deposits in the Rockies—or the aurora borealis—or something of the sort. I said as much to Ted when he returned to the office.

"Go find out!" he barked. "I'm as good a guesser as you are. I tell you that there is *design* behind that mist! Why doesn't it appear over the wilderness——"

"It does! It says so in these flashes. It's probably a phenomenon peculiar to the high mountain regions——"

"In your hat!" growled Ted. "Beat it out there and find out what you can. Take the plane and Jim Keogh with you—he can set up the short-wave set. I don't want a good story on the commer-

cial wires. If you land a real yarn, use our code. Because every other sheet in New York is too excited with the fighting in Shanghai to take notice of this is no reason why we should miss out!"

"Oh, all right!" I answered, wearily. "I'll go. After all, you're the boss. If you say go—why, it's go. Write me an expense slip and I'll beat it."

He wrote the slip and I watched him curiously as he filled it in. June 23, 1942. $500. We shook hands warmly, for, after all, I'm very fond of the man, and I knew that he had a distinct liking for me.

"Good luck, kid," he said. "I'm playing a hunch that there's a real front page yarn in that Colorado mist—and maybe a Sunday feature for the magazine section. If there is, put on your pink tights and wrestle the English language to your heart's content. It'll give you a chance to write something dramatic—it's a cinch you can't write plays."

I grimaced as I wrung his big hand. He was referring to a very recent failure of mine, a play that had run two weeks and died horribly.

"Beat it!" he grinned. "I'm in a hurry. If you need more money, wire me. Spare no expense to run this thing down—and stay as long as may be necessary to do it."

I walked out of the *Star* building and caught a taxi for my apartment. During the ride, I read over the flashes again, and the more I read them, the more they began to stir a premonitory, sinister *something* in my subconscious mind. The feeling is difficult to define.

I told my housekeeper that she could have a vacation while I was away, packed my bag, threw in my army .45 automatic for luck, and phoned Jim Keogh out at the field to get the *Star* plane ready for a long hop.

"She's ready to go," answered Jim, "except for gas. I can have her loaded to capacity in an hour. Where are we going—so I can get the weather reports?"

"Colorado first. After that, I'm hanged if I know."

"O. K.," replied Jim. "Suits me. I'll be ready to hop off by the time you get here. My bag's in the hangar."

I hung up and looked around my apartment, wondering how soon I was going to get back, and picked up my bag. Little did I dream of the world-shaking events that would occur before I could again settle down to my beloved new play. I went downstairs and hailed a taxi.

"Roosevelt Field," I told the driver, and settled back to listen to the radio in the taxicab. These broadcasts are a feature of the *Star,* and I listened intently. Japan's warships were shelling the forts again. Russia was at the gates of Tsitsihar. Chapei was in ruins and burning. French regulars were coming up from Indo-China and there had been a skirmish on the German-Russian front. Americans in Shanghai had been killed by shells dropping into the International Settlement, and the situation was tense. And I had to go to the Rockies to look at a mist! At a time like this! I was plenty sore. But, how could I possibly guess what I was running into?

## 2. *We See the Mysterious Mist*

JIM KEOGH had the plane warmed up and ready to go when I reached the field. I climbed into my suit, took the controls and gave her the gun.

The trip to Chicago was uneventful. We made it in five hours. The weather was ideal, so we took off again immediately, and I signed to Jim to take the controls as we headed west. I leaned back for a rest and took the head-phones.

There was little fresh news over the radio, and after awhile I fell asleep. Jim is an expert pilot, and night flying is nothing new to him. We were following the mail route beacons and we made Lincoln right side up in a short time. Here we went into town to catch a nap and a bath. The next morning, early, we were off again, heading west. I took the controls and Jim stayed at the radio.

Toward noon, we raised the tip of Pike's Peak. The plane had been running perfectly all the way, and now, as our altitude increased, I turned on the supercharger. Then it occurred to me to have a look up and down the foothills before we pulled into Denver. There was plenty of gas and the day was warm and still, not a cloud in the sky. Ideal flying weather.

We breezed along, idly watching the sunlit prairies, the little towns, the concrete ribbons of road that ran here and there.

Jim glanced at me inquiringly as I veered away from the compass course for Denver.

"Going for a look over the foothills as far as Colorado Springs," I explained; "then we'll head for Denver and something to eat. Lots of gas."

The country changed as we approached the foothills, and the towns disappeared. Also, the air became bumpy—because of the hills—and I climbed to get above the upwash.

In the interior, behind the foothills, stretched a level, park-like plateau, dotted here and there by cottonwood trees. It wsa a beautiful place and I went over it for a better look. Then the motor began to sputter.

I immediately had my hands full and forgot about the scene. Instinctively I headed into the slight breeze and tried the gun. The motor was dead and wouldn't start. The altimeter said 9,500 feet; so, with plenty of altitude, I wasn't worried. I had made emergency dead-stick landings before. I picked an open spot and began to circle, losing altitude all the time.

Heading into the wind—which was much stronger near the ground—I made a fair landing in an open spot. Jim had been as startled by the unexpected failure of the motor as I was, but he had said nothing. When the ship stopped rolling, I turned to him.

"Now, what happened?" I queried. "She was running as pretty as you please all along. We're stuck here. Not a house or a road in sight."

"Sounded to me like ignition trouble," responded Jim. "I'll take a look."

"Or as if the gas line quit feeding," I supplemented. "Let's look her over. I don't want to stay here. I want to get into Denver and get some food."

"We're carrying everything," grinned Jim. "The usual emergency pack, you know. Food, camping equipment—everything. It may come in handy, too!"

We worked on that plane all afternoon and couldn't find a thing wrong. The long, summertime mountain twilight was lingering when Jim turned to me with a baffled face covered with perspiration.

"I give up," he acknowledged. "I can't find a thing wrong with this ship—yet she won't start."

"Neither can I," I answered. "What shall we do, Jim? Look for a road and one of us go for help?— or shall we spend the night here and try to go on in the morning?"

"I'm for staying here with the ship," Jim affirmed. "It's warm and we can sleep out. We've got grub—and there's a little stream over there for drinking purposes. I move we wash up and take a little rest. I'm tired."

"That goes!" I agreed, promptly. "I'm tired, too. Let's get a bath and then we'll break out the grub you're talking about. Let's start a small fire, too. You go ahead and I'll tie the ship down—there may be some stiff wind during the night."

We washed, put up the emergency silk tent, blew up our sleeping-bags and were quite comfortable in the mountain solitude. In the summer, in these high altitudes, it doesn't get dark until nearly nine o'clock. The plane altimeter registered 5,300 feet. More than a mile up.

JUST when the consciousness of something amiss struck me, I do not know, but there seemed, suddenly, to be an expectant hush over the entire country. I looked around and was conscious of a dead silence—a silence fraught with some intangible menace. I couldn't place it.

Jim stood at some little distance, smoking a cigarette and looking at the high mountains of the Divide.

"Funny!" he called to me, pointing at the mountains. "Here it is July and those peaks still have plenty of snow on them. Must be cold up there."

"Yes," I assented, uneasily. "They're about 13,000 feet up—no wonder there's snow. Notice anything else, Jim?"

"No," he said, eyeing me.

"Notice how *quiet* it is here? You can almost hear the silence!"

Jim nodded after a moment. "Now that you mention it," he answered, "I do notice it. Creepy, isn't it? I guess it's because all the birds have gone to bed. No more bird music."

He had placed it, all right. There was a blank silence that was like a dead world. The bird voices had ceased, it was true, but now I discovered that there wasn't a sound of insects. They, too, had stopped their chirping.

Then, as my eyes swept the sky, I thought I noticed something to the far south of us.

"Jim," I called. "Can you make out anything on the skyline—to the south?"

He looked. He has excellent vision. We both stood, intent. "Looks like a faint yellow color in the sky, doesn't it?" he said.

I nodded, a thrill racing up my spine, I couldn't have explained why. I had told Jim all about the golden glow on the way out, so he knew as much about it as I did.

"Yes, it looks faintly golden," I answered. "I wonder what in the world causes it."

Slowly the faint glow died out, and I turned to Jim. "If we're going to be here for the night, let's set up the radio and see what's doing. Might be a good idea to have it ready in case we need help tomorrow. And we might as well get in touch with the office and report to Ted."

"O. K.," said Jim, and turned to the plane.

Our portable radio is a small but efficient affair. We pulled it out of the plane and tried to tune in. The tubes lit up, but not a sound came from the radio. We set up the televisor, but it wouldn't work. Fuss as we would, trace wires, contacts, test batteries—it was no use. Both the radio and televisor were dead.

"This place has a jinx on it!" complained Jim. "Nothing seems to work here." He drew out his watch. "Think I'll get some sleep," he continued; then: "Hello! Even this thing has stopped! What time is it, Gordon?"

I looked. My watch had stopped, too. At 1:58—about the time we had landed when the motor cut out.

"What time did your watch stop?" I asked curiously. "Mine quit at one fifty-eight."

"Why—so did mine—exactly! That's funny!"

"Damned funny!" I snapped. "There's something devilish here, Jim! Let's look at the chronometer in the plane."

We looked, and sure enough, that, too, had stopped at 1:58! And the compass in the instrument panel was doing a witch's dance. We eyed it in amazement.

"What do you make of that?" queried Jim. "I never saw a compass do that before. Are there a lot of large ore bodies in these mountains?"

"Probably, but I don't believe that has anything to do with it. Something is putting our electrical apparatus on the bum. I wonder if that golden mist has anything to do with it—and if so, how? And likewise, why?"

Jim didn't answer. The tense hush prevailed around us. Not a sound came to break the nerve-shattering stillness. We both looked now to the south, and as it gradually became darker, the mist became more discernible—a faint yellow glow in the heavens, hardly definite as to extent, devilish, sinister somehow.

An occasional lurid flash of heat lightning burned swiftly in the sky and was gone, leaving a Stygian blackness. I fought a sudden, panicky fear that threatened to overpower me.

What was this terrible oppression in the air—this smothering sensation that clutched at my throat?

We stood silently watching the faint glow in the south die out. Gradually we both grew normal again in our reactions. I was vastly intrigued. That there was some superhuman mystery hidden in all this seemed certain to me. But what? I made a silent resolve to find out.

Finally, Jim, the phlegmatic, shrugged, looked at me and turned in. I sat for some time, thinking, an unnamed, unacknowledged terror in the back of my mind. It finally disappeared and I sat looking at the sky, shot with summer stars.

SUDDENLY, as I lay there on my sleeping-bag, I was conscious that the eery silence no longer existed. Somewhere a cricket was chirping; I heard the rasping, repeated calls of katydids; and in the pond, near our camp, the frogs boomed hoarsely. The world was normal again.

These sounds cheered me, and I fell to thinking about the terrible silence I had experienced. Was it true that birds and animals and insects had instincts keener than our own? Did the delicate antennæ of the insects sense something in the glow before we were aware of it? Did they see it?—feel it? If so, did it mean anything to them? Sleepily, I told myself that I would get to the bottom of this thing—if it cost me my life.

I awoke to a glorious, wine-like mountain morning, fresh and dewy, with the pipe of bird music in my ears and the heavenly smell of boiling coffee in the air. Jim greeted me with a wide grin.

"Beat you to it, old-timer," he said, cheerfully, "so I thought I'd get the breakfast. Some morning, what? Let's eat and then blow into Denver. This place is beautiful, but after last night, I'd rather be somewhere else—if it's all the same to you. I discovered last night that I had nerves!"

We ate with appetites born of the keen morning, then prepared to take off. Then again that expectant hush fell over the country. This time, I sensed it sooner and stood fascinated, watching the life of the place go dead.

The birds sensed something in the air and their songs died; the insect buzz stopped; the entire symphony of homely little country sounds halted abruptly. A village of prairie-dogs near us became

deserted as the little fellows twitched their tails, looked around and scuttled into their holes. Silence, tense, strange, terrible, fell upon the world.

Silence, yes, but it seemed to me that there was a terrible noise in the air, a vibrant commotion of which the frequency was too high for human ears. A hawk, high up, swooped like a bullet all at once and was lost to view in the trees.

A vast, unheard disturbance filled the air with an unfelt sense of vibration. I sensed the unseen clamor and roar of a storm—though the sun was shining brightly! A feeling of some unknown, unspeakable horror sent sudden chills through me. Jim's sun-browned face was slightly purple. We eyed one another in silence.

For perhaps ten minutes the weird quiet lay upon the land. Everything stopped; then I noted a gradual resumption of normal life among the small birds and animals. We tried the plane, and the engine responded at once.

Jim had been staring at the distance. Now he turned to me.

"Remember my calling your attention to the snow on the summits yesterday? Well, look at them now. Must have been a very heavy snowfall last night. Just look at those mountains!"

I looked. And I was startled. Assuredly, snow must have fallen during the night—and what a snow! The range was actually *covered* with glittering white!

"Strange!" I said, slowly. "I remember there was some snow yesterday—but nothing compared to this. I wonder if severe snowstorms are frequent in the high altitudes during July——"

"They are not!" snapped Jim. "They might have some, but nothing to account for that fall up there."

"Then how do you account for it, Jim?"

"I don't. This whole section has a devilish jinx on it! I wouldn't try to fly it in a blimp! Let's get out of here—and get fast. This place gives me the willies!"

We took off without any trouble, however, and an hour later we landed in Denver.

There I got off a long code message to Ted and began to go about my work of investigation. Incidentally, I learned that Colorado Springs had been visited by the golden glow the night before with the usual results—everything electrical, and even clocks and watches, had gone dead; and more, for the first time, the city had been thrown into a turmoil of strange excitement. Men had suddenly become frantic with a strange tension; women had fainted. And the same thing had happened—at the same time—to a little, isolated town called Geyso, in California. Two widely separated points on the same night. I shuddered, remembering my own reactions.

Two widely separated points—on the same night. That threw me off. I had thought that the disturbance was in Colorado alone, but this news made me think hard. And mighty little good it did me!

### 3. *The Two Strange Men*

I FOUND out exactly nothing. No amount of inquiry, no amount of work, made any headway. The newspapers, as well as all the scientists, were guessing as to the cause of the golden glow.

Then it stopped entirely, as if it had been some prank of nature that might not happen again for a thousand years. In fact, one well-known scientist positively gave sun spots as the cause. He said that the sun spots were disappearing and that the disturbance would not occur again. And it looked as if he might be right, for nothing happened and the golden mist did not appear again. I simply gave it up.

Jim and I took the plane and went back east. I wanted to get back to the office and the exciting war news. The fighting in the Far East had become very serious.

At Chicago, our trusty Lancia went haywire and I left it with Jim at Sky Harbor, determining to come in by train to New York. Jim was to follow with the plane as soon as it was in condition to fly. I caught the Century, glad to be going back home to the big town and to the work I loved.

I was on my way to the diner after boarding the train, when the opening door of a compartment attracted my attention. A tall, dark man stuck his face out of the door, almost into mine. There was no mistake. He was an Indian. The dark, hawk-like features could belong to no other race. He seemed as startled as I was for the moment, and exclaimed in perfect English:

"Oh—I beg your pardon! Sorry! Can you inform me which way the dining-car is located?"

"Up forward," I answered, and glanced idly into the compartment. There was a slight, elderly man sitting at the window. My first startled impression was that he was Edgar Allan Poe. I had seen several pictures of the great American writer, and this man was almost the image of him. Secondly, I wondered at this strangely assorted pair occupying the same compartment.

"I'm on my way to the diner," I continued. "Come along."

The Indian glanced at the elder man with an unspoken query in his eyes.

"I shall be quite comfortable until you return, Zack," said the man in the compartment. The Indian nodded.

Instantly, I made up my mind that the man was a college professor. I don't know why, but that was the impression he gave me; then I wondered again at the strange pair, and, being a reporter by instinct, I became curious.

The Indian walked behind me, and I said, over my shoulder:

"Is your friend ill?"

"Oh, no!" he answered. "He is quite well, but I do not like to leave him alone."

"Why?" I was curious. "He's a grown man and looks capable."

"You do not understand, sir." His tone told me that the subject was closed. So I tried something else.

"These trains certainly make time to New York," I ventured. "Used to take eighteen hours for the run in the old days—now we'll make it in eight—thanks to electric locomotives."

There was silence behind me for a moment; then:

"Are you from New York, sir?"

"Yeah. My home. Are you going to New York?"

"Yes. Perhaps you can tell me of a good hotel in New York? One that is quiet and not too ostentatious?"

"There are hundreds of them," I smiled. "Depends on what part of the city you want to be in."

"Well, that would be governed by others matters. We would like to reside in the vicinity of the largest and most influential newspaper, if possible."

I pricked up my ears instantly.

"Eh? Well, the greatest newspaper in New York is the one I work on—and that's not exactly in a hotel neighborhood. What do you want with a paper?"

He ignored my question. "Are you a newspaper man?" he queried.

"Nothing else but!" I found one of my cards, and handed it to him.

"The *New York Evening Star*," he read. "But, Mr. Dean, it has always been my impression that the *Bulletin* was the

largest newspaper published in New York."

"Not much!" I stated, positively. "The *Star* is the greatest newspaper in the world. Greatest editorial staff—largest circulation."

"Really? I must tell that to Professor Jamison."

My curiosity was growing. Why all the emphasis on which was the largest and most influential newspaper? What difference did it make to them?

"I'm a native of New York," I ventured, "and if the professor is interested in newspapers, why, that's right up my street. And I know the city pretty well. If I can be of any service——"

"I shall convey your kind offer to the professor," he interjected, hurriedly. "I thank you for your kindness."

We had reached the diner, and the Indian stopped to talk to the steward. He gave me not another glance. Evidently, he was ordering lunch sent to the compartment. I shrugged, seated myself and ordered.

I tried to read the newspapers, but the Indian and the professor persisted in my mind. A queer pair! And interested in which was the largest newspaper in New York. Was there a story in this? I determined to see a little more of this strange pair during the trip east.

I FINISHED my lunch, smoked a cigarette and digested the war news in the papers. Fresh reports said that the Russian army was striding forward and that the French regulars were sweeping opposition from their path.

On my way back to my seat in the Pullman, I looked for the door of the compartment that housed the professor and the Indian, Zack. I had determined to offer my services to them as guide, philosopher and friend; but I didn't have to do it. The door was open and the Indian stood in it.

"Ah!" he exclaimed. "I was hoping that you would pass, sir. Would you mind coming in and giving the professor the benefit of your knowledge of New York? I spoke to him about meeting you—and your kind offer."

"Glad to," I said, and stepped into the compartment.

The two men had been eating their lunch in the compartment, and the little professor made room for me and held out his hand. He glanced at the card I had given the Indian.

"Mr. Dean?" he said. "I am Hazelton Randolph Jamison, at one time of the Rockefellow Foundation and of De Guise University."

"Delighted, sir," I smiled, and shook his hand. On closer inspection, his resemblance to the great Poe was startling.

"I am indeed happy to make your valued acquaintance," continued the professor. "Perhaps you will assist me in orienting myself in your city? It is many years since I have visited New York—over twenty-five years ago; and my visit was limited to but two days."

"Happy, indeed, to give you any information within my power. Your companion informs me that you want a hotel near the largest and most influential newspaper. In that case, you might try the Troy. It is only a few streets away from the *Star* offices."

"The *Star* offices? I always had the impression that the *Bulletin* was the largest newspaper in New York. Perhaps I gained that impression from its—ah—bulk——"

"That's just it, sir," I interjected. "The *Bulletin* has bulk and screaming headlines; but the *Star* is a newspaper of vast, world-wide influence. We are far more conservative——"

"Splendid!" exclaimed the professor. "That is exactly what I am seeking. A newspaper noted for a conservative policy."

"May I ask why?" I questioned. "I'm a member of the editorial staff and perhaps I can assist you in whatever it is you are planning."

The professor hesitated for a brief moment. His eyes swept me in a long, comprehensive scrutiny; and I was aware, all at once, that his eyes were sharp and penetrating, full of a deep fire that suddenly thrilled me.

"If you will pardon me, I do not feel that I may discuss that at present," he answered. "You say that you are a member of the editorial staff? Then you can undoubtedly direct me to the owner of the newspaper. I have a very serious matter to discuss and execute."

"Certainly, Professor," I said. "I'll be glad to bring you to Mr. Dorgan, our editor, and Mr. Davis, the owner of the paper. But perhaps it might save time if you did tell me something of the matter you have in mind. If it happens to be something confidential, I assure you that I shall not violate that confidence. We have many such matters come to us"— I thought it best to explain this to the little man—"and we observe complete silence. I have just come from an important assignment in the West and am on my way home. I was trying to get to the bottom of that mysterious golden glow that has upset the mountain region so much lately——" I stopped. Something made me stop.

The professor and the Indian exchanged lightning glances, but I caught the flicker of understanding that passed between them. Jamison's fiery eyes went to mine like a stab of blue light.

"You were sent to investigate the golden glow?" he asked.

"Yes. Generally, it is conceded to be a natural phenomenon, but our editor, Mr. Dorgan, insisted that it wasn't. He sent me west to see if I could learn something about it. I made no headway, I'm sorry to say."

"I—see! And your editor was convinced that it was something important? Important enough to send you all the way from New York?"

"Yes. And perhaps it is. I couldn't find out anything." I was conscious of a growing tenseness, but I asked: "Do you know anything about it, Professor?"

Again I was aware of a searching, penetrating scrutiny that seemed to filter through every fiber of my body. The professor was a strange mixture of sharpness, innocence, force and power.

"You are a very prepossessing young man," he said, finally, with a slight smile. "I judge you to be upright, honest and of high moral qualities."

"Well, I hope I am," I grinned. "Sometimes it's a struggle!"

He nodded. "I understand," he said, sagely—and I was sure the dear old man didn't. The Indian, Zack, sat silent. A curious excitement was growing within me.

"It is my impression, sir, that you are to be trusted and are worthy of confidence," went on the professor. "I shall confide in you. You see, the golden glow is a child of mine. I perfected it. I am responsible for its appearance."

My heart leaped into my throat.

"What!" I shouted, coming to my feet. "You're not kidding, Professor?"

Instantly, the thought flashed through my mind that this was a great "break." What a climax to a perplexing search—to stumble upon the man who had caused the golden glow! What a break—if this little Poe-like professor wasn't crazy—what a scoop!

"Kidding?" repeated the professor, puzzled. "To what do you refer? Oh, I comprehend! You believe a sense of humor might induce me to purposely mislead you? No. The golden glow is my own child. That, and a few other experiments of mine, is why I am now going to New York. I have but recently perfected the control of these forces. The results have been highly satisfactory. Now I am ready to state my demands."

"Demands?" My blood was racing. Something told me that the man was in dead earnest and that I was on the verge of an extraordinary yarn.

"Demands!" repeated the professor, with stern dignity. "I am now ready to put an end to the nonsense of warfare."

*"What did you say?"* I gasped.

"I said, I am ready to end all warfare. Japan, France, Russia and Germany must desist at once. The fighting in the Far East must stop."

"Oh—I see!" I said, more calmly. I was telling myself that he was a harmless nut; yet something within me refuted this statement.

"I SHALL, at first, be very lenient, sir, and allow them to retire gracefully from the fields of combat; but if they do not give up this folly, I shall be compelled to force its abandonment. I am quite determined. I shall brook no nonsense."

I fished, nervously, for a cigarette. Was I hearing this or imagining it? Was this inoffensive-looking little man crazy—or did he have some basis of fact for his wild assertions? Then I thought of the golden glow. Was that his weapon? And how was it used?

"But, Professor, these are great world powers engaged in this war. How do you propose to make them listen? Is the golden glow the weapon you intend to use to compel their acceptance of your demands?"

"I shall make my demands known through an influential, authoritative newspaper," he smiled. "The golden glow is but one of my cogent arguments. There are others—far more deadly! I should regret having to use them, but it may become necessary to make one last war upon the combatants so that war will end for all time to come."

"But—good heavens, Professor! Our own Government will never allow you to interfere——"

"I shall thoroughly explain it all to them, sir, if they wish to inquire. I feel that no sane nation will object to the abolition of war. I am not concerned with politics or politicians. Nor with statecraft. I am intelligent enough to interpret the meaning of this war—of all wars. And I am determined not to be interfered with—by *any* Government!"

My head was spinning. Something told me that this little man meant every word he uttered—impossible as it all sounded.

"I trust that you will see the justice of my position," he went on, earnestly. "I trust that your newspaper will comprehend that I am actuated only by a sincere love of humanity. I seek no gain, no personal advantages. I am a scientist, content in my laboratory.

"And let me tell you that some years ago—it was in March of 1932—my only brother was killed by a stray bullet in Shanghai during the senseless fighting that was going on there at the time. He was just a traveler—not a combatant—yet he was killed. And they tried to hush it up! Since then, sir, I have devoted my time to perfecting these various rays—and by their use I shall compel all nations to abandon war for all time."

"That's a tremendous ideal!" I cried, trying to hold on to my elation and the

overpowering excitement that swept me. "A marvelous ambition and a great achievement—if you can actually bring it about. I'm with you, Professor. But you'll have to be able to back up your demands before they'll take you seriously—or even listen to you. You'll have to convince my paper——"

"Yes, of course, of course!" he interrupted, eagerly. "I am amply prepared to demonstrate. Observe this, if you will."

From his pocket he drew out a small box that looked like a safety razor sharpener. It had two long wires attached to it with clips on the end. He fastened these clips to what looked like flexible, metal wrist-bands that he wore—they were exactly like wrist-watch bands. Then he cranked the little box, unfastened the wires, put the box away and smiled at me, his eyes flashing strangely.

"Observe! The touch of both my hands on the metal of this car will bring this entire train to a complete and instant stop!"

I stared, unbelieving. Did my eyes deceive me, or was there suddenly a faint green mist around the professor? He placed his hands upon the metal window-sill of the car and it suddenly slowed sharply—and stopped!

I was aware of excited voices calling outside, running feet; the train crew appeared, gesticulating, shouting, puzzled as to the reason for the stop.

"As you see," smiled the professor, "this is not a scheduled stop."

"Good Lord!" I exploded, looking around the stretch of woods where we had stopped. "I'll say it's not! Heavens, man—this is astounding! And tell me—do I imagine it—or is there a faint green mist around you?"

"There is," he smiled. "Try to touch me."

I tried, but crazy as it sounds, my hands wouldn't penetrate the mist! I couldn't touch the man, no matter how much force I employed—and I'm not exactly a weakling. Slowly it dawned upon me that the professor couldn't be reached or touched behind that green mist. It was as impenetrable as a suit of steel armor. And putting my hand near the mist had given me a strange exhilaration. Strength flowed through me like a rushing stream.

"Exhilarated?" queried the strange little man. "Yes, it has that effect. Now we'll allow the train to go on. They have lost but a few minutes."

He took his hands off the window-sill. The shouting and the excitement outside stopped as the train suddenly lurched forward; then, slowly, it gathered speed and once more we were hurtling through the sunny countryside. My strange exhilaration died down somewhat, but I felt hugely stimulated. I resolved that this remarkable man must not get away from me even for a moment. History was in the making! And wait until Ted Dorgan made the acquaintance of this wizard! Wouldn't his eyes pop wide open! I chuckled gleefully.

### 4. *The Great Powers Are Warned*

DURING the rest of the trip east I learned much—so much, that a species of skin-prickling awe possessed me for the quiet-spoken, fiery-eyed professor. Zack, the Indian, it appeared, was his constant companion and assistant. From what I could gather, the professor had raised him from a homeless infancy and looked upon him as a son. And it was evident that Zack fairly worshipped the professor.

They had a small laboratory in some hidden valley of the Rockies, where the professor had harnessed a small waterfall

to supply his electric power; and here this remarkable man had worked for many years, seldom venturing out even to any neighboring settlement. Zack brought in supplies every month or so, and the two lived and worked alone, save for an Indian woman who kept house for them and cooked their food.

They kept in touch with the great world outside through their powerful radio, and both knew intimately what was going on.

The professor informed me that he had a trunk containing apparatus, but I asked him to take with him only what was necessary for the immediate present; that I would see to it that he got all his baggage as soon as he was settled.

I called Ted at his home from the train, on the wireless phone, and told him that I was coming in with some friends; that he was to meet me at the office at once. He tried to ask questions, but I wouldn't answer them.

"Snap into it!" I yelled. "Biggest thing since Noah went for a boat ride! Meet me at the office in thirty minutes."

I finally ushered the professor and Zack into the office in a frenzy of impatience. I was trembling with excitement, for I sensed that world events would soon be in the making.

Ted was in the office and regarded us with questioning eyes. The introductions were soon made, and still the puzzled Ted looked from me to Zack and to the professor in well-bred bewilderment. I purposely prolonged the agony.

The professor and Zack sat quietly, smiling and waiting for me to explain their mission. I grinned. Ted finally blurted:

"Well, now that greetings are out of the way—what did you find out—if anything? What about that golden mist? Did you find out anything?"

"All in good time, my man!" I responded. I snickered, anticipating the shock he was shortly due for; but his eyes were so puzzled that I finally said:

"Well, Mr. Dorgan, you wanted the low-down on the golden mist. Permit me to say that Professor Jamison is the originator of the mist—and a few more breath-taking inventions—and that he has come here—at my invitation—for the express purpose of seeing you."

"Is that so?" exclaimed Ted, impatiently, yet curious. "So what?"

I chuckled, and went on: "You see, Ted, the professor is the inventor of the golden glow, and other numerous remarkable rays—or, more correctly, he knows how to generate and control them. I believe that's correct, isn't it, Professor? Well, after he tried them all out—that, by the way, was what all the disturbance in Colorado was about—he decided that he wanted the backing and the use of the editorial columns of the largest and most influential newspaper to voice his views, and so, naturally, I brought him here. It is the professor's intention"—I watched Ted for the explosion I knew would come—"to tell the nations now at war that they must stop all hostilities at once—and he wants that notice printed on page one of tomorrow's issue of the *Star*. And if these nations do not comply with his wishes—he may have to be very rough with them."

Ted's impatience vanished. He eyed me in bewilderment.

"What? Here! Hold on! Wait a minute!" he yelled. "We can't do that——"

"Oh, yes we can!" I interrupted calmly, baiting him. "Remember, Ted, that I *promised* this to the professor—and a promise is a promise! We'll print it——"

"Over my dead body!" snapped Ted. "Are you crazy——"

"Pardon me," said Professor Jamison,

gently. "Mr. Dean has stated the matter correctly, as a whole. I wish the *Star* to warn Japan, France, Russia and Germany that this warfare must cease—or I shall be compelled to stop it myself! It must not go on any longer!"

Ted stared at the little man, glanced at Zack, his face a study of incredulous amazement. Then he looked at me and I had to laugh outright at his expression.

"Perhaps you'd better explain the entire matter, Professor," I said. "You see, Mr. Dorgan is incredulous of your ability to do what you propose."

THE professor cleared his throat and spoke calmly to the stupefied Ted. Slowly, a vast excitement grew visible on his face. I didn't blame him. My own blood was racing and my heart was thumping like a muffled drum. If all this was to become fact, history was in the making!

"You see," concluded Jamison, "I have perfected the golden glow. I shall not, at this time, go into the scientific angle of it, although I shall be glad to later, Mr. Dorgan, if you are scientifically minded. Simply let me say that I can control it in any part of the globe. Where it appears, all things electrical instantly cease functioning. In this way entire areas—indeed, an entire nation—can be affected. Calling it the golden mist is indeed a misnomer. It is a species of infra-red ray.

"Then, there is the green mist—so to speak—really a green ray, which has another function and is equally powerful. Mr. Dean saw it operated in a small way on the train, during our journey to New York."

Ted looked at me, his eyes fairly popping out of his head. I nodded and hastily explained what had happened to the train. Ted looked stunned.

The professor nodded. "There is also the radium ray," he added, simply, "which is a powerful destructive agent. I shall use it only in an extreme emergency—if these misguided, warring nations will not see sense."

The dazed Ted pulled himself upright in his chair. A lightning glance at me telegraphed a query. I nodded affirmatively.

"The professor can do what he says, Ted!"

"Still," gulped Ted, "you understand that we must have some tangible evidence, Professor, before we throw the columns of the paper open to you for such a revolutionary announcement. If you should fail, we'd be the laughing-stock of the entire world. We'd all lose our jobs and we'd never get another——"

"Oh, I quite understand, Mr. Dorgan," agreed the professor. "I am fully prepared to substantiate my claims. Suppose we try a little experiment right here and now? Have you any objection?"

"No," said Ted, his lips hardly moving. The man was stunned. I had felt the same way at first, so I didn't blame him. "What do you intend to do—blow us all up?"

"Certainly not!" exclaimed the professor. "Merely a slight demonstration of the work of the radium ray." He opened his ancient grip and took out a small black box. It had a metal pointer on it like a long pencil. "Now, observe," continued the professor. "I will focus the pointer upon—let us say that object on the floor. Have you any scruples against its instant disintegration?"

The "object" was Ted's cuspidor, a cheap, porcelain affair.

Ted shook his head. "Go ahead, Professor," he said, an intense curiosity in his eyes. I, too, was fascinated. What was he going to do now?

The professor aimed the glittering pointer at the cuspidor and turned a switch on the black box. Instantly a slight hum sounded and a liquid, blue fire played lambently from the long pointer.

Before our astonished eyes, the cuspidor vanished instantly. Ted and I stared while the professor switched off his contraption. He smiled, and Zack grinned broadly.

"Where is it?" cried Ted. "What became of it?"

"It was demolished," smiled the professor. "Rather, the basic electrons were released from the form they occupied in that object."

Ted's face was a study, and, I confess, a shudder ran up and down my spine. This was uncanny! That black box was—murderous!

"Tell me, Professor," queried Ted, with dry lips, "can you do the same thing to other objects—at will?"

"Surely! I could destroy this entire building in a few minutes and leave not a trace to show that it ever existed. The entire city of New York would disappear under the ray in twenty-four hours. Further, this ray can be directed to any part of the globe with extreme accuracy. I should hesitate to use it, as it is not my intention to destroy property or life; but I have other means at my command fully as proficient if not as destructive."

Ted shook his shaggy head and bit his lower lip savagely. He came to his feet with a bound.

"I'm with you, Professor," he cried, "if Mr. Davis, the owner of the *Star*, will back me up—and I'm sure he will after you show him the reason!" Then he turned to me, fiercely, wildly exultant: "Will this be a scoop! The greatest in all the world since time began! You did marvelously well, you damned blockhead!"

He turned to the professor: "It's all yours, Professor! What did you want to say in the paper?"

"Simply that all hostilities must cease at once and must never again be resumed."

"Just that, eh? Did you hear that, Gordon? *Just that!* Can you feature the yowl that will rise to the high heavens? Will the other rags in this town laugh! And will they eat dirt! Good God! The thing's unbelievable! I still don't get it all. You write the professor's statement, Gordon. God help us all if something slips up and you can't make good, Professor! That's all I've got to say. Hell won't be deep enough to hide us!"

"You need have no apprehension, Mr. Dorgan, on that score. I have spent years perfecting control of these various forces and I can assure you that there will be no slip."

"As this is a mighty important event, Professor, may I suggest that you give no information or interviews to any other paper? If we are to make the plunge—stake our all on this unbelievable business—it must be exclusive with us. And, of course, Mr. Davis will have to be called into conference before we can go ahead—you'll have to convince him, Professor."

"You have my word that I will deal only with you," answered the professor, simply. "And I will indeed be glad to demonstrate to Mr. Davis. I quite understand your attitude and position. And now—perhaps we should attend to the matter of rooms. I confess to a slight weariness——"

"A thousand pardons!" cried Ted. "I was so taken up with all this that—here, Gordon—the professor is our guest while he is in New York——" A new thought seemed to strike him. He whirled upon me.

"Hell!" he exploded. "The professor can't go to a hotel. The roof will come off the world when he gets going, and he wouldn't be safe for five minutes! It would be far cheaper to knock him off than to give up a war that will net millions of square miles of territory! Let me see. Let me think——"

"You need have no apprehension," began the professor, but I butted in:

"I've got it!" I exclaimed. "I have a large apartment. Why can't he and Zack stop with me? Surely, there will be more comfort and freedom than in a hotel. And no one will think to look for him there——"

"But no one will know anything about me," insisted the professor. "I do not wish my name to be used. You gentlemen of the press can make any negotiations necessary."

"Right!" snapped Ted, who saw visions, as I did, of the paper becoming the most important center in the whole world. "Still, to make assurance doubly sure, perhaps it would be best if you stopped with Mr. Dean. He has a quiet, comfortable place—and if something was found out——"

"It's just the place for you, Professor!" I was eager to have him. "I shall be delighted to have you and Zack as my guests for as long as you may care to stay. The apartment is comfortable and quiet—and I have a good cook——"

"Well——" The professor hesitated, eyeing me doubtfully; but he must have seen the eager welcome in my eyes and the liking I had for him, and he smiled. "So be it, then!" he suddenly decided. "Perhaps it would be best. But, gentlemen," he turned to Ted, "no one can do me physical harm, if that is what you fear."

"They'd shoot you, Professor," wailed Ted. "You don't know our big cities! They could hire a thousand men who would kill you for a fee. And the world can't spare you——"

"Needless alarm," smiled the little Jamison. "I can not be shot!"

*"What?"* gasped Ted—and I echoed him.

The professor shook his head. "Once I am surrounded by the green ray, no bullet can penetrate to me!"

I stared, but I remembered my experience on the train, when the professor had invited me to try to touch him. Ted was frankly skeptical.

"Really, Professor?" he queried. "That sounds impossible, if you will pardon my saying so——"

"I shall be glad to demonstrate this interesting fact," smiled the professor. "I shall charge myself heavily with the green ray and you shall shoot at me with any form of weapon——"

"Not on your life!" gasped Ted. "If something went wrong and you should get hurt——"

Jamison waved his hand in negation. "We have tried it frequently, Zack and I," he said. "I fear no assassin, Mr. Dorgan. However, inasmuch as both you and Mr. Dean may be exposed during these negotiations, I insist that you allow me to make you likewise immune—if the danger of assassination is what you picture it. Likewise, for the sake of prudence, we should include your Mr. Davis and every employee of the paper.

"A treatment with the negative pole of the green ray will make you all immune to any sort of bullets and will not interfere with any electrical apparatus you may go near or handle. That effect, Mr. Dean—as demonstrated to you upon the train—only occurs when both the positive and negative charge is released into the human body."

We spent a wild night. Ted and I didn't sleep a wink. We couldn't! I installed Professor Jamison and Zack in my apartment, and he seemed to like it very much. I made every arrangement for his comfort. Who wouldn't? He was the most important man in the world, and I was thrilled with the privilege of spending some time with him. The famous names of history—Alexander—Cæsar—Napoleon—were as nothing compared to what Jamison's name could mean if the man but willed it.

Here was a man who could command the world all by himself—that is, if all that he promised was possible to perform. He needed no army or navy. The thing sounded unbelievable! Ted and I gloated over the prospect.

I sent a special man in a taxi for the professor's baggage, and he put all his boxes into the bedroom he was to occupy. It was a large room and he had plenty of space for his gadgets and the few mysterious, complicated-looking pieces of apparatus.

It was well past two in the morning when the professor and Zack retired calmly to sleep, just as if nothing more exciting was in prospect than breakfast in the morning!

The next morning, Mr. Davis, the owner and publisher of the *Star,* was hastily called into consultation. For several days he and the professor and Ted were behind locked doors while the professor substantiated his claims. Every now and then, I, too, went into the conference room and stared with the others in goggle-eyed amazement. The man was a wizard! The things he could do were hair-raising!

I was convinced from the very beginning, but finally, when Davis and Dorgan were convinced beyond any doubt that Jamison was the century's scientific wizard, that his discoveries and their applications were epoch-making, Davis wiped the perspiration from his forehead and signified that we could go ahead.

"Good God!" he exclaimed to Dorgan and me, when the professor had calmly gone to bed, "the man simply doesn't realize the huge scope of his plans! I have seen enough to know that he can accomplish the ending of this war—and he tells me there are still other means which he can not demonstrate in a small way. This is simply beyond reason, but we'll go ahead with it. Who in the world would believe the things he has shown us in the past few days? No one! And yet, *we know!* Go ahead, you two! Shoot!"

Undoubtedly you recall that first announcement. It was copied far and wide—all over the world—as the greatest joke of the year. How they laughed at us! How the newspapers howled! How the European press tittered! And the mayor suggested that we ought to have our heads examined! And the State Department, at Washington, sent a peremptory radio, ordering us to refrain from publishing any such nonsense again!

Ted and I howled. We choked with the rare surprize we were going to hand these smart Alecks! Mr. Davis was beset by thousands of messages, threats, but he calmly referred all inquiries to Ted. And Ted just grinned and said nothing.

In case you don't remember the first published statement, I am giving it to you here to refresh your memory:

W-A-R-N-I-N-G !

To Japan, France, Russia and Germany.

In the name of humanity, the *New York Evening Star* demands the cessation of all hostilities on all fronts in the Far East and on the German-Russian borders.

Innocent men, women and children are being killed without reason. In the name of humanity, we object!

We hereby serve notice that unless all war-

like actions by these four powers cease within twenty-four hours, we shall be compelled to take such action as we may deem necessary to terminate all hostilities.

REMEMBER—JAPAN—FRANCE—RUSSIA and GERMANY—24 HOURS!

THE EDITORS.

A gale of sarcasm, a cyclone of laughter, abuse, amazement, scorn—what not—came our way instantly. As we knew it would! But we had all the faith in the world in that little Jamison. At that moment, he was exclaiming like a delighted child at the view from my forty-second floor window! His, after all, was a simple soul.

The events that took place when this first announcement was made were nothing to what followed. But let me tell it in the sequence in which it occurred.

### 5. *The Rays Are Let Loose*

OF COURSE, Japan, France, Russia and Germany paid no heed to our announcement. We didn't expect that these great nations would stop all hostilities at our demand.

The fighting went on more fiercely than ever. The professor went calmly about his experiments in his tiny laboratory in my apartment. All he needed, apparently, was the material he had brought with him.

He was a keen student of the war news, and I could see that the man's determination to stop the fighting grew with every fresh cable and radio "flash" from the scene of action.

Well, the twenty-four hours passed, as I have said, and nothing happened. The world ignored us and our warnings—as we knew it would.

We held a consultation in my apartment. The professor was quite unable to understand the stupidity—as he termed it—of the war-drunk nations.

"It is the leaders who are to blame," he exclaimed. "The civilians of these warring countries do not want any war. You can inform them now, Mr. Dorgan, that unless they come to our way of thinking—and our way is the humanitarian way—the golden mist will henceforth hover over the fields of battle in the Far East and all electrical apparatus will be rendered useless."

We did. We explained that, as a first measure, we would henceforth render all electrical apparatus ineffective in the war zones.

Another titanic gale of laughter greeted this announcement. What did we think we were? Omnipotent? God?

But their tune changed the next day. That night the professor had set up a small contraption which had a movable finger on it. It looked like a pantagraph. Under the moving finger, he had a curious metal map of the world, divided into peculiar zones and squares. In what was supposed to represent the Far East war zone, he placed the finger and set it to moving so that it confined the complete area. You've seen similar apparatus in drug-store windows, where a fountain pen writes within a certain confined area.

To the professor's apparatus was attached a small wire which ran to a loop aerial—at least, it looked like one to me—outside the window. There was no noise, no electrical display. The box containing the mysterious apparatus was no larger than a typewriter and it emitted a faint hum. That was all. But the devastating results!

THE next morning a flood of inquiry poured into the offices of the *Star*. Did we have anything to do with the amazing thing that had happened on the battle front? Did we know in advance that this thing would happen? Was it

possible that we had actually caused it, as we had editorially declared?

The other newspapers went wild. They begged, they threatened, they cajoled. We simply must let them in on whatever it was we knew about all this! It wasn't fair! No one paper had a right to all the inside! And so on.

What happened was this—as you will remember from the newspaper stories of last summer: The entire war zone was electrically dead! The big guns on the battleships couldn't be fired. Motors quit, and planes had to make forced landings. Airship motors cut out and the huge ships couldn't be managed. They floated away, at the mercy of the wind, until far out of the war zone.

All clocks stopped. Telephone, telegraph and radio were dead. All the many and various activities of war, depending in any measure upon the use of electricity, were halted. The effect upon the world was a huge shock.

Then the Homeric laughter of the outside world sounded in the ears of the battling nations. The spectacle of these great powers, held in leash on the battlefields by the apparently impossible intervention of an American newspaper, was too much. The neutral nations roared their mirth.

But it did not halt the fighting in the Far East. There were now fierce hand-to-hand combats with rifles, bombs, swords, gas, grenades, mines and every devilish instrument of destruction that could be devised.

European scientists, called into action by the warring nations, scoffed at the idea of the electrical disturbance being man-made. They attributed it to a dozen causes, but they could do nothing to stop it.

We just grinned. We had not as yet been dignified by any response from any of the warring nations. They ignored us. Again we held a conference and went over the war news. We had all become very good friends by now, and I was really very fond of the professor—yes, and respected his vast ability as well. He was an amazing man.

"It is regrettable," he said, "but we will simply have to make these people understand that we mean to have an end to this fighting. You may inform them, Mr. Dorgan, that as a further measure of punishment, Japan will be under a blanket of snow for the next week——"

Even we—now fairly accustomed to the miracles of this astounding man—were astonished afresh.

"But, Professor!" I protested. "It's July—it's summertime in Japan! This *is* beyond the realms of reason——"

"Hardly!" he answered dryly, waving his hand. "If you understood the theory, you wouldn't say that. I demonstrated this to Mr. Davis and Mr. Dorgan in a small way. I believe you were busy at the office that morning. It is simply a question of what can be done to the atmosphere."

I looked at Ted in bewilderment, and he shrugged his shoulders. The professor was smiling confidently. Could this be possible? Then I suddenly remembered the huge snowfall on the Rockies that Jim Keogh had puzzled over.

"Professor," I said, "did you ever cause a large snowfall on the Rockies?"

"Yes," he smiled, "I did. During my experiments." Then he went on: "You tell me that Japan is the worst offender. Well, in that case, you may inform Japan through the columns of the paper that snow will begin to fall throughout their empire within twenty-four hours—and it will not cease until they come to their senses! In thirty-six hours, snow will begin to fall in France—if, by that time,

they have not stopped active warfare. And further, the same thing will happen in Russia and Germany a day after it begins in France. I greatly dislike to visit this punishment upon the civilian inhabitants of these countries, because the innocent will suffer; however, we must make it emphatic. We may even resort to more drastic measures if they fail to respond sensibly."

"Good Lord!" muttered Ted, his eyes glittering.

I said: "If you actually do this, Professor, I'll believe anything—even that cows can fly over the moon!"

"There is nothing very complicated about it, gentlemen. Radio, in its day, was just as revolutionary. I simply control the atmosphere over any desired locality. Briefly, it amounts to forming a cloud layer that shuts out the heat from the sun, which condenses the moisture in the air, and snow falls. And it will fall as long as we choose to control the atmosphere of the section. It is simple enough."

"Yeah—very!" said Ted, dazed.

I said nothing. Mental pictures flashed over my mind as to what this snowfall would mean to the warring nations. It staggered the imagination!

But the professor, apparently, had dismissed the subject from his mind. He was beaming upon me with his usual friendliness.

"Tomorrow being Sunday," he informed me, "do you think we could go on another tour of inspection of this wonderful city? I am greatly exhilarated by the motor-car rides and the sights of this great metropolis. What a hive of industry! What did you say the metropolitan population is?"

"Fifteen million, Professor."

"Fancy that! Amazing!" said the little man who held the entire world in his hand and gave it not a thought. Was there ever another like him? I doubted it.

TED and I went back to the office and discussed the professor's latest instructions. They sounded crazy, but we believed in him and we were too far committed to back out now. Besides, we knew of some things he actually could do—to our knowledge—and they were enough! So we took the plunge and wrote the next startling announcement and warning to the warring nations.

It was too much—as you may recall reading. Here it was the end of July, and —to boot—a very hot summer everywhere, and we threatened to snow under all of Japan, France, Germany and Russia! The howl of derision that went up shook our confidence somewhat. After all, in the clear light of reason, the thing *did* sound crazy.

But—God help us!—that quiet little man did just that! You will, no doubt, remember the consternation that followed. The press of the world went plain crazy after that. While many attributed the strange snowfall to the just vengeance of an affronted deity, nearly all the nations dropped their skepticism and became surly. They believed—but they were afraid to believe. They all trembled with a new fear. And the *New York Star* became the most powerful center of the world—it *was* the center of the world!

It was at this time that the first offensive of the enemy began against the *Star*. Whether they believed us miracle-makers or not, at least they must have thought it prudent to eliminate us. I'm referring to "they" as the nations at war. Still, they may not have been behind the attacks. I don't know. No one ever found out.

A man, walking in the street, carrying

a valise, was suddenly blown to pieces by an explosion of the contents of the bag. Next day, this happened again near Davis' house; and still again near the *Star* building. Mysterious explosions.

Ted grinned savagely, but the professor was concerned.

"Perhaps these efforts will cease," he suggested, "if you will inform these misguided people that the *Star* building and the homes of our employees can not be blown up. Tell them that our rays protect the territories of these homes and the personnel of the paper. Explain to them that any explosive brought into this territory will go off within the effective safety zone established by the radium ray—except bullets—and we are immune to them."

We printed the announcement and the warning. As if to test the truth of the statement, there was a veritable orgy of explosions in our neighborhood. Many plotters—we assumed they were agents of the warring nations—were blown to bits. Several desperate attempts were made to kill Davis, and failed. Then the violence ceased. Evidently they realized how powerless ordinary means were to put us out of the way.

And all this time, the snow fell. And it snowed for days and nights, until the four nations struggled with ten-foot drifts; in a week they were smothered in snow. All activities stopped. Commerce and railways were tied up. The economic life of the four powers was threatened. People stayed in their homes and couldn't get out. The snow fell too fast to be cleared away, and, finally, in despair, the job was given up.

Threatened with revolution and anarchy at home, the food supplies endangered and cut off, crops ruined, the people terrified at the thought of starvation and plague, the war zone electrically dead, a cry went up that rocked the world. The fighting had to be abandoned!

Japan, France, Russia and Germany were furious. Europe rushed to arms, lamely realizing the absurd futility of soldiers, guns and navies as a menace to the catastrophe that had overtaken the four warring nations.

"Now, then," said the professor, when all the reports were before him, "perhaps this will teach them that we mean just what we say."

"Look here, Professor," said Ted. "This thing is terribly serious. We are advised that a member of the State Department is coming up to read the riot act to us. We'll have to state our position and our demands and stick by our guns, come hell or high water! Do you want us to state your ideas and demands, or do you want to do so yourself?"

"Perhaps, in that case, I had better be present."

"We also have communications from the ambassadors of Japan, France, Germany and Russia saying that they are leaving Washington for New York and demanding a conference," said Ted. "I suggest that we meet them all at one time. That will save time and they can all hear what we have to say. Otherwise, these wily gentlemen will always suspect that one or the other has been able to make a better bargain. Let's have this thing out in the open. We have nothing to conceal and our demands on each of these nations are identical."

"Excellent!" agreed the professor. "If you will arrange the meeting, Ted, I shall be glad to be present. The gravity of the situation must be brought home to them!"

"It's your party, Professor, so you have your say. I'll arrange the meeting. We'll consult on it later. We'd better be prepared for anything, Professor—it may be us against the whole civilized world!"

"Numbers matter very little," answered the professor. "If the civilized world insists on behaving like a class of refractory freshmen, why, we will be obliged to discipline the civilized world—so called!"

"But," I said, "even our own Government may hop on us, Professor. Better be prepared for anything. Suppose they order us to stop our efforts for obtaining peace on pain of imprisonment?"

The professor's eyes opened wide. "Do you say that seriously, Gordon?—Well, let us assume that this might happen. If so, allow me to tell you that no prison will hold us. We will make our way out, go to my little mountain cabin, and from there we will compel the entire world to listen to reason."

"Even our own Government?"

"Even our own Government! I am determined that there shall be no more war, no matter what short-sighted people may say or think to the contrary!"

TED and I left, silent. Immense events were impending. We stepped out into the street, absorbed in our epoch-making plans, when a wild-eyed man ran up to me, peered into my face and yelled:

"You're Gordon Dean, aren't you—of the *Star?*"

"Yes," I answered, puzzled at his vehemence.

He whirled upon Ted. "And you're Dorgan, the editor of the *Star?*"

"So what?" snapped Ted. "Where do you tend bar?"

"I knew it! You two are traitors to humanity! You've caused untold suffering to millions of people! Traitors should die!"

He leveled a blue, automatic pistol and fired pointblank at me.

I stepped back instinctively for a moment and he emptied the pistol at Ted. Then we sprang for him. He stood dazed, his eyes staring at us uncomprehendingly. We hadn't been touched by his bullets, thanks to the fact that we had been treated by the professor's green ray. The man could see that we were unhurt, and his amazement was laughable. He suddenly began to shiver and tremble and his eyes bulged wildly.

Ted laughed and shoved the fellow aside. A crowd was rapidly collecting and Tel called to me:

"Come on—let's beat it! This damn' fool is of no consequence!"

I released the now thoroughly cowed fanatic and followed Ted into the car. We drove away rapidly, neither speaking until we were out of the neighborhood.

"This is the best way," said Ted. "If we had him arrested, it would take up a lot of time, and right now we can't spare any. I wonder if that bird was just a fanatic, or if somebody hired him to rub us out."

"I wonder! I suppose any of the four powers would have a reason for getting us out of the way. We've thrown a whole bag of tools into their war machinery. Maybe they think that if we were killed everything would be all right. Boy, this is getting hot! What do you think of the professor's green ray now, Ted?"

"I think that little guy's the most remarkable human being that ever lived," he answered, with conviction. "I stand amazed at his lack of ego. He actually shames me! If I could do what he can, I'd own the world and everything in it!"

"Yes," I admitted, "I feel the same way. I'd want power, fame, glory—say, Ted, we'll have to watch our step! Others will try to kill us—and if bullets don't reach us, they might try poison—or some other way."

"I should worry!" grinned Ted. "I've lived long enough to see the *Star* become a modern Delphic Oracle — and

that's long enough for any man! What a man that little guy Jamison is!"

The city was in a turmoil. People talked of nothing else but the "miracles." Groups, with copies of the *Star* in their hands, discussed, in hushed tones, the plight of the four great nations, buried in snow—in the middle of summer.

Similar "miracles" had happened before, hadn't they? During the times of the Old Testament? Hadn't the Egyptians been visited with plagues, locusts, floods, when they had offended the high heavens? And so a divine hand was seen behind the professor's miracles—pure products of science and the laboratory. And the people, everywhere, became afraid.

Ted was bubbling over with joy.

"Good Lord!" he gasped, as he read the messages from the ambassadors, asking for a conference. "Did you ever dream it would come to this? Four of the world's greatest nations waiting on us—*and we've got 'em licked!*"

The ambassadors from many other countries had also arrived and demanded that they, too, be present at the conference. No more closed treaties behind locked doors! Ted finally arranged the meeting for that night with all the accredited ambassadors and our own Secretary of State. It was to take place in our office, immediately after dinner, in Mr. Davis' large conference room. When all the details were settled, Ted turned to me:

"That's that!" he exclaimed. "Tonight will tell a story unique in the history of the world!"

And it did!

### 6. *The Radium Ray*

RADIO loud-speakers all over the land were shouting the news that over fifty ambassadors were in New York to hold conference with the *Star*. New York was frantic with excitement. Crowds began to collect early around the *Star* building, for it had become known that the meeting would be held there. The inference was instant: The *Star* building and vicinity were immune to bullets, bombs, violence of any kind. And there was a whisper in the streets that the *Star* editors and officials were wizards—scientifically protected from bullets. There was an explosion early in the evening on the next street, and many people were hurt. Then the rumor was spread that the ambassador from Bolivia had tried to bring a bomb to the conference and had died in the explosion. It was, of course, nonsense. Another ambassador, we heard, had sworn to shoot us all at the conference. We laughed. If he tried, he'd learn something!

Ted and I went to my apartment in grave thought, to consult with the professor. He was unruffled and unimpressed with the fact that he was to meet so many celebrities. The tremendous political import of the conference meant nothing to him. These ambassadors were powerful men and they could stop the killing. That was what the professor wanted. Great names, pomp, ceremony, meant less to him than the plight of one peasant soldier, lying dead on the battlefield, who had fought a fight he did not understand. Humanity was the professor's passion. There was some simple and fine quality about this small man that made me think of the legendary Cincinnatus.

I wondered what this unsophisticated man would say to the ambassadors of the great nations. Would he involve our country—the world—in a hopeless misunderstanding—or would he prove a savior for humanity? I said as much to Ted:

"After all, Ted, he's a plain man, despite his marvelous brain; he's unused to

suave diplomacy, urban discourse. I wonder——"

"Don't worry about that guy!" snapped Ted. "I know him now—he'll prove a match for all of them. Just let him alone. What bothers me is that he may get some nut idea that *we* need reforming—and then heaven help us all!"

The professor and Zack made several preparations after I had explained the nature of the meeting and the people who would be present; and after we had our dinner, we all climbed into my car and drove to the office.

Huge, curious crowds were everywhere. We had to leave the car several streets from the *Star* building and proceed on foot.

It was impossible to approach the front entrance. Many policemen were there, trying to keep the mobs in order and maintain an open pathway to the entrance, but it proved more than they could manage. The crowds surged irresistibly over the open spaces like huge waves.

We managed to get in through the delivery entrance. From there on it was easier. We entered Davis' office, identifying ourselves to the police who were guarding the corridor and the hallway.

Mr. Davis met us and conducted us in. I saw some fifty men, keen-eyed, eager, smoking and talking, as we walked in.

A HUSH fell as we entered, and all eyes were turned to us.

Mr. Davis briefly identified us as officials of the *Star* and said that we would be the spokesmen; and Ted assumed the position of master of ceremonies—so to speak. The men present identified themselves and their connections, and Ted courteously asked our own Secretary of State to verify the identifications. He did this with poor grace. He was a man who looked and felt extremely important, and he sensed that the center of the stage was not for him that night.

We all sat down at the long conference table, a tense excitement growing in the abrupt silence following the introductions. Ted, in his calm, level voice, spoke:

"Gentlemen," he said, "we are here in the interests of humanity and universal peace. This meeting is one of the most momentous in the history of the world. I beg of you all, therefore, to consider carefully anything that may be said here and to give every expression mature consideration. This is not the time—or the occasion—for patriotism, for any show of partizanship or for ambitious dreams of conquest. We must consider humanity at large, with no racial or territorial prejudices or distinctions. We have no ax to grind—and all we desire is peace on earth."

"In that sentiment, we are of one accord, sir," answered the Japanese ambassador. "My nation desires peace on earth above all else. It is to enforce and preserve peace that our present actions are necessary."

"It sees itself—in the blow of an eye," agreed the French ambassador.

Emphatic nods and a chorus of assent followed. All eyes were turned to Ted. He smiled cryptically and turned to the professor, who had been looking around him curiously. He was pale and his eyes flashed with a brilliant fire.

"Gentlemen," Ted continued, "I want you to listen to our spokesman, Professor Jamison. He may have a few interesting and welcome words for you."

The professor turned to the assemblage immediately.

"I understand, gentlemen," he said, in his quiet voice, "that you all desire peace. That is what we also desire. It is then only necessary for your Governments to

recall all troops from the war zones, all battleships, and desist immediately from all further hostile actions. When that is accomplished, there will be halted all hostile assaults upon your own countries."

The French ambassador leaned over to me to whisper, in a shocked sibilance:

"He is—ah—what you call it?—*ivre*—No?"

"No!" I snapped. "He's no more drunk than I am!"

A tense hush fell upon the group. It was finally broken by the Japanese ambassador. He turned to the professor with perfect courtesy.

"Your request, sir, is not as easily accomplished as would appear from your simple statement. There are questions of great importance involved—of national honor——"

"You will pardon me," interjected the professor, "if I suggest that the most important thing is to halt the killing of human beings; and I am not interested in the question of national honor——"

"Sir!"

"One moment, if you please!" The professor did not like the Japanese ambassador's attitude. He continued with quiet firmness: "Your nation, sir, was asked to stop the needless slaughter. You paid no attention to the request. The same request was made of France, Russia and Germany. The same refusal resulted.

"Now, please bear in mind that we will not tolerate a repetition of the deplorable conditions that existed in 1932—the ruthless killing of civilians, women and children. This must stop!"

"But this is infamous!" shouted the Russian ambassador.

"It is hardly that!" snapped the professor. "Do me the courtesy to listen until I have finished, then I shall be glad to listen to anything you may have to say, sir!"

"But, Professor Jamison!" It was our own Secretary of State's insistent voice. "This is hardly the procedure——"

"I am not interested in the etiquette of the matter, sir!"

I was gloating. My lips and mouth were dry with an intense excitement. The professor was getting his back up, and what he might tell these birds in a few minutes kept me on edge.

"You will pardon my lack of diplomatic training and bear with me, I am sure," went on the professor. "We are not here to play at diplomacy. And I wish to remind you gentlemen that you are here to listen to our terms. And they are these: All fighting must stop at once on all fronts. There must be no further killing anywhere in the name of war—at any time.

"You will all sign an agreement to that effect, and keep it, under pain of subjecting your own countries to a continued fall of snow that will, eventually, snuff out all your inhabitants. We would regret to do this, but it may be necessary to be harsh for once in order that the future of all humanity may be safe from the blighting destruction of war.

"And, unless you agree, we will sink your entire fleets in the war zones, first warning your sailors and officers to abandon the ships—or go down with them. Either all war ceases—or the nations that persist in warfare—*cease to exist!*"

He stopped, and I eyed the group of amazement-stricken men at the table. Not a sound came from any of them. This was not their habitual atmosphere of diplomacy; this blunt, unheard-of demand by the little, brilliant-eyed man left them all tongue-tied.

The eyes of the Japanese ambassador glittered. I watched him as he bent forward at last and said:

"These are broad statements, Profes-

sor Jamison! While I might acknowledge your mastery in science—acknowledge, even, that you caused this strange snowfall—it is difficult to believe that our navy will be sunk——"

The professor interrupted. "Be so kind, then," he said, "as to wireless your admiral in charge to abandon his flagship—and take all his men with him—and the ship will disappear at once! We have released the Shanghai sector of the war zone from the golden glow for tonight, and your wireless will function in the area."

A blank astonishment reigned. Fear, for the first time, was visible on many faces. But the Jap was plainly skeptical.

"It might be worth the price of a battleship," he agreed, finally, "to test this most interesting statement. I shall consult my Government at once."

"Do so!" snapped the professor. "And advise your people to leave the ship opposite the Woosung forts and keep all other shipping away from the vicinity—I do not want any lives lost. As soon as you tell me that this has been accomplished, I shall at once illustrate the power of *the radium ray!*"

The Jap bowed slightly. "How long will the experiment take, sir?"

"Five minutes!" retorted the professor, promptly.

A murmur went up from the roomful of men whose eyes were fettered upon the professor in sheer fascination.

The Japanese ambassador turned to his aid and issued some swift instructions. Then he turned to Mr. Davis: "If you will kindly allow us the use of your radio station for this message—and the use of code?"

Mr. Davis nodded. Our radio station is on the roof of the *Star* building. Ted phoned the order and the Jap aid left the room. We sat, mostly in silence. Here and there, others whispered to one another. The professor and Zack retired to an adjoining room where Ted had placed the professor's apparatus under a heavy guard of our own *Star* people.

Then the Jap aid returned with one of our own operators carrying a portable microphone and headphones for two-way radio telephone. This was plugged in on a wall connection and the ambassador put through his call to Japan through our station. Almost immediately he began to talk, and, apparently assured that he was talking to the proper officials, continued in an ear-confusing Japanese jargon, quoting from a tiny code-book sheltered in the palm of his hand. Occasionally he listened, intent.

Ted smiled to me and went into a whispered consultation with Mr. Davis in a far corner. The old man was bubbling over with excitement.

Our Secretary of State approached and said to Ted, hardly above a whisper: "This is most extraordinary, sir! I believe I would be justified in ordering Jamison's arrest. The man is a lunatic. He will hopelessly compromise us in the eyes of the world. We shall be discredited—laughed at——"

"Hardly, sir!" Ted snapped his answer. "I would advise a hands-off policy right now. As for arresting the professor—don't do it!—that's all I have to tell you. Good God, man, can't you realize that you are dealing with one of nature's supermen? Thank God that America can produce men like Edison and Jamison!"

They whispered in this fashion until the professor and Zack stepped into the room again. And again silence fell upon the group. I wondered if any of these accredited ambassadors would attempt any misguided violence upon our persons—as per rumors—but no move was made. Finally, the Japanese ambassador

turned to the professor with a wave of his hand.

"It is arranged, sir," he said, in his gracious manner. "My superiors and my Government have consented. The scene is laid for the experiment. The *Tokyo* is opposite Woosung forts, and the men are ashore. All shipping has been warned away from the vicinity. I await your demonstration, sir!"

Was there a little twinkle of derision in his beady eyes? I couldn't be sure.

The professor, eyes blazing, arose and motioned to Zack.

"I shall return in five minutes," he said, and left the room through the side door.

Men sat and looked at one another in silence. The tension was great. The fate of nations hung in the balance of the next few minutes. The minutes dragged. What mysterious rites was the professor performing? The four warring nations got together at the table—at least!—and held a whispered conference. I walked to the window and looked at the nightly gem display of Manhattan. And then the professor and Zack returned to the room. Throats were cleared, feet shuffled, then—silence.

"It is done, sir," said the professor, courteously, to the Japanese ambassador. "Will you confirm it?"

The ambassador turned to his microphone again and adjusted his headphones. His young aid left the room at a nod from the ambassador and went again to our radio control room—apparently to see that the messages were properly put through.

We waited with bated breath. My heart was pumping fire, I thought; Ted and Mr. Davis were both pale as death. The young Jap aid returned in a few minutes and nodded to the ambassador. He spoke a few words into the mike; listened, rapt; spoke again, and then wet his lips and his eyes sought the professor's. The professor smiled.

"My message says," the Japanese ambassador hesitated, "that the *Tokyo*—has disappeared!"

At once a roar of excitement filled the room. The professor waved his hand for silence.

"Just so!" he announced, calmly. "It disappeared! It would have been just as simple to have the entire fleet disappear—or an entire city! And now, there is little further to be said. You gentlemen have twenty-four hours in which to stop all warfare. When that is done, the snow will stop, your countries will resume their normal weather, and you can all blithely follow the profitable pursuits of peace. If you refuse, we shall destroy those nations which are bent upon destruction! And please remember that we are very much in earnest. I bid you good-night, gentlemen."

He bowed and walked from the room, followed by Zack and me. Ted stayed to get the ambassadors' signatures to a prepared statement that would bind their respective countries to declare and maintain peace.

WE MADE our way down the back elevators and fought a passage through the dense crowds that surged everywhere. We were not recognized, and finally, we stood a block away and looked back at the *Star* building. The crowds milled endlessly. As we walked along, each busy with his own thoughts, I was thrilled beyond words at the scene I had just witnessed. Then a man's voice yelled:

"Look out! *Look out!* You're on the spot, feller! Hey——"

I saw three men with sub-machine guns trained upon us. There was a red

burst of fire from the muzzles, but we stood there, unharmed. The gunmen sprayed us to the extent of their magazines, then looked wildly at us, threw the guns down and ran into the terrified crowds. People cried out at the attempted murder, and I noticed that a man in back of me was down rubbing a foot violently and swearing. Due to the green ray, we were unhurt.

"Quick!" I called. "This way."

"That was a dastardly attack!" said the professor, and shrugged. "However, we are immune."

"And a good thing!" I answered. "I'd have looked like a coffee-strainer by this time!"

Ted came to the apartment an hour later and handed the professor the signed agreements of the ambassadors.

"There you are, Professor," he said. "You win! You've licked four nations single-handed!"

The professor eyed the papers. "They fully understand the terms?" he asked. "Good! As long as peace is kept, I shall not intrude into their affairs. We will see what happens in the next twenty-four hours."

WHAT could happen? The warring nations surrendered to the genius of Jamison. They had to. They had to agree to all his terms in full, accept the humiliation, demobilize their 10,000,000 soldiers, pay an indemnity for the damage they had done. Another week of the professor's snow and half of Europe would be a trackless white wilderness!

During the days that followed, we were busy people. Sometimes I even slept at the office, on a cot, and didn't go home at all. There were no more attacks made upon us, thank heaven, or upon any of the employees of the *Star*. No more bombs appeared near any of the buildings, either.

The professor saw the peace treaty concluded, and smiled contentedly.

There was a vast disturbance in Washington, and I went down for a few days to get the inside story. It was on my return that I found my apartment empty.

A note on my study table gave me the news:

Dear Gordon:

As your return may be delayed for weeks, and as my presence is immediately necessary elsewhere, Zack and I are returning to our cabin in the mountains at once. We have much to do and the time is all too short. I shall keep in touch with the situation by radio.

I want to thank you and Ted for the marvelous co-operation you have given me in bringing about my dreams of universal peace. And I extend heartfelt thanks for the hospitality you extended. Perhaps I can reciprocate some day. In the meanwhile, believe that my immediate departure is imperative for reasons which I can not go into here, and allow me to disappear from the scene without ceremony. We shall meet again.

Your friend,
HAZELTON RANDOLPH JAMISON.

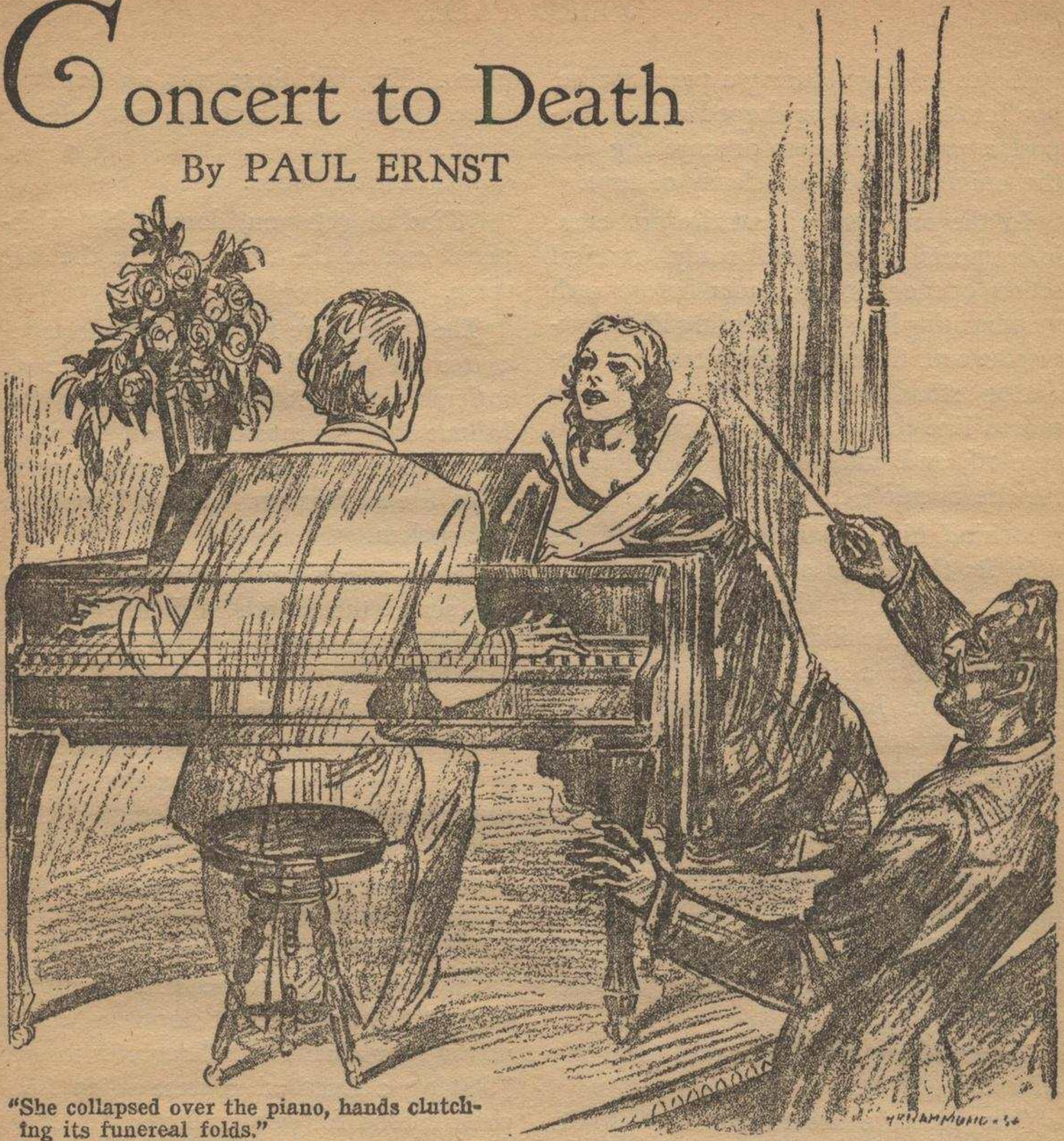
That was all. I was dumfounded. I asked the housekeeper what she knew about it. She knew nothing except that the professor had tried to reach me in Washington, and had failed; and Ted had gone to Boston, so they couldn't reach him.

He may be dead, for all I know, the little Jamison. I haven't heard from him since he left, over nine months ago. I've tried to get in touch with him by radio and failed. I searched the Rockies for three months and couldn't find the cabin he mentioned as his home.

At any rate, this is the true story of the startling events that you read about in the newspapers last summer. And you know now that the *Tokyo* wasn't sunk to bottle up the river—as the Japs claimed—but by the terrible radium ray, directed by the professor. And, of course, you know that peace now reigns supreme—and there's no prospect of any further wars.

# Concert to Death

By PAUL ERNST



**"She collapsed over the piano, hands clutching its funereal folds."**

*A novel ghost-story, about a great musical genius and a weird concert to his memory*

THE stage was illuminated brightly, rawly. Every ridge on the ugly steel fire-curtain stood out in the ghostly white radiance.

On the stage were a concert grand piano and a battered piano stool. The top of the piano was down, shutting in the sounding-board. A black drape was thrown over it. A vase of yellow roses was set on the closed, draped lid.

All was in readiness for Lucchesi to enter from the wings, to bow and smile as he walked to the piano, as he had done so many times in his life. Everything was as the master pianist liked it: his favorite, battered old piano stool; piano set in the right-center of a perfectly bare stage; nothing but the raw steel fire-curtain for a backdrop; harsh, uncompromising light.

Only the piano itself was different. For it is not usual for the lid of a concert

grand to be down during a performance, nor for the case to be draped and to support a vase of flowers or anything else that might muffle pure clarity of tone.

In the orchestra pit sat the orchestra, instruments tuned and ready, musical scores opened on the racks before each member, tiny lights glimmering like glow-worms over the racks. The orchestra conductor stood before them with arms poised like the wings of a bird about to take off, and with his head back to nod for the opening crash of harmony.

Behind him, in the great auditorium with its thousands of seats, a breathless hush prevailed. In the hush the gradual dimming of the indirect lights overhead had been like a silent dusk over an unrippled lake. In the vast silence just one sound was heard, for an instant—a woman's sobbing.

The conductor's arms swooped down. The opening bar of Lucchesi's *Minuet in G* flooded the huge hall with quivering melody. Every instrument was adding to the tide of music—but the piano. Every musician was playing—but the great Lucchesi himself.

The sobbing sounded again, instantly stifled.

The piece, a short one, drew to its conclusion and silence again held the house. The conductor turned from his rack and faced the thousands of seats. He raised his baton as though to still thunderous applause; which was odd, because there was no applause.

"We will now play Lucchesi's *Dance of the Sprites,*" the conductor said. And his voice rang in the auditorium with the hollow boom of a voice in an empty cavern. Rightly so! For there was no one in the vast hall.

The thousands of seats were empty. The boxes, galleries and balconies were empty. On the bare stage was Lucchesi's piano. Yes, but there was no Lucchesi there to play it. There never would be again.

Lucchesi was dead.

"Kind of gets you, doesn't it?" whispered one of the three men in the left wing.

The three were Howard Kent, star reporter for the *Globe,* who was here on sufferance and not for publicity purposes; Milnor Roberts, music critic on the same newspaper; and Isaac Loewenbohn, owner of the auditorium. It was Kent who had spoken.

"Kind of gets you," he repeated, looking across the length of bare stage between the footlights and the fire-curtain.

IN THE other wing a woman stood alone: a woman dressed in mourning, with a white face standing out against the black like a dainty white cameo. The woman's red underlip was caught between her teeth and her body shook with suppressed sobs.

"It's certainly a unique idea," Kent whispered on. He was afraid that if he didn't talk he would get sloppy, which is no way for a hard-boiled reporter to get. "Staging a Lucchesi concert when Lucchesi is food for worms. Eccentric idea."

"A nice idea, I t'ink," said Loewenbohn, scowling at the reporter. "Today, one year from the day Lucchesi has died, his friends and fellow musicians hold an all-Lucchesi concert in memoriam. That is a nice tribute."

Roberts, the music critic, nodded abstractedly. His mind was full of the piece the orchestra was now playing. *Dance of the Sprites* had been written for a piano lead. There were three long interludes in it when only the piano played—and the piano on the stage had no player before its keyboard!

"Wonder how they'll treat the piano

interludes," he whispered to Loewenbohn as the first one drew near. "Will they fill in?"

The auditorium owner shrugged. There was a piano in the pit. Perhaps the orchestra pianist would play Lucchesi's interludes.

But the conductor was more subtle than that.

The three men leaned forward a little as the composition reached the first interlude and died away in a shower of flute notes. Now it was time for the piano to pick up the thread. Now it was time for Lucchesi to crash in. . . .

Only there was no Lucchesi.

There was silence, while the conductor faced the piano on the stage, with his baton at rest by his side. Silence. The tense, oppressive silence that comes when music is interrupted, but when you know the piece is not yet finished.

In that silence conductor and orchestra stared at the piano on the stage; stared and held their instruments in readiness to play again. There was an eery matter-of-factness about orchestra and conductor. It was as though of course Lucchesi was seated on the stool; of course he was playing his piano. Death? They were wordlessly refusing it its power. Particularly the conductor. . . .

"Look at him!" muttered the reporter, running his forefinger around under his collar. "Look at him!"

The orchestra leader's body was swaying very slightly. His eyes were wide, mystic, as he stared at the piano—and at the empty stool.

"You'd think Lucchesi really was there, playing!"

The other two paid no attention to him. The critic softly hummed the interlude Lucchesi would be playing if he were alive. Loewenbohn's heavy face seemed less florid than usual.

The critic stopped humming. Even as he did so, the conductor raised his baton and the orchestra went on with the composition, softly, for the piano notes were supposed to sound over the other instruments for a few more bars.

Kent moistened his lips and stared at the keyboard. Curious. For just an instant it had seemed to him that the keys were being rhythmically depressed, as though at the touch of unseen fingers. But that, of course, was imagination.

The piano standing on the bare stage in lonely majesty; the funereal drape over the closed case, and the scent of the yellow roses; the somber dignity with which the orchestra played to an empty auditorium—these things tended to make you see what did not exist.

"Marvelous stuff, that music," Kent said, resolutely keeping the shiver out of his voice.

Roberts nodded. "Lucchesi had supreme genius. It was tragic that he had to die."

"Yeah. And only forty-one. A guy that could turn out stuff like this!"

Roberts smiled.

"Yes, this is superb. But it's not as fine as Lucchesi's last composition—one he finished just before he died last year. That piece was greatest of all."

Loewenbohn's heavy eyebrows went up.

"I don't t'ink I ever heard of that piece," he said.

"Few have," replied Roberts. "And no one ever heard it played. It's lost."

"Huh?" said Kent. "But if nobody ever heard it, how do you know it was so great?"

The critic shrugged.

"Lucchesi said it was," he said simply. "He worked on it for nearly a year, in secret, as he always composed. He finished it. He told me and one or two other

close friends about it. He died—and no one has ever been able to find the score."

Kent shook his head. "That's tough. And Mrs. Lucchesi is flat broke, too. I did a story on her six months ago. Living with her sister—lost the insurance money—even Lucchesi's piano in storage. By the way, the piano on the stage is really Lucchesi's own, isn't it?"

Roberts looked at the shrouded piano and nodded.

"We got it out of storage for the occasion. Tomorrow"—he looked across at Lucchesi's widow—"it is to be sold at auction. She has to have money."

"If only she could find the song!" sympathized Kent.

"It would mean a lot to her," responded Roberts. "There's no real wealth in genius. But the song would bring several thousand dollars. And it would bring Lucchesi tremendous posthumous fame."

He stopped talking. The second piano interlude was near.

THE orchestral notes slowed. The conductor and each musician in the pit gazed at the draped piano.

Instinctively the three men in the left wing stared at it too. And in the right wing Lucchesi's widow swayed forward a little, with her arms going out and her lips parting.

The orchestra stopped playing. Everything was in readiness. All was waiting on Lucchesi, who would play no more. . . .

But as the thick stillness of the interlude continued, Kent, watching the keyboard of Lucchesi's piano with eyes that were less cynical than usual, began to have an insane idea that perhaps the great composer *was* here at the concert held in his memory.

Surely there was a tall, shadowy figure seated on the old stool. Surely long, steely fingers were flying over the keyboard. Surely a shower of notes was sounding from the instrument that had known for so long the touch of those fingers.

The conductor was again swaying, as though to a cascade of harmony. But now his eyes were wide, almost frightened-looking; and his mouth was a little open and his head was bent as though he dimly heard something not quite audible to others there. The musicians, too, in this second, almost ghastly silence, were not quite the same as they had been in the first interlude. They were rigid in the pit, the lights over their racks reflecting on the whites of their staring eyes and on points of moisture on their tense faces.

Kent drew a deep breath, and glanced at Roberts and Loewenbohn quickly to see if they had heard how shaky his sigh was.

The atmosphere of this memorial concert—this concert to death—had changed. A new element had entered it, somehow. A sort of electricity charged the air. Kent could feel it. He knew the others felt it. He found himself holding his breath, waiting, waiting . . . for what? He did not know.

Once more he tore his eyes from the keyboard of Lucchesi's piano. The keys were *not* moving! How could they, with no fingers to move them?

He saw Lucchesi's widow stagger a little, and started impulsively toward her. She raised her slim hand and waved him back.

The conductor raised his baton. Sweat was glistening on his forehead. He waved his arms, and the musicians, with an obvious effort, swung into the *Dance*.

Kent gulped with relief as the hushed stillness was broken. The strain was lifted a little now; and he took refuge from his inexplicable nervousness by telling himself that this whole thing was a

silly farce: getting Loewenbohn to donate the place this afternoon, scraping up an orchestra, dragging Lucchesi's piano from the warehouse—and then acting as though the dead man were here and playing before an accustomed audience! Crazy!

And it was ripping Lucchesi's widow to pieces. He stared across at her and was alarmed by her pallor. They simply shouldn't have permitted this.

She must be terribly broke—forced to put Lucchesi's piano in storage because she had no home of her own to put it in. And it must be the devil for her to have to sell it. It would bring a good price, though. Lucchesi's own piano. . . .

"You say they looked everywhere for that last composition of his?" he whispered to Roberts under cover of the music.

The critic nodded. "Of course. All his effects were gone over." His voice was like Kent's: not quite steady, a little strained. And his eyes, like Kent's, were continually turning toward the keyboard of the funereally draped piano. "I helped in the search myself. But he'd hidden it too well."

"Hidden it?" repeated Kent. "Why did he hide it?"

"He thought somebody was trying to steal it. At the very last, he was not a well man. He had delusions. But there were no delusions about his composition. That must have been grand."

The music welling from the musicians in the pit was sublime. No man there had ever played so well before. They were inspired, playing beyond themselves, as though they themselves were but instruments manipulated by a master hand.

THE third, and last, piano interlude in *Dance of the Sprites* drew near. The orchestral notes began fading as the piano was supposed to pick up the thread of the composition. Kent scowled.

"I wish they wouldn't *do* this! It's . . . it's . . . damn it, it's ghostly!"

"Shut up," whispered Roberts, his voice thin and brittle.

The last note died away. The great, empty hall swam again in silence. Live, electric silence. Every gaze was riveted on the black-draped piano on the bare stage.

Again the illusion came to Kent, terrifically, that there was a figure on the stool, that long fingers raced over the keyboard in the climactic crash of the interlude. Surely, surely . . .

Roberts started, and stared first at the piano on the stage and then at the piano in the pit. His mouth hung open and his face paled. The great vein in his throat pulsed jerkily.

Kent avoided looking at him. The reporter didn't want to see in the critic's eyes confirmation of something he was telling himself wildly had *not* happened. For he, too, had thought to hear the thing that had sent the blood from Roberts' face: a low, dim note sounding from Lucchesi's piano.

It did not help any to gaze at Loewenbohn and discover that the auditorium owner's face had gone a sickly gray; nor to look from there to the orchestra pit and see that the conductor had dropped his baton and was pressing his fists against the sides of his head while he stared as though in a trance at the piano on the stage.

The interlude was ending. On the score a fountain of notes in upward crescendo culminated in a single note, loud and clear, sustained a moment; then a crescendo to the bass.

Kent gazed at the keyboard of Lucchesi's piano. He didn't want to look at it; he willed his eyes to turn away; but he couldn't look in any other direction. He stared at it, and he saw the keys rip-

ple in an upward sweep. Up and up. A trick of the light! he told himself wildly. A trick of the light!

In the throbbing silence of the empty auditorium a piano note sounded loud and clear.

The three men stared at each other and then, like sleep-walkers, at Lucchesi's piano.

The note faded in the immense stillness . . . faded and was lost.

Lucchesi's widow screamed. She stumbled onto the stage toward the piano, fell, got up again, went on. She collapsed over the piano, cheek to the sable drape, hands clutching at its funereal folds.

"He's *here!*" she screamed. "That note . . . you all heard . . . he's *here!*"

Kent's nails bit into the palms of his hands. Then he caught Roberts' shoulder in a convulsive grip.

"The piano in the pit!" he stuttered. "It was the piano in the pit! Someone in the orchestra sounded it!"

ROBERTS only wrenched his shoulder free and turned to the woman sobbing over the piano. There was no one near the piano in the pit.

"Here—with us!" cried Lucchesi's widow brokenly. "He came to our anniversary concert! Carlo . . . Carlo! . . ."

"I won't be a fool!" Kent heard his own voice sound out, high and flat. "I won't believe this! I won't!"

But no one paid attention. His voice died away. But the ghostly vibration of the clear high note still seemed to stir the air of the empty hall.

Lucchesi's widow stood erect beside the piano, with her arms spread in supplication toward the empty piano stool.

"Carlo, you are here! You are! Carlo . . . tell me . . . where is the missing score? Where is your last masterpiece?"

The silence hurt the ears as she faced the battered, empty stool, as she called to a man a year dead. Loewenbohn's thick lips were moving soundlessly. The musicians in the pit seemed figures of stone. Roberts and Kent rigidly faced the piano.

"Carlo, tell me," entreated Lucchesi's widow. "Tell me! Please, please, where is the score? Not for me—for you. Your greatest piece. Tell me where it is."

The myriad seats in the auditorium seemed occupied by a vast audience turning ghostly faces toward the stage, uniting with the living folk in wings and pit in staring at the keyboard of Lucchesi's piano.

And the keys—the keys! . . .

They were rippling in a downward sweep, a downward crescendo toward the bass.

"Carlo!" called Lucchesi's widow.

A bass note sounded from Lucchesi's piano—that piano which had no player that mortal eyes could see. A single note, loud and clear. . . .

No, not clear! Loud, it was; but it was cracked, tinny, as if invisible hands were laid on the strings in the closed ebony case.

A thick exclamation tore from Roberts' lips. He stared at the orchestra leader, who stared back at him while comprehension dawned in the eyes of both. Then the music critic started running along the strip of stage to the piano.

Lucchesi's widow was gazing pitifully, tragically, at the battered piano stool.

"Here!" she faltered. "He was here. And he would not answer me . . . would not tell me!"

"But he *has* answered you," Roberts said gently. "He *has*. With that last note. You heard how it sounded. How stupid for no one of us to think to look there before!"

With a trembling hand he took the

vase of yellow roses from the top of the concert grand and set it on the floor. He swept the black drape aside and opened the lid—the first time the top had been opened since Lucchesi's death a year ago.

There, on the bass strings where Lucchesi had hastily thrust them, were penciled sheets of music.

The priceless score, Lucchesi's missing masterpiece!

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# Mist on the Meadows

*By* MARION DOYLE

Strange portents there are—
What gain to deny them?—
'Twixt twilight and dawning:
What use to defy them?

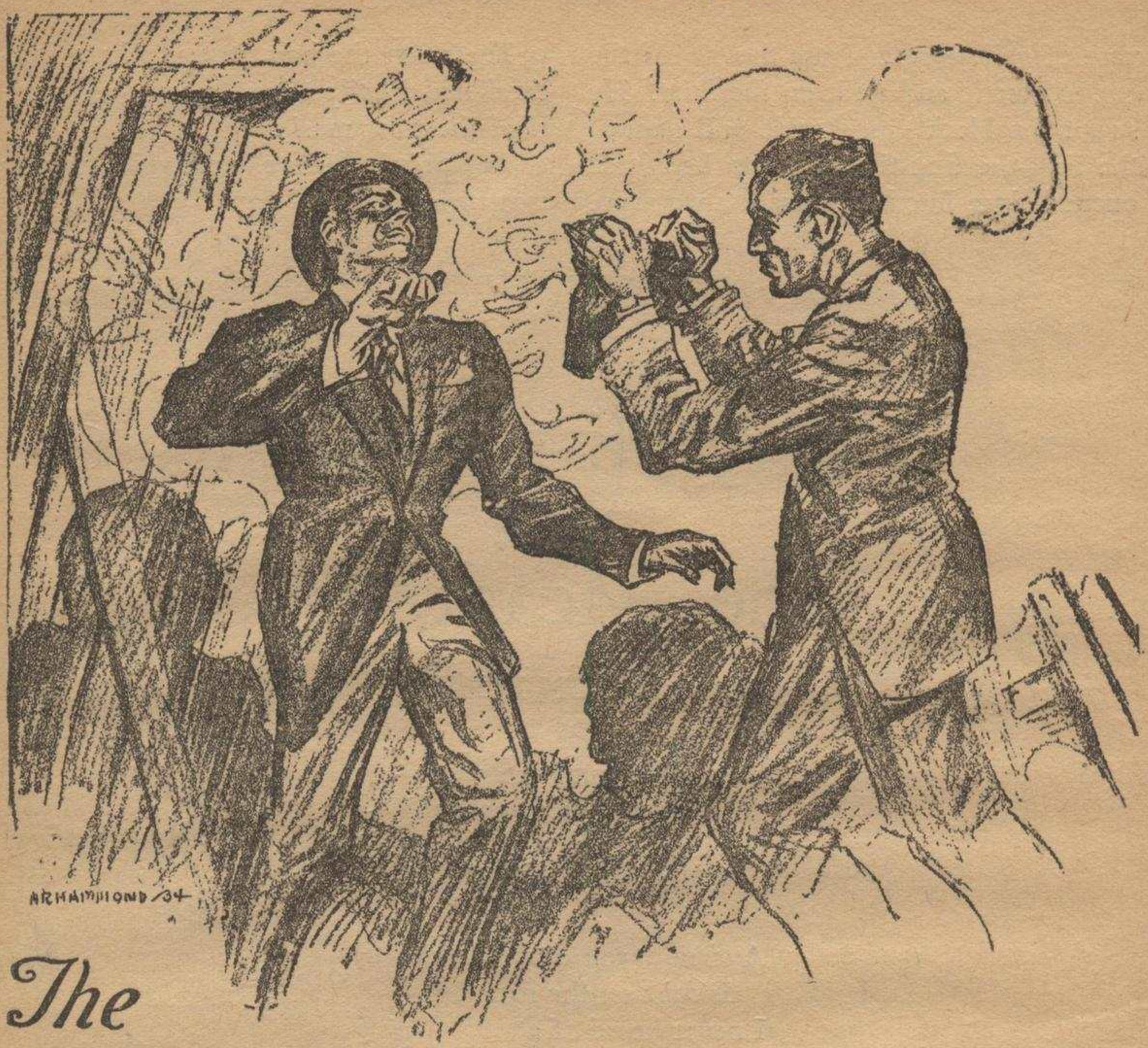
And now you contend this
Is mist on the meadow—
I never heard of a
Mist casting shadow.

It is not mist, but
The uneasy dead
Trailing their long shrouds
Low overhead,

Blurring the high moon
And blotting the stars,
Caught in the Judas-trees—
Death's avatars.

This is unholy:
If you would be
Inviolate
Eternally,
Turn you about
And flee—
And flee!

"He fell back, gasping, fighting madly against the stupefying vapor."




# The Trail of the Cloven Hoof

*A startling weird mystery story, of strange deaths on the desolate Moor of Exham, and the mysterious creature known as "The Terror of the Moor"*

*The Story Thus Far*

WHAT is the real explanation of the mysterious monster—horned, cloven-footed, yet speaking with a human voice—which haunts the desolate recesses of Exmoor? This problem confronts Hugh Trenchard in a dramatic guise when he stumbles on Silas Marle lying stunned and helpless one misty night, and the subsequent disappearance of the old man's body only serves to deepen the mystery.

With the aid of a former fellow-student, Ronnie Brewster, Hugh determines to solve the mystery, and his resolution is strengthened when he learns that Silas Marle has bequeathed his entire fortune to him on that very condition. Accom-



This story began in WEIRD TALES for July

panied by Ronnie, he motors to Moor Lodge, Marle's former home, and in a safe there discovers a letter which seems to give the clue to the origin of the Terror of the Moor.

According to this statement, Marle had discovered a method whereby the nitrogen of the atmosphere, combined with the natural elements contained in every living body, might be utilized as a means of wholesale slaughter. The secret of the chemical formula by which this may be effected is contained in a sealed envelope, which Hugh places, unopened, in the safe. Marle's letter further states that he had taken into his employ a half-witted lad known as Crazy Jake, who, having memorized the formula, was about to betray it to Professor Lucien Felger, a suspected secret agent in the employ of a foreign power.

As the only means of preserving the secret, Marle determined to use his new invention on Jake as he made his way across the Moor to Felger's house. Marle examines the body of his victim after the explosion has taken place, and finds that the entire lower portion of the body has been completely destroyed.

Leaving the remains lying on the Moor, he hurries home, thinking his dread secret safe for all time. Some six months later, however, he is horrified to see the face of his victim gazing in at him through the library window. Later, when he examines the spot where the apparition has been standing, he finds the unmistakable trail of cloven hoofs. . . .

An attempt of Professor Felger to obtain the fateful formula is frustrated by Hugh's presence of mind. Next morning, determined to solve the secret of the professor's mysterious entry, he searches the ground in the vicinity of the lodge in the hope of finding a secret passage. In a cavern in the near-by cliff, he comes upon Inspector Renshaw of Scotland Yard, who offers to show him the workings of the abandoned lead mine which lie beyond.

At a point where a dank, earthy smell pervades the atmosphere, Renshaw suddenly extinguish his lamp, leaving Hugh in utter darkness.

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## 20

"HERE," said Renshaw's voice from the darkness, and Hugh felt himself grasped by the arm and urged gently forward. "Mind your head, the roof is very low. Round to your left, and here's what I brought you to see."

Turning an angle formed by a buttress of smooth rock, Hugh became aware of a thin shaft of golden sunlight slanting through the blackness and falling in an irregular circle on the opposite wall of rock. By its light he perceived that he was in a tiny natural chamber. The welcome daylight, as well as the twisted roots of some large tree which partly formed, partly supported the roof, showed that he was not far beneath the surface of the ground. The hole which admitted the ray of light was about a man's height from the floor of the cave; its outer rim was fringed with grass, and it had every appearance of being a natural rabbit burrow.

"My observation post," Renshaw explained, indicating the hole with a wave of his hand. "Care to have a look?"

Hugh Trenchard stepped up to the hole and peered through, and it was as much as he could do to stifle an outcry of amazement at what he saw. Separated from him only by the width of the grass-bordered moorland track, was his own house—Moor Lodge! Facing as it did the front right-hand angle of the house, this strange peephole commanded a view which included the front entrance as well

as the door at the side which gave access to the garden at the rear. It was impossible for any one to enter or leave, or even to approach the house without being observed by a concealed watcher in the little underground cave. A single glance satisfied him on this point, and he quickly turned to the detective by his side.

"Now I understand what you meant that night when you told me that you had my place under constant observation. And it also explains how you and your men managed to be on the spot so quickly after Ronnie and I entered the house. Of course you were already posted here before we arrived?"

Inspector Renshaw coughed modestly.

"Well, hardly that, sir," he hastened to disclaim. "You could hardly expect me to know just when somebody was going to turn up—we've had the place under observation for weeks previous to that, ever since the day following Marle's murder, in fact; and during that time not a soul has come near the place. We only keep one man at the 'observation hole'; the rest are quartered in a cottage about two miles down the combe—a mere hut it is. If the man on watch sees anything suspicious, or needs help at any time, he just flashes an agreed signal from the mouth of the cave overlooking the valley. Of course, all this is in confidence, sir."

"You may rely on my discretion, inspector," Hugh assured him. "I shan't mention your very ingenious arrangements to a soul—with the exception, maybe, of my close friend Doctor Brewster——"

"Not to *anybody*, if it's all the same to you, sir," said Renshaw quickly. "My experience teaches me that, no matter how clever an actor a man may be, he always acts most convincingly when he thinks he is speaking the truth, and it is of the utmost importance to my plans that everything should go on at Moor Lodge in exactly the same manner as if it were not under observation. That is most important."

"Very well, inspector. I will keep my own counsel. By the way," Hugh added suddenly, "were you watching the house last night?"

"Naturally." The inspector smiled slightly. "I saw you come into the garden from the direction of the rear of the house and meet Miss Endean, and I saw you both enter by the front door. But I will admit that I didn't notice you leave the house in the first place."

"No, you wouldn't!" said Hugh grimly. "I made my exit head first through the back upstairs window!" And in a few words he told him of the attempted hold-up by Professor Felger.

"That must have been the shot I heard just before I saw you," Renshaw said musingly when he had finished. "I thought it sounded too faint to have come from the house itself. But I'll take my oath that nobody entered the house by either door."

Hugh Trenchard slapped his knee triumphantly.

"Just as I thought—there's a secret door somewhere!"

"MAYBE," said the detective, slowly stroking his heavy mustache. "Maybe."

"How about making a thorough exploration of this old mine to see if any of the side passages lead directly beneath the house?"

Inspector Renshaw hailed the suggestion with enthusiasm.

"That's a good idea, sir. I'll signal for my men and we'll make a search without delay. It'll be a longish job, for this mine is as complicated as a maze,

once you quit the main galleries. The only way you can find your way about is to take a ball of twine and unwind it as you enter, and follow the line back in order to get out again. You might wander for days if you lost your bearings. But you may rely on us to go over it with a fine tooth comb."

There was a short pause, during which Renshaw remained deep in thought.

"Curious that you should have mentioned the possibility of some one else using the mine besides us," he remarked presently. "If it's true, it explains something that has puzzled me more than a little."

"And what is that?"

"When we first found this place we saw signs that there had been swarms of rabbits here recently — our observation hole was one of their burrows—but since then we've not caught sight of a single, solitary one."

Hugh murmured a perfunctory agreement, although in his own mind he did not attach much importance to this sudden migration. It was, he thought, far more likely that the advent of Inspector Renshaw himself had caused the rabbits to seek fresh fields and pastures new. That, however, was an unimportant detail; the great outstanding fact was the comforting knowledge that Moor Lodge, instead of being lonely and isolated, was watched and guarded far better than the average suburban villa. When, soon afterward, Hugh took his departure, he had a much enhanced opinion of the capabilities of the man from Scotland Yard. That morning he had fully made up his mind to lose no time in transferring the precious sealed envelope to the vaults of a safe deposit company in London; now, however, he was quite content to allow it to remain in the ingenious chemical-guarded safe that had been devised by Silas Marle. His mind was pleasantly at ease when, after having eaten a solitary cold lunch, he locked the door of Moor Lodge and set off to walk to Excombe.

In passing he threw a keen glance in the direction of Renshaw's observation post. It must lie, he decided, beneath that low grassy bank, overshadowed by the spreading branches of two dwarf oak trees. There were several rabbit-holes visible on the slope of the bank, but it was quite impossible to tell which one was being used by the hidden watcher. With a cheery but unobtrusive wave of his walking-stick, Hugh turned into the path which struck across the Moor.

His first step was to call on Mr. Andrew Shale. Making his way along the straggling High Street, with its quaintly blended mixture of ancient and modern architecture, he halted before a double-fronted Georgian house whose rounded bay-windows were half covered with old-fashioned wire blinds bearing the legend in letters of faded gilt, "Shale & Shale, Solicitors and Commissioners for Oaths."

He presented his card to the clerk in the outer office, and was soon ushered into the inner sanctum. The lawyer advanced to meet him as he entered, and Hugh was struck by the unusual warmth of the old man's greeting.

"Good morning, Doctor Trenchard. This is indeed an unexpected pleasure. Take a chair, my dear sir, take a chair. Your visit is most opportune—a most fortunate coincidence. I had intended to drive over and see you this very afternoon about a little matter that has cropped up with regard to Moor Lodge, but you have saved me that journey."

Hugh was conscious of a vague feeling of uneasiness.

"I hope there's no flaw in my inheritance?" he questioned.

"Oh, not at all, not at all. Your title is sound enough in that respect—unless, of course, Silas Marle should suddenly turn up and claim his property." Andrew Shale gave the ghost of a dry smile, as though at some hidden joke. "No, sir, you may rest easy on that score; the business I had in mind will be to your advantage rather than otherwise. But that can wait for the moment, for I presume you have come here to consult me on business of your own?"

At this hint, Hugh immediately plunged into the matter that had brought him there. The solicitor listened without speaking until he had finished, then nodded his gray head and again smiled genially.

"Of course, my dear sir, of course," he said. "You really need not have troubled to come personally about such a trifling matter. I intended to make it clear at our last interview that you might draw on me for any reasonable amount of ready money. It is true that the legal formalities, which will result in the handing over to you of Mr. Marle's large bank balance, have not yet been completed, but to all intents and purposes it is at your disposal. But it would be advisable for you to regard me as your banker for the time being."

He opened a drawer and produced an imposing check-book.

"Just tell me how much you require."

"It's rather a large sum," Hugh hesitated. "You see, I must have a car if I'm to live in such an isolated place, and a car will mean a garage to be built adjoining the house. I don't mean the ordinary type of garage, with brick walls and slate roof, but one specially planned to harmonize with the exterior of the old house—oak half-timbering, and weathered red tiles, and so forth. I shall have to consult an architect before I can tell you how much that will cost."

"H'm," purred the lawyer, thoughtfully stroking his gray side-whisker. "You need have no fear about the money not being forthcoming, but you may not need that garage after all."

"What do you mean?"

Andrew Shale opened a box-file and selected a letter.

"This morning I received a communication from a firm which styles itself 'The Country Hotel Development Syndicate.' Apparently it is a company that has been newly formed with the object of acquiring genuinely old houses situated amid pleasant and picturesque surroundings, and turning them into small residential hotels, while preserving their original Old World interest and comfort. You will perceive that they have made a very tempting offer for Moor Lodge."

He pushed the letter across the desk as he spoke. Hugh Trenchard looked at the figure and gasped. In his wildest dreams he had never imagined that the property could be worth one quarter of the huge sum which, quoted in figures and again in bracketed words to avoid the possibility of mistake, stared him in the face from the neatly typed sheet. As he looked, he felt an indefinite but profound suspicion forming in his mind.

"Do you know anything about this 'Country Hotel Development Syndicate'?" he asked, and the lawyer shrugged.

"I have already explained that it is a newly formed company, but their finances are sound enough. Their bankers' reference is unassailable. If I might venture to advise you, sir, I think it would be sound policy to close with the offer at once. It is a very tempting proposition."

"It's far more than the place is worth," Hugh objected.

"That is *their* look-out. They have offered the money, and this signed letter constitutes a legal contract from which they can not withdraw without your consent. After all, value in house property is a very elastic term. A residence which would have a merely nominal value to a private individual like yourself might appear very different to the directors of a syndicate desirous of developing it on novel and money-making lines."

"I'll think it over," said Hugh, rising to his feet.

Andrew Shale's gray brows flashed upward in an expression of deprecatory amazement.

"I don't see that it requires much thought, Doctor Trenchard. Most people would jump at such a tempting offer."

"It's a jolly long sight too tempting, Mr. Shale, and that's what makes me suspicious."

The genial smile had vanished from Shale's face and he was biting his under lip in unconcealed disappointment.

"I am only an intermediary in this matter, and it concerns me very little whether you decide one way or the other," he said with a belated pretense of indifference. "But I really fail to see your motive in declining to sell. Is it that you have taken a fancy to living in the neighborhood of the Moor? If so, there are plots of land to be acquired on the outskirts of this town, and the proceeds of the sale of Moor Lodge would cover the cost of the erection of an up-to-date bungalow, complete with garage, and leave a very handsome balance into the bargain."

But Hugh refused to be drawn into an argument.

"I'll think it over," he repeated, adding: "May I take this letter with me?"

"Certainly—I have already filed a copy for reference. But pray take care of it," he went on anxiously, "for it will come in useful if they try to back out of their offer."

There was a rather grim smile on Hugh Trenchard's face as he placed the letter in his wallet and crossed to the door.

"I don't anticipate any desire to back out on their part," he said quietly. "Good afternoon, Mr. Shale."

A BRISK ten minutes' walk brought him to Ronnie's surgery, where he discovered that far from hard-worked young man indulging in an after-dinner siesta. Ronnie listened with lazy indifference while Hugh told him of the amazing offer he had received, and at the conclusion expressed his opinion of his chum's business capabilities in terms which left nothing to the imagination.

"Well, of all the unmitigated asses!" he exclaimed contemptuously. "Why didn't you jump to it with both feet? I only wish some misguided dive-promoter would offer a tenth of the money for this old shack; then my economizing days would be over for good! You surely don't mean to say that you're going to turn down the offer of this—this what-do-they-call-themselves?"

Hugh drew the letter from his wallet.

"The Country Hotel Development Syndicate," he informed as he read the engraved heading. "And the offer is signed by a certain Cleve Marchmount."

He had merely glanced casually at the signature as he spoke, but now a strange sense of familiarity about the neat writing thrust itself into his mind. He looked closer, and then, moved by a sudden impulse, drew from his wallet the letter of assignation which had led to his exciting adventure at the Devil's Cheesepress. Placing them side by side, he compared the writing, then sat back with a gasp,

his heart hammering against his ribs, his eyes snapping with excitement.

Line for line, curve for curve, the handwriting was identical. The magnificent offer for the purchase of Moor Lodge had been signed by the same hand that had penned the note that had lured him to the midnight ambush in the Valley of Rocks!

Thrusting the two letters back in his wallet, he rose to his feet and faced his friend.

"Care to come and help me choose a car and see about the erection of a garage at Moor Lodge?" he queried of the astonished Ronnie. "I intend to stick to that house like a limpet, and to play the game through to the end!"

21

THE architect on whom Hugh Trenchard's random choice alighted proved to be the very man for the job. He was young, enthusiastic, and energetic; moreover, he had made a hobby of the study of the domestic architecture of bygone ages, and Hugh's unexpected commission came to him as a heaven-sent opportunity for the display of his specialized knowledge. He lost no time in visiting Moor Lodge and preparing a scale plan of the front elevation, and from this succeeded in evolving a garage-annex which so harmonized with the prevailing style that—on paper at any rate—it seemed part of the original structure.

By a lucky chance there happened to be a row of four Sixteenth Century cottages in the purlieus of the little market town, and these the owner had allowed to fall into such a state of dilapidation that they had been ordered to be demolished in the interests of public safety. The owner was only too glad to cut his loss by selling the material for a very modest sum, and, provided with this lucky windfall of antique oak beams, ready-weathered, hand-made bricks and tiles, to say nothing of the pick of the blown-glass, leaded windows, the architect mobilized his bricklayers and laborers and set them to work. Instead of inviting the usual tenders from building contractors, he superintended the job himself with the zest of a man whose heart was in his work. The result was a perfect gem of correct period craftsmanship, which subsequently figured in a supplementary colored plate in one of the leading journals devoted to practical architecture, and was incidentally the means of introducing this budding genius to more ambitious things.

The question of the car was settled even more speedily, and the venerable bricks and timbers that had sheltered generations of plowmen and farm laborers for four hundred years now found themselves sheltering a monster of shining enamel and gleaming metal, so unashamedly modern that it proclaimed itself a model of the year that had not yet dawned. It was, in short, a six-cylinder sports model with a torpedo pattern body, and capable of a speed that was never likely to be attained off a racing-track, unless the driver aspired to break a record—or his neck.

During the two weeks when the solitude of his moorland home had been invaded by a gang of workmen, and its deep silence broken by the noise of saw and hammer, and the ring of bricklayers' trowels, Hugh Trenchard had seen nothing of Joan Endean. In vain he hung about the empty house in Excombe, where he had talked with her when she had appeared so effectively disguised. He even took to calling at Ronnie's surgery at such times when he knew his friend would be absent visiting his patients, and from the front windows watched the windows of

the mysterious house through a pair of field glasses. But she might have completely vanished off the face of the earth for all he could see of her. Coming out of the vastness of the lonely waste of bog, bracken and frowning crags of granite; passing through his life for a brief space like a storm-driven wraith, it seemed almost as if the desolate Moor, which had brought her to him, had again taken her to its broad, mysterious, mist-veiled bosom and had claimed her for its own.

As the weeks glided by, he kept his eyes and ears open for signs of fresh activity on the part of the horned apparition which Silas Marle had graphically dubbed "The Terror of the Moor." But it was through the medium of the local press that he received the first news of the elusive monster's reappearance.

HE WAS seated in the sitting-room of Moor Lodge, idly glancing through the pages of the weekly newspaper which maintained a somewhat sluggish circulation through the district, when, wedged between the report of a local cattle sale and a description of a new type of reaping-machine, his eye lighted on a paragraph which brought him to his feet with tingling pulses. It bore a double heading:

STRANGE STORY FROM GUPWORTHY

WELL-KNOWN FARMER ATTACKED BY FEROCIOUS BEAST

An alarming and in some respects mysterious occurrence took place on the Excombe Road, near Gupworthy, at a late hour last night. Mr. John Thacker, of Uphill farm, Gupworthy (a familiar and much-respected figure in local agricultural circles), was in the act of returning to his home after having attended Excombe Market. Accompanied by one of his drovers, an elderly man named Amos Vokes, he set out from Excombe shortly after 10 p. m., and whilst passing over the extensive stretch of uncultivated ground commonly known as Gallows Heath, he was surprized to hear a voice, apparently coming from a dense clump of bushes, calling on him to halt. Thinking the cry emanated from some wayfarer who had met with an accident and was in need of assistance, Mr. Thacker immediately turned his horse in the direction of the supposedly injured man.

We have been unable to ascertain with any degree of exactitude what subsequently occurred, but our representative gathered from the brief statement that Mr. Thacker was able to give him, that he found himself confronted by the figure of a naked, or half-naked man who, he states, appeared to be riding on the back of a large stag. Mr. Amos Vokes, however, who seems to have had a better view of this unexpected sight, stedfastly adheres to his statement that the unclothed man was not riding on the back of the stag, but actually formed part of the animal itself. To quote his own expressive words: "The gashly thing were half-and-half."

While not committing ourselves by expressing an opinion as to the accuracy of the impression afforded by Mr. Vokes's admittedly hurried glimpse in the uncertain light, we regret to state that the injuries sustained by both men leave no doubt that the unknown made a violent and murderous attack on the two defenseless men, though happily the injuries of neither are likely to prove fatal.

Sergeant Jopling, our popular and energetic representative of the County Constabulary, was promptly on the scene, and we have been given to understand that there is every possibility of an early arrest being effected in connection with the matter.

Meanwhile the fact of such a thing being at large on the Moor has given rise to a feeling of uneasiness among the dwellers in this sparsely populated district.

Although the local scribe had infused a fair amount of caution—not to say skepticism—into his work, Hugh Trenchard's own experience enabled him to supply the gaps fairly vividly. But he was determined to know more, and ten minutes after his eye had lighted on the headline he was seated at the wheel of his new car, speeding to the scene of the affray.

GALLOWS HEATH was an undulating shoulder of ground of a slightly higher elevation than the rest of the upland wilderness. At a spot just before the narrow ribbon of road dipped out of sight over the farther slope, a few slabs of moss-grown stone still remained to mark the spot where formerly had stood the grim erection that had served both as an instrument of harsher justice than prevails today, and as a warning text whose meaning could not have been miscon-

strued by the most illiterate passer-by. For in those far-off days the body of the malefactor, suitably coated with pitch and adorned with rusty chains, was pressed into service to point the moral of his own untimely fate.

Hugh did not have a long search before finding the exact spot where Thacker and his drover had been attacked. There was but one clump of bushes large enough to conceal a man. This was situated on the opposite side of the road from the site of the ancient gallows, and in the dense shade of the overhanging boughs the ground was as soft and plastic as the keenest amateur detective could desire. Footprints were there in plenty, but they were not the ones that Hugh Trenchard was anxious to see. The date of the paper had told him that four days had elapsed since the affray had taken place, and during that time the place had been overrun by scores of curious sightseers, and such tracks as might have been left by the Terror had been hopelessly obliterated.

Hugh gave one long, searching look at the ground, then, with a resigned shrug, turned and re-entered his car. He was scarcely surprized at drawing a blank; but he hoped to learn something from the two injured men, provided that they were sufficiently recovered to grant him an interview. He started the car and swooped down the inclined road which pointed straight to the distant cluster of houses which represented Gupworthy.

He had fully expected to find the two victims in their beds, or at the best reclining in easy-chairs. But his knock on the door of Uphill Farm brought a buxom, rosy-cheeked lass who, in the slow, burring dialect of broadest "Zummerzet," informed him that "Maister be upalong at poun-'ouse."

"And where may that be?" asked the frankly puzzled Hugh.

"The poun-'ouse be the wring'ouse," she explained with the air of one imparting the fullest possible explanation.

"Wring-house? I fear I'm very ignorant, but——"

"That be place weer they presses the apples for zider, zur."

A light broke on Hugh. "Oh, the cider-press? And how do I get there?"

"Coom wi' me and I'll show 'ee. 'Tain't var away, zur."

Hugh followed the girl through the house and out into a wide stone-paved yard lined on either side with thatched byres and stables, and having a large pump in the center. Hugh could not help noticing the fact that the place appeared unusually silent and deserted, and he made a remark to that effect. His guide explained that it "weer apple-harvest toime", and everybody except herself was either in the orchards helping to gather in the fruit, or in the wring-house engaged in turning the apples into cider.

The cider-house was an ancient and somewhat dilapidated structure standing about fifty yards from the farmhouse. Against one wall was heaped a very mountain of russet-hued fruit, a mountain whose bulk never diminished, in spite of the efforts of the two brawny laborers who were engaged in shovelling the apples through a square aperture which led to the hopper of the crushing-mill inside; for as fast as they shovelled, a constant stream of men, women, boys and girls kept up the supply from their brimming baskets.

Stepping inside, Hugh Trenchard became aware of a scene of Old World rustic picturesqueness that would call for the brush of a Morland to do it justice. The greater part of the rambling building was wrapped in deep, umberous shadow, but here and there broad shafts of the mellow October sunshine slanted

through the unglazed windows, throwing random splashes of light and color which, however, only served to deepen the dusky mystery of the surrounding gloom. The air was fragrant with the sweet, penetrating vapor which arose from the fermenting cider that was stored in the long row of shadowy vats standing along one wall. In the center was the grinding-mill, a huge primitive contrivance with great iron cog-wheels, red with rust except on the actual working-parts, and grinding-rollers of ponderous stone, beneath whose slow revolutions there seethed and squelched the pulpy mass which would eventually become the clear, sparkling beverage that had been termed, not inaptly, the "Vintage of the West." A little apart, a sober old cart-horse ceaselessly trudged his slow, circling path, communicating the necessary motion to the pulping-gear.

At Hugh's entry, a hale, weather-beaten old man glanced round from his task of lubricating the moving machinery.

"A ge'mman to see 'ee, varther," the girl announced, and immediately hurried back to her interrupted duties.

FARMER THACKER at once laid down the oil-can, wiped his hands on a wisp of straw, and advanced to Hugh.

"Good marnin', zur. What moight 'ee be wantin' wi' I?" he inquired with rough civility.

Hugh kept his eyes on the old man as he proceeded to explain the object of his visit. Save for a large patch of court-plaster on his forehead, Farmer Thacker showed but little signs of his recent encounter with the Terror of the Moor. But the trained eye of the young doctor noticed an unusual sluggishness in his movements, and the eyes which were peering at him from beneath the shaggy gray brows were abnormally dull and vacant. When Hugh had finished speaking the old man stared at him for a few moments, then passed his hand across his brow in a bewildered and helpless manner.

"I dunno as how I can tell 'ee overmuch, zur," he said slowly. "Ever since that night I feels all mazed and witless."

"What was it that attacked you?"

"Can't rightly zay, zur," replied Thacker, shaking his head.

"Was it a man?"

"Belike it weer—I couldn't rightly zee. Theer warn't no moon that night, zur, just a zort o' dimpsy-light from the stars."

"But you told Sergeant Jopling that you heard some words spoken," Hugh persisted, more than a little puzzled at the man's vague manner.

"Aye, you'm right theer, zur. I hears 'un, speakin' same's you or me. But when he coomed out from the clutter o' bushes I sees——"

"Yes?" Hugh prompted eagerly.

Thacker stopped dead, and again passed his hand across his forehead.

"I—I doan seem to mind what happened then. My brain seems dazed an' dead-loike."

Suddenly Hugh leant forward, his eyes fixed on the upper portion of the old man's arm which showed below his uprolled shirt sleeve. Showing red and angry against the sun-tanned skin were several marks which Hugh immediately recognized as the punctures made by a recently used hypodermic syringe.

"Who has been giving you injections?" he asked, sharply, all his vague suspicions crystallizing in an instant into one staggering fact. It was clear by the old man's expression that he did not understand; so Hugh repeated his question in a simpler form:

"What doctor attended to your injuries, Mr. Thacker?"

"Theer weer two on 'em as happened to be passin' a'most the same time as I got back-along home to the varm, and they weer kind enow to see to my hurts and those of my man, Amos."

"Humph! their arrival was very fortunate!" was Hugh's somewhat dry comment. "And did these kind gentlemen prick your arm?"

"Iss, fay," said the old man, nodding, "and they stucked needle into me every time they called since then. It tooked away the pain voine."

"I dare say it did," Hugh muttered, his eyes hardening to points of steel. "And what were the names of these good fellows?"

Thacker shook his head.

"They didn't zay, zur. But my gal said that she recognized one of 'em. She said he lived at the big house beyond Worplecombe and that his name was Doctor Felger."

"Felger?" Hugh jerked out the exclamation in a gasp. "The devil!"

"I fear you exaggerate, my dear Doctor Trenchard," said a smooth voice behind him, and, swinging round, Hugh saw for the first time the face of his elusive enemy.

22

THE newcomer had removed his hat with a sweeping bow as he had uttered his cynical greeting, and now stood bareheaded in the full glare of a shaft of sunlight which illuminated his face with the intensity of a theatrical spotlight, rendering each feature clear and distinct. There was no sign of furtiveness in Professor Felger's manner now. The position he had taken and the attitude he had assumed both seemed indicative of mocking defiance, as though he were inviting Hugh Trenchard to examine the features which he had till then kept carefully concealed.

Hugh, on his part, was not slow to take advantage of the opportunity, and as he looked he realized, with secret satisfaction, that the personal appearance of the Austrian scientist was striking enough to be easily remembered. Slightly above the average height, his well-proportioned body hinted at the litheness of a panther rather than the possession of great strength. His age was difficult to guess, for the almost blue-black hue of his hair and beard was suggestive of the use of dye. His complexion was so sallow that Hugh decided that he must either be in very poor health or else have a strong strain of Eastern blood in his veins. His hair, which was plentiful, was brushed straight back from a decided point in the center of his forehead, and this, combined with his short pointed beard and up-turned, waxed mustaches, gave him an aspect that was startlingly Mefistofelian. There was a look of sardonic amusement in the pale eyes which, keen as spear-points, challenged Hugh's from beneath the oblique brows.

There ensued a long pause, during which the eyes of the two men met, watchful and challenging as two duellists awaiting the first clash of steel. Then Professor Felger, replacing his hat with a slow, sweeping movement of his hand, broke the tense silence.

"It would seem that my presence here occasions you some surprize, Doctor Trenchard?" he murmured, and once again Hugh was aware of the note of mockery hidden in the silky tones.

"On the contrary," he returned steadily, looking the other full in the face, "considering the curious nature of Mr. Thacker's symptoms, your presence here seems perfectly natural."

Professor Felger's jet-black brows flickered upward and a slow smile curved his bearded lips.

"Symptoms?" he repeated the word with an air of amiable tolerance. "You speak with the air of one who has discovered a—how do you call it?—a—a nest of a mare. So, you have observed his symptoms?"

"I have!" Hugh said grimly, "—all of them!"

"So?" Felger's manner expressed no more than a polite and gratified interest as he went on. "Truly it is touching to see a novice in medical science evince such an altruistic interest in an unfortunate sufferer—especially when that sufferer happens to be under the care of another medical man. But I have yet to learn that it is a recognized ethic of your English medical etiquette for one doctor to interfere with the patient of another. You see, I am but a stranger in your so-excellent country, and I should be obliged if you will be kind enough to enlighten my ignorance on that point, Doctor Trenchard."

"I will do more, sir," Hugh cried, stung into sudden anger by the scarcely veiled insult. "I will enlighten your ignorance on a point of law. It is an indictable offense for an alien doctor to practise in the so-called country of his adoption (as you term it), especially when such practise includes the injection of drugs which do not figure in the *British Pharmacopeia.*"

Hugh had expected his words to be greeted with an outburst of fury, but Felger merely laughed.

"Ah, but that is a very wise provision on the part of your lawmakers," he said in a tone of hearty agreement, "but in this case their edicts have not been violated in the least degree. Mr. John Thacker is not *my* patient—I have no more interest in his case than, say, a friendly and disinterested inquirer like yourself. My excellent colleague, Doctor Nathaniel Mutley, is in sole charge of the case, and I feel sure that such an old and experienced practitioner would not inject anything except the recognized palliatives, or maybe a—ah—narcotic to soothe pain."

Before answering, Hugh glanced at the old farmer, who had been listening open-mouthed. Luckily the conversation had so far been as unintelligible as so much Greek to his simple understanding, but now Hugh had something to say that was for Felger's ears alone.

"I should like a word with you in private," he said to Felger.

"By all means—a thousand if you wish." The professor turned to the gaping farmer and gracefully raised his hat. "Good morning, Mr. Thacker. I am delighted to see you so hale and active. Allow me to congratulate you on such a rapid and complete recovery from your injuries. Good morning." And, after shaking the old man heartily by the hand, he followed Hugh out into the deserted farmyard. Once outside, however, he cast a keen, lightning glance at the young man's face.

"IF YOU are so desirous of a private interview with me, why not call at the Sanatorium?" he asked suavely. "There would be no risk of our talk being overheard there, and we would be quite safe from interruption."

"I dare say we should," Hugh commented, a hint of dryness in his voice. "But I prefer to say what I've got to say right here and now."

"As you please," shrugged the other, and waited.

And there, amid the drowsy peace of that Old World rustic scene, his voice, accompanied by the distant cackle of poultry, bleating of sheep and lowing of kine, Hugh Trenchard spoke of life and

death . . . and of a thing worse than death.

"Have you ever heard of 'The Apple of Lethe'?" was his first question.

Felger repeated the question slowly, then shook his head.

"I am afraid my Greek mythology must be somewhat rusty," he said with an apologetic shrug. "I can only remember the *Waters* of Lethe, the river of forgetfulness in the classical Hades, of which the spirits drank before entering Elysium. But I certainly have no recollection of an *Apple* of Lethe."

"I will refresh your memory by calling it by its modern botanical name," said Hugh. "Does *Datura obliterare* suggest anything to you?"

"No!" Felger jerked out the denial with a cold, rasping ring.

"Then, at the risk of boring you, I will explain," Hugh went on calmly. "*Datura obliterare* is a rare species of the genus of plants which are classed under the general name of *Solanaceæ.* A very curious feature of this widely distributed order is that some varieties yield valuable food products, some have a recognized medicinal value, while others are powerful narcotic poisons. Stranger still, some varieties have certain parts with poisonous properties, while other parts of the same plant are innocuous."

"All this is very interesting, no doubt," interrupted the other impatiently. "And I congratulate you on your detailed knowledge, but——"

"You can cut out the congratulations for the present, and just listen. The peculiar properties of the *Datura* group have long been recognized. In India the seeds of the *Datura fastuosa* have been employed from time immemorial by thieves and other criminals; the Peruvians prepare a delirium-producing beverage from the seeds of *Datura sanguinea;* while in China a tincture of *Datura stramonium* is voluntarily swallowed by its devotees to induce erotic visions and hallucinations. All these, as I said, have long been known. But the most dangerous species of all was not known to scientific botanists until fairly recently. It was in 1913 that Rudolf Bräuschütter—a fellow countryman of yours, by the way—discovered a new variety growing wild on Lanzarote, a small island of the Canaries group, off the west coast of Africa, and to this he gave the very appropriate name of *Datura obliterare.* Bräuschütter on returning to his native land published a monograph on his find, a work that is now extremely rare owing to the amazing fact that he almost immediately suppressed it and forbade the publication of more copies. I was lucky enough to get hold of one, however, very recently, and it greatly interested me. The author, who seems to be an excellent all-round scientist, introduced his subject by a curious reference to the mythology of ancient Greece. After remarking that the local name for the fruit of the newly discovered plant was a word meaning 'Apple of Lethe', he proceeded to propound the startling theory that Lanzarote, the only place where it grew, was the island described by Homer in the *Odyssey* under the name of the Island of Ææa, where dwelt the enchantress Circe. Quoting from the original Greek of the ancient poem, Bräuschütter went on to declare that Circe's 'charmed cup' in which were mixed 'infusing drugs' meant nothing else than an infusion of *Datura obliterare,* and the subsequent metamorphoses of the followers of the Greek hero into 'swine in head and voice, bristles and shape' was simply a poetical mode expressing the brain-destroying properties of the drug, and the 'harmful venom' which made 'their country vanish from

their thought' was but a naïve way of describing the complete atrophy of the nerves of the anterior lobes of the brain which control the memory."

"Your little lecture may be very interesting to one interested in fairy-tales, ancient or modern, but I can scarcely see the point of your inflicting it on me," Felger burst out angrily.

"Wait! the point will soon be plain enough. Herr Bräuschütter described the outward symptoms which follow the injection of his new drug, and those symptoms coincide in every respect with those of the man whom you and your partner have been attending! Doctor Felger, why have you gone to so much trouble to ensure the silence of the only man who could describe the appearance of the monster that is known as the Terror of the Moor?"

FELGER had anticipated the accusation, and had braced himself to meet it. As Hugh's scathing words rang out, the Austrian turned and stared him full in the face, and in his cold gray eyes was the fixed, baleful glare of a snake about to strike. Only his lips were smiling as he replied:

"I really can't persuade myself that you intend me to take your accusation seriously, my dear Doctor Trenchard."

"Maybe Scotland Yard will be able to persuade you," Hugh suggested grimly.

The professor indulged in an elaborate shrug.

"The most that Scotland Yard would do would be to listen to your story with polite interest and then dismiss you with the stock phrase which they keep for all the spinners of airy theories who waste their time."

"What if I offered them something more than airy theories—the record of Silas Marle's experiments, and the description of the Apple of Lethe from Herr Bräuschütter's book?"

There was a few seconds' pause.

"The latter might be somewhat difficult to offer," Felger then said slowly. "I understand that the publication is very rarely met with nowadays."

"But I happen to have a copy," Hugh cried in quick triumph.

Professor Lucien Felger raised his hand to the brim of his soft felt hat, at the same time bending his body in a low, ironical bow.

"In that case, allow me to compliment you on your forethought—and to bid you 'Good day'."

He raised his hat as he spoke, and Hugh glimpsed a tiny metal nozzle pointing straight at him from the inside of the crown. Instinctively he stepped backward. But, quick as he was, the professor was a fraction of a second quicker. His hand pressed the yielding crown and a dense spray of liquid drenched Hugh's face.

Hugh fell back, reeling, gasping, fighting madly against the cloud of stupefying vapor that was like a palpable but invisible hand clutching his throat. Then a curtain of darkness seemed to descend on his mind, and like a man in a dream he heard the low purring of the swift car that was bearing his exultant foe—whither?

Then came a sensation of being borne dizzily downward in a lift that had no end, and then he remembered no more.

## 23

HUGH TRENCHARD'S mind was still spinning in a confused maelstrom when, after a space of utter blankness which seemed to have lasted ages, he again opened his eyes.

With a dull sense of wonder he realized that it was still day, but the light

which greeted his eyes was the tempered sunshine that filtered through the drawn curtains of the window in his own bedroom at Moor Lodge. He was lying on his bed, and presently he began to speculate whether his encounter with the professor was nothing but an unpleasantly vivid dream. With a great effort of will, he re-opened his eyes, and immediately came to the conclusion that he was still dreaming.

But now, he decided, his dream had taken a pleasing phase, and he devoutly hoped that it would continue. For there, seated by the table near the window, was the mystery-girl who had been ever present in his waking dreams—Joan Endean.

With a supine sense of contentment he allowed his eyes to rest on her slender, girlish figure as she sat busily writing in a dainty note-book. Her face was in shadow, but the sunshine behind her framed her head with the nimbus of the saintly ideal of some old Italian painter, outlining the perfect curve of her brow and neck, drenching with a deeper gold her mass of gleaming hair.

A faint murmur of admiration escaped Hugh's lips, and abruptly a fantasm much less pleasing to Hugh's idea of beauty intruded itself into his vision. It was his red-headed chum, Ronnie Brewster, with a medicine glass in his hand and an anxious grin on his good-humored but by no means handsome features.

"Behold, the wounded hero awakes!" he said dramatically. "And if the wounded hero aforesaid doesn't show more originality than to bleat out the usual 'Where am I?' as his first articulate speech, I will undo all Miss Endean's and my own good work by braining the wounded hero forthwith! Has that horrific threat trickled into your returning consciousness? Good! Then drink this."

He held the glass to Hugh's lips.

"A simple prescription, and one not wholly unknown outside medical circles," Ronnie commented with another grin. "Did you like it?"

"It tasted like whisky," Hugh said slowly.

Ronnie gave a chuckle of delight and rubbed his hands.

"Capital! Capital! You haven't lost your memory, at any rate, since you are able to recognize your old friends so unerringly. Speaking of old friends, here is Miss Endean, who found you this morning roosting peacefully among the ducks and geese in old Thacker's farmyard."

He stood aside and Joan came forward and laid her hand for an instant in Hugh's.

"You?" he looked up at her with unconcealed wonder in his eyes. "At last you have come to me?"

"Yes—and in the jolly old nick of time—just like a movie-film," interpolated the irrepressible Ronnie. "By Jove! she must have arrived on the scene almost as if she knew that it was your turn to be sent down for the long count by that highly scientific thug—for I naturally assume it was either Felger or his amiable myrmidons who downed you?"

Hugh struggled to rise as recollection came back.

"It was!" he muttered fiercely. "He squirted some fluid in my face——"

"And the subsequent proceedings interested you no more?" quoted Ronnie. "But whatever made him do a thing like that? You—you didn't try to arrest him or anything?"

Hugh shook his head and immediately went on to give an outline of what had occurred. At the conclusion Ronnie's customary smile appeared a trifle twisted.

"Holy smoke! the mystery is getting more turbid and sticky than ever!" he exclaimed. "Gosh! I only wish to whisk-

ers that I could get the chance to inject a little of that Apple-of-Lethe-tincture into some of my creditors, and make them forget what I owe 'em! That stuff would be worth a guinea a drop to me!"

"Oh, for goodness' sake try to be serious for once in your life," Hugh expostulated, but his friend only shook a grinning head at him.

"I couldn't, old bean. It'd take a major operation to eradicate my sense of humor. But I will relieve you of my exhilarating presence by departing—I am sure you and your fair rescuer will have a lot of things to talk over, and I should not like to spoil the interview with my ribald comments. Ta-ta for the present. Just ring the bell when you feel you'd like the prescription repeated."

DURING the long silence which ensued after Ronnie had made his laughing exit Hugh glanced at the girl once or twice out of the corner of his eye, and the look which he surprized in her eyes sent his pulses racing. Her eyes had only met his for the merest fraction of a second, but in that second a miracle seemed to have happened. She loved him. The sudden realization was like a breath of pure oxygen to a suffocating man. It inflamed him with an overwhelming longing to take her in his arms, to tell her of his own love; to leap, as it were, the dark gulf which stretched between them and force from those sweet lips the true explanation of the mystery that surrounded her life.

But he had the good sense to recognize that this was scarcely the time or place for such an avowal. He schooled his voice to a casual tone when at length he spoke:

"So you too paid a visit to Thacker's Farm this morning! Was that due to mere curiosity on your part or—something else?"

"Idle curiosity is a luxury that is denied to such as I." The smile which accompanied her words held a suspicion of wistfulness. "To be quite frank, I went there for the same purpose as you did—to get Thacker's story of the Terror of the Moor. As I approached the side road which leads to the farm, a car was driven past me at full speed, and I was forced to crouch into the hedge at the side of the lane to avoid being run down. I caught but a fleeting glance at the driver, but it was enough to enable me to recognize Professor Felger. He was crouched over the steering-wheel, his eyes glaring straight ahead, and the expression on his features was simply diabolical. I at once suspected that something was wrong, and hurried up the lane and went straight through to the yard—and there I found you. Two of the farm hands carried you to your car; I drove you back here, calling for Doctor Brewster on the way; and—and that's all there is to tell."

"Scarcely all," smiled Hugh, shaking his head. "There still seems to be quite a lot of things to explain."

She slowly raised her head and he saw that her expression was almost defiant.

"What sort of things are they that need explaining?" she asked coldly.

"Oh, all sort of things," he returned, endeavoring to speak lightly. "About yourself, for instance——"

"Please leave me out of it." She seemed to catch her breath as she spoke, uttering the words so low that he could scarcely hear them.

"I can't leave you out of it. As far as I'm concerned you are the central and most attractive figure in the whole of this ghastly business. Forgive me if I pursue the matter, but—is your name really Joan Endean?"

He saw the fingers of her clasped hands writhe together and a tinge of

deeper red creep up her smooth throat and burn in her cheeks.

"My—my name is Joan."

"Endean?" He put the query in a low voice, at the same time taking her hand in his.

"That is an alias." The girl laughed with an assumption of defiant abandon which, however, did not for a moment deceive the keen-eyed Hugh Trenchard. "Oh, there's nothing to be surprized at in that. Every suspicious character, such as I, uses an alias."

She made to withdraw her hand, but he grasped it tighter as he went on:

"You may be mysterious, but not suspicious, at least not to me," he said tenderly. "I do not seek to force your confidence, but I can not call you by a name that is not your own. Since 'Endean' is but an alias, I must call you by your only real name that I know. But won't you trust me . . . *Joan?*"

It was several breathless seconds before she spoke, and in her voice was a wistful note that thrilled like a chord of music.

"Freely will I trust you with all that is my own"—the quick flash of her laughing eyes gave point to the *double entendre* which lay in her words—"but who I am, what I am, and the mission that has brought me to Exmoor are secrets that are not my own. You asked me to trust you just now. Well, now I will repeat your words and ask you to trust me. Soon—very soon, maybe—you will know all. Till then——"

"Till then we will trust each other, eh?" cried Hugh, and thereupon he sealed the compact in the convincing manner that was in vogue between man and maid long before the invention of written agreements or contract-notes.

At length she disengaged herself and smoothed her ruffled hair.

"Am I to regard your extraordinary conduct as a symptom of relapse, or an indication of complete recovery?" she asked severely, though her eyes were dancing. "If your medical adviser——"

"If you mean Ronnie, you may tell my medical adviser to go to blazes," Hugh cried with a laugh. "Or—stop!—tell him that his patient never felt so blithe and gay in all his life, and that he'll be up and dressed in about three minutes from now."

A WILD elation filled Hugh's mind when the girl had left the room. The memory of her so recently in his arms tinged his whole mental outlook with an alluring, rose-tinted hue, and if for an instant there obtruded through that rosy dream the vision of a horned head with baleful, leering eyes of luminous green, it was not sufficiently distinct to abate one jot of his new-found happiness. Joan was his!—the unravelling of the mystery of the Terror could wait. Thus ran his thoughts as he hastily dressed, with the dark hand of impending catastrophe casting not the faintest shadow of its coming on his carefree mind.

"Well, old bean, what's the next jolly old move in your duel of wits with the professor?" drawled Ronnie as Hugh entered the library. "This affair reminds me of nothing so much as a game of blindfold chess—you know, the game where both players are unable to see the board and have to keep in mind both their own and their opponent's moves, as well as the position of every piece on the board. It's a nice, brainy pastime, but a trifle too slow for my liking. I prefer a game with a bit more dash in it."

"Before long there will be enough 'dash' in this particular game to satisfy your craving for excitement," said Hugh, "and it is not so much a blindfold game

as you imagine. At least I have seen the face of Professor Felger, and after what happened this morning I have grounds on which to prefer a definite charge against him."

Ronnie Brewster indulged in a contemptuous grimace.

"Yes—a charge of assault and battery, with yourself as the only witness! Even if you proved your case, which is very doubtful, what good would it do to get Felger fined forty bob, or even a few days in jail? No, old chap, you must wait till you have a bigger charge against him than that. You said just now that you had seen his face. Well, I've gone one better than you. I've snapped his face."

"Snapped his face?" Hugh shook his head with a puzzled expression. "Is that a riddle?"

"Not on your life. I mean I've snapped his face with a camera." Ronnie lit a cigarette and puffed it with an air of supreme satisfaction. "It happened like this. I was passing the gates of the Torside Sanatorium yesterday, when who should come out but a tall, black-bearded guy who looked like the Devil in mufti."

"That was the professor!" Hugh burst out with some excitement.

"Just what I thought myself at the time, dear boy, and I thanked my lucky stars that I had my camera with me. I stepped up to him, raised my hat politely, and asked to be directed to a village on the farther side of the Moor. I fear I must have appeared very dull, for he had to explain the route to me twice before I seemed to assimilate the information, and during that time I managed to press the button twice, and got two lovely photos—full-face and profile—without the professor being any the wiser. Here are the enlarged prints——" and he laid two unmounted photographs on the table.

Hugh seized on them eagerly.

"Excellent! The authorities at Scotland Yard will be delighted to get these."

"I dare say they will, but they're not going to get them," Ronnie responded dryly. "I didn't go to all that trouble to help some flat-footed copper get promotion. I intend to have some fun of my own before I let the police in on this. How would you say the professor's height compares with mine?" he asked, apparently going off at a tangent.

Hugh cast a critical eye over the proportions of his chum.

"About the same, as nearly as I can remember."

"Good! And the build?"

"Also about the same. But what is the idea?"

"See here"—Ronnie took up the photographs and held them so that his fingers covered the hair and beard of each—"I'm not trying to shower bouquets on myself, but I think you'll agree that at a casual glance those features are not widely different from my own. With a cleverly made wig and beard, and a touch of black grease-paint on my eyebrows, I wouldn't make a bad impersonation of Professor Lucien Felger. At any rate I intend to have a shot at it. I've been complimented on my amateur acting on more than one occasion, as you yourself will admit, and I flatter myself I could keep my end up as far as the voice and foreign accent were concerned. I'm going to start rehearsing as soon as I get back home, and I'll give you a dress rehearsal all to yourself before I make the great attempt."

Hugh looked doubtful.

"What, exactly, is your plan?"

"Haven't got more than the barest outline of one at present," Ronnie confessed with a grin. "But if I succeed in getting inside the Torside Sanatorium without my real identity being discovered, it'll be

a funny thing if I don't get hold of some evidence that will bring that infernal scoundrel's career to an abrupt termination."

HARD upon his words came a knock on the front door. Hugh glanced through the window and gave an exclamation of surprize.

"It's Inspector Renshaw of the C. I. D.," he muttered just loud enough for Ronnie to hear. "I wonder why he has taken it into his head to call?"

"A Scotland Yard man?" Ronnie laid his hand on his friend's arm. "Don't breathe a word of my little stunt to him—it would spoil everything to have the police in this. They can come in afterward to clear up the mess, but I want to have my bit of fun all to myself first."

Hugh nodded his head in token of agreement, and went to admit his unexpected caller. Inspector Renshaw favored him with a long, keen glance as he entered.

"You seem to have recovered pretty quickly from your nasty experience, sir," he observed. "What did he use—chloroform?"

"Something much more effective," Hugh returned with a rueful laugh. "But who told you of my experience?"

"Nobody." The inspector lowered his voice. "From my peephole I saw you being carried unconscious into the house, and I put two and two together, and surmised that you had gone to the farm to get details from the injured man. But you should have left that to us."

"Should I?" cried Hugh, with a pardonable feeling of pride. "Well, it may interest you to know that my medical knowledge has shown me something which would have escaped a layman. Thacker has been doped with a rare drug which acts on the nerve centers that control the memory. Come into the library, and I will show you a monograph written by Herr Bräuschütter, the scientist who discovered the rare plant from which it is prepared."

Hugh Trenchard led the way into the room as he spoke and halted opposite the shelves of books which covered one wall. He was in the act of running his eyes along the volumes when he suddenly whirled round with a gasped question:

"Who entered this house today, inspector?"

"Only Doctor Brewster and yourself—and, of course, Miss Endean."

"You're sure of that?"

"Positive!"

"Then that proves my theory of the existence of a secret entry into the house," Hugh cried. "Some time within the past four hours Herr Bräuschütter's monograph, which describes the action of the memory-stealing drug, has been stolen from that bookcase!"

**The mystery deepens in next month's thrilling chapters of this story, as Hugh Trenchard explores the cellars of the Torside Sanatorium**

"He bent above the pair—the man and beast, face and muzzle almost touching."


# Voodoo Vengeance

By KIRK MASHBURN

*A thrill-tale of ancient magic, brought from the black island of Haiti to the United States—with shocking consequences*

"MY INTEREST in psychopathic research, as it affects crime or otherwise, does not extend to private practise," Doctor Forest Loring coldly informed his visitors. "There is nothing in this case to warrant an exception."

Captain Frane flushed angrily beneath the tan of his strong, lean face. The dark eyes of the white-faced girl beside him grew deeper with somber hopelessness.

"Our mutual friend, the district attorney, advised me to see you——" Frane began, but was bruskly interrupted.

"So you have said before, I believe," Doctor Loring retorted. "I have helped him in one or two cases, because they involved factors of interest in my line of

psychological research. In your own case, there has not even been a crime. Your wife apparently entertains a form of persecution complex—which hardly justifies interruption of some very pressing experiments I am conducting."

Controlling his anger as he turned toward his wife, Frane said, merely, "Come, my dear. Let us go."

As he rose stiffly to his feet, a deep-throated growl sounded beneath the open window at Doctor Loring's side. A shaggy head with a lean, pointed muzzle heaved into view; long, slavering fangs gleamed in a saturnine snarl. With its forepaws upon the low sill, a monstrous, wolfish thing glared through the window, its eyes hot with red ferocity.

Natalie Frane stifled a scream.

"There it is!" her husband exclaimed, his voice not quite steady. "Perhaps my wife's fear of her stepbrother is a 'persecution complex', but his police dog—unless the thing's really a wolf!—has followed us here!"

Without haste, Doctor Loring reached into a drawer of his desk. Taking out an object somewhat resembling a small automatic pistol, he pointed it toward the window, and a thin, needle-like stream of liquid spurted toward the dog.

With a roar that changed abruptly to choking gasps, the sinister muzzle dropped from view; the gasping coughs retreated rapidly. The smell of ammonia cleared quickly from the room.

"A very effective weapon, as I have found on other occasions," Doctor Loring calmly announced. "You say the dog belongs to your wife's unpleasant relative? I shall ring for Tou-Tou, and find out why it was permitted inside my yard."

"The brute can jump walls higher than yours," Frane answered him, with a mirthless laugh.

He picked up his hat and stick, as a door opened and Tou-Tou, the doctor's black and gaunt Haitian servant, slipped through. He handed his master a small, manila-wrapped box, with the laconic explanation—

"Bell rang; I looked and found this. No one was there."

Captain Frane, ex-Marine with four years of Haitian service to his credit, understood the words of creole *patois*. As the black man departed, the captain uneasily regarded the mysterious parcel.

"I can't help wondering," he hesitantly offered, "whether Polynice Poynter's hand mayn't be in that. His ugly brute is seldom far from his side, and it is evident we were followed here. Poynter may have sent that as a warning for you not to take our case. If so—and it would tie in with his theatrical nature—it likely will be something unpleasant, even dangerous."

Doctor Loring gently shook the package, which obviously was a wrapped cardboard box, holding it close to an ear. His expression non-committal, he decided—

"Well, we can see! Like to come along, Captain?"

After requesting Mrs. Frane to resume her chair and wait, he led her husband to a bathroom and turned on the faucets of the tub. When there was enough water to cover it completely, the doctor put in the box, wrapped as he had received it. The thing was light, and floated.

BORROWING the stick which Frane still had in his hand, Doctor Loring immersed the parcel. Carefully, he forced the cane's ferrule through the wrapping and the cardboard underneath. As the water ran into the hole, a scuffling noise came faintly from inside the box. With a motion of his wrist, Doctor Loring enlarged the hole in the now soggy cardboard, and withdrew the cane.

"Now watch," he invited.

For a moment, nothing happened. Then, squeezing through the small hole he had made, came a dark, scale-sheathed wedge; two feet of sinuous, convulsed length swiftly followed the serpent's head. The reptile swam to and fro, its angry forked tongue flashing with increasing rapidity as it vainly sought to climb the smooth porcelain of the tub.

"Fer-de-lance, if I ever saw one!" Doctor Loring exclaimed.

Frane nodded, several shades paler beneath his tan.

"Poynter may have robbed the zoo, or he may have brought this one and others from Haiti—he's like that!" said the captain.

"So this Poynter has been in Haiti?" mused the doctor.

"He *is* Haitian," Frane corrected. He stiffly anticipated Doctor Loring's unspoken question. "He is an octoroon, yes. You recall that I said he is my wife's stepbrother."

"If he sent that snake, he's a damn' villain, one way or another!" the doctor heatedly announced. "Those things"—motioning toward the tub—"are an unusually nasty species."

"I know," Frane soberly agreed; "I've seen what they can do. But then," he ironically reminded, "Polynice Poynter runs to nasty things—such as causing 'persecution complexes', for instance!"

"Tell me the details before we rejoin your wife—those you must have omitted the other time," Doctor Loring abruptly demanded. He made a wry grimace: "I have conceived a dislike for your Polynice Poynter!

"Come, come!" he prodded testily, as Frane hesitated. "Give me the really important facts: how an octoroon happens to be stepbrother to your wife, and his motive for wating to injure her."

"It's simple," Frane responded. "Natalie's—my wife's—father was a cane-grower in Haiti. Natalie's mother died, and her father remarried—a Haitian woman who had been his mistress for many years; for so many years, in fact, that Polynice, who is about thirty, is believed by everyone in Port au Prince to be old Poynter's natural son. At any rate, Poynter legally adopted him, after marrying his mother. The situation was unbearable for Natalie—I married her, immediately afterward resigning my commission in order to leave Haiti with her.

"As to the motive you spoke of," he rapidly went on, "unless it has been changed recently, Haitian law prohibits whites from outright ownership of land in Haiti. So old Poynter invested his income here in the States, with such shrewdness that Natalie inherited a sizable fortune at his death.

"It's as simple as this: If Natalie dies without issue, Polynice gets everything. Do you see?"

"The motive is plain," Doctor Loring admitted. "But what has this Polynice actually done? You have told me merely that your wife's mind and health were being destroyed by fear of him, the basis for which was not mentioned. Tell me what you have kept back."

Captain Frane hesitated. "You must realize," he said, at length, "that Natalie was born in Haiti. Some things that would seem absurd to the average American girl are seriously real to her. Haiti is a strange island, Doctor Loring, and Natalie *believes* in voodoo."

"Ah!" nodded the doctor; "I follow you. Indeed, I am well ahead of you! This Polynice has persuaded your wife of his control of dark powers, and used the fact to influence her. Do you know in what way?"

Frane made a baffled, embarrassed ges-

ture. "He has her believing that her—her soul—a part of it, at least—oh, hell! It's childish, but it's going to kill Natalie, if you can't stop it. She believes he's put part of her into a silly little block of mahogany, a piece of dry wood no bigger than a small book. And he tells her, daily by 'phone or in person, that he is going to destroy that block, and her with it, in the near future."

"And she will die if he does destroy it," Doctor Loring promptly confirmed. "The power of induced suggestion makes that a reasonable certainty. But," he deprecated, "any half-baked psychologist could remedy that for you. . . . However, I will do it myself. I have, I repeat, conceived a dislike for this Polynice who sends snakes to people."

After a moment of thought, he added, "The only difficulty is that block of wood. To have it is not absolutely necessary, fortunately; but it would simplify matters."

"Natalie herself keeps it," Frane eagerly returned. "It's in her handbag, now."

Doctor Loring pursed his lips in a soundless whistle. "The fellow *is* clever!" he conceded. "That was a master-stroke, to let her have it, the power of his suggestion strengthening as she continually regards it, strives constantly to keep it from harm. Suggestion is the most powerful force in the world, Captain Frane. In this case, it will be the fire with which we fight the devil.

"Come! We have nearly the whole afternoon, and we shall use it to confound this voodoo that was born in the African jungles."

BACK in the study, Frane quietly informed his wife that Doctor Loring had reconsidered, and was prepared to take her case. The doctor regarded her with searching scrutiny for the first time.

Natalie Frane was at least a dozen years her husband's junior; about twenty-five, Doctor Loring judged. She would have been beautiful, except for the haunted look in her somber eyes. From instincts reaching back to the years when he had been a mere general practitioner, the doctor automatically disapproved of her pallor, which was the more noticeable by contrast with the dark hair that was drawn simply back into a heavy knot upon her neck. She looked like a pale, troubled madonna; quite the type, impressionable and hyper-sensitive, to respond to subtle influences.

"I came because John wished it, Doctor Loring," she said, a defensive note underlying the listless words. "I doubt that a physician can help me, or even understand the thing that saps my strength and will."

"My dear," Doctor Loring gently assured her, "it is true that I am a physician. But I am also a psychologist, which is more. Further, I am a psychopathist—and that is much, much more."

He leaned forward, confidentially:

"Beyond all that, I have lived and learned in Haiti. I have lived among the natives as one of them, in order to further my scientific investigations. I know as much of voodoo as Polynice, plus other things of which he has no knowledge whatever. I *can* help you. Will you let me?"

Natalie Frane looked up into his face; and what she found there brought a light of breathless, incredulous hope into her own. Impulsively she caught his hand.

"Yes!" she whispered, "oh, yes!"

There was a low couch in the study, from the doctor's habit of taking cat-naps at odd minutes; and to this he led the girl.

"Lie down," he persuaded. "Stretch out and relax."

When she had complied, he resumed:

"I take it for granted that when"—he motioned toward the bag still clutched tightly in her hand—"when *it* happened, you either were asleep or in a state of induced coma. The same condition is requisite to a reversal of matters. . . ."

Still talking, the doctor placed a curious contrivance upon his desk, a series of small mirrors arranged in a common frame. A cord plugged into a wall socket set the mirrors spinning. As they spun, they merged into a disk of shimmering, hypnotic light. Natalie Frane looked into the whirling, compelling radiance; and looking, she sighed and relaxed. The precious handbag dropped from her limp fingers.

"An effective mechanical adjunct to hypnosis," Doctor Loring explained, stilling the spinning mirrors. Removing the contrivance, he pressed the button beneath the desk.

"Bring me a hatchet, or a heavy knife —that machete you use to prune the hedges will do nicely," he directed, when Tou-Tou appeared.

"When I wake her," he resumed to Frane, "we will tell her that whatever part of her ego may have been in the block has been forced out and restored to her. When she has accepted that, we shall show her the splintered block as proof. Afterward, you have only to keep your Polynice from further contact with her. As time goes on, her Haitian impressions will dim and disappear."

Tou-Tou returned with the machete, a long, heavy-bladed implement. Frane got the mahogany block from his wife's bag; and Doctor Loring set it on a magazine upon the desk. The machete rose, descended smartly. The dry, aged wood split cleanly — but neither Frane nor Doctor Loring watched its halves fall apart.

At the moment the blade bit into the block, Natalie Frane screamed. She screamed, and then seemed to stifle, to choke on other screams that her working throat would not emit. Her body stiffened convulsively, knees drawing up with a jerk.

"My God!" cried Doctor Loring; "this is no mummery—it's stark, terribly genuine voodoo!"

"What is it?—In the fiend's name, what have you done?"

"Never mind that!" snapped the doctor, whipping into action; "Get out of my way. . . ."

He dashed out a doorway. In scant minutes he was back, a hypodermic syringe in his hand.

"That devil's business can't succeed, not quite, while she is in a hypnotic condition," he muttered, more to himself than to Frane. "But the coma won't last long, of itself; and if she wakes now—she dies! So——"

He sent home the needle's plunger. Almost as Doctor Loring released her arm, Natalie relaxed under the influence of the opiate. Even then, there was a curious intensity underlying her quiescent pose. The doctor whirled on Frane:

"Do you know how to reach that devil?"

"Polynice? Yes, by 'phone. But for God's sake what is——"

"No time for that, now!" Doctor Loring jerked him short. "You 'phone Polynice: tell him exactly what has happened. Tell him that you agree to anything he demands, if he will come immediately and help me undo his voodoo. Tell him anything, but get him here—quickly. *Move!*"

FRANE searched feverishly through the directory, threw it aside with an oath. He dialed "Information," and Doctor Loring heard him ask for the wanted

number. Then Frane slowly replaced the receiver, a baffled look on his face.

"The 'phone's privately listed. She wouldn't give me the number. And," he added despairingly, "I've no idea where he lives."

"If we can't get him here shortly——" The significance of the doctor's unspoken words was plain.

"Look here!" blazed the ex-captain of Marines. "Do you mean to tell me that, now you've forced matters to a crisis, you can't mend your bungling? *Do* something! You boasted that you knew more than Polynice—can't you do whatever he could?"

"Polynice couldn't save your wife," Doctor Loring returned paradoxically. "I'll do that. But Polynice is a necessary factor."

"You talk in riddles," Frane grated. "I put Natalie blindly in your hands—and look! You've pushed matters beyond your control. And I don't even know what's happened to my wife, nor why. If *you* know, it's time you told me!"

"I bungled," Doctor Loring bitterly admitted. "That fer-de-lance did it. I thought it a piece of crude theatrics, but instead, it was as clever as I thought it stupid. It threw me off the trail, angered me into becoming a catspaw for Polynice. I thought he was working on your wife's fears until she would eventually have broken under his pretended voodooism. There are very few genuine adepts, even among the Haitian *papalois*—but Polynice evidently is one of the few."

"Do you mean to tell me there is such a thing as genuine voodoo sorcery?" Angry disbelief struggled with sick dread as Frane's tortured eyes flashed toward the couch.

"Sorcery, in the sense you mean—no," Doctor Loring promptly answered his question. "There is nothing that can not be explained in scientific terms, though sometimes the explanation is obscure. Voodoo, as a black art, is nothing more than induced auto-suggestion. It is a fairly common phenomenon among savage or semi-civilized peoples, to find individuals with a high degree of natural psychic control. Polynice has it, from that part of his heritage rooted in the jungles.

"He has dominated your wife's mind with the belief that he has induced a part of her—something of what, for want of a better term, we may call her spiritual self—into that mahogany block. To all practical intents, because he made her believe it, *he actually did it!*

"The matter was static, without seriously affecting her while it remained so. But when I destroyed the block by violence, a sympathetic psychic reaction affected your wife as you have seen. In her coma, the psychic shock was partly neutralized; but if she wakens now, what will happen is comparable to trying to start a motor with a nearly discharged battery. We must recharge her psychic battery before she returns to consciousness and exhausts what little force remains. Otherwise——"

Doctor Loring spread his hands in a gesture more eloquent than words.

"And you must have Polynice to save her?" Frane groaned. "Why?"

The girl on the couch stirred, and the question went unanswered as the doctor sprang quickly to her side. His thin, quizzing fingers held her wrist a moment; then he dropped it and wordlessly refilled the hypodermic syringe.

WHEN the drug had been administered, Doctor Loring visibly braced himself as he turned to Frane.

"That is all I dare give her," he slowly announced. "More would kill her. It should maintain her coma for three or four hours longer."

His eyes held Frane's for a bleak, ghastly minute. There was hell in Frane's face as he turned, finally, to look at the still, helpless figure of his wife. The doctor pressed his call button.

"Tou-Tou," he demanded of the Haitian, "do you understand what has happened here?"

The whites of Tou-Tou's eyes showed eerily, as his gaze swept around the room. He nodded, silently.

"Is there a way," Doctor Loring asked hesitantly, almost fearfully, "—a way out?"

"One," Tou-Tou answered softly. A significant look passed between them; it seemed they understood each other. Doctor Loring nodded slowly as Tou-Tou went out.

"One way," he murmured to himself, his face bleak. "One way—and no means of finding him."

Frane raised his head from his hands. Stark murder looked out of his eyes.

"Polynice——" he muttered, thickly; "if she dies, the law can't touch him"—his lean fingers crooked in promise—"but God help him!"

They sat silent, then, waiting. The tip of Frane's tongue drew haltingly across his dry lips. . . .

The telephone rang.

Doctor Loring placed the receiver to his ear with a startled jerk; then motioned to Frane. "Calling you," he said.

Watching him, the doctor saw Frane's dull eyes light with excitement.

"It's Polynice!" he cried, a trembling hand across the transmitter. "What shall I tell him?"

"Tell him—-no, let me tell him!" Doctor Loring rapped out. Taking the 'phone, he spoke crisply.

"Hello! . . . Doctor Loring speaking. Mrs. Frane is here in a critical condition, following my destruction of a certain mahogany block—your understand me, of course. I must have your assistance in restoring her to a normal condition, from the mesmeric control under which I barely hold her.

"In consideration of your help Captain Frane is ready to accept any terms you may name. I pledge my own word that there will be no subsequent reprisal from him or the police. . . . Oh, yes! I think my testimony would make criminal action *quite* possible!"

The doctor's lips twisted sardonically as he added, with visible calculation, "Captain Frane himself is in a pitiful state. You had better come at once."

After the receiver had clicked into place, he turned to Frane in grim triumph.

"That got him, that part about you being shot to pieces. He couldn't resist coming to gloat. Besides, he feels quite sure of himself."

"You promised him immunity!" Frane retorted bitterly.

"I did not!" Doctor Loring contradicted. "I told him that you were ready to make any terms for your wife's safety—as you are; and that there would be no criminal action. . . ."

He paused, his fingers feeling under the edge of his desk.

"There will be no need!" he quietly amended, with a significance that was lost on Frane.

DOCTOR LORING parted his lips to speak, as Tou-Tou slipped in, then hesitated. After an uncertain glance at Frane, he altered his original decision, motioning the Haitian back.

"I have some preparations to make for our visitor," he explained abruptly. The door closed after him.

Frane paced back and forth across the study, his haunted eyes turning always to

rest upon the pale, bloodless face of the still form upon the couch. He glanced up quickly as Doctor Loring re-entered.

"You look as if you were all set," he slowly observed, "waiting for something to break."

"All set," grimly nodded the doctor, "to fight the devil with his own fire!"

Any questions Frane might have asked were forestalled by the faint sound of a bell in the recesses of the house.

"And there," Doctor Loring softly exclaimed, his eyes snapping, "there comes the devil!"

Through the cracked door, Tou-Tou jabbered in his French *patois:*

"It is that one! He will not enter without the dog."

Doctor Loring snapped his fingers with an exclamation—"The dog, Tou-Tou! The dog you have agreed will do as well as any goat!"

The whites of the Haitian's eyes flashed as he turned away. He came back, ushering in a man beside whom walked a gaunt, wolfish dog, stiff-legged with suspicion. It was the same animal that had snarled through the doctor's window.

The man, who needed no introduction as the much-wanted Polynice, was of medium height, but broad. His skin, slightly jaundiced in appearance rather than swarthy, betrayed little of his hybrid origin; nor did his straight, black hair. His arresting feature was a pair of evil, hypnotic eyes, as black and opaque as jet.

"Ah!" he murmured, in faintly accented English, with a slight bow; "Doctor Loring, I presume—and the estimable Captain Frane!" With purring malice, he added, "And my poor stepsister!"

The muscles stood out on Frane's clamped jaws, but Doctor Loring's voice was mildly urgent as he admonished—

"Come in, please. We've no time to lose."

Shaking his head regretfully, the octoroon advanced into the room.

"In spite of Captain Frane's contrary belief, I have no designs against his wife's person or, er—possessions. Surely I am not to blame for her regrettable mental disorder, and I am not a man of science. Eager as I wish it, there is nothing I can do to help, Doctor Loring."

"So you think to stand by, gloating, while Mrs. Frane dies when her coma passes?" Doctor Loring's voice was deceptively gentle: "Well, you are a cheat all around. The shock she has sustained is too great for you to remedy, even if you would."

"Then why ask me here?" murmured Polynice.

"Because I can help her, *now!* But it is going to be hard on *you!*"

Doctor Loring gestured fiercely to Tou-Tou, who hovered like an eager shadow.

The gaunt black man jerked a hand from behind him, and the noose of a rope flipped over the octoroon's shoulders, pinning his arms. But they reckoned without the fierce, wolf-like thing that sprang as its master cried out in startled anger. The dog leaped in slavering fury at Tou-Tou, who dropped the rope to ward off slashing fangs.

Polynice, free of the noose in a twinkling, jerked a pistol from the breast of his coat. He leaped toward the open window, but Frane swiftly interposed. The edge of his hand struck Polynice's wrist, and a shot went wild; the pistol spun across the room. The ex-Marine's fist smashed out, rocking Polynice back against the desk—the desk upon which a heavy machete lay. Lean, sallow fingers darted forward; the murderous blade slashed out at Frane, who barely threw himself aside.

As Polynice leaped again for the win-

dow, to which the way was clear, Doctor Loring flung his slight form after him. Something glittered in the doctor's own fist, stabbed viciously down into the Haitian's left shoulder.

With a startled snarl of rage and pain, Polynice whirled the machete in an awkward cross sweep, which Doctor Loring evaded narrowly. Before he could turn toward the doctor, or slash out at Frane, rushing in on him again, Polynice staggered in his tracks. The machete dropped to the floor.

"Don't hit him!" Doctor Loring cried. But Frane already had stopped short, staring at Polynice's twitching face.

"Damn you!" choked the jaundiced-looking Haitian. He would have slumped to the floor, had not the doctor caught and held him. Frane helping, he lowered Polynice to a chair.

"Strong stuff in that hypodermic!" gasped the doctor; "but it won't last long. Tie him up."

They had been too busy to observe Tou-Tou's battle with the dog. Now, as Frane turned to get the rope, the black man was holding the dog's throat with one hand, seemingly well in control. Tou-Tou's coat was slashed, and his free hand dripped blood; but the dog looked dazed, subdued. Its eyes were unaccountably glassy.

"Wring the brute's neck!" Frane growled over his shoulder as, rope in hand, he crossed anxiously toward the neglected girl, who remained motionless upon the couch.

"No," contradicted the doctor; "we need it a while longer. Take it on to the garden, Tou-Tou."

While Doctor Loring bent over Natalie, Frane trussed Polynice to the chair. Satisfied that the girl's condition remained unchanged, the doctor transferred his own attentions to the captive.

POLYNICE already showed signs of returning consciousness. The doctor helped him along with a bottle of smelling-salts held beneath his nostrils. The octoroon moved his head aside, writhed in the chair with a groan. Tilting his chin, Doctor Loring forced him to swallow something he had mixed in a glass. Polynice's eyes opened dully; then cleared, became bright with venom.

"Now you're out of it," Doctor Loring observed. "That is good; because I want you to understand thoroughly what I am about to say."

Giving Polynice no chance to interrupt, he continued sharply: "You know all about Haitian voodoo—and so do I! For months, I studied it in the mountains near the Dominican border. My servant comes from the region, as you may have learned."

"You did not know enough to save Mrs. Frane!" Polynice snarled.

"Ah! There you are mistaken," softly corrected Doctor Loring. "Until your influence is *completely exterminated,* it is true that I can not cleanse her mind." He paused significantly, then added deliberately—"So I propose to remove you!"

His hearer's face drained, leaving it the hue of a dead fish's belly.

"You dare not!" Polynice hissed; "I took care that several people knew I came here."

"You credit me with very little subtlety," Doctor Loring chided dryly. "I intend nothing so crude and, in this case, ineffective as physical violence. . . . There is no way of holding you accountable to the law, if Mrs. Frane dies; nor could the police protect her for the future if I undid your work temporarily. But I propose to issue my own injunction"—his voice blazed up wrathfully—"and punish you everlastingly for the crime already committed!"

"You dare not harm me!" Polynice snarled in repetition, through dry lips.

"So?" hissed Doctor Loring. "Undoubtedly you have seen the thing I have in mind, at *petro* ceremonies?—the girl and the goat? Well, my sender of snakes, Tou-Tou was a *papaloi* in the Haitian mountains; and he says that your dog will substitute for the goat. And while you surely are no virgin maid, still—I think we shall manage!"

Frane had listened with impatience and lack of understanding, but the doctor's meaning evidently was horribly clear to Polynice.

"Not that!" he screamed, straining frenziedly at his bonds. Panting, he strove helplessly, but suddenly ceased. A sly look crept across his face.

"Have you the drug they give the girl, before the ceremony?" he demanded triumphantly. "I don't believe it, and you can't do without it. Your narcotics will not substitute—the mind must be under control, not deadened. The only other way is to hypnotize me, and my mind will never yield to yours! You can't hypnotize me, and you dare not murder me!"

"I'd like to take your challenge—on both counts," Doctor Loring retorted, with a twisted smile. "But the time is too short to risk my patient's life for my own vanity. I have delayed this long only because it was necessary that your mind be fully aware of what is to happen. Already it grows dark; and tonight the moon comes up almost with the dusk. . . ."

Once more, the contraption with the mirrors was placed upon the desk. Almost apologetically, while he adjusted the mirrors Doctor Loring told Polynice, "Your psychic inheritance from African witch-doctors hasn't much chance against modern science."

Uncomprehending but uneasy, the Haitian watched while the mirrors began their spinning. Too late, he realized that he was trapped. Desperately he tried to tear away his eyes; corded veins throbbed at his damp temples. For long minutes Polynice fought a silent, agonized battle with an impersonal thing that beat down his will. With a stifled sigh, he relaxed in the chair, eyes staring, unseeing.

TOU-TOU slipped in like a weird, silent shadow. Behind the impassivity of his black face, there was an unholy eagerness. A gaudy handkerchief was wound about his wooly head, and there was a curiously twined wand in his hand.

"I have made a staff with the bones of the serpent that one sent!" he half chanted, in his slurred *patois*. "The dog is ready, and the moon comes up."

"This one also is ready," grimly returned the doctor. Motioning toward Natalie, he directed Frane—"Bring her in your arms. I hope that enough of what is to happen will reach her subconscious mind to register the impression of her release. . . . Come!"

Gripping Polynice by one arm, while Tou-Tou took the other, Doctor Loring murmured commandingly: "Rise! Walk to your gods, walk to Damballa!"

Half shuffling, half carried, Polynice sagged between the two. Taking Natalie gently up in his arms, Frane followed behind them.

The moon, a thin crescent, looked over the high wall of the wide garden. Flowers that were a riot of color by day, looked up with faces ghostly white or falsely drab in the pale light. Toward a clump of silent, secretive shrubbery in the center of the garden, the group moved. The wolfish dog, tethered to the bushes, whimpered as they approached.

Frane lowered his wife into a canvas garden chair he found in place. Doctor Loring released his hold on Polynice, and

helped adjust the chair until the girl lay half reclining. He passed his fingers lightly across her forehead, with a low command—

"Rest, and observe Hell take back its evil."

Tou-Tou had forced Polynice to hands and knees, facing the now quiet dog. The pale blob of the man's face was scant inches from the dark muzzle of the beast.

"You will have to overlook the trappings," Doctor Loring muttered to Frane. "They are psychologically vital."

He moved away and took from out the shadows something that had been placed there in readiness; Frane saw with wonderment that it was a large guitar. Squatting with the incongruous thing upon the ground before him, the doctor commenced to drum measuredly upon its reverse.

Tou-Tou swayed upon his feet in response to the weird, throbbing cadence of the drumming fingers.

"Legba, open the road! Great Damballa-Ouédo, take this thing we offer!"

He stopped shuffling, and bent above the strangely assorted pair, that stared in their queer fixity—the man and the beast, face and muzzle almost touching. The wand, with its twining snake vertebræ, described immemorial, cabalistic strokes above them. The doctor maintained the steady, monotonous tempo of his fingers upon the improvised drum.

"The thing is done!" Tou-Tou announced, his voice a thin whisper. The doctor's beat increased to a staccato pitch, sharp, imperative. Moonlight glinted fleetingly upon the knife in Tou-Tou's fist. The beginning of a scream, unearthly but seemingly human, died in a choked gurgle. The *dog* dropped upon its side, twitched briefly.

"My God!" the cry burst from Frane. "Polynice——"

"*Is* it Polynice?" rasped Doctor Loring, his fingers stilled.

For Polynice, upon all fours, held back his head—*and bayed wolfishly at the moon!*

"Bring Mrs. Frane back into the house. Hurry! She may wake at any minute, and I do not want her to see any of this, not consciously."

NATALIE was already beginning to stir, as Frane laid her again on the couch, back in the study. Doctor Loring bent over her, held her wrist briefly.

"A few minutes more," he promised, "and she will awaken—and be normal. Her subconscious mind has registered its freedom from the threat of Polynice. That should counteract the shock she sustained when I split the block."

"Thank God for that!" Frane fervently exclaimed. "But Doctor Loring! Polynice? That dog screamed like a human, and Polynice howled on all fours like a dog. I've heard of voodoo priests making such exchanges, but I didn't believe it—damn it, I don't believe it now!"

"Of course not," agreed Doctor Loring; "but *Polynice* believed it! Every voluntary cell in his brain is sealed, for ever, with the impression he received and believed in, at the moment Tou-Tou cut the dog's throat. To all practical purposes, his personality *was* in the dog when it died, and the dog's in him.

"It is the same thing that happened to your wife, repeated in his case. I told you that we would fight the devil with his own fire! So we frustrated a heinous attempted crime, which the law was powerless to check; and the criminal has been punished."

He consulted his watch, adding—"I have 'phoned for the police; they should come for Polynice at any minute. Tomorrow I shall sign the papers commit-

ing him to the State insane asylum."

He broke off, to step swiftly toward the couch. Frane reached his wife first, as the girl stirred, opened her eyes. Her husband, his face tense with anxiety, helped her as she struggled to sit upright.

"I am so tired," she sighed. The wan, strained lines of her face accentuated its pallor. Then Doctor Loring moved aside, deliberately. Natalie Frane's eyes widened, and her fingers flew to her mouth to stifle a scream. Then a look of wonder dawned in her face; a suspicion of color flushed the pale cheeks.

"Oh, John!" she cried to her husband, with the ghost of a choked, happy little laugh that was close to tears of amazed relief. "You've cut the block in two!—there isn't anything to voodoo, after all!"

"Absolutely correct!" Doctor Loring crisply approved, as the door-bell rang. With his arms tightening around his wife, Captain John Frane stifled a startled impulse to contradict.

Faintly through the open window came the mournful, terrified howls of a dog—howls with a note that was oddly, disquietingly human.

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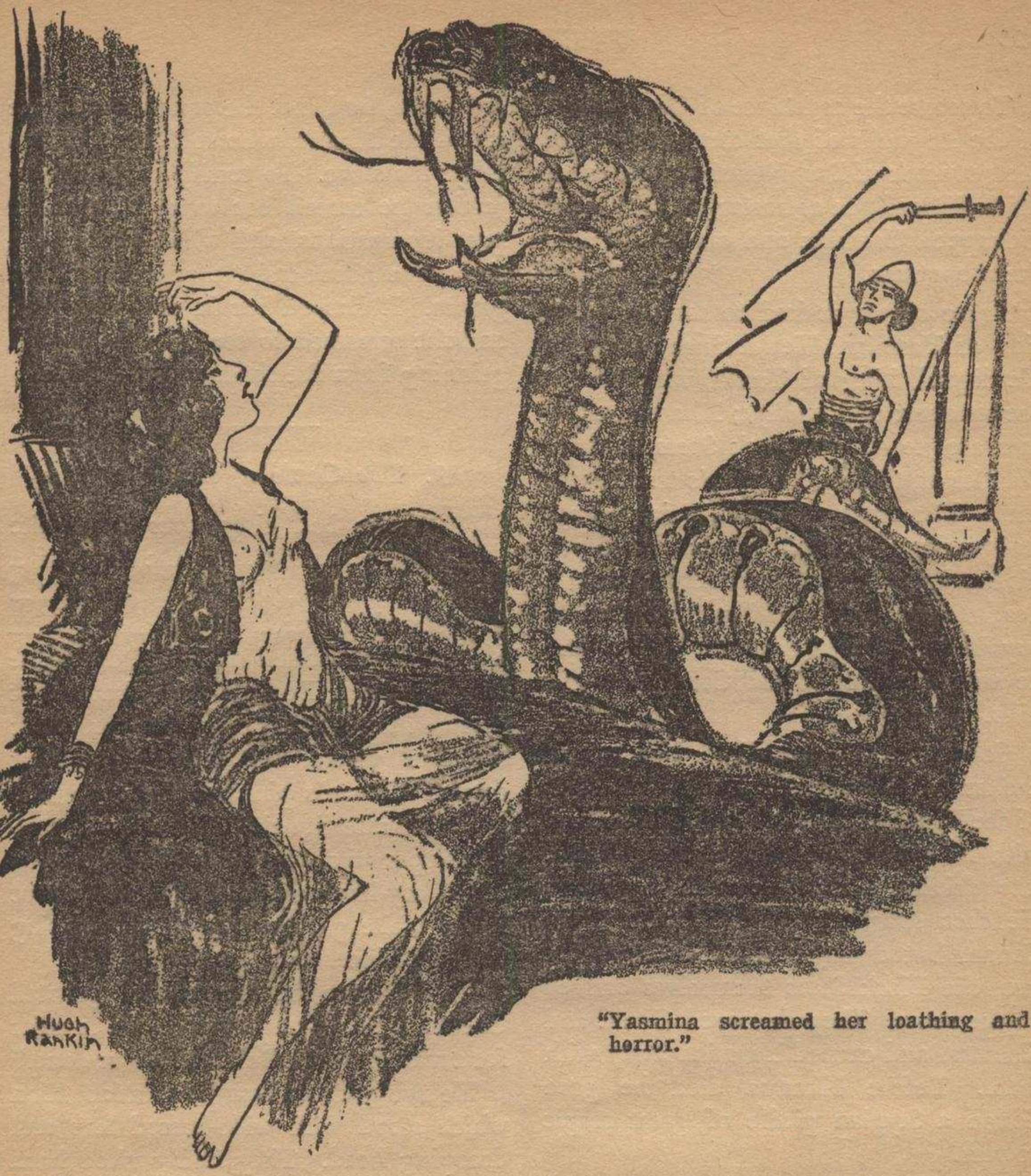
# Anne Boleyn

By DOROTHY QUICK

Anne Boleyn from the Tower came
With sparkling eyes and cheeks of flame,
With regal pomp and jewels proud
Amid the cheering of the crowd.
And as she walked across the square
No sign of her dark fate was there.
With head held high and heart serene
She left the Tower to be crowned Queen!

Anne Boleyn from the Tower came
Without a crown, without a name,
Without a glance to left or right
For those who pitied most her plight;
And as she walked across the square
The scaffold and the sword were there.
With head bent low with anguished thought
She paid the price her crown had brought.




"Yasmina screamed her loathing and horror."

# The People of the Black Circle

By ROBERT E. HOWARD

*A stupendous story of Conan the barbarian soldier of fortune, and a tremendous adventure in the castle of the Black Seers*

*The Story Thus Far*

YASMINA DEVI, queen of Vendhya, sought vengeance for her brother, who had met his death through the sorcery of the Black Seers of Yimsha, magicians who dwelt on a mountain in Ghulistan, a wild, barbaric hill country.

This story began in WEIRD TALES for September

To secure the assistance of Conan, chief of the Afghulis of that country, she had the governor of Peshkhauri capture seven Afghuli headmen as hostages. But Conan kidnapped Yasmina and carried her into the mountains.

Three others desired to secure possession of Yasmina: Kerim Shah, a spy of Yezdigerd, king of Turan, who plotted the conquest of Vendhya; Khemsa, a former acolyte of the Black Seers, and his sweetheart, Gitara, Yasmina's treacherous maid. These two wished to wring a huge ransom from Vendhya. Khemsa employed his black magic to kill the seven Afghuli headmen so they could not be used to buy Yasmina's release from Conan, and he and Gitara followed Conan into the hills.

Conan, in the meantime, had sought shelter with his friend Yar Afzal, chief of the Wazulis. Khemsa killed Yar Afzal with his magic, and tricked the Wazulis into driving Conan from their village. He then sought to take Yasmina from Conan, but during a fight between the two, the Black Seers themselves arrived on the scene. They destroyed Gitara and Khemsa, and carried Yasmina away with them. Before Khemsa died he gave Conan a Stygian girdle of great magic powers.

Conan, riding toward Afghulistan to gather his followers to rescue Yasmina, met five hundred of them seeking him. They had learned of the death of the seven headmen, and believed he had betrayed them. Escaping from them, he met the spy, Kerim Shah, with a band of Irakzai, riding to meet a Turanian army which was forcing its way through the hills to capture Yasmina, whom they thought a captive among the Afghulis.

Striking a temporary truce, Conan and Kerim Shah rode together toward Yimsha.

In the meantime Yasmina, in the wizard castle, had met the mysterious figure called the Master, who told her she was to be his slave. To terrify her into subjection he forced her to relive all her past incarnations, and when she awoke, she saw a hooded shape near her in the gloom. It clasped her in its bony arms, and she screamed to see a fleshless skull grinning from the shadow of the hood.

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### 9. *The Castle of the Wizards*

THE sun had risen over the white Himelian peaks. At the foot of a long slope a group of horsemen halted and stared upward. High above them a stone tower poised on the pitch of the mountainside. Beyond and above that gleamed the walls of a greater keep, near the line where the snow began that capped Yimsha's pinnacle. There was a touch of unreality about the whole—purple slopes pitching up to that fantastic castle, toy-like with distance, and above it the white glistening peak shouldering the cold blue.

"We'll leave the horses here," grunted Conan. "That treacherous slope is safer for a man on foot. Besides, they're done."

He swung down from the black stallion which stood with wide-braced legs and drooping head. They had pushed hard throughout the night, gnawing at scraps from saddle-bags, and pausing only to give the horses the rests they had to have.

"That first tower is held by the acolytes of the Black Seers," said Conan. "Or so men say; watch-dogs for their masters—lesser sorcerers. They won't sit sucking their thumbs as we climb this slope."

Kerim Shah glanced up the mountain, then back the way they had come; they were already far up on Yimsha's side, and a vast expanse of lesser peaks and crags spread out beneath them. Among those labyrinths the Turanian sought in

vain for a movement of color that would betray men. Evidently the pursuing Afghulis had lost their chief's trail in the night.

"Let us go, then." They tied the weary horses in a clump of tamarisk and without further comment turned up the slope. There was no cover. It was a naked incline, strewn with boulders not big enough to conceal a man. But they did conceal something else.

The party had not gone fifty steps when a snarling shape burst from behind a rock. It was one of the gaunt savage dogs that infested the hill villages, and its eyes glared redly, its jaws dripped foam. Conan was leading, but it did not attack him. It dashed past him and leaped at Kerim Shah. The Turanian leaped aside, and the great dog flung itself upon the Irakzai behind him. The man yelled and threw up his arm, which was torn by the brute's fangs as it bore him backward, and the next instant half a dozen tulwars were hacking at the beast. Yet not until it was literally dismembered did the hideous creature cease its efforts to seize and rend its attackers.

Kerim Shah bound up the wounded warrior's gashed arm, looked at him narrowly, and then turned away without a word. He rejoined Conan, and they renewed the climb in silence.

Presently Kerim Shah said: "Strange to find a village dog in this place."

"There's no offal here," grunted Conan.

Both turned their heads to glance back at the wounded warrior toiling after them among his companions. Sweat glistened on his dark face and his lips were drawn back from his teeth in a grimace of pain. Then both looked again at the stone tower squatting above them.

A slumberous quiet lay over the uplands. The tower showed no sign of life, nor did the strange pyramidal structure beyond it. But the men who toiled upward went with the tenseness of men walking on the edge of a crater. Kerim Shah had unslung the powerful Turanian bow that killed at five hundred paces, and the Irakzai looked to their own lighter and less lethal bows.

But they were not within bow-shot of the tower when something shot down out of the sky without warning. It passed so close to Conan that he felt the wind of the rushing wings, but it was an Irakzai who staggered and fell, blood jetting from a severed jugular. A hawk with wings like burnished steel shot up again, blood dripping from the simitar-beak, to reel against the sky as Kerim Shah's bowstring twanged. It dropped like a plummet, but no man saw where it struck the earth.

Conan bent over the victim of the attack, but the man was already dead. No one spoke; useless to comment on the fact that never before had a hawk been known to swoop on a man. Red rage began to vie with fatalistic lethargy in the wild souls of the Irakzai. Hairy fingers nocked arrows and men glared vengefully at the tower whose very silence mocked them.

But the next attack came swiftly. They all saw it—a white puffball of smoke that tumbled over the tower-rim and came drifting and rolling down the slope toward them. Others followed it. They seemed harmless, mere woolly globes of cloudy foam, but Conan stepped aside to avoid contact with the first. Behind him one of the Irakzai reached out and thrust his sword into the unstable mass. Instantly a sharp report shook the mountainside. There was a burst of blinding flame, and then the puffball had vanished, and of the too-curious warrior remained only a heap of charred and black-

ened bones. The crisped hand still gripped the ivory sword-hilt, but the blade was gone—melted and destroyed by that awful heat. Yet men standing almost within reach of the victim had not suffered except to be dazzled and half blinded by the sudden flare.

"Steel touches it off," grunted Conan. "Look out—here they come!"

The slope above them was almost covered by the billowing spheres. Kerim Shah bent his bow and sent a shaft into the mass, and those touched by the arrow burst like bubbles in spurting flame. His men followed his example and for the next few minutes it was as if a thunderstorm raged on the mountain slope, with bolts of lightning striking and bursting in showers of flame. When the barrage ceased, only a few arrows were left in the quivers of the archers.

THEY pushed on grimly, over soil charred and blackened, where the naked rock had in places been turned to lava by the explosion of those diabolical bombs.

Now they were almost within arrow-flight of the silent tower,and they spread their line, nerves taut, ready for any horror that might descend upon them.

On the tower appeared a single figure, lifting a ten-foot bronze horn. Its strident bellow roared out across the echoing slopes, like the blare of trumpets on Judgment Day. And it began to be fearfully answered. The ground trembled under the feet of the invaders, and rumblings and grindings welled up from the subterranean depths.

The Irakzai screamed, reeling like drunken men on the shuddering slope, and Conan, eyes glaring, charged recklessly up the incline, knife in hand, straight at the door that showed in the tower-wall. Above him the great horn roared and bellowed in brutish mockery. And then Kerim Shah drew a shaft to his ear and loosed.

Only a Turanian could have made that shot. The bellowing of the horn ceased suddenly, and a high, thin scream shrilled in its place. The green-robed figure on the tower staggered, clutching at the long shaft which quivered in its bosom, and then pitched across the parapet. The great horn tumbled upon the battlement and hung precariously, and another robed figure rushed to seize it, shrieking in horror. Again the Turanian bow twanged, and again it was answered by a death-howl. The second acolyte, in falling, struck the horn with his elbow and knocked it clattering over the parapet to shatter on the rocks far below.

At such headlong speed had Conan covered the ground that before the clattering echoes of that fall had died away, he was hacking at the door. Warned by his savage instinct, he gave back suddenly as a tide of molten lead splashed down from above. But the next instant he was back again, attacking the panels with redoubled fury. He was galvanized by the fact that his enemies had resorted to earthly weapons. The sorcery of the acolytes was limited. Their necromantic resources might well be exhausted.

Kerim Shah was hurrying up the slope, his hillmen behind him in a straggling crescent. They loosed as they ran, their arrows splintering against the walls or arching over the parapet.

The heavy teak portal gave way beneath the Cimmerian's assault, and he peered inside warily, expecting anything. He was looking into a circular chamber from which a stair wound upward. On the opposite side of the chamber a door gaped open, revealing the outer slope—and the backs of half a dozen green-robed figures in full retreat.

Conan yelled, took a step into the tower, and then native caution jerked him back, just as a great block of stone fell crashing to the floor where his foot had been an instant before. Shouting to his followers, he raced around the tower.

The acolytes had evacuated their first line of defense. As Conan rounded the tower he saw their green robes twinkling up the mountain ahead of him. He gave chase, panting with earnest blood-lust, and behind him Kerim Shah and the Irakzai came pelting, the latter yelling like wolves at the flight of their enemies, their fatalism momentarily submerged by temporary triumph.

The tower stood on the lower edge of a narrow plateau whose upward slant was barely perceptible. A few hundred yards away this plateau ended abruptly in a chasm which had been invisible farther down the mountain. Into this chasm the acolytes apparently leaped without checking their speed. Their pursuers saw the green robes flutter and disappear over the edge.

A few moments later they themselves were standing on the brink of the mighty moat that cut them off from the castle of the Black Seers. It was a sheer-walled ravine that extended in either direction as far as they could see, apparently girdling the mountain, some four hundred yards in width and five hundred feet deep. And in it, from rim to rim, a strange, translucent mist sparkled and shimmered.

Looking down, Conan grunted. Far below him, moving across the glimmering floor, which shone like burnished silver, he saw the forms of the green-robed acolytes. Their outline was wavering and indistinct, like figures seen under deep water. They walked in single file, moving toward the opposite wall.

KERIM SHAH nocked an arrow and sent it singing downward. But when it struck the mist that filled the chasm it seemed to lose momentum and direction, wandering widely from its course.

"If they went down, so can we!" grunted Conan, while Kerim Shah stared after his shaft in amazement. "I saw them last at this spot——"

Squinting down he saw something shining like a golden thread across the canyon floor far below. The acolytes seemed to be following this thread, and there suddenly came to him Khemsa's cryptic words—"Follow the golden vein!" On the brink, under his very hand as he crouched, he found it, a thin vein of sparkling gold running from an outcropping of ore to the edge and down across the silvery floor. And he found something else, which had before been invisible to him because of the peculiar refraction of the light. The gold vein followed a narrow ramp which slanted down into the ravine, fitted with niches for hand and foot hold.

"Here's where they went down," he grunted to Kerim Shah. "They're no adepts, to waft themselves through the air! We'll follow them——"

It was at that instant that the man who had been bitten by the mad dog cried out horribly and leaped at Kerim Shah, foaming and gnashing his teeth. The Turanian, quick as a cat on his feet, sprang aside and the madman pitched head-first over the brink. The others rushed to the edge and glared after him in amazement. The maniac did not fall plummet-like. He floated slowly down through the rosy haze like a man sinking in deep water. His limbs moved like a man trying to swim, and his features were purple and convulsed beyond the contortions of his madness. Far down at last on the shining floor his body settled and lay still.

"There's death in that chasm," muttered Kerim Shah, drawing back from the rosy mist that shimmered almost at his feet. "What now, Conan?"

"On!" answered the Cimmerian grimly. "Those acolytes are human; if the mist doesn't kill them, it won't kill me."

He hitched his belt, and his hands touched the girdle Khemsa had given him; he scowled, then smiled bleakly. He had forgotten that girdle; yet thrice had death passed him by to strike another victim.

The acolytes had reached the farther wall and were moving up it like great green flies. Letting himself upon the ramp, he descended warily. The rosy cloud lapped about his ankles, ascending as he lowered himself. It reached his knees, his thighs, his waist, his arm-pits. He felt it as one feels a thick heavy fog on a damp night. With it lapping about his chin he hesitated, and then ducked under. Instantly his breath ceased; all air was shut off from him and he felt his ribs caving in on his vitals. With a frantic effort he heaved himself up, fighting for life. His head rose above the surface and he drank air in great gulps.

Kerim Shah leaned down toward him, spoke to him, but Conan neither heard nor heeded. Stubbornly, his mind fixed on what the dying Khemsa had told him, the Cimmerian groped for the gold vein, and found that he had moved off it in his descent. Several series of hand-holds were niched in the ramp. Placing himself directly over the thread, he began climbing down once more. The rosy mist rose about him, engulfed him. Now his head was under, but he was still drinking pure air. Above him he saw his companions staring down at him, their features blurred by the haze that shimmered over his head. He gestured for them to follow, and went down swiftly, without waiting to see whether they complied or not.

Kerim Shah sheathed his sword without comment and followed, and the Irakzai, more fearful of being left alone than of the terrors that might lurk below, scrambled after him. Each man clung to the golden thread as they saw the Cimmerian do.

Down the slanting ramp they went to the ravine floor and moved out across the shining level, treading the gold vein like rope-walkers. It was as if they walked along an invisible tunnel through which air circulated freely. They felt death pressing in on them above and on either hand, but it did not touch them.

The vein crawled up a similar ramp on the other wall up which the acolytes had disappeared, and up it they went with taut nerves, not knowing what might be waiting for them among the jutting spurs of rock that fanged the lip of the precipice.

IT WAS the green-robed acolytes who awaited them, with knives in their hands. Perhaps they had reached the limits to which they could retreat. Perhaps the Stygian girdle about Conan's waist could have told why their necromantic spells had proven so weak and so quickly exhausted. Perhaps it was knowledge of death decreed for failure that sent them leaping from among the rocks, eyes glaring and knives glittering, resorting in their desperation to material weapons.

There among the rocky fangs on the precipice lip was no war of wizard craft. It was a whirl of blades, where real steel bit and real blood spurted, where sinewy arms dealt forthright blows that severed quivering flesh, and men went down to be trodden under foot as the fight raged over them.

One of the Irakzai bled to death among

the rocks, but the acolytes were down—slashed and hacked asunder or hurled over the edge to float sluggishly down to the silver floor that shone so far below.

Then the conquerors shook blood and sweat from their eyes, and looked at one another. Conan and Kerim Shah still stood upright, and four of the Irakzai.

They stood among the rocky teeth that serrated the precipice brink, and from that spot a path wound up a gentle slope to a broad stair, consisting of half a dozen steps, a hundred feet across, cut out of a green jade-like substance. They led up to a broad stage or roofless gallery of the same polished stone, and above it rose, tier upon tier, the castle of the Black Seers. It seemed to have been carved out of the sheer stone of the mountain. The architecture was faultless, but unadorned. The many casements were barred and masked with curtains within. There was no sign of life, friendly or hostile.

They went up the path in silence, and warily as men treading the lair of a serpent. The Irakzai were dumb, like men marching to a certain doom. Even Kerim Shah was silent. Only Conan seemed unaware what a monstrous dislocating and uprooting of accepted thought and action their invasion constituted, what an unprecedented violation of tradition. He was not of the East; and he came of a breed who fought devils and wizards as promptly and matter-of-factly as they battled human foes.

He strode up the shining stairs and across the wide green gallery straight toward the great golden-bound teak door that opened upon it. He cast but a single glance upward at the higher tiers of the great pyramidal structure towering above him. He reached a hand for the bronze prong that jutted like a handle from the door—then checked himself, grinning hardly. The handle was made in the shape of a serpent, head lifted on arched neck; and Conan had a suspicion that that metal head would come to grisly life under his hand.

He struck it from the door with one blow, and its bronze clink on the glassy floor did not lessen his caution. He flipped it aside with his knife-point, and again turned to the door. Utter silence reigned over the towers. Far below them the mountain slopes fell away into a purple haze of distance. The sun glittered on snow-clad peaks on either hand. High above, a vulture hung like a black dot in the cold blue of the sky. But for it, the men before the gold-bound door were the only evidence of life, tiny figures on a green jade gallery poised on the dizzy height, with that fantastic pile of stone towering above them.

A sharp wind off the snow slashed them, whipping their tatters about. Conan's long knife splintering through the teak panels roused the startled echoes. Again and again he struck, hewing through polished wood and metal bands alike. Through the sundered ruins he glared into the interior, alert and suspicious as a wolf. He saw a broad chamber, the polished stone walls untapestried, the mosaic floor uncarpeted. Square, polished ebon stools and a stone dais formed the only furnishings. The room was empty of human life. Another door showed in the opposite wall.

"Leave a man on guard outside," grunted Conan. "I'm going in."

Kerim Shah designated a warrior for that duty, and the man fell back toward the middle of the gallery, bow in hand. Conan strode into the castle, followed by the Turanian and the three remaining Irakzai. The one outside spat, grumbled in his beard, and started suddenly as a low mocking laugh reached his ears.

He lifted his head and saw, on the

tier above him, a tall, black-robed figure, naked head nodding slightly as he stared down. His whole attitude suggested mockery and malignity. Quick as a flash the Irakzai bent his bow and loosed, and the arrow streaked upward to strike full in the black-robed breast. The mocking smile did not alter. The Seer plucked out the missile and threw it back at the bowman, not as a weapon is hurled, but with a contemptuous gesture. The Irakzai dodged, instinctively throwing up his arm. His fingers closed on the revolving shaft.

Then he shrieked. In his hand the wooden shaft suddenly *writhed*. Its rigid outline became pliant, melting in his grasp. He tried to throw it from him, but it was too late. He held a living serpent in his naked hand, and already it had coiled about his wrist and its wicked wedge-shaped head darted at his muscular arm. He screamed again and his eyes became distended, his features purple. He went to his knees shaken by an awful convulsion, and then lay still.

The men inside had wheeled at his first cry. Conan took a swift stride toward the open doorway, and then halted short, baffled. To the men behind him it seemed that he strained against empty air. But though he could see nothing, there was a slick, smooth, hard surface under his hands, and he knew that a sheet of crystal had been let down in the doorway. Through it he saw the Irakzai lying motionless on the glassy gallery, an ordinary arrow sticking in his arm.

Conan lifted his knife and smote, and the watchers were dumfounded to see his blow checked apparently in midair, with the loud clang of steel that meets an unyielding substance. He wasted no more effort. He knew that not even the legendary tulwar of Amir Khutum could shatter that invisible curtain.

In a few words he explained the matter to Kerim Shah, and the Turanian shrugged his shoulders. "Well, if our exit is barred, we must find another. In the meanwhile our way lies forward, does it not?"

With a grunt the Cimmerian turned and strode across the chamber to the opposite door, with a feeling of treading on the threshold of doom. As he lifted his knife to shatter the door, it swung silently open as if of its own accord. He strode into a great hall, flanked with tall glassy columns. A hundred feet from the door began the broad jade-green steps of a stair that tapered toward the top like the side of a pyramid. What lay beyond that stair he could not tell. But between him and its shimmering foot stood a curious altar of gleaming black jade. Four great golden serpents twined their tails about this altar and reared their wedge-shaped heads in the air, facing the four quarters of the compass like the enchanted guardians of a fabled treasure. But on the altar, between the arching necks, stood only a crystal globe filled with a cloudy smoke-like substance, in which floated four golden pomegranates.

The sight stirred some dim recollection in his mind; then Conan heeded the altar no longer, for on the lower steps of the stair stood four black-robed figures. He had not seen them come. They were simply there, tall, gaunt, their vulture-heads nodding in unison, their feet and hands hidden by their flowing garments.

One lifted his arm and the sleeve fell away revealing his hand—and it was not a hand at all. Conan halted in mid-stride, compelled against his will. He had encountered a force differing subtly from Khemsa's mesmerism, and he could not advance, though he felt it in his power

to retreat if he wished. His companions had likewise halted, and they seemed even more helpless than he, unable to move in either direction.

The Seer whose arm was lifted beckoned to one of the Irakzai, and the man moved toward him like one in a trance, eyes staring and fixed, blade hanging in limp fingers. As he pushed past Conan, the Cimmerian threw an arm across his breast to arrest him. Conan was so much stronger than the Irakzai that in ordinary circumstances he could have broken his spine between his hands. But now the muscular arm was brushed aside like a straw and the Irakzai moved toward the stair, treading jerkily and mechanically. He reached the steps and knelt stiffly, proffering his blade and bending his head. The Seer took the sword. It flashed as he swung it up and down. The Irakzai's head tumbled from his shoulders and thudded heavily on the black marble floor. An arch of blood jetted from the severed arteries and the body slumped over and lay with arms spread wide.

Again a malformed hand lifted and beckoned, and another Irakzai stumbled stiffly to his doom. The ghastly drama was re-enacted and another headless form lay beside the first.

As the third tribesman clumped his way past Conan to his death, the Cimmerian, his veins bulging in his temples with his efforts to break past the unseen barrier that held him, was suddenly aware of allied forces, unseen, but waking into life about him. This realization came without warning, but so powerfully that he could not doubt his instinct. His left hand slid involuntarily under his Bakhariot belt and closed on the Stygian girdle. And as he gripped it he felt new strength flood his numbed limbs; the will to live was a pulsing white-hot fire, matched by the intensity of his burning rage.

The third Irakzai was a decapitated corpse, and the hideous finger was lifting again when Conan felt the bursting of the invisible barrier. A fierce, involuntary cry burst from his lips as he leaped with the explosive suddenness of pent-up ferocity. His left hand gripped the sorcerer's girdle as a drowning man grips a floating log, and the long knife was a sheen of light in his right. The men on the steps did not move. They watched calmly, cynically; if they felt surprize they did not show it. Conan did not allow himself to think what might chance when he came within knife-reach of them. His blood was pounding in his temples, a mist of crimson swam before his sight. He was afire with the urge to kill—to drive his knife deep into flesh and bone, and twist the blade in blood and entrails.

Another dozen strides would carry him to the steps where the sneering demons stood. He drew his breath deep, his fury rising redly as his charge gathered momentum. He was hurtling past the altar with its golden serpents when like a levin-flash there shot across his mind again as vividly as if spoken in his external ear, the cryptic words of Khemsa: *"Break the crystal ball!"*

His reaction was almost without his own volition. Execution followed impulse so spontaneously that the greatest sorcerer of the age would not have had time to read his mind and prevent his action. Wheeling like a cat from his headlong charge, he brought his knife crashing down upon the crystal. Instantly the air vibrated with a peal of terror, whether from the stairs, the altar, or the crystal itself he could not tell. Hisses filled his ears as the golden serpents, suddenly vibrant with hideous life, writhed and smote at him. But he was fired to the speed of a maddened tiger. A whirl of steel sheared through the hideous

trunks that waved toward him, and he smote the crystal sphere again and yet again. And the globe burst with a noise like a thunder-clap, raining fiery shards on the black marble, and the gold pomegranates, as if released from captivity, shot upward toward the lofty roof and were gone.

A mad screaming, bestial and ghastly, was echoing through the great hall. On the steps writhed four black-robed figures, twisting in convulsions, froth dripping from their livid mouths. Then with one frenzied crescendo of inhuman ululation they stiffened and lay still, and Conan knew that they were dead. He stared down at the altar and the crystal shards. Four headless golden serpents still coiled about the altar, but no alien life now animated the dully gleaming metal.

KERIM SHAH was rising slowly from his knees, whither he had been dashed by some unseen force. He shook his head to clear the ringing from his ears.

"Did you hear that crash when you struck? It was as if a thousand crystal panels shattered all over the castle as that globe burst. Were the souls of the wizards imprisoned in those golden balls?—Ha!"

Conan wheeled as Kerim Shah drew his sword and pointed.

Another figure stood at the head of the stair. His robe, too, was black, but of richly embroidered velvet, and there was a velvet cap on his head. His face was calm, and not unhandsome.

"Who the devil are you?" demanded Conan, staring up at him, knife in hand.

"I am the Master of Yimsha!" His voice was like the chime of a temple bell, but a note of cruel mirth ran through it.

"Where is Yasmina?" demanded Kerim Shah.

The Master laughed down at him.

"What is that to you, dead man? Have you so quickly forgotten my strength, once lent to you, that you come armed against me, you poor fool? I think I will take your heart, Kerim Shah!"

He held out his hand as if to receive something, and the Turanian cried out sharply like a man in mortal agony. He reeled drunkenly, and then, with a splintering of bones, a rending of flesh and muscle and a snapping of mail-links, his breast burst outward with a shower of blood, and through the ghastly aperture something red and dripping shot through air into the Master's outstretched hand, as a bit of steel leaps to the magnet. The Turanian slumped to the floor and lay motionless, and the Master laughed and hurled the object to fall before Conan's feet—a still-quivering human heart.

With a roar and a curse Conan charged the stair. From Khemsa's girdle he felt strength and deathless hate flow into him to combat the terrible emanation of power that met him on the steps. The air filled with a shimmering steely haze through which he plunged like a swimmer, head lowered, left arm bent about his face, knife gripped low in his right hand. His half-blinded eyes, glaring over the crook of his elbow, made out the hated shape of the Seer before and above him, the outline wavering as a reflection wavers in disturbed water.

He was racked and torn by forces beyond his comprehension, but he felt a driving power outside and beyond his own lifting him inexorably upward and onward, despite the wizard's strength and his own agony.

Now he had reached the head of the stairs, and the Master's face floated in the steely haze before him, and a strange fear shadowed the inscrutable eyes. Conan waded through the mist as through

a surf, and his knife lunged upward like a live thing. The keen point ripped the Master's robe as he sprang back with a low cry. Then before Conan's gaze, the wizard vanished—simply disappeared like a burst bubble, and something long and undulating darted up one of the smaller stairs that led up to left and right from the landing.

Conan charged after it, up the left-hand stair, uncertain as to just what he had seen whip up those steps, but in a berserk mood that drowned the nausea and horror whispering at the back of his consciousness.

He plunged out into a broad corridor whose uncarpeted floor and untapestried walls were of polished jade, and something long and swift whisked down the corridor ahead of him, and into a curtained door. From within the chamber rose a scream of urgent terror. The sound lent wings to Conan's flying feet and he hurtled through the curtains and headlong into the chamber within.

A frightful scene met his glare. Yasmina cowered on the farther edge of a velvet-covered dais, screaming her loathing and horror, an arm lifted as if to ward off attack, while before her swayed the hideous head of a giant serpent, shining neck arching up from dark-gleaming coils. With a choked cry Conan threw his knife.

Instantly the monster whirled and was upon him like the rush of wind through tall grass. The long knife quivered in its neck, point and a foot of blade showing on one side, and the hilt and a hand's-breadth of steel on the other, but it only seemed to madden the giant reptile. The great head towered above the man who faced it, and then darted down, the venom-dripping jaws gaping wide. But Conan had plucked a dagger from his girdle and he stabbed upward as the head dipped down. The point tore through the lower jaw and transfixed the upper, pinning them together. The next instant the great trunk had looped itself about the Cimmerian as the snake, unable to use its fangs, employed its remaining form of attack.

Conan's left arm was pinioned among the bone-crushing folds, but his right was free. Bracing his feet to keep upright, he stretched forth his hand, gripped the hilt of the long knife jutting from the serpent's neck, and tore it free in a shower of blood. As if divining his purpose with more than bestial intelligence, the snake writhed and knotted, seeking to cast its loops about his right arm. But with the speed of light the long knife rose and fell, shearing half-way through the reptile's giant trunk.

Before he could strike again, the great pliant loops fell from him and the monster dragged itself across the floor, gushing blood from its ghastly wounds. Conan sprang after it, knife lifted, but his vicious swipe cut empty air as the serpent writhed away from him and struck its blunt nose against a paneled screen of sandalwood. One of the panels gave inward and the long, bleeding barrel whipped through it and was gone.

Conan instantly attacked the screen. A few blows rent it apart and he glared into the dim alcove beyond. No horrific shape coiled there; there was blood on the marble floor, and bloody tracks led to a cryptic arched door. Those tracks were of a man's bare feet. . . .

*"Conan!"* He wheeled back into the chamber just in time to catch the Devi of Vendhya in his arms as she rushed across the room and threw herself upon him, catching him about the neck with a frantic clasp, half hysterical with terror and gratitude and relief.

His wild blood had been stirred to its uttermost by all that had passed. He caught her to him in a grasp that would have made her wince at another time, and crushed her lips with his. She made no resistance; the Devi was drowned in the elemental woman. She closed her eyes and drank in his fierce, hot, lawless kisses with all the abandon of passionate thirst. She was panting with his violence when he ceased for breath, and glared down at her lying limp in his mighty arms.

"I knew you'd come for me," she murmured. "You would not leave me in this den of devils."

At her words recollection of their environment came to him suddenly. He lifted his head and listened intently. Silence reigned over the castle of Yimsha, but it was a silence impregnated with menace. Peril crouched in every corner, leered invisibly from every hanging.

"We'd better go while we can," he muttered. "Those cuts were enough to kill any common beast—or *man*—but a wizard has a dozen lives. Wound one, and he writhes away like a crippled snake to soak up fresh venom from some source of sorcery."

He picked up the girl and carrying her in his arms like a child, he strode out into the gleaming jade corridor and down the stairs, nerves tautly alert for any sign or sound.

"I met the Master," she whispered, clinging to him and shuddering. "He worked his spells on me to break my will. The most awful was a moldering corpse which seized me in its arms—I fainted then and lay as one dead, I do not know how long. Shortly after I regained consciousness I heard sounds of strife below, and cries, and then that snake came slithering through the curtains—ah!" She shook at the memory of that horror. "I knew somehow that it was not an illusion, but a real serpent that sought my life."

"It was not a shadow, at least," answered Conan cryptically. "He knew he was beaten, and chose to slay you rather than let you be rescued."

"What do you mean, *he?*" she asked uneasily, and then shrank against him, crying out, and forgetting her question. She had seen the corpses at the foot of the stairs. Those of the Seers were not good to look at; as they lay twisted and contorted, their hands and feet were exposed to view, and at the sight Yasmina went livid and hid her face against Conan's powerful shoulder.

## 10. *Yasmina and Conan*

Conan passed through the hall quickly enough, traversed the outer chamber and approached the door that let upon the gallery. Then he saw the floor sprinkled with tiny, glittering shards. The crystal sheet that had covered the doorway had been shivered to bits, and he remembered the crash that had accompanied the shattering of the crystal globe. He believed that every piece of crystal in the castle had broken at that instant, and some dim instinct or memory of esoteric lore vaguely suggested the truth of the monstrous connection between the Lords of the Black Circle and the golden pomegranates. He felt the short hair bristle chilly at the back of his neck and put the matter hastily out of his mind.

He breathed a deep sigh of relief as he stepped out upon the green jade gallery. There was still the gorge to cross, but at least he could see the white peaks glistening in the sun, and the long slopes falling away into the distant blue hazes.

The Irakzai lay where he had fallen,

an ugly blotch on the glassy smoothness. As Conan strode down the winding path, he was surprized to note the position of the sun. It had not yet passed its zenith; and yet it seemed to him that hours had passed since he plunged into the castle of the Black Seers.

He felt an urge to hasten, not a mere blind panic, but an instinct of peril growing behind his back. He said nothing to Yasmina, and she seemed content to nestle her dark head against his arching breast and find security in the clasp of his iron arms. He paused an instant on the brink of the chasm, frowning down. The haze which danced in the gorge was no longer rose-hued and sparkling. It was smoky, dim, ghostly, like the life-tide that flickered thinly in a wounded man. The thought came vaguely to Conan that the spells of magicians were more closely bound to their personal beings than were the actions of common men to the actors.

But far below, the floor shone like tarnished silver, and the gold thread sparkled undimmed. Conan shifted Yasmina across his shoulder, where she lay docilely, and began the descent. Hurriedly he descended the ramp, and hurriedly he fled across the echoing floor. He had a conviction that they were racing with time, that their chances of survival depended upon crossing that gorge of horrors before the wounded Master of the castle should regain enough power to loose some other doom upon them.

When he toiled up the farther ramp and came out upon the crest, he breathed a gusty sigh of relief and stood Yasmina upon her feet.

"You walk from here," he told her; "it's downhill all the way."

She stole a glance at the gleaming pyramid across the chasm; it reared up against the snowy slope like the citadel of silence and immemorial evil.

"Are you a magician, that you have conquered the Black Seers of Yimsha, Conan of Ghor?" she asked, as they went down the path, with his heavy arm about her supple waist.

"It was a girdle Khemsa gave me before he died," Conan answered. "Yes, I found him on the trail. It is a curious one, which I'll show you when I have time. Against some spells it was weak, but against others it was strong, and a good knife is always a hearty incantation."

"But if the girdle aided you in conquering the Master," she argued, "why did it not aid Khemsa?"

He shook his head. "Who knows? But Khemsa had been the Master's slave; perhaps that weakened its magic. He had no hold on me as he had on Khemsa. Yet I can't say that I conquered him. He retreated, but I have a feeling that we haven't seen the last of him. I want to put as many miles between us and his lair as we can."

He was further relieved to find horses tethered among the tamarisks as he had left them. He loosed them swiftly and mounted the black stallion, swinging the girl up before him. The others followed, freshened by their rest.

"And what now?" she asked. "To Afghulistan?"

"Not just now!" He grinned hardly. "Somebody—maybe the governor—killed my seven headmen. My idiotic followers think I had something to do with it, and unless I am able to convince them otherwise, they'll hunt me like a wounded jackal."

"Then what of me? If the headmen are dead, I am useless to you as a hostage. Will you slay me, to avenge them?"

He looked down at her, with eyes fiercely aglow, and laughed at the suggestion.

"Then let us ride to the border," she

said. "You'll be safe from the Afghulis there——"

"Yes, on a Vendhyan gibbet."

"I am queen of Vendhya," she reminded him with a touch of her old imperiousness. "You have saved my life. You shall be rewarded."

She did not intend it as it sounded, but he growled in his throat, ill pleased.

"Keep your bounty for your city-bred dogs, princess! If you're a queen of the plains, I'm a chief of the hills, and not one foot toward the border will I take you!"

"But you would be safe——" she began bewilderedly.

"And you'd be the Devi again," he broke in. "No, girl; I prefer you as you are now—a woman of flesh and blood, riding on my saddle-bow."

"But you can't *keep* me!" she cried. "You can't——"

"Watch and see!" he advised grimly.

"But I will pay you a vast ransom——"

"Devil take your ransom!" he answered roughly, his arms hardening about her supple figure. "The kingdom of Vendhya could give me nothing I desire half so much as I desire you. I took you at the risk of my neck; if your courtiers want you back, let them come up the Zhaibar and fight for you."

"But you have no followers now!" she protested. "You are hunted! How can you preserve your own life, much less mine?"

"I still have friends in the hills," he answered. "There is a chief of the Khurakzai who will keep you safely while I bicker with the Afghulis. If they will have none of me, by Crom! I will ride northward with you to the steppes of the *kozaki*. I was a hetman among the Free Companions before I rode southward. I'll make you a queen on the Zaporoska River!"

"But I can not!" she objected. "You must not hold me——"

"If the idea's so repulsive," he demanded, "why did you yield your lips to me so willingly?"

"Even a queen is human," she answered, coloring. "But because I am a queen, I must consider my kingdom. Do not carry me away into some foreign country. Come back to Vendhya with me!"

"Would you make me your king?" he asked sardonically.

"Well, there are customs——" she stammered, and he interrupted her with a hard laugh.

"Yes, civilized customs that won't let you do as you wish. You'll marry some withered old king of the plains, and I can go my way with only the memory of a few kisses snatched from your lips. Ha!"

"But I must return to my kingdom!" she repeated helplessly.

"Why?" he demanded angrily. "To chafe your rump on gold thrones, and listen to the plaudits of smirking, velvet-skirted fools? Where is the gain? Listen: I was born in the Cimmerian hills where the people are all barbarians. I have been a mercenary soldier, a corsair, a *kozak*, and a hundred other things. What king has roamed the countries, fought the battles, loved the women, and won the plunder that I have?

"I came into Ghulistan to raise a horde and plunder the kingdoms to the south—your own among them. Being chief of the Afghulis was only a start. If I can conciliate them, I'll have a dozen tribes following me within a year. But if I can't I'll ride back to the steppes and loot the Turanian borders with the *kozaki*. And you'll go with me. To the devil with your kingdom; they fended for themselves before you were born."

She lay in his arms looking up at him,

and she felt a tug at her spirit, a lawless, reckless urge that matched his own and was by it called into being. But a thousand generations of sovereignship rode heavy upon her.

"I can't! I can't!" she repeated helplessly.

"You haven't any choice," he assured her. "You—what the devil!"

They had left Yimsha some miles behind them, and were riding along a high ridge that separated two deep valleys. They had just topped a steep crest where they could gaze down into the valley on their right hand. And there a running fight was in progress. A strong wind was blowing away from them, carrying the sound from their ears, but even so the clashing of steel and thunder of hoofs welled up from far below.

They saw the glint of the sun on lance-tip and spired helmet. Three thousand mailed horsemen were driving before them a ragged band of turbaned riders, who fled snarling and striking like fleeing wolves.

"Turanians!" muttered Conan. "Squadrons from Secunderam. What the devil are they doing here?"

"Who are the men they pursue?" asked Yasmina. "And why do they fall back so stubbornly? They can not stand against such odds."

"Five hundred of my mad Afghulis," he growled, scowling down into the vale. "They're in a trap, and they know it."

THE valley was indeed a cul-de-sac at that end. It narrowed to a high-walled gorge, opening out further into a round bowl, completely rimmed with lofty, unscalable walls.

The turbaned riders were being forced into this gorge, because there was nowhere else for them to go, and they went reluctantly, in a shower of arrows and a whirl of swords. The helmeted riders harried them, but did not press in too rashly. They knew the desperate fury of the hill tribes, and they knew too that they had their prey in a trap from which there was no escape. They had recognized the hillmen as Afghulis, and they wished to hem them in and force a surrender. They needed hostages for the purpose they had in mind.

Their emir was a man of decision and initiative. When he reached Gurashah valley, and found neither guides nor emissary waiting for him, he pushed on, trusting to his own knowledge of the country. All the way from Secunderam there had been fighting, and tribesmen were licking their wounds in many a crag-perched village. He knew there was a good chance that neither he nor any of his helmeted spearmen would ever ride through the gates of Secunderam again, for the tribes would all be up behind him now, but he was determined to carry out his orders —which were to take Yasmina Devi from the Afghulis at all costs, and to bring her captive to Secunderam, or if confronted by impossibility, to strike off her head before he himself died.

Of all this, of course, the watchers on the ridge were not aware. But Conan fidgeted with nervousness.

"Why the devil did they get themselves trapped?" he demanded of the universe at large. "I know what they're doing in these parts—they were hunting me, the dogs! Poking into every valley —and found themselves penned in before they knew it. The poor fools! They're making a stand in the gorge, but they can't hold out for long. When the Turanians have pushed them back into the bowl, they'll slaughter them at their leisure."

The din welling up from below increased in volume and intensity. In the

strait of the narrow gut, the Afghulis, fighting desperately, were for the time holding their own against the mailed riders, who could not throw their whole weight against them.

Conan scowled darkly, moved restlessly, fingering his hilt, and finally spoke bluntly: "Devi, I must go down to them. I'll find a place for you to hide until I come back to you. You spoke of your kingdom—well, I don't pretend to look on those hairy devils as my children, but after all, such as they are, they're my henchmen. A chief should never desert his followers, even if they desert him first. They think they were right in kicking me out—hell, I won't be cast off! I'm still chief of the Afghulis, and I'll prove it! I can climb down on foot into the gorge."

"But what of me?" she queried. "You carried me away forcibly from *my* people; now will you leave me to die in the hills alone while you go down and sacrifice yourself uselessly?"

His veins swelled with the conflict of his emotions.

"That's right," he muttered helplessly. "Crom knows what I *can* do."

She turned her head slightly, a curious expression dawning on her beautiful face. Then:

"Listen!" she cried. "Listen!"

A distant fanfare of trumpets was borne faintly to their ears. They stared into the deep valley on the left, and caught a glint of steel on the farther side. A long line of lances and polished helmets moved along the vale, gleaming in the sunlight.

"The riders of Vendhya!" she cried exultingly.

"There are thousands of them!" muttered Conan. "It has been long since a Kshatriya host has ridden this far into the hills."

"They are searching for me!" she exclaimed. "Give me your horse! I will ride to my warriors! The ridge is not so precipitous on the left, and I can reach the valley floor. Go to your men and make them hold out a little longer. I will lead my horsemen into the valley at the upper end and fall upon the Turanians! We will crush them in the vise! Quick, Conan! Will you sacrifice your men to your own desire?"

The burning hunger of the steppes and the wintry forests glared out of his eyes, but he shook his head and swung off the stallion, placing the reins in her hands.

"You win!" he grunted. "Ride like the devil!"

SHE wheeled away down the left-hand slope and he ran swiftly along the ridge until he reached the long ragged cleft that was the defile in which the fight raged. Down the rugged wall he scrambled like an ape, clinging to projections and crevices, to fall at last, feet first, into the mêlée that raged in the mouth of the gorge. Blades were whickering and clanging about him, horses rearing and stamping, helmet plumes nodding among turbans that were stained crimson.

As he hit, he yelled like a wolf, caught a gold-worked rein, and dodging the sweep of a simitar, drove his long knife upward through the rider's vitals. In another instant he was in the saddle, yelling ferocious orders to the Afghulis. They stared at him stupidly for an instant; then as they saw the havoc his steel was wreaking among their enemies, they fell to their work again, accepting him without comment. In that inferno of licking blades and spurting blood there was no time to ask or answer questions.

The riders in their spired helmets and

gold-worked hauberks swarmed about the gorge mouth, thrusting and slashing, and the narrow defile was packed and jammed with horses and men, the warriors crushed breast to breast, stabbing with shortened blades, slashing murderously when there was an instant's room to swing a sword. When a man went down he did not get up from beneath the stamping, swirling hoofs. Weight and sheer strength counted heavily there, and the chief of the Afghulis did the work of ten. At such times accustomed habits sway men strongly, and the warriors, who were used to seeing Conan in their vanguard, were heartened mightily, despite their distrust of him.

But superior numbers counted too. The pressure of the men behind forced the horsemen of Turan deeper and deeper into the gorge, in the teeth of the flickering tulwars. Foot by foot the Afghulis were shoved back, leaving the defile-floor carpeted with dead, on which the riders trampled. As he hacked and smote like a man possessed, Conan had time for some chilling doubts—would Yasmina keep her word? She had but to join her warriors, turn southward and leave him and his band to perish.

But at last, after what seemed centuries of desperate battling, in the valley outside there rose another sound above the clash of steel and yells of slaughter. And then with a burst of trumpets that shook the walls, and rushing thunder of hoofs, five thousand riders of Vendhya smote the hosts of Secunderam.

That stroke split the Turanian squadrons asunder, shattered, tore and rent them and scattered their fragments all over the valley. In an instant the surge had ebbed back out of the gorge; there was a chaotic, confused swirl of fighting, horsemen wheeling and smiting singly and in clusters, and then the emir went down with a Kshatriya lance through his breast, and the riders in their spired helmets turned their horses down the valley, spurring like mad and seeking to slash a way through the swarms which had come upon them from the rear. As they scattered in flight, the conquerors scattered in pursuit, and all across the valley floor, and up on the slopes near the mouth and over the crests streamed the fugitives and the pursuers. The Afghulis, those left to ride, rushed out of the gorge and joined in the harrying of their foes, accepting the unexpected alliance as unquestioningly as they had accepted the return of their repudiated chief.

THE sun was sinking toward the distant crags when Conan, his garments hacked to tatters and the mail under them reeking and clotted with blood, his knife dripping and crusted to the hilt, strode over the corpses to where Yasmina Devi sat her horse among her nobles on the crest of the ridge, near a lofty precipice.

"You kept your word, Devi!" he roared. "By Crom, though, I had some bad seconds down in that gorge—*look out!*"

Down from the sky swooped a vulture of tremendous size with a thunder of wings that knocked men sprawling from their horses.

The simitar-like beak was slashing for the Devi's soft neck, but Conan was quicker—a short run, a tigerish leap, the savage thrust of a dripping knife, and the vulture voiced a horribly human cry, pitched sideways and went tumbling down the cliffs to the rocks and river a thousand feet below. As it dropt, its black wings thrashing the air, it took on the semblance, not of a bird, but of a black-robed human body that fell, arms in wide black sleeves thrown abroad.

Conan turned to Yasmina, his red knife still in his hand, his blue eyes smolder-

ing, blood oozing from wounds on his thickly-muscled arms and thighs.

"You are the Devi again," he said, grinning fiercely at the gold-clasped gossamer robe she had donned over her hill-girl attire, and awed not at all by the imposing array of chivalry about him. "I have you to thank for the lives of some three hundred and fifty of my rogues, who are at least convinced that I didn't betray them. You have put my hands on the reins of conquest again."

"I still owe you my ransom," she said, her dark eyes glowing as they swept over him. "Ten thousand pieces of gold I will pay you——"

He made a savage, impatient gesture, shook the blood from his knife and thrust it back in its scabbard, wiping his hands on his mail.

"I will collect your ransom in my own way, at my own time," he said. "I will collect it in your palace at Ayodhya, and I will come with fifty thousand men to see that the scales are fair."

She laughed, gathering her reins into her hands. "And I will meet you on the shores of the Jhumda with a hundred thousand!"

His eyes shone with fierce appreciation and admiration, and stepping back, he lifted his hand with a gesture that was like the assumption of kingship, indicating that her road was clear before her.

[ THE END ]

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# Feigman's Beard

By AUGUST W. DERLETH

*A brief and eery tale of hexerei*

MARTHA FEIGMAN looked cautiously from behind the curtain into her half-brother's bedroom. Her eyes swept the room, the unoccupied bed, and fixed upon Eb's big form at the mirror. As usual, he was combing out his beard, the red mop of which he was so fond. He was bent forward, his eyes intent on the reflection of the long red hair which hid most of his face. He passed his comb through the beard again and again, and finally, putting the comb down, he stroked the beard with his blunt fingers.

The woman withdrew softly, her fingers catching nervously together. He had not said a word to her when he came into the house that evening, not a word about those hogs. She knew he had sold them, hers with his, because the hog rack was empty as he drove into the yard. But he had paid her nothing and, worse, he gave no hint that he meant to pay.

Impulsively, she pulled aside the curtain and stepped into his room. "I want my money, Eb," she said uncertainly.

He turned, his head outthrust. "What're you talkin' about?" he asked harshly, his eyes flashing anger.

"My money," she repeated. "My money for them hogs. I know you sold 'em. You ain't paid me my share yet."

"You ain't got no money comin'," he said shortly.

"I hev so," she replied. "I raised them hogs. They're mine. You went an' sold 'em 'thout my knowin' anything about it. 'Tain't no more 'n right I get my money for them hogs."

He rose slowly and came casually over to her, his hands hanging at his sides. Then suddenly he had his fingers at her throat and was shaking her, his rough beard thrust into her face. She flailed weakly with her arms, and screamed until he choked her off. He released her abruptly and flung her beyond the curtain into the adjoining room.

She fell against the floor, and for a moment she lay there. Then she pulled herself up, her eyes fixed in fright upon the towering bulk of her half-brother standing in the doorway to his bedroom.

"You ain't got no money comin'," he said in a cold voice. "Don't forget that."

She was too frightened to speak.

"You hear me?" he demanded.

She nodded, not daring to make a move.

He stood for a moment looking down at her, then turned and disappeared behind the curtain, where the noise of a chair being pulled up indicated to Martha that he had returned to the table and was now again engaged with his beard.

She got up slowly and painfully, felt gingerly of her throat, and went through the house to the kitchen, where she stood in the dark, looking out over the moonlit fields toward the square of light in the small house where the widow Klopp lived. The sight of the lamp burning in the widow's house gave her hope of getting her money from Eb.

For the widow Klopp, as everybody knew, was a hex, a witch-woman, who could do anything for money. It was whispered that she had once sent her broom over to Hepshell's and killed four of his cows because he had said something about her. And once, too, she had cured a whole family of diphtheria. As Martha thought of these things, she felt that the old woman could help her get her money. If she couldn't, no one could.

She slipped out of the house, hoping Eb had not heard her. But he would be too busy with his beard. As she thought of his beard, Martha wondered if there might not be a way to punish him through his mop of red hair. Perhaps Mrs. Klopp could make it fall out.

She hurried.

THE widow Klopp was at home, as the light had indicated. She was a very old woman, almost helpless with age, it seemed. She made Martha welcome in a few short words.

"You've come because that Eb's got to be too much for you, ain't so?" she asked.

This confirmation of her motive without her having said a word astonished Martha and convinced her at once of the old woman's powers. She nodded.

"That's it," she said. "He went 'n sold my hogs, an' now he ain't figurin' to give me my money."

The widow Klopp looked speculatively across the table. "What you aim to hev me do?" she asked quietly.

"I want my money."

The old lady grunted. "Didja ever know it was Eb who stole most-a my land from me when my old man died?" she asked suddenly, a curiously hard light in her eyes.

"No!"

"Sure," said the old woman. "I knew I couldn't do nothin' then. And since then, Eb's been mighty careful 'bout where he lets his things lay around."

"What you mean?" asked Martha breathlessly.

"I mean I hev t' hev somethin' that's his before I c'n do anything 'bout your money."

"Oh," said Martha uneasily. "But it's only my money I want. I don't want nothin' else, except maybe something to make his beard fall out."

"That's it," said the widow. "Go right home, an' when he's asleep, you cut off a couple-a hairs from that beard an' you bring 'em back here. An' bring the looking-glass he uses, too."

IN TEN minutes Martha was home again, standing breathlessly in the kitchen, listening for any sound to indicate that Eb was not asleep. The only sounds she heard were the persistent calls of whippoorwills from the meadow, and the snoring sound of Eb's breathing.

Quickly, she got her scissors, crept into the bedroom, and with great caution snipped off a few of the long red hairs from his bushy beard. Then she snatched up the mirror and backed carefully from the room, her heart pounding excitedly.

She went out into the moonlight again and ran across the fields toward the yellow square of lamplight beyond which the widow Klopp waited for her. Once she paused to look back, but there was nothing in the dark silence of the house she had left to indicate that Eb might have awakened.

Misgivings came to Martha at sight of the eagerness with which the old woman took the strands of hair and the mirror from her.

"What you aim to do?" she asked nervously.

The widow Klopp smiled, exposing her worn and almost toothless gums. "I aim to ask the devil to sit on this glass. I reckon Eb'll never see such another sight as I aim to make him see. He ain't never seen it, and he won't see it again."

"An' my money?"

The old woman's laugh came like the lash of a whip. "You'll get your money, Martha. Yes, an' a good deal besides, or I ain't no good at figurin' no more."

For the first time Martha was afraid. A sense of peril took possession of her, and she watched the old woman nervously, marvelling at the speed with which she got around.

The widow Klopp turned the lamp low and hung a red cloth about it. Then she laid the mirror, glass up, on the table, and on the glass she laid the strands of hair Martha had brought. Around it she drew a circle, and the line of the circle she covered with a gray powder.

She turned to Martha suddenly and said, "Better you look the other way. Ain't a good thing to see."

Then she took a match and touched it to the hairs on the glass, reciting a quaint gibberish, a mixture of broken English and old German incomprehensible to Martha. A green glow of fire circled the mirror, playing on the glass. Martha watched in fascination, unable to draw her eyes away.

Suddenly there was a puff of crimson smoke that seemed to fill the small room, and a ghastly stench came to fill Martha's nostrils. She coughed and gasped against the widow's steady gibbering. Blinded, she half rose, one hand feeling before her.

"It's too much for me," she gasped.

Abruptly the old woman leaned forward, turned up the lamp and took away the red cloth. Just as suddenly, the smoke and flame vanished, and Martha saw dazedly that not only was the widow's table untouched by any mark of fire,

but the looking-glass was not marred by any blackness from the flame that had burned on it.

A smile broke into the old woman's face. "That's all," she said, one claw-like hand gently caressing the mirror. "That's all, Martha. You c'n take the glass home now and put it where he keeps it. When he looks into it in the mornin', you'll get that money. But mind you don't look into it on the way home. An' don't look into it before sun-up in the mornin', nohow."

"How much is it?" asked Martha, hoping it would not cost her too much.

The old woman shook her head. "'Tain't anythin'," she said. "I been waitin' fer this chance a good many years now. Who'd-a thought his own half-sister'd give it t' me! But mind you don't look into the glass before the sun comes up, no matter what you might think you'll see there; because then you'll have to pay—an' you won't pay me, you'll pay him as sat on it. An' it won't be nice pay. So mind."

THE women parted, and Martha made her way back to the house where her hateful half-brother lay asleep. The widow's spell had taken longer than she had thought, for the moon was slanting westward, and even the whippoorwills were silent. The creak of the kitchen door sounded unnaturally loud, and for a moment fear caught and held her quiet on the threshold.

But no sound came from Eb's room to break the stillness. Reassured, Martha closed the door, tiptoed to his room, and replaced the looking-glass. Then she went quietly to her own room, a sense of relief flooding her. She had got even with Eb at last, for all he had done to her. And in the morning she would have her money, and more, the widow had said. Only she must not look into the glass; even as she thought it, she felt an odd, overpowering urge to see what Eb would see, and it was only with effort that she repressed it.

As she lay in bed, she wondered presently what the widow could have meant when she said that Martha would get a good deal more money than was coming to her from the sale of the hogs. She thought of this for some time, and at last, unable to satisfy herself as to its meaning, she got up and lit a candle to guide her upstairs to the tiny attic where her father had many years ago put the *Seventh Book of Moses*, in which the secrets of hexerei and witchcraft were hidden away.

After some search, she found the slim volume, and sat by the light of her candle leafing through it. She pondered over cures for falling hair, measles, lumbago, and countless common ailments, and did not notice the passing of time.

Presently she came upon a paragraph which dealt with death curses. There her eyes were caught and held by a sentence—"To frighten an enemy to death, contrive to get his looking-glass and ask the devil to sit upon it, for the Evil One will put into the glass a being not of this world to bring about the death of the desired one." So that was what the widow Klopp had meant—Eb's death would leave her sole owner of the farm.

At that moment two sounds came to her ears. The old-fashioned kitchen clock began to strike four, and from her half-brother's room came the customary noise of his early rising.

A match was struck below, and a lamp chimney lifted and replaced. Then came sounds of Eb walking across the floor in his bare feet, the lamp being put on the table, and a chair scraping the floor. Then Eb sat down.

Now he would be taking up his comb, she thought, and passing it through his hateful beard.

A frightful scream, hoarse with terror, drove into the attic from below. A chair crashed to the floor. Then came the sound of a heavy body striking the floor.

For a moment Martha made no move. Then she dropped the book in her lap, snatched up the candle, and went hurriedly down the attic stairs. She ran through her room into Eb's.

Eb lay on the floor, motionless, his mouth agonizingly wide, gaping at her from the depths of his bushy beard. On his beard were black marks—as if blackened fingers had brushed repeatedly through it.

She fell to her knees at his side and felt for his heart. He was dead. She knelt for a moment, looking at his dead body with mingled relief and pleasure. Then she rose and went to the tiny closet where she knew he kept his money. Behind a half-dozen old coats she found it, a heavy bag of silver hanging on a long leather cord.

She took it down and carried it, with some effort, into the bedroom, where she looked into it by the light of her candle. It was almost full of silver dollars, the way in which Eb had chosen to keep his money, since he had always scorned paper. It was probably all the money Eb had, and now it was hers! That was what the widow Klopp had meant.

She looked down at her half-brother's body with fierce joy. Her memory, stirred, brought to her attention some long-lost words of her father's—"Those who invoke the devil's help will have to pay him when the time comes!"—but this she thrust coldly away. She wondered instead, curiously, about the mirror. There was an urge upon her, now that she had the money, to look into the glass and see what had frightened Eb to death. Scorning the widow Klopp's warning, she reveled in the strength she felt with the leather cord of Eb's money-bag in her hand.

She located the glass out of the corner of her eyes—then she faced it and looked into it. The glass was black, and upon its surface played lambent fire, outlining a hellish face, a face that was Eb Feigman's and yet was not, a face without eyes, with rotting, bleeding nose and lips, a face through which yellowing bones pushed out. And behind it was something even more terrible, *something alive!*

In an access of terror, Martha blew out the candle to blot out sight of the glass. Then she saw something coming out of the mirror, slithering evilly from the black glass. It was looking at her. She screamed, and swung at it with the heavy bag of silver, swinging it wildly, frantically in the darkness. She thought something touched her neck, and whirled the bag around her.

Then something closed about her neck, jerking upward. She fell, striking her head against the bureau, and descended into blackness.

IT WAS the widow Klopp who found the Feigmans. The doctor who examined them said that Eb had died of heart-failure. He had had trouble with his heart for a long time. But Martha's death was strange. She had been strangled. He could not understand how it had happened. She had been strangled by the bag of silver dollars—somehow the loop of the cord had caught on a clothes hook near the bureau, she had fallen unconscious, and the leather cord, looped twice about her neck and weighted by the heavy bag, had choked the life from her frail body.

# Nude With a Dagger

By JOHN FLANDERS

*The old money-lender bumped into a weird problem that all his hardness could not penetrate*

OLD GRYDE was a money-lender, and a hard one. In the course of his career, five thousand clients owed him money, he was the occasion of one hundred and twelve suicides, of nine sensational murders, of assignments, bankruptcies and financial disasters without number.

A hundred thousand maledictions were called down on his head, and he laughed at all of them. But the hundred thousand and first malediction killed him, in the strangest and most frightful fashion.

I owed him two hundred pounds, he ground out of me the most abominable interest payments every month, and yet he had made me his intimate friend. As a matter of fact, this was only a way he had of torturing me, for I was forced to submit to every sort of cruelty and malice at his hands, to echo his boisterous laughter as his victims begged, entreated, and even died at his hands.

He scrupulously recorded all this suffering and blood in his day-book and his ledger, as his ill-gotten fortune grew day after day.

But today I do not regret the pain he caused me, because I was allowed at last to witness his death-agony. And I wish all his dear colleagues a like fate.

ONE morning I found him in his office engaged in an argument with a client, a very pale and very handsome young man.

The young man was speaking:

"It is impossible for me to pay you, Mr. Gryde, but I implore you not to sell me out. Take this painting. It is the one good piece of work I have done. I have worked it over a hundred times; I have put my heart's blood into it. Even now I realize that it isn't quite finished. There is something lacking still—I can't tell exactly what it is—but I know I shall find out in time, and then I will finish it.

"Take it for this debt which is killing me—and is killing my poor mother!"

Gryde sneered. When he noticed me, he called my attention to a moderately large painting which stood against his bookcase. When I caught sight of it, I started with surprize and admiration. It seemed to me that I had never seen anything so perfect.

It was a life-size nude, a man as handsome as a god, standing out against a vague, cloudy background, a background of tempest, night and flame.

"I don't know yet what I shall call it," said the artist in a voice filled with pain. "That figure you see there—I have been dreaming of it ever since I was a child; it came to me in a dream just as certain melodies came from heaven in the night to Mozart and Haydn."

"You owe me three hundred pounds, Mr. Warton," said Gryde.

The young man clasped his hands together.

"And my painting, Mr. Gryde! It is

worth twice that, three times that, ten times that!"

"In a hundred years," assented Gryde. "I shan't live long enough to get the good of it."

But as he spoke I seemed to catch in his face a sort of vacillating glimmer which was different from the steel-hard gaze I had always seen there before. Was it admiration of an artistic masterpiece, or was it the prospect of fabulous profit?

Then Gryde went on:

"I am sorry for you," he said, "and away down in my heart I have a weakness for artists. I will take it and credit you with a hundred pounds on your debt."

The artist opened his mouth to reply. The usurer cut him off.

"You owe me three hundred pounds, payable at the rate of ten pounds a month. I will sign a receipt for ten months. Don't forget to be prompt in your payment eleven months from today, Mr. Warton!"

Warton had covered his face with his beautiful hands.

"Ten months! You are giving me ten months free from worry, ten months of relief for Mother—Mother is sadly nervous and ill, Mr. Gryde—and I can work hard in these ten months——"

He took the receipt.

"But," added Gryde, "you admit yourself that there is something still lacking to the picture. You must put the finishing touch to it, and you must find a name for it by the time the ten months are up."

The artist promised all this, and the picture was hung on the wall above old Gryde's desk.

ELEVEN months went by, and Warton was unable to pay his installment of ten pounds. He begged and implored Gryde to allow him more time, but to no avail. The usurer secured an order for the sale of the poor boy's effects. When the officers came, they found mother and son sleeping the sleep of death in a room filled with asphyxiating fumes from a brazier of live coals.

On the table, there was a letter for Gryde.

"I agreed to furnish you a name for my picture," the artist had written him. "You may call it *Vengeance*. And as for my promise to finish the picture, I will keep that promise, too."

Gryde was very much annoyed.

"The name," he argued "doesn't fit the picture at all. And how can a dead man come back and finish a picture?"

But his challenge to the other world was answered.

ONE morning I found Gryde terribly worried and excited.

"Look at the painting!" he cried, the moment I entered the room. "Don't you see something strange about it?"

I studied the painting, but I could discover no change in it. My assurance seemed to relieve him greatly.

"Do you know——" he began. He passed his hand over his forehead, and I could see drops of perspiration standing out on his brow.

"It was last night, sometime after midnight. I had gone to bed; then all at once I remembered that I had left some very important papers lying on my desk.

"I got up at once to see that they were put away safely. I never have any trouble in finding my way about in the dark in this house, for I know every corner and crevice of it. I came into my office here without taking the trouble to turn on a light. There was really no need for one, for the moonlight fell square on my desk. As I leaned over my papers, I had a feeling that something was moving between the window and me——

"Look at the picture! Look at the pic-

ture!" Gryde cried out suddenly in abject terror.

Then, in a moment, he murmured: "I must be imagining things. I have heard of hallucinations but I can't remember ever having had one—I thought I saw the man in the picture move again.

"Well, when I came in here last night, it seemed to me I saw—no, I swear I *did* see that man in the painting reach out his arm to seize me!"

"You're going crazy," said I.

"I wish I could explain it so," said Gryde; "that would be better than——"

"Well, why don't you destroy the painting, if you think all this isn't just imagination?"

Gryde's face brightened.

"That hadn't occurred to me," he said; "I suppose because it was too simple."

He opened a drawer and took out a long-bladed dagger with a delicately chiseled handle.

He walked toward the picture with the dagger in his hand. Then, suddenly, he seemed to change his mind.

"No!" he said. "I'm not going to fling a hundred pounds into the fire just because I had a bad dream. You're the one that's crazy, young friend."

And he flung the weapon angrily down on his desk.

WHEN I went back the next day, I did not find the same Gryde. In his stead was a broken old man with the eyes of a tracked beast, shaking with insane terror.

"No," he howled, "I'm not crazy, I'm not an imbecile! I know what I'm talking about. I got up again last night, and came in here to see if the other thing had been a dream. And I tell you—I tell you—*he* came out of the picture," Gryde bellowed, twisting his hands around each other, "and—and—look at the picture, you damned fool! He took my dagger away from me!"

I put my hands up to my head. I felt myself turning as crazy as old Gryde was. The thing was impossible, but it was true. The nude figure in the painting held in his hand a dagger which had not been there the day before, a dagger that I recognized by the artistic carving on the handle. It was the weapon which Gryde had flung down on the desk when I was here last!

I begged Gryde, by all he held sacred, to destroy the painting. But mad with terror though he was, he could not bring himself to wreck an object that had money value.

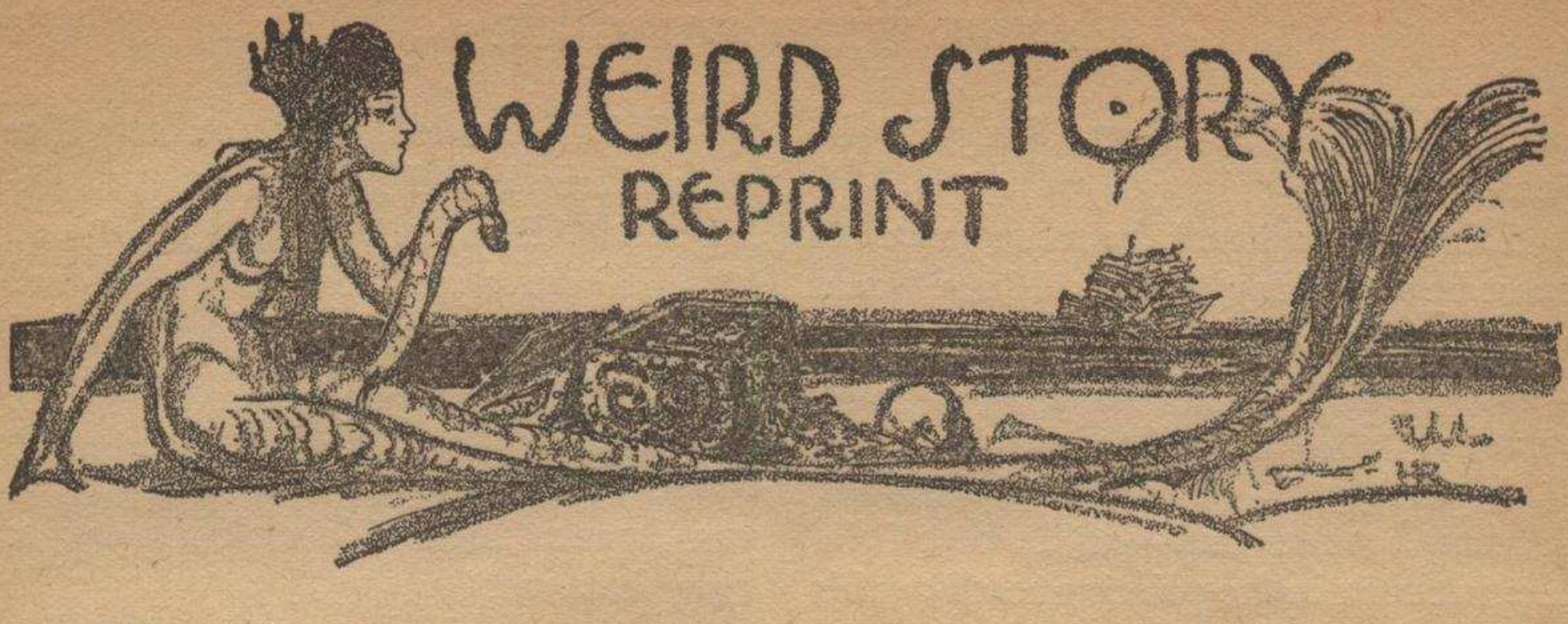
*He still did not believe that Warton would keep his promise!*

* * * * *

GRYDE is dead.

We found him in his armchair, his body emptied of blood, his throat cut clear across. The murderous steel had slashed into the leather of the chair.

And when I looked at the painting, I saw that the blade of the dagger was red to the hilt.




# The Music of Erich Zann*

By H. P. LOVECRAFT

I HAVE examined maps of the city with the greatest care, yet have never again found the Rue d'Auseil. These maps have not been modern maps alone, for I know that names change. I have, on the contrary, delved deeply into all the antiquities of the place; and have personally explored every region, of whatever name, which could possibly answer to the street I knew as the Rue d'Auseil. But despite all I have done, it remains an humiliating fact that I can not find the house, the street, or even the locality, where during the last months of my impoverished life as a student of metaphysics at the university, I heard the music of Erich Zann.

That my memory is broken, I do not wonder; for my health, physical and mental, was gravely disturbed throughout the period of my residence in the Rue d'Auseil, and I recall that I took none of my few acquaintances there. But that I can not find the place again is both singular and perplexing; for it was within a half-hour's walk of the university and was distinguished by peculiarities which could hardly be forgotten by anyone who had been there. I have never met a person who has seen the Rue d'Auseil.

The Rue d'Auseil lay across a dark river bordered by precipitous brick blear-windowed warehouses and spanned by a ponderous bridge of dark stone. It was always shadowy along that river, as if the smoke of neighboring factories shut out the sun perpetually. The river was also odorous with evil stenches which I have never smelled elsewhere, and which may some day help me to find it, since I should recognize them at once. Beyond the bridge were narrow cobbled streets with rails; and then came the ascent, at first gradual, but incredibly steep as the Rue d'Auseil was reached.

I have never seen another street as narrow and steep as the Rue d'Auseil. It was almost a cliff, closed to all vehicles, consisting in several places of flights of steps, and ending at the top in a lofty ivied wall. Its paving was irregular, sometimes stone slabs, sometimes cobblestones, and sometimes bare earth with struggling greenish-gray vegetation. The houses were tall, peaked-roofed, incredibly old,

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* From WEIRD TALES for May, 1925.

and crazily leaning backward, forward, and sidewise. Occasionally an opposite pair, both leaning forward, almost met across the street like an arch; and certainly they kept most of the light from the ground below. There were a few overhead bridges from house to house across the street.

The inhabitants of that street impressed me peculiarly. At first I thought it was because they were all silent and reticent; but later decided it was because they were all very old. I do not know how I came to live on such a street, but I was not myself when I moved there. I had been living in many poor places, always evicted for want of money; until at last I came upon that tottering house in the Rue d'Auseil kept by the paralytic Blandot. It was the third house from the top of the street, and by far the tallest of them all.

My room was on the fifth story; the only inhabited room there, since the house was almost empty. On the night I arrived I heard strange music from the peaked garret overhead, and the next day asked old Blandot about it. He told me it was an old German viol-player, a strange dumb man who signed his name as Erich Zann, and who played evenings in a cheap theater orchestra; adding that Zann's desire to play in the night after his return from the theater was the reason he had chosen this lofty and isolated garret room, whose single gable window was the only point on the street from which one could look over the terminating wall at the declivity and panorama beyond.

Thereafter I heard Zann every night, and although he kept me awake, I was haunted by the weirdness of his music. Knowing little of the art myself, I was yet certain that none of his harmonies had any relation to music I had heard before; and concluded that he was a composer of highly original genius. The longer I listened, the more I was fascinated, until after a week I resolved to make the old man's acquaintance.

One night, as he was returning from his work, I intercepted Zann in the hallway and told him that I would like to know him and be with him when he played. He was a small, lean, bent person, with shabby clothes, blue eyes, grotesque, satyr-like face, and nearly bald head; and at my first words he seemed both angered and frightened. My obvious friendliness, however, finally melted him; and he grudgingly motioned to me to follow him up the dark, creaking and rickety attic stairs. His room, one of only two in the steeply pitched garret, was on the west side, toward the high wall that formed the upper end of the street. Its size was very great, and seemed the greater because of its extraordinary bareness and neglect. Of furniture there was only a narrow iron bedstead, a dingy washstand, a small table, a large bookcase, an iron music-rack, and three old-fashioned chairs. Sheets of music were piled in disorder about the floor. The walls were of bare boards, and had probably never known plaster; whilst the abundance of dust and cobwebs made the place seem more deserted than inhabited. Evidently Erich Zann's world of beauty lay in some far cosmos of the imagination.

MOTIONING me to sit down, the dumb man closed the door, turned the large wooden bolt, and lighted a candle to augment the one he had brought with him. He now removed his viol from its moth-eaten covering, and taking it, seated himself in the least uncomfortable of the chairs. He did not employ the music-rack, but, offering no choice and playing from memory, enchanted me for over an hour with strains I had never heard

before; strains which must have been of his own devising. To describe their exact nature is impossible for one unversed in music. They were a kind of fugue, with recurrent passages of the most captivating quality, but to me were notable for the absence of any of the weird notes I had overheard from my room below on other occasions.

Those haunting notes I had remembered, and had often hummed and whistled inaccurately to myself; so when the player at length laid down his bow I asked him if he would render some of them. As I began my request the wrinkled satyr-like face lost the bored placidity it had possessed during the playing, and seemed to show the same curious mixture of anger and fright which I had noticed when first I accosted the old man. For a moment I was inclined to use persuasion, regarding rather lightly the whims of senility; and even tried to awaken my host's weirder mood by whistling a few of the strains to which I had listened the night before. But I did not pursue this course for more than a moment; for when the dumb musician recognized the whistled air his face grew suddenly distorted with an expression wholly beyond analysis, and his long, cold, bony right hand reached out to stop my mouth and silence the crude imitation. As he did this he further demonstrated his eccentricity by casting a startled glance toward the lone curtained window, as if fearful of some intruder—a glance doubly absurd, since the garret stood high and inaccessible above all the adjacent roofs, this window being the only point on the steep street, as the concierge had told me, from which one could see over the wall at the summit.

The old man's glance brought Blandot's remark to my mind, and with a certain capriciousness I felt a wish to look out over the wide and dizzying panorama of moonlit roofs and city lights beyond the hilltop, which of all the dwellers in the Rue d'Auseil only this crabbed musician could see. I moved toward the window and would have drawn aside the nondescript curtains, when with a frightened rage even greater than before, the dumb lodger was upon me again; this time motioning with his head toward the door as he nervously strove to drag me thither with both hands. Now thoroughly disgusted with my host, I ordered him to release me, and told him I would go at once. His clutch relaxed, and as he saw my disgust and offense, his own anger seemed to subside. He tightened his relaxing grip, but this time in a friendly manner, forcing me into a chair; then with an appearance of wistfulness crossing to the littered table, where he wrote many words with a pencil, in the labored French of a foreigner.

The note which he finally handed me was an appeal for tolerance and forgiveness. Zann said that he was old, lonely, and afflicted with strange fears and nervous disorders connected with his music and with other things. He had enjoyed my listening to his music, and wished I would come again and not mind his eccentricities. But he could not play to another his weird harmonies, and could not bear hearing them from another; nor could he bear having anything in his room touched by another. He had not known until our hallway conversation that I could overhear his playing in my room, and now asked me if I would arrange with Blandot to take a lower room where I could not hear him in the night. He would, he wrote, defray the difference in rent.

As I sat deciphering the execrable French, I felt more lenient toward the old man. He was a victim of physical

and nervous suffering, as was I; and my metaphysical studies had taught me kindness. In the silence there came a slight sound from the window — the shutter must have rattled in the night-wind, and for some reason I started almost as violently as did Erich Zann. So when I had finished reading I shook my host by the hand, and departed as a friend.

The next day Blandot gave me a more expensive room on the third floor, between the apartments of an aged moneylender and the room of a respectable upholsterer. There was no one on the fourth floor.

IT WAS not long before I found that Zann's eagerness for my company was not as great as it had seemed while he was persuading me to move down from the fifth story. He did not ask me to call on him, and when I did call he appeared uneasy and played listlessly. This was always at night—in the day he slept and would admit no one. My liking for him did not grow, though the attic room and the weird music seemed to hold an odd fascination for me. I had a curious desire to look out of that window, over the wall and down the unseen slope at the glittering roofs and spires which must lie outspread there. Once I went up to the garret during theater hours, when Zann was away, but the door was locked.

What I did succeed in doing was to overhear the nocturnal playing of the dumb old man. At first I would tiptoe up to my old fifth floor; then I grew bold enough to climb the last creaking staircase to the peaked garret. There in the narrow hall, outside the bolted door with the covered keyhole, I often heard sounds which filled me with an indefinable dread—the dread of vague wonder and brooding mystery. It was not that the sounds were hideous, for they were not; but that they held vibrations suggesting nothing on this globe of earth, and that at certain intervals they assumed a symphonic quality which I could hardly conceive as produced by one player. Certainly, Erich Zann was a genius of wild power. As the weeks passed, the playing grew wilder, whilst the old musician acquired an increasing haggardness and furtiveness pitiful to behold. He now refused to admit me at any time, and shunned me whenever we met on the stairs.

Then one night as I listened at the door I heard the shrieking viol swell into a chaotic babel of sound; a pandemonium which would have led me to doubt my own shaking sanity had there not come from behind that barred portal a piteous proof that the horror was real — the awful, inarticulate cry which only a mute can utter, and which rises only in moments of the most terrible fear or anguish. I knocked repeatedly at the door, but received no response. Afterward I waited in the black hallway, shivering with cold and fear, till I heard the poor musician's feeble effort to rise from the floor by the aid of a chair. Believing him just conscious after a fainting fit, I renewed my rapping, at the same time calling out my name reassuringly. I heard Zann stumble to the window and close both shutter and sash, then stumble to the door, which he falteringly unfastened to admit me. This time his delight at having me present was real; for his distorted face gleamed with relief, while he clutched at my coat as a child clutches at its mother's skirts.

Shaking pathetically, the old man forced me into a chair whilst he sank into another, beside which his viol and bow lay carelessly on the floor. He sat for some time inactive, nodding oddly, but having a paradoxical suggestion of intense and frightened listening. Subsequently he seemed to be satisfied, and

crossing to a chair by the table wrote a brief note, handed it to me, and returned to the table, where he began to write rapidly and incessantly. The note implored me in the name of mercy, and for the sake of my own curiosity, to wait where I was while he prepared a full account in German of all the marvels and terrors which beset him. I waited, and the dumb man's pencil flew.

It was perhaps an hour later, while I still waited and while the old musician's feverishly written sheets still continued to pile up, that I saw Zann start as from the hint of a horrible shock. Unmistakably he was looking at the curtained window and listening shudderingly. Then I half fancied I heard a sound myself; though it was not a horrible sound, but rather an exquisitely low and infinitely distant musical note, suggesting a player in one of the neighboring houses, or in some abode beyond the lofty wall over which I had never been able to look. Upon Zann the effect was terrible, for, dropping his pencil, suddenly he rose, seized his viol, and commenced to rend the night with the wildest playing I had ever heard from his bow save when listening at the barred door.

IT WOULD be useless to describe the playing of Erich Zann on that dreadful night. It was more horrible than anything I had ever overheard, because I could now see the expression of his face, and could realize that this time the motive was stark fear. He was trying to make a noise; to ward something off or drown something out—what, I could not imagine, awesome though I felt it must be. The playing grew fantastic, delirious, and hysterical, yet kept to the last the qualities of supreme genius which I know this strange old man possessed. I recognized the air—it was a wild Hungarian dance popular in the theaters. This was the first time I had ever heard Zann play the work of another composer.

Louder and louder, wilder and wilder, mounted the shrieking and whining of that desperate viol. The player was dripping with an uncanny perspiration and twisted like a monkey, always looking frantically at the curtained window. In his frenzied strains I could almost see shadowy satyrs and bacchanals dancing and whirling insanely through seething abysses of clouds and smoke and lightning. And then I thought I heard a shriller, steadier note that was not from the viol; a calm, deliberate, purposeful, mocking note from far away in the west.

At this juncture the shutter began to rattle in a howling night-wind which had sprung up outside as if in answer to the mad playing within. Zann's screaming viol now outdid itself, emitting sounds I had never thought a viol could emit. The shutter rattled more loudly, unfastened, and commenced slamming against the window. Then the glass broke shiveringly under the persistent impacts, and the chill wind rushed in, making the candles sputter and rustling the sheets of paper on the table where Zann had begun to write out his horrible secret. I looked at Zann, and saw that he was past conscious observation. His blue eyes were bulging, glassy and sightless, and the frantic playing had become a blind, mechanical orgy that no pen could even suggest.

A sudden gust, stronger than the others, caught up the manuscript and bore it toward the window. I followed the flying sheets in desperation, but they were gone before I reached the demolished panes. Then I remembered my old wish to gaze from this window, the only window in the Rue d'Auseil from which one might see the slope beyond the wall,

*(Please turn to page 655)*

# Coming Next Month

"TARAMIS has instituted human sacrifice, and since her mating with Constantius, no less than five hundred men, women and children have been immolated. Some of these have died on the altar she has set up in the temple, herself wielding the sacrificial dagger, but most have met a more horrible doom.

"She has placed some sort of monster in a crypt in the temple. What it is, and whence it came, none knows. But shortly after she had crushed the desperate revolt of her soldiers against Constantius, she spent a night alone in the desecrated temple, alone except for a dozen bound captives, and the shuddering people saw thick, foul-smelling smoke curling up from the dome, heard all night the frenetic chanting of the queen, and the agonized cries of her tortured captives; and toward dawn another voice mingled with these sounds—a strident, inhuman croaking that froze the blood of all who heard.

"In the full dawn Taramis reeled drunkenly from the temple, her eyes blazing with demoniac triumph. The captives were never seen again, nor the croaking voice heard. But there is a room in the temple into which none ever goes but the queen, driving a human sacrifice before her. And this victim is never seen again. All know that in that grim chamber lurks some monster from the black night of ages, which devours the shrieking humans Taramis delivers up to it.

"I can no longer think of her as a mortal woman, but as a rabid she-fiend, crouching in her blood-fouled lair amongst the bones and fragments of her victims, with taloned, crimsoned fingers. That the gods allow her to pursue her awful course unchecked almost shakes my faith in divine justice." . . .

This tale of the old, forgotten times, a vivid weird novelette of uncanny power and fascinating episodes, is in many ways the most gripping story that Mr. Howard has yet written. It will be published complete in WEIRD TALES for December:

## A WITCH SHALL BE BORN

### By ROBERT E. HOWARD

—ALSO—

### BLACK GOD'S SHADOW

*By* C. L. MOORE

Another fascinating story about Jirel of Joiry, who went down into a terrible place of darkness to release a human soul from torment.

### THE GRAVEYARD DUCHESS

*By* JOHN FLANDERS

The tale of a ghastly horror that stalked at night through the cemetery—a blood-chilling story of the Undead.

### THE VENGEANCE OF TI FONG

*By* BASSETT MORGAN

A thrilling, fascinating tale of talking apes and the weird genius of a Chinese scientist who had mastered too many of Nature's laws.

### XEETHRA

*By* CLARK ASHTON SMITH

A strange weird tale, exquisitely told, about a goatherd who had been king in the olden days, and how he regained and lost again his kingship.

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**December WEIRD TALES Out December 1**

# THE EYRIE

READERS, we can not reiterate too often that WEIRD TALES belongs to you. We welcome your suggestions, and you will find no magazine more responsive to your wishes than WEIRD TALES. We especially invite discussion of the stories themselves. We want to know what stories you like best, and why you like them. And if there are any stories that you don't like, we want to know about those, too. Write a letter to the Eyrie, WEIRD TALES, or fill out the coupon at the end of the Eyrie and mail it to us. As this issue goes to press three stories are in a neck-and-neck race for most popular story in our September issue. These are Seabury Quinn's story of Jules de Grandin, *The Jest of Warburg Tantavul;* the opening installment of Robert E. Howard's tale of Conan, *The People of the Black Circle;* and the third part of Arlton Eadie's novel, *The Trail of the Cloven Hoof.*

### WT Opens New Vistas

Clyed Birdie Bacon, of Vashon, Washington, writes: "My husband and I have been steady readers of your magazine since first we found a copy among a pile of discarded books. It has opened new vistas, much as did the key in that rather breath-taking story, *Through the Gates of the Silver Key,* in your July issue. *The Three Marked Pennies* in the August number is a masterpiece in prose. I wouldn't be surprized to find it in a book of little classics some day."

### New Idea in Fantasy Fiction

Harold F. Keating, of Quincy, Massachusetts, writes: "The September issue of WEIRD TALES was just about perfect. *The People of the Black Circle* promises to be up to Howard's usual high standard, while the third part of *The Trail of the Cloven Hoof* is Eadie's best yet. It introduces an entirely new idea in fantasy fiction; at least, new to me. *Vine Terror,* by Howard Wandrei, is one of those rare stories that entirely gripped my attention to the very end. I did not care much for *The Pale Man,* as it seemed quite senseless to me, and attempted no explanation whatsoever. . . . *The Sinister Painting* was very good, and *Naked Lady* was perfect. *The Jest of Warburg Tantavul,* needless to say, was superb, as Seabury Quinn could not write any other kind."

### A Plea for Shorter Stories

Jack Snow, of Dayton, Ohio, writes: "There isn't a weak story in your latest issue, but I wonder why it is that your Eyrie writers never put in a word for the shorter stories. For years I have noticed that these stories—two, three, four and five pages in length—are usually much more entertaining and in most cases weirder than the longer efforts. I think this is because the longer stories are usually written intentionally; that is, they are carefully planned and plotted to develop so much material, while the shorter stories in many cases are the result of a sudden flash of inspiration and take complete form before the author touches the typewriter. At any rate, such stories as Mary Elizabeth Counselman's tale of the three pennies and Paul Ernst's madman story in the August issue are many times more effective than some of the longer stories. And I don't think Lovecraft's longer stories such as the one of the silver key in the July issue can touch his old tales of a few years ago—the shorter ones—*The Outsider* and *Pickman's Model.*"

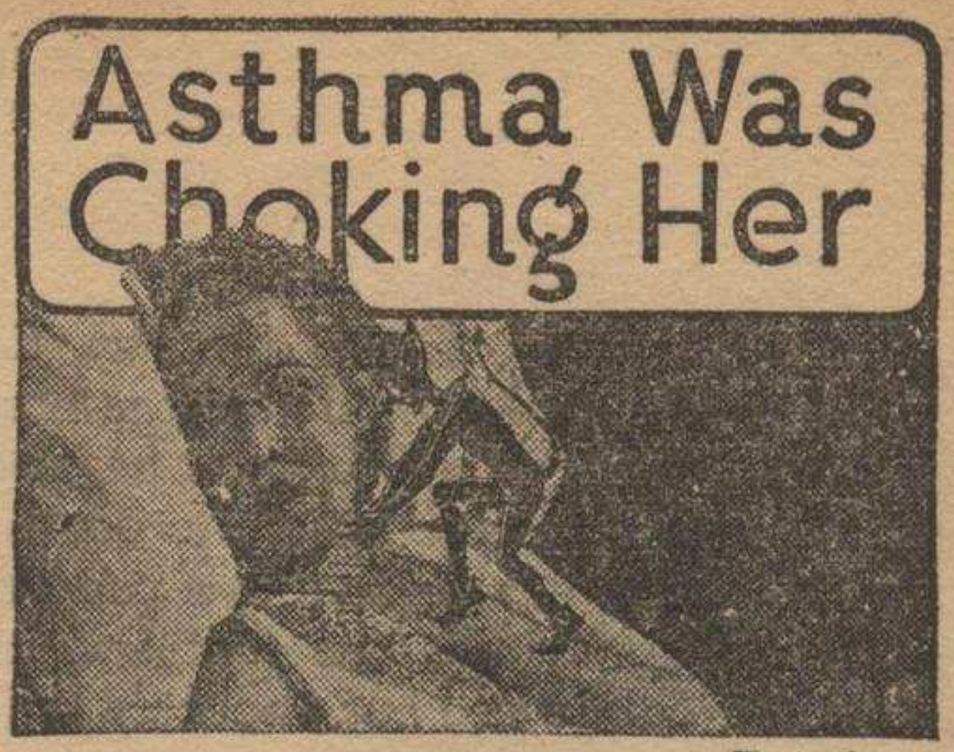
### First Place to Robert E. Howard

Claude H. Cameron, of Toronto, writes: "I have just finished the September issue of

WT and I find it so exceptionally good that I am breaking my silence of several months. I vote first place to my old favorite, Howard, for the first installment of *The People of the Black Circle*. It is Conan at his best, a truly absorbing story that didn't allow my somewhat jaded interest to falter. It appears that this serial will make history for WT. I give second place to Mindret Lord for *Naked Lady*. At last it appears that we have a successor to the late Rev. Whitehead. Enough said. . . . I liked Julia Green's poem, *The Return*. I am glad to read that you do not contemplate an author's page. I doubt if it would materially enhance modern fiction of the weird type to know that author so-and-so eats dill pickles. However, I must say, in deference to other opinions, that a more thorough understanding of Poe is obtained by a careful reading of his life story. . . . The cover design is O. K. It certainly is truly weird. It is evident that M. Brundage has been reading and benefiting by the fans' letters of criticism."

### A Crack at Conan

Robert Bloch, of Milwaukee, writes: "The present issue of WT is rather remarkable in that the short stories by far excel the longer ones—a fact which each successive issue makes more evident. Conan is rapidly becoming a stereotyped hero, but I was greatly pleased with Francis Flagg; a real writer, with something to say. I am awfully tired of poor old Conan the Cluck, who for the past fifteen issues has every month slain a new wizard, tackled a new monster, come to a violent and sudden end that was averted (incredibly enough!) in just the nick of time, and won a new girl-friend, each of whose penchant for nudism won for her a place of honor, either on the cover or on the inner illustration. Such has been Conan's history, and from the realms of the Kushites to the lands of Aquilonia, from the shores of the Shemites to the palaces of Dyme-Novell-Bolonia, I cry: 'Enough of this brute and his iron-thewed sword-thrusts—may he be sent to Valhalla to cut out paper dolls.' I would like to see the above tirade in print—I feel sure that many of your other readers would support me—at least there is good material there for an argument." [Sharpen your axes, you loyal supporters of the Conan tales, for anon we shall publish a short story by Mr.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Bloch, the author of the above letter. It is entitled *The Secret in the Tomb*.—THE EDITOR.]

### From a Budding Medico

Harry S. Weatherby, of Washington, D. C., writes: "Being an interne in a large hospital is not all that it's cracked up to be, and I have to have a magazine or two to occupy my mind when I'm not tending to a patient. WEIRD TALES amply fills the spot and its stories are not only weird but also very brilliant. I have never seen a more clever group of writers than those that you have. The September edition was packed with action and chilling moments for the reader. The best story, in my opinion, was *The Jest of Warburg Tantavul*. The plot was closely knit and ran very smoothly. Three cheers for Seabury Quinn—he could write all of the magazine and I would never get tired. His imagination is something to rave about. Second best was *Vine Terror* by Howard Wandrei. I'm very fond of vampire tales of any description, and this one certainly appealed."

### Another by Cahill

J. Wasso, Jr., of Pen Argyl, Pennsylvania, writes to the Eyrie: "*They Called Him Ghost* by Laurence J. Cahill, in the June issue, is one of the best stories to appear in WEIRD TALES in recent years and earns an undisputed place in the immortal company of the seven or eight greatest stories published in WEIRD TALES since its inception." [Mr. Cahill's story has been very popular with the readers of WEIRD TALES. An even more unusual story by him—a story entitled *Charon*—is scheduled for our January issue.—THE EDITOR.]

### De Grandin's Triumphal Return

Alvin Earl Perry, of Rockdale, Texas, writes: "I was pleasantly surprized on seeing Bram Stoker's tale as the reprint story this month; please let's have more by him. Another reprint which I am looking forward to, and which I am sure you will print soon, is Edmond Hamilton's first story, *The Monster-God of Mamurth*. From what I hear, this must be one fine piece of literature. Little Jules de Grandin certainly made a triumphant return in the September issue. Seabury Quinn wove the threads of plot expertly for the dynamic Frenchman in *The Jest of Warburg Tantavul;* the yarn is told vividly and in a manner that creates an almost tangible atmosphere of terror. . . . Arlton Eadie's serial, *The Trail of the Cloven Hoof,* is coming along remarkably well, although I consider it merely an old plot with a new twist."

### Old Ideas Rehashed

Julius Hopkins, of Washington, D. C., writes: "I have read every story in the September WT, and without a doubt the best story in this issue is *Vine Terror*, with part one of *The People of the Black Circle* in second place. Most all of the tales in this number are old ideas rehashed, but even with that they are so well written that reading them becomes a pleasure instead of proving uninteresting perusals. However, next month's issue promises to bring forth a host of new ideas, headed by WT's new sensational writer, C. L. Moore. I was glad to see Seabury Quinn return with another adventure of Jules de Grandin. Now that he has returned, don't wait too long to publish another story by Edmond Hamilton. And see if you can't get Frank Owen to pen some more of his tender and colorful orientales for the delight of WT readers. I like the cover on the September WT. It is truly a weird picture, and I notice that a certain magazine dealer in D. C. has his front display filled with copies of WT and it makes a truly weird and beautiful exhibit. I am following *The Trail of the Cloven Hoof* with much interest and regret very much that I have to wait a whole month between installments. I wish you would have Mr. Eadie write some more adventures of Count Roulette, who appeared in *The Eye of Truth* in your issue of September, 1932. Count Roulette was a distinctive and most appealing character."

### A Stupendous Issue

Fred Anger, of Berkeley, California, writes: "Titanic! super-colossal! stupendous! (copyright Jack Darrow). These and half a dozen other words followed by exclamation marks describe the September number. Cover A-1! M. Brundage is scrubbing pastels around at a terrific pace. Who in the world could be dissatisfied with a cover like the last one? . . . *Naked Lady* was kind of

*(Please turn to page 654)*

# Suppressed Books of Bible Reveal Man's Inner Power

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| Mar. | Mar. | ---- | | ---- | Mar. | Mar. |
| Apr. | ---- | ---- | Apr.-May | Apr. | Apr. | Apr. |
| ---- | May | ---- | | ---- | May | May |
| ---- | June | ---- | Jun.-Jul. | June | June | June |
| July | ---- | July | | July | July | July |
| Aug. | ---- | ---- | Aug. | Aug. | Aug. | Aug. |
| ---- | ---- | ---- | ---- | Sept. | Sept. | Sept. |
| Oct. | ---- | ---- | Oct. | Oct. | Oct. | Oct. |
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(Continued from page 652)

sappy. Nothing to it as far as I could see. *The Sinister Painting* was in the same boat; both resembled each other closely, and since both were bad, chalk two goose eggs for both authors. (Tut, tut, Greye La Spina, I'm surprized.) *The People of the Black Circle* is Robert E. Howard's triumph. The first installment takes my vote for first place. Next comes *Vine Terror;* Howard Wandrei is no slouch when it comes to weird fiction. Long and Derleth turn out a couple of nice shorts."

### Something Seems Missing

Mrs. J. L. Harvey, of Salisbury, North Carolina, writes: "I have read WEIRD TALES for several years and think it is the best of all magazines. Its stories are unique, mysterious, fantastic, imaginative, not at all like the usual trash. However, there seems to be something missing lately; I don't get the same thrill that I did, for instance, last spring and summer, while *Golden Blood* was running. Can't you do something about this? I think Jack Williamson's *Golden Blood* the best serial I've ever read anywhere, and A. Merritt's *The Woman of the Wood* the best short story you've ever printed. Merritt's little fantasy was perfect, as many others have said, a 'gem'—and then some. . . . I believe Doctor Keller's *The Solitary Hunters* is this year's best serial. My favorite characters are Conan, Northwest Smith and Jules de Grandin. All the Conan tales are excellent, especially *Queen of the Black Coast.* I also enjoy the little bits of poetry which Howard inserts in his stories. I do not agree with some readers about Brundage's excellence. I've seen many others much better than she is. I think Rankin is about the best artist I've ever seen in WEIRD TALES. All of his drawings are perfect; I only wish there were more."

### Look Who's Here!

Jack Darrow, of Chicago, writes to the Eyrie: "The September issue was fine. The cover and the stories were all good. The new serial by Robert E. Howard, *The People of the Black Circle,* cops first place this time. It starts off fine. I'm glad to see Conan in a long story. It's about time that Jules de Grandin returned to your pages. Seabury Quinn's latest fully comes up to his past excellent efforts. Howard Wandrei's story, *Vine Terror,* gets third place. . . . How about getting a new interior decorator? I don't care if Joseph Doolin does live in New York, he was about the best artist you ever had."

## My favorite stories in the November WEIRD TALES are:

| Story | Remarks |
|---|---|
| (1) _____ | _____ |
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## The Music of Erich Zann

*(Continued from page 648)*

and the city outspread beneath. It was very dark, but the city's lights always burned, and I expected to see them there amidst the rain and wind. Yet when I looked from that highest of all gable windows, I saw no city spread below, and no friendly lights gleamed from remembered streets, but only the blackness of space illimitable; unimagined space alive with motion and music, and having no semblance of anything on earth. And as I stood there looking in terror, the wind blew out both the candles in that ancient peaked garret, leaving me in savage and impenetrable darkness with chaos and pandemonium before me, and the demon madness of that night-baying viol behind me.

I staggered back in the dark, without the means of striking a light, crashing against the table, overturning a chair, and finally groping my way to the place where the blackness screamed with shocking music. Once I thought some chill thing brushed me, and I screamed, but my scream could not be heard above that hideous viol. Suddenly out of the blackness the madly sawing bow struck me, and I knew I was close to the player. I felt ahead, touched the back of Zann's chair, and then found and shook his shoulder in an effort to bring him to his senses.

He did not respond, and still the viol shrieked on without slackening. I moved my hand to his head, whose mechanical nodding I was able to stop, and shouted in his ear that we must both flee from the unknown things of the night. But he neither answered me nor abated the frenzy of his unutterable music, while all through the garret strange currents of wind seemed to dance in the darkness and babel. When my hand touched his ear I shuddered, though I knew not why

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—knew not why till I felt of the still face; the ice-cold, stiffened, unbreathing face whose glassy eyes bulged uselessly into the void. And then, by some miracle finding the door and the large wooden bolt, I plunged wildly away from that glassy-eyed thing in the dark, and from the ghoulish howling of that accursed viol whose fury increased even as I plunged.

Leaping, floating, flying down those endless stairs through the dark house; racing mindlessly out into the narrow, steep, and ancient street of steps and tottering houses; clattering down steps and over cobbles to the lower streets and the putrid canyon-walled river; panting across the great dark bridge to the broader, healthier streets and boulevards we know; all these are terrible impressions that linger with me. And I recall that there was no wind, and that the moon was out, and that all the lights of the city twinkled.

DESPITE my most careful searches and investigations, I have never since been able to find the Rue d'Auseil. But I am not wholly sorry; either for this or for the loss in undreamable abysses of the closely written sheets which alone could have explained the music of Erich Zann.


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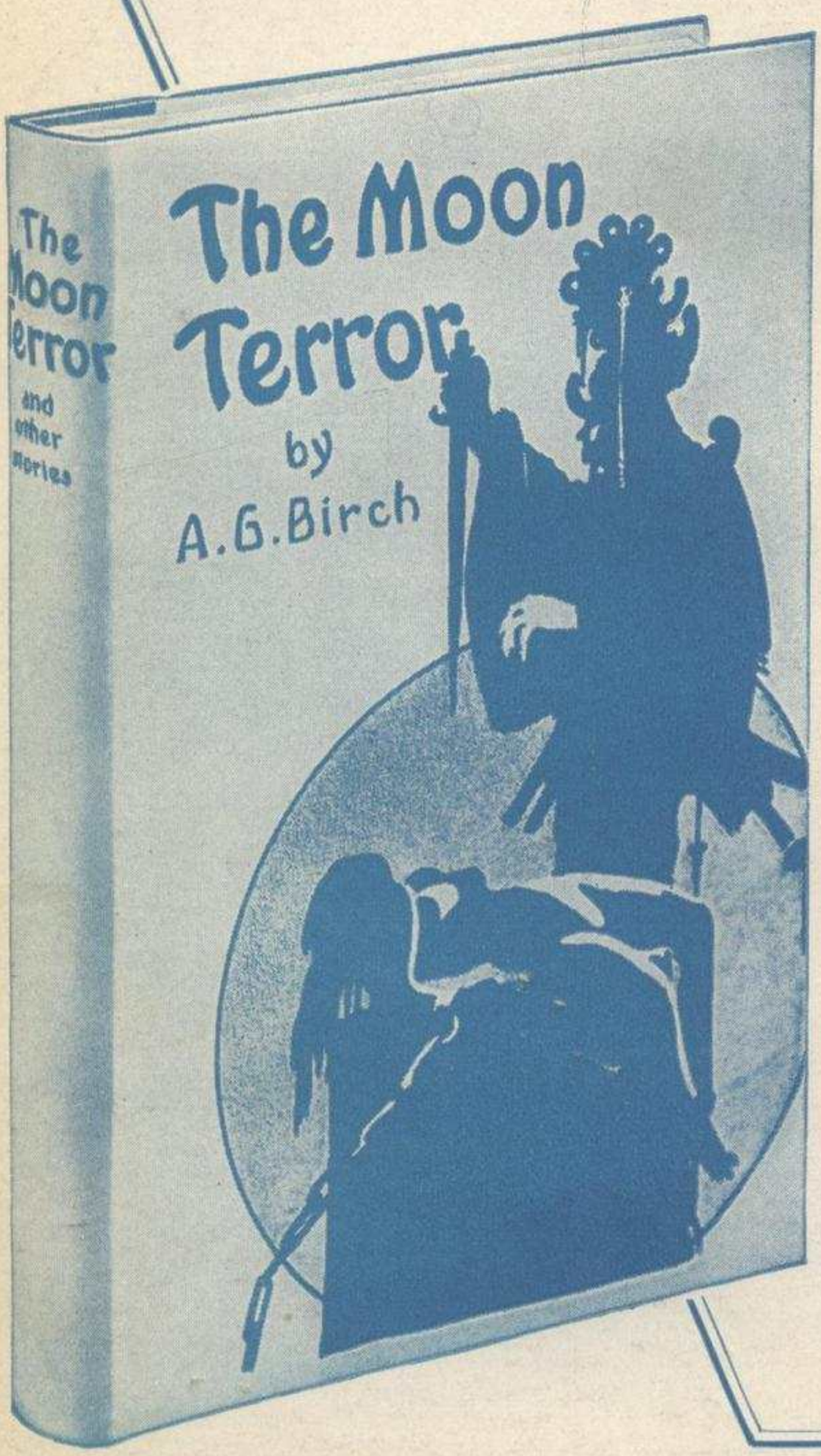


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