JAN. 25c

Weird Tales

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WE DO OUR PART

BLACK BAGHEELA

A thrill-tale of dark horror

By BASSETT MORGAN

ARLTON EADIE
SEABURY QUINN
CLARK ASHTON SMITH

RULERS OF THE FUTURE

a powerful weird-scientific novel

By PAUL ERNST



"PSYCHIANA"

The New Psychological Religion

A new and revolutionary religious teaching based entirely on the misunderstood sayings of the Galilean Carpenter and designed to show how to find and use the same identical power that He used.

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FOURTH—That Jesus had NO MONOPOLY on this Power.

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Dr. Frank B. Robinson
Founder of *"Psychiana."* Author of *"America Awakening"*—*"The God Nobody Knows,"* etc.

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Weird Tales

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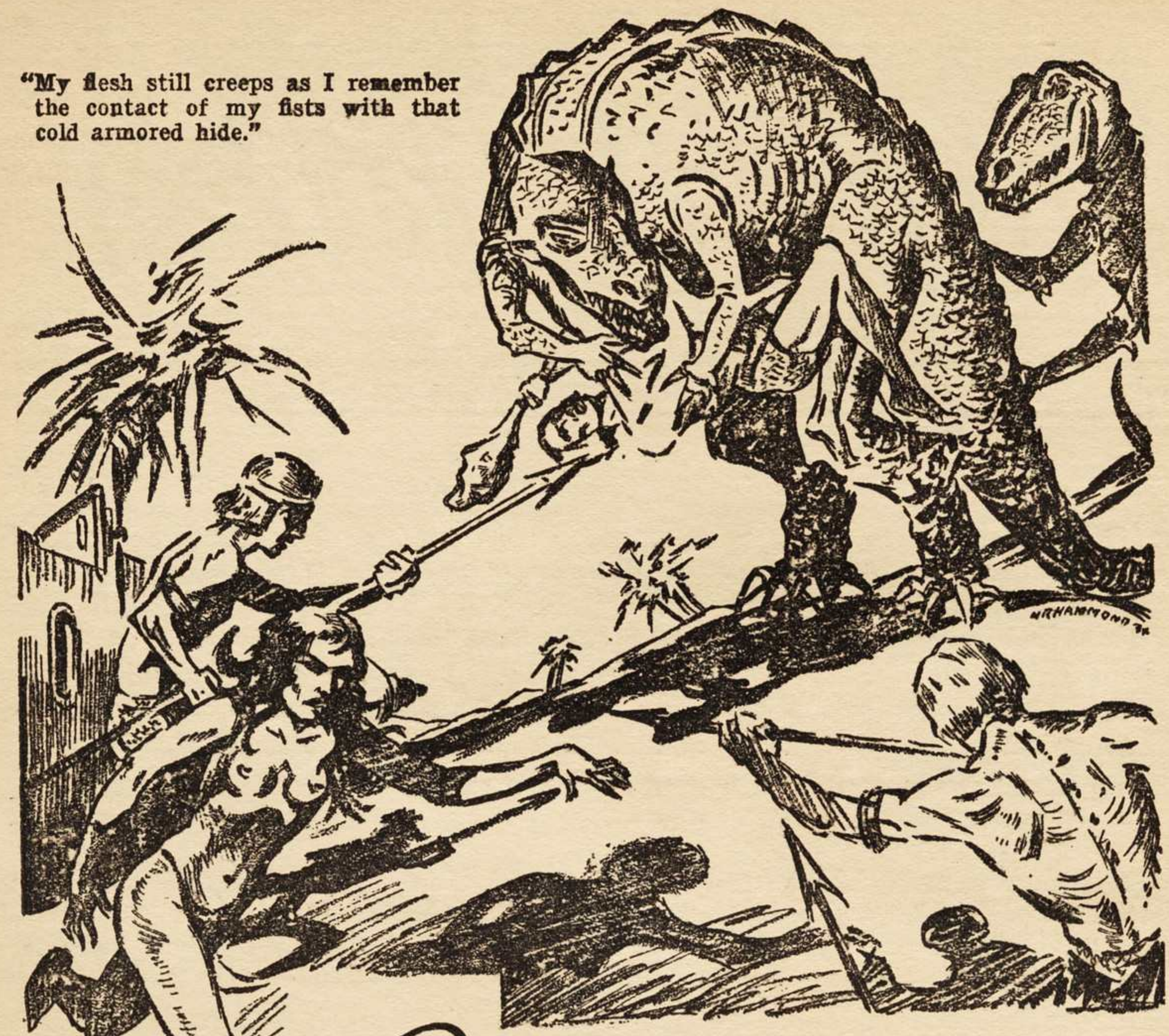
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WEIRD TALES ISSUED 1st OF EACH MONTH

"My flesh still creeps as I remember the contact of my fists with that cold armored hide."



Rulers of the Future

By PAUL ERNST

The story of a trip through the universe with the speed of light, and incredible monsters that rule the human race hundreds of millions of years from now

THE beginning, for me, of the fantastic story I am about to relate, took place in the most prosaic sort of surroundings.

It was a spring morning of the year 1990. I was in a large room outfitted as an office. It was quite an ordinary-looking office; and the man behind the big walnut desk looked like any average businessman.

He was mild-mannered, this man behind the desk. He had on a sober, dark blue business suit. He was a bit below average height, and inclined to rotundity. Only in his eyes and forehead could be read hints of his true greatness. His eyes, deep-set under heavy gray eyebrows, were a sort of translucent gray-green. And his forehead was wide and high, with the smooth outward bulge of the dreamer.

This was George P. Ticknor, colossus of science.

Striding up and down the office as if impatient of the restraint of any four walls, was another man. A distinctly different type, this one. Six feet three, heavily muscled and vast-shouldered, with a small blond spade beard and heavy blond hair, he was a man of action. His face was immobile and his light blue eyes almost secretive in their expressionlessness; but the quick, restless movements of his great body told of a spirit that longed for things to combat. He was Wayland Brock, wealthy adventurer, with the heart of a pioneer and explorer—born years too late into a tamed world.

And seated there beside the desk to interview these two famous men was—myself, one of the youngest and least important of reporters on the *Capetown Globe,* a self-conscious youngster with reddish hair, and hands and feet that seemed always getting in the way. Raymond Woodward. That's me.

"Your paper doesn't think very highly of our modest plans, does it?" Brock had said when I introduced myself. But his smile took the sting from the words, which had to do with the fact that I had been sent instead of some veteran reporter who signed his name to his work.

"It doesn't matter," Professor Ticknor said quickly, laying his hand on my shoulder for an instant. "The younger the man, the more elastic his imagination—and the more chance he has of assimilating the facts we have to give him."

Two fine, kindly men, these; with the simplicity of true greatness. I warmed to them.

And then, there in that commonplace-looking room, with the spring sunshine coming in the windows to gild the homely-looking old-fashioned furniture, Professor Ticknor began to outline his incredible plans, while the striding giant, Brock, grunted from time to time as some particularly salient point was touched upon.

"We are starting on a journey into space," began Ticknor, as calmly as though speaking of a projected trip to Europe. "We are going to Alpha Centauri."

Alpha Centauri. I wrinkled my forehead over that one. Then classroom memories came back to me, and I guess my mouth hung open for a moment.

Alpha Centauri, the nearest star to earth—but so distant, even in its comparative nearness, that it took light, our fastest traveler, more than four years to come from there to here!

"We shall go in a space-projectile which I have invented and perfected, and which Mr. Brock has financed in building and equipping. Out into the heavens——"

His eyes kindled; and Brock stopped his pacing a moment.

"——out into space, to see what stuff the stars are made of. Till now we have known them only through telescopes. But we—my friend and I—will find out at first hand what they are. Are they blazing suns, or cold, luminous bodies? Are they solid, fluid, or vaporous? How were they born, and what will be their future? All these things we will find out by personal observation with the aid of instruments that are at least as wonderful—if not more so—as the space-ship itself which will bear us forward."

I MANAGED to make my pencil work in recording these impossible things. But I was not at all sure that Professor Ticknor and Wayland Brock weren't trying to play a joke on somebody.

"But the speed you will have to attain," I objected. "How on earth can you man-

age to get there and back in one lifetime?"

"We shall go with the speed of light," replied Ticknor. "Indeed, we shall travel on a beam of light. But I'll explain.

"It has long been known that a beam of light strikes an object in its path with a definite impact. That impact, till now, has been so slight as to be almost immeasurable. But now I have a method of producing a light so powerful, and exerting so much force on an object in its path, that it propels that object as a cannon propels a projectile. My space-ship, in a word, will be shot from Earth to Alpha Centauri by a super-searchlight."

He seized pencil and paper and began to draw.

"This is the projectile," he said, sketching in a thing that looked not unlike an old-style rifle cartridge. "And this is the 'gun' from which it is fired." He drew an object that looked like a shallow trench-mortar.

"In the bottom of the 'gun', or, rather, searchlight, is placed a mass of radium. The projectile is lowered into the mouth of the gun as a bullet is rammed into the barrel of an old-time muzzle-loader. The radium is instantly broken down when I throw a switch from inside the shell. A beam of light of almost incalculable power is produced. The projectile is shot forth with the velocity of light, traveling in the straight line of light toward its objective. And in the bowl of the searchlight is left nothing but a little lump of lead. You see?"

"I think so," I said. "How do you manage to break down your radium so instantaneously?"

"That's nobody's business but ours," said Brock bluntly.

Professor Ticknor shrugged. "That is one of the few things about our plans I do not wish to make public," he put it less gruffly. "The super-searchlight, as I have developed it, would be too ghastly an engine of war, if some one got hold of its secret and abused it. By training it on a body of men we could rip them to pieces, smash them to bits! And now that radium has become one of our commoner metals, there would be nothing to stop some nation from building hundreds of the lights and setting out to conquer the world."

I apologized for my indiscreet question. "To get back to your marvelous trip," I said, "how do you propose to get back from Alpha Centauri? Are you carrying one of these super-searchlights with you?"

"In a sense, yes." He pointed to his drawing. "This bulge at the lower end of the projectile is a false bottom. It is really another 'gun' which goes along with the 'bullet' on the trip out. When we wish to come home, I shall point the projectile toward Earth, throw the switch that disintegrates the charge of radium in the false bottom, and we shoot Earthward with the same speed and in the same manner as we shot heavenward."

"How will you manage to equip a projectile for so long a trip?" was my next question. "Even riding on a beam of light, you will need four years each way. Eight years *en route*. Your space-ship must be tremendous to carry provisions for eight years."

Ticknor smiled; and again, for an instant, Brock stopped his pacing.

"That brings up one of the most interesting points of the trip," said the great scientist, "and one on which, if we have guessed wrong, we shall lose our lives.

"It has long been my theory that speed and time are closely related factors, or dimensions, if you want to call them that. When one travels at great speed, he begins to catch up with time. Man has so far been unable to reach a speed great

enough to measure its effect on time. But I believe that in our space-shell, rocketing forth into the heavens with the speed of light, we will not only catch up with time partially—but will *equal and cancel* it. In other words, there will be no such thing as time at 186,000 miles a second. In that event, though we will take four years of time as we know it to reach Alpha Centauri, as far as we ourselves shall be conscious of time we will get there in about three minutes, which will be the time taken to accelerate to that speed."

"Then you'll be asleep for four years?"

"Not at all," said Ticknor a little impatiently. "We shall step into our projectile, throw the switch, and two or three minutes later shall see the great disk of Alpha Centauri out the bow porthole."

"Two or three minutes to you—four years to us," I puzzled. Then I let it go —and I began to despair of ever getting this story seriously accepted by my paper. I believed in Professor Ticknor and his theories. Almost instinctively, I *knew* he and they were right. But making a city editor, and a reading public, believe it was another matter.

"Suppose your guess about the speed of light canceling time is wrong?"

"Then we'll starve to death," said Ticknor. "We have only two weeks' provisions in the shell."

Two weeks' provisions for an eight-year trip! Madness? Perhaps. But a splendid madness, I thought, as I sat there gazing in growing admiration at these two men who were about to risk their lives. How prosaic, how deadly dull, did such sublime adventuring make my own job seem!

"How will you be able to stop before you have crashed into the star you're aiming at?" was my next question. "Traveling at that speed, and with only two or three minutes in which to act, you won't have much time to work at the controls."

"We won't aim at the star," replied Ticknor. "We will aim very carefully a degree or so to one side of the star. When we have reached that point, our speed will be decelerated for us: we shall be caught by the net of gravity of the great globe, and whirled off our course round and round it as a satellite. Then we can proceed to cruise about as we please by means of an ordinary rocket motor with which the shell is equipped."

"The purpose of your trip?" I prepared to conclude this strange interview.

"It's purely for the purpose of scientific research," said Ticknor; "that is, on my part," he added, with a glance at Brock.

"On my part," said Brock, towering before me, "it is for adventure alone. I'm sick of civilization, sick of modern existence. I am glad to leave Earth, if only for a short time and at the risk of my neck."

"I don't think our young friend will be much interested in such an opinion," murmured Ticknor.

But I was—if not for my paper, then personally. The giant had put into words a feeling I had had many a time myself. The boredom of life as lived in the dawn of the Twenty-first Century!

"When do you start?" I asked, shutting my notebook.

"In about four hours," said Ticknor, surprizingly.

"So soon! I had no idea——"

"I didn't give permission for this interview until the last moment," he said, "because I didn't want anything to happen to stop us. So by the time your words are in print, before any misguided imbeciles can get here to prevent our going, we'll be on our way."

"How could your trip be prevented?"

Ticknor shrugged. "Pressure could be

brought to bear by some absurd humane society bent on stopping what they might look on as sheer suicide. Also a rival of mine, a certain scientist——" He stopped, and would not go on.

2

"COULD I see the ship?" I asked, wistfully.

After an instant of hesitation, Ticknor nodded. The three of us left the office and went to the rear where a great concrete shed housed the laboratory. Ticknor pointed to a gigantic mass of mechanism in the center of the place.

The pointed nose of the space-shell stuck out of the muzzle of the "gun" or super-searchlight about twelve feet; enough to show heavy windows, and a trap-door up to which a ladder led. The whole was set on a movable standard, so that the muzzle could be raised or lowered, or swung from side to side to point the shell.

Ticknor showed me how the standard was moved, then motioned for me to climb into the shell itself.

I got a glimpse of a tiny cabin, the walls of which were lined with metal drawers containing heaven knew what weird apparatus; and I saw a rocket motor that was too old a story to me to call for investigation. Then, in a corner, I saw a carefully packed crate.

"What's in that?" I asked. "Provisions?"

"No," said Ticknor. He stared doubtfully at me, as if wondering whether to answer my question. Then he went on: "That crate contains, in thick packing, one of the bits of equipment I mentioned as being as wonderful as the space-ship itself. It's a little time-machine. In it is a camera with several million feet of film. With this we shall be able to photograph the birth and growth of the star. I shall set the machine for, say a billion years in the past while we hang over Alpha Centauri. When it has gone back that far, a counteracting spring will be set in motion and it will return through the eons, bearing visible records of the star's beginning and career. Ah, this trip will go down through the ages! It marks the start of man's solution of vast problems of infinity and creation."

I was now beyond shock; my sensibilities of comprehension were numbed. The wonders of the cabin around me; the crate in which was the time-machine, that dream never before realized; the fact that Ticknor had harnessed light itself to be his driving force—all these things were too much for my mind to grasp.

Never mind, I knew I'd give my eyeteeth to go along.

"If only I could go with you!" I burst out impulsively.

Ticknor merely smiled. But Brock laughed shortly, and his big hand clapped me on the back in a way that nearly knocked the wind out of me.

"It will be a trip, eh?" he said. "But of course it's impossible, even if you really wanted to go."

"I do really want to go," I said, again speaking almost before I knew what I was saying.

"You're just dazzled by the thought," said Brock. "Anyway, it's impossible, of course. Utterly impossible."

And it was, naturally. This was none of my affair. I hardly knew the two; certainly there was no reason why they should take me along.

We went back to Ticknor's office, where I bade them a reluctant good-bye, and started out to the street to my giro.

But as I was leaving the office, Ticknor's servant hurried in. His face was pale and agitated.

"The police, sir," he announced. "They are at the front door. They demand admittance. With them is Professor Gorse, and some other gentlemen."

Brock and Ticknor looked at each other. Brock swore. Ticknor's face went as white as his servant's.

"Gorse!" he said. "Gorse!"

"What's wrong?" I asked, sensing news. Gorse's name was almost as potent in science as Ticknor's.

"Gorse—my deadliest rival," explained Ticknor rapidly. "He's found out about my projected flight before I meant him to. Now he's come to prevent me taking it, and rob me of the glory."

"How could he do that? By what authority——"

"Through the Humanitarian League. The sort of well-intentioned fools who rule that a man may not risk his own life if he chooses. The kind that insist on 'taking care of you in spite of yourself.' I was afraid of this. If Gorse ever gets in that laboratory, he'll fix my space-shell so it'll be weeks before I can get it in order again."

The servant tugged at his arm.

"Shall I admit the police, sir, and the officers of the Humanitarian League?"

Ticknor gazed helplessly at Brock.

"What shall we do?"

Brock's big fist smashed down on the desk.

"Do? Do? Leave on our trip at once! That's what we'll do! Or try to, anyhow. Ticknor, you go back to the lab and point the space-shell. I'll hold the crowd off till it's done. Then I'll join you—and we'll shoot out into the heavens. Quick, man! How long will you need for your calculations?"

"Five minutes," said Ticknor, his eyes shining. "But can you, all alone——"

"I'll help," I snapped. And Brock and I ran down the hall to the front door, getting there just as the police, led by Gorse—who smelled a rat in the delay to open the house to the Law—started battering against the panels to break them in.

THE door crashed in at last; and I caught a glimpse of many men, some in police uniform, and some—evidently the Humanitarian League representatives—in civilian clothes.

Leading them was an undersized man with thick glasses behind which were eyes that glowed fairly green with rage and jealousy. This was Gorse, Ticknor's rival.

Gorse darted toward the hallway leading back to the laboratory. Without comment, Brock plucked him up by the coat collar and flung him back.

"Let me in to Ticknor!" screeched Gorse. "Admit me to the laboratory! We have warrants—full authority—to make sure you and he do not take your trip. You are not to be allowed to throw your lives away——"

"Bah," snapped Brock. "A lot you care about our lives! It's the prestige Ticknor may get that's bothering you."

I saw him glance at the watch on his wrist. About a minute of the five Ticknor needed for his calculations had passed.

But now one of the policemen strode up.

"Sorry, sir," he said, "but we must be admitted to the laboratory, while Professor Gorse officially seals your airplane, or whatever it is, to stop you from killing yourselves."

"Suppose I refuse to let you pass?" said Brock, his big bulk filling the doorway into the hall.

"Then we'll place you under arrest, and force our way in," replied the officer. I thought I saw sympathy in his eyes—the sympathy of the man of action for

another man of action who is being hampered by some of the officious busybodies our civilization always has with it.

A minute and a half had elapsed now since Ticknor had left for the laboratory, to prepare the shell for its launching.

"Act quickly," pleaded Gorse, his sparse hair awry. "They're stalling for time. Arrest them." And in his anxiety he crowded toward Brock again.

This time the big man picked him up and threw him bodily into the press of men still crowded by the street door. And that started it!

The officer who had parleyed with Brock sprang toward him with his stick raised to bring it down on the adventurer's head. But Brock had been expecting the move. There was a crack as his big fist smashed into the policeman's jaw. The officer sagged limply to the floor.

"Get him!" another uniformed man spoke. And four men rushed Brock.

Here, I joined in. Side by side, Brock and I met the four. Their numbers had little to do with the outcome of the struggle—for the first few seconds. The two of us, retreating a few feet into the hall, filled the corridor so that only two of them could get at us. And we more than held our own.

Again I saw Brock down a man with a single blow. I couldn't do quite that well myself. It took me three smashing punches to get my man; and in the meantime I got a bad crack on the shoulder with the fellow's stick. But in about ten seconds the first two were out of the fray and the second two were on us.

A FEW more steps we gave way down the corridor. There were at least twenty men in the crowd that pressed to get at us. Hopeless, of course, if we were fighting to beat the lot of them. But we weren't. All we wanted was to stand them off till Ticknor should have the shell pointed.

The second brace of our assailants went down—my man with a left punch knocking the wind from him, and a right cross to the jaw sending him to the land of Nod; Brock's man under a whirlwind of blows that I thought must tear his head from his shoulders.

"You'll catch it . . . for this . . . Woodward," panted Brock. "They'll jail you . . . for life."

"Oh, no, they won't!" I said. For even then I had a plan in mind. . . .

We retreated again, with the crowd after us. By now the affair had passed from a matter of forcing an official way into Ticknor's laboratory, and had settled down to one of placing under arrest two apparently dangerous criminals.

I saw two of the police pull their riot guns—squat barrels with revolving cylinders containing the new glass-cased paralyzing bullets. Once Brock or I had one of those bullets in us we'd be out of the world for twenty-four hours!

"Watch——" I gasped in warning, leaping back to avoid a crashing sweep of a hardwood stick. But Brock had seen the guns drawn. Promptly he seized his nearest assailant by the throat and held him, half throttled, as a living shield before his body.

No such protection was before me, however. Out of the corner of my eye I saw a paralyzing gun leveled at me. I fell to the floor, and heard a ping of glass down the hall where one of the fragile bullets had hit. Then Brock, jerking the stick from the lax hand of the man he was throttling, threw it at the gunman. It caught him in the throat. He did no more shooting!

"The laboratory! Run for it!" snapped Brock to me. "Can't face those guns."

We had retreated half down the long hallway by now. Some thirty feet behind us was the heavy laboratory-door. I whirled and ran for it, with Brock pounding at my heels and the police roaring for us to halt.

I jerked the door open and leaped into the great room behind it. Brock followed, slammed the door shut again, and shot the ponderous bolts Ticknor had equipped it with to make his scientific secrets safe from marauders.

Instantly there was a clamor from the hall. Fists and sticks beat against the door. "Open it!" bellowed a voice I recognized as belonging to the officer who had first felt the weight of Brock's fist.

Brock turned toward the great shell-mechanism. I turned, too, and saw Ticknor, eyes blazing with concentration, bending over a calculating-chart.

"One more minute," Ticknor said. "I'm almost done."

He left the board, and sprang to the mechanism. He spun a wheel, and I saw the whole thing, shell and "gun" and all, slowly turn and elevate its muzzle.

TICKNOR glanced at his chart, raised the snout of the space-ship an infinitesimally small distance. Then he pressed a button in a column close by. The roof overhead silently parted in the middle and slid back to reveal the clear sky above us.

Behind us, the door was resounding to the blows battering against it. The panels were heavy, and the bolts were strong; but the barrier could not hold long under that strain.

"It's set to be fired in eighty seconds," Ticknor rapped out. "Get in, Brock. Hurry!"

He set the example by darting up the ladder and in through the door of the space-ship. Brock ran after him. And I —I followed Brock!

I tumbled into the door so close behind him that he hadn't a chance of shutting me out, even if he'd been prepared for the move.

"What——" he began.

"I'm going along," I said, fumbling for the lever that swung the trap-door shut and hermetically sealed it.

"You can't! We won't permit——"

"Forty seconds left," rapped out Ticknor, who was gazing through a cabin window at a chronometer on the laboratory wall. Glancing through the same window, I could see the laboratory door buckle in the middle as it was charged from the hall. We could hear no sound in the shell; but it was obvious that the panels wouldn't stand much more such treatment.

"Get out, I say!" roared Brock. "It's your last chance. I don't want to have to throw you out."

"I tell you I'm going along," I said. I'd got the door shut by now, and was striving amateurishly to lock it as Ticknor had showed me how.

"You young fool!" But acceptance—and something like friendship—gleamed in Brock's cool blue eyes. "Come, then, if you want to risk your neck."

"Seal that door!"

Like a bugle call Ticknor's voice rang out. His hand was on the heavy copper switch set in the control board. Beads of sweat were on his forehead.

Through the window we saw the laboratory door strain inward once more. And then Ticknor's hand slammed the big switch home.

There was a flood of light that was dazzling clear through the double walls of the shell. I heard a soft puff of sound. Then I knew no more.

3

IT SEEMED only a fraction of a second that consciousness was clicked off. If it *was* clicked off: I wasn't sure whether I had been unconscious or simply in a complete mental turmoil for an instant.

At any rate I was conscious now; and I picked myself up off the floor, gazing dazedly about me.

"Hel*lo,*" said Brock, shaking himself like a big dog. "You all right, Woodward? Professor?"

"All right," said Ticknor, blinking. And I nodded.

The three of us gazed, still rather densely, at each other.

Ticknor and I were in the direct path of light beating fiercely in at the port window. Brock was half in and half out of the beam. From the waist up he was in intense daylight; the legs of him were in deep night.

It was the queerest sunlight I ever saw —like a straight beam from a searchlight it poured in the window; and the shadow next to the sharp outline of its path was utterly unrelieved, solid black.

But then I remembered. This wasn't sunlight—it was Alpha Centauri-light!

Our trip, then, was over. In that little click of time, four years had passed. Even as Ticknor had said it would be, our journey had been completed almost before we knew it had started.

"Well," said Ticknor, shakily, "we're here."

Commonplace words; but there were no words big enough to describe what had happened. An instant ago, to our consciousness at any rate, we had been on earth, annoyed by police and the Humanitarian League. Now we were out in the immensity of space, circling about in a thin metal shell. No language is designed to express such things.

Ticknor reached into one of the compartments lining the walls, and got out heavily smoked squares of glass. He handed us each one, and we stepped to the window to look out at the blazing globe we had so miraculously reached.

How can I tell adequately of the next few moments? How can I describe our emotions as we slowly realized what had happened — the fantastic, unbelievable thing that had occurred?

We pressed close to the port window, gazing with all our eyes at the flaming mass some scores of millions of miles away.

It looked the size of a dinner plate from the distance where the net of its gravity had slowed our light-speed. It was golden yellow. We could almost see its surface seethe with the immense internal heat of its mass. There were queer spots on it, evidently cooler places; and altogether it resembled——

"Strange," I heard Ticknor mutter. "Strange. This yellow color—that is not the color I had expected to find."

He looked yet more intently.

Then Brock spoke up. "It looks exactly like our own sun, doesn't it?"

"It does," said Ticknor, still with that baffled note in his voice. "Sun spots and all. . . ."

I could only stare at the great golden plate and try to remember where we were. Out in the heavens. . . .

"Are all the stars exact duplicates of our own sun, save for difference in size?" mused Ticknor aloud. "But that can't be. The colors. Some are white, some blue-white, and some orange——"

At that moment he was interrupted by Brock's excited cry.

"Professor! Look below! A satellite! And the damned thing looks exactly like Earth!"

At that we all pressed our cheeks to

the glass to look down at as sharp an angle as possible. And the next instant we all stared dumfoundedly at each other —to press close to the glass again and peer down at that amazing satellite.

Even I, as a layman utterly unversed in things scientific or astronomic, could get the astounding resemblance.

There below us swam in space an ice-white ball mottled with occasional green spots that looked remarkably like Earth. Slightly different, it was, but not much, from the atlas I had studied in classroom days.

There was a long stretch of land, sheathed in white, spreading toward the upper pole, that was the continents of Africa and Eurasia to the life. And across a huge stretch of plain that must be a sea, were two continents—also sheathed in white for the most part, that certainly seemed to be North and South America.

"But the Atlantic Ocean has grown," I mumbled, involuntarily speaking in Earth-terms of this odd satellite. "That means the Pacific, if we could see it around the bend of the globe, must be cut in half."

"Continental drift," replied Ticknor; and as I gazed at him in astonishment for an instant, I could see the pulse in his throat pounding heavily.

"The white coating," spoke up Brock, his heavy voice vibrating. "What is it?"

"Ice," said Ticknor. "Glaciers, spreading from pole to pole, and leaving oases of green, fruitful land here and there."

"So much like Earth, except for that too-wide Atlantic, and the glaciers," whispered Brock.

And then Ticknor straightened up from the window and stood before us, a little man with mild gray-green eyes, inclined to rotundity, commonplace-looking and yet somehow stamped with all the indomitability that makes the human race what it is.

"Gentlemen," he said, "let us not deceive ourselves any longer. You know, I think, what I am about to tell you."

I BELIEVE we did know—only the conscious mind always strives to stave off admitting as fact a truth that is repulsive. But we waited to hear him put it into words.

"The blazing ball off yonder not only looks like our own Sun, it *is* the Sun. And the satellite below us is our own Earth."

I felt my heart constrict as though a fist had clutched it, for I felt—I *knew*—that some fearful revelation was yet to come from the awed-looking little scientist who stood so straight before us. And I saw Brock tense his powerful body as if to receive a blow.

"My calculations, when I aimed the shell at Alpha Centauri, were made too hastily," Ticknor went on. "Thanks to Gorse and his meddling, we missed our target—how narrowly I don't know, but enough. As a result, we have traveled clear around the universe—to return to our starting-point! Einstein was right. A beam of light, traveling in a straight line as we know it, eventually circumnavigates the entire universe and comes back to the point of its beginning."

"But—good heaven," half whispered Brock, "if it is four light-years from Earth to Alpha Centauri——" He could not finish the sentence.

Ticknor nodded. "How long it takes a ray of light to go clear around the universe, no one can even guess. A hundred million years? Two hundred million? I don't know. But whatever the time required—that is the time that has elapsed since we left my laboratory in Capetown bound for Alpha Centauri."

And there we had it—the news we had partly guessed already and refused to admit to ourselves—news so momentous that it took days for the full realization of it to be grasped by our minds.

In that little click of elapsed time that had occurred immediately after our start, hundreds of millions of Earth-years had reeled by!

And we—we were back where we had started from, our own planet — but separated from our own true world by a gulf of uncountable eons. Exiled in the Future. Two hundred million years away from Earth as we knew it!

I moistened my lips. "How are we going to get back?" I said at last. And Brock hung on the professor's reply as desperately as I did.

"We aren't," said Ticknor slowly, "unless——"

He swung around to gaze into the corner of the cabin at the crate in which was packed that marvel—the little time-machine.

"In that lies our only salvation. It is a crude little thing, and I have no way of checking its accuracy. But, using it as a model, I may be able to build a machine large enough to carry the three of us back over the years to 1990 again."

"Then we're saved," began Brock. But Ticknor held up his hand.

"To build such a machine, I must have all the laboratory facilities I had in my own shop. That presupposes that there are now on Earth people as intelligent and as scientifically advanced as only a few were in our own time. We do not know that we will find such people when we descend to Earth. We don't know *what* we'll find—what forms of life have evolved in the unguessable millions of years that have passed since we left here. Perhaps there is no life at all; the glaciers may have killed every living thing. Perhaps strange monsters roam the world again, as they did in our own prehistoric times."

There was silence then, while our staggered brains tried to comprehend it all.

"God, I can't believe it," said Brock finally. "Two hundred million years or so—gone in the wink of an eye!"

As for me, I was speechless. I could only stare now and then at that weird planet beneath us that was Earth, but which, with its glacial sheets and strangely altered oceans, did not seem like Earth.

Then the man of action took command. Brock's heavy jaw set, and his great shoulders went back.

"We'll accomplish nothing up here in the heavens," he said crisply. "I move we descend at once, and set about our only chance of salvation—the building of another time-machine."

So Ticknor went to the controls, while Brock and I remained at the window.

THE professor switched on the auxiliary rocket-motor with which the shell was equipped, and we began to streak downward—at a snail's pace compared to our interstellar speed, but still at a distance-devouring clip.

We wanted to land in some spot where morning was in swing. It might be suicidal to come to rest in the darkness of night, not having the faintest notion what kind of inhabitants now ruled Earth.

Such a spot chanced to be in North Africa, where the Sahara Desert had been in the dim far past from which we had traveled.

There, as we got to within a few thousand miles of the ground, we saw two green dots in the vast expanse of solid glacial ice that seemed to have coated nearly all the world. The larger of the two dots was probably five hundred miles across, the smaller about two hundred;

but from our distance they looked like a green dime set down on a rounded surface beside a green quarter.

We made for the larger circle, once desert, now one of the few fruitful spots still left unconquered by the great ice sheets.

In the glare of the early morning sun, we settled down. And now Ticknor set the controls so that he could join us in watching the unfolding details of this new Earth of ours.

The circle spread and spread as we neared it. Just before the surrounding glacial sheets had faded from sight on every side, we saw tiny ridges at their edges that were in reality great hills, debris of earth and rock dropped by the glaciers—which indicated that we had come toward the end of this latest glacial age.

"Thirty or forty thousand years from now, there may be no more ice on Earth than the normal amount at the poles," said Ticknor.

"But we can't wait that long," said Brock, with a mirthless grin. "And if there aren't remnants of a superior civilization left in this oasis, or in another like it somewhere——"

"There'll be no time-machine built, and we'll live and die several hundred million years out of our own era," Ticknor finished for him. Then: "I see no signs of a city, or even a village."

Nor was there one. In the center of the five-hundred-mile circle was a big area dotted with odd green mounds, like moss-grown shells of enormous turtles; but these, of course, must be only oddly shaped, natural hills.

Now we saw that the whole region was threaded with rivers and creeks; and that every few miles a small lake sat like a jewel in the greenery, surplus water from the glaciers as they slowly melted.

We got close enough to see that the entire region was thickly wooded, with only here and there pasture-like spaces heavily carpeted with what must be grass. And still we saw no sign of any living thing, and no sign of a human habitation.

"The last man on Earth!" How often one jokingly uses that phrase. Was that to be our fate? Were we going to die slowly, through weeks of starvation on an ice-coated planet, the last men on Earth?

"But it's warm here," Brock muttered. "The trees and grass show that. The sun overcomes the chill of the surrounding ice, or not even vegetation could live. We'll find food of some sort."

"The vegetation may be of a sort that can stand immense cold," said Ticknor. "It may be of a type we knew nothing of, millions of years ago."

But the trees, as we hovered over them, certainly looked much like our own. There was more branch and trunk and less leaf; the leaves themselves were larger and thicker; but otherwise they were trees of our own time and of our own temperate zone. We took hope from that.

And then Ticknor stepped to the controls and, with a little jar, we landed beside a small lake.

4

EACH of us drew a long breath, and stared around the close confines of the tiny cabin. We had landed; but we were reluctant to leave the space-shell. In it, at least, was a measure of security. Outside, in the thickly wooded oasis in the glacial sheet, anything might happen.

"We'll each load ourselves with weapons," said Brock. "A rifle and an automatic apiece. . . . Why, what's wrong, Professor?"

With his words, I whirled to look at the stocky little scientist.

Ticknor had gone pale.

"We—we have no arms," he faltered at last. "We left so suddenly . . . I had meant to fill the racks, but there was no time——"

"No guns?" exclaimed Brock, running his big fingers through his shock of yellow hair. "Good heaven!"

Ticknor caught his arm. "But, Brock—you must have an automatic. I've never known you to be without one."

Brock shook his head. "This is the exception to the rule. I have no gun with me."

Here I reached into my pocket. I withdrew my own automatic, a weapon I usually carried as protection against the giro bandits that infested the air over the outskirts of every large city.

The eyes of Brock and Ticknor gleamed as they fell on the weapon.

"Thank God!" said Brock. "We have at least one gun."

"We have a gun," I said, "but we have nothing to put in it."

"You mean——"

"I mean that in this gun there is one bullet. Just one. When that's gone, we're through. I cleaned it day before yesterday—I mean a couple of hundred million years ago—and neglected to put the clip back in."

Brock swore, in a disappointment no more bitter than my own. It was seldom I carried that gun without its clip of fourteen shots in the grip. And fate had selected this time, with diabolical precision, as one of those few occasions.

One bullet! True, the automatic was a late model, shooting the new trinitele explosive bullet. One of them could blow an elephant to bits.

But—one bullet! If anything attacked us in numbers. . . .

"You'd better carry it," I said to Brock. "You're no doubt a better marksman than I am."

He nodded. "Probably. I've handled guns all my life. Well, let's get out and stretch our legs."

Ticknor eased open the heavy door of the space-shell. For an instant we hesitated, wondering if the air would be breathable to our ancient form of lungs, wondering if the temperature was as temperate as the look of the trees indicated, or far below zero.

We all sighed with relief as both questions were satisfactorily answered.

The air was warm; about like the air of a late spring day in old New York. And it was breathable. It was a little thin—Earth had lost some of its atmosphere through the eons—but it was perfectly life-sustaining.

WE JUMPED to the ground, finding it soft and spongy to the feet. Moisture from the surrounding glaciers evidently underlay the entire five-hundred-mile oasis, making the earth almost bog-like and rich as delta-land.

"Now where?" I asked, instinctively looking to Brock. Ticknor was the man of brains; but Brock was by nature the leader in anything concerning practical action.

The big man nodded toward a tongue of woods that stretched out from the main forest toward us.

"If there are any humans here, they'll probably be in the thickets, perhaps hiding from us in fear. But we must be ready to run for the ship at a moment's notice. That's our fortress now."

We followed him toward the thicket of trees, leaving the silver sheet of the little lake behind us. Strange figures we must have been, moving through that wild and deserted-seeming landscape, dressed in the sober garb of the Twenty-first Century.

On the edge of the forest we soon saw

one lone tree that was different from any of the others; and, since we had no definite destination, almost unconsciously we walked toward that.

The tree was not as large as some of the more familiar-looking forest giants near it; but what it lacked in size it made up in color. It was aflame with purple blossoms — great, cup-shaped flowers almost like tulip blooms. And trunk and branches were deep, dark, almost sinister-looking purple.

"Odd-looking thing," muttered Brock, as we walked toward it. But the remark was abstracted; all of us were too busy looking for signs of animate life to waste much thought on trees.

We reached the tree without having seen a moving thing. And we paused under the purple branches—beneath them there was no underbrush to impede the feet—to talk over what we would do next.

"Shall we go farther into this dark forest, in the hope of finding people?" Brock put the question. "Or shall we try to cruise low in the space-shell over the area—what's the matter, Woodward?"

I had been sniffing the air sharply.

"Let's get away from this tree," I said. "Those purple flowers look handsome, but they smell like death itself."

"We'll go along in a moment. The question is, which way shall we travel?"

"If we take to the shell," argued Ticknor, "we might soar the country for a week and never see a soul—because, if there are humans here, they may well be frightened by the ship."

"Unless they're enlightened beings," said Brock hopefully. Then he glanced curiously up at the tree branches above us. "Say—that's queer. These branches are moving, and there isn't a breath of air to stir them!"

And just at that instant the arboreal trap was sprung.

"Run!" I choked, leaping away from the sinister, purplish bole.

But I was too late—as were the others. Down around us like a purple web drooped the lower tree branches. Like hungry, purple mouths, the budding flowers yawned toward us. Whip-like tendrils caught and clung at our legs, our arms, our bodies.

"Help——" I choked.

But Brock and Ticknor were in peril as deadly as my own. It was every man to take care of himself.

The purple tree was rocking as though a gale of wind tossed it now. The tendrils crawled like things of flesh over our bodies, to be followed by thicker, more powerful branches.

I heard Brock panting and shouting as he sought with his great hands to tear loose from the clutching branches. I felt one of the horrible purple blooms press avidly to my throat.

Whatever those blooms looked like, they were not flowers. They were tough as leather, hardy as rubber. And like a rubber suction disk the flower at my throat flattened against my flesh—and held there.

I caught a whirling jumble of blue sky through a purple web of tossing branches as I was whipped off my feet. Then a branch as thick as my thumb coiled around my throat, and the world went black. . . .

Painfully, long later, I struggled back to consciousness. And for a dreamy instant, in a half-world of fancy, I thought I was back in my own age. For I thought I heard human voices.

But that, of course, was fantastic. I realized it a moment later as fuller consciousness returned. I opened my eyes with an effort, and sat up. And then a

cry of wonder burst from my lacerated throat.

I had heard human speech! For all around me—and around the still motionless bodies of Brock and Ticknor—was a ring of creatures that were undeniably human beings!

THERE were about two hundred of them, as human as the races we knew, and seemingly as intelligent. Their eyes were clear and contemplative, and they had good, broad foreheads. They were a shade less than our average height; about five feet six, I should say. Their color was very light, lighter even than the fairness of Brock's skin, and he is pure blond.

"Not very advanced in civilization, though," I mused, thinking of Ticknor's hope that we would find a race advanced scientifically.

They were dressed in some simple garment of coarse fabric that left arms bare, and came down to the knee. Decidedly a primitive costume. On the other hand, their bare heads were neatly trimmed as to hair; and the women, who were as tall as the men and in most cases slightly better muscled, even wore simple but tasteful ornaments of colored bark in their tresses.

They were a gentle-looking folk, these people that had rescued us from the tree of death. They had wide, soft eyes in which no ferocity lay—but in the depths of which there seemed to rest, in every case, an abiding terror——

Of what? We were later to find out!

They looked cowed, spirit-broken. A fine people in bondage to something loathsome and horrible, crushed down through generations until they had become gentle, almost spiritless creatures in whose liquid eyes blended docility and awful fear.

Yet they could not be a cowardly race, since they had somehow, by sheer press of numbers, managed to rob the purple tree of our lives.

Such were some of the thoughts that passed confusedly through my mind as the woods people chattered about us in an alien tongue. Then Brock and Ticknor stirred and sat up; and the humans pressed nearer to us.

I could see mirrored in my comrades' faces all the thoughts that had been mine. Then Brock said impulsively in English: "Hello."

An instant later we all smiled ruefully. English! How many hundreds of millions of years ago had the English language been forgotten?

Now our gentle, shyly inquisitive rescuers came nearer, glancing first at us and then back at our space-shell, which could barely be seen through the intervening pattern of trees.

One of them, a girl, seemed either bolder or more trusting than the rest. She came up to within a few yards of us, smiled, and said something in a fluid, beautiful voice. Words, of course, that were no more intelligible to us than so many syllables in old Phenician would have been.

We got up from the ground, then, all of us a bit shaky but otherwise none the worse for our experience with the carnivorous tree.

I can shut my eyes and see the picture that girl made now, with the green forest making a background for her light beauty as she stood in the little clearing, only a few yards from the purple tree, trying to make us understand what she was talking about.

She was lovely, as exquisitely shaped as a wood sprite, with ash-blond hair in which was a dark blue wood-flower braided over her left ear; and dark, rich brown

eyes in almost shocking contrast to her white skin and silky, nearly white hair.

My eyes must have revealed my thoughts, for she colored a little, and her clear accents faltered. The next instant, though, she edged ever so little nearer to me than to the others. Then, with wonder in her lovely, dark eyes, she reached out a slim hand to feel curiously of the brown tweed of my coat.

At this the rest of the crowd packed us in in a dense circle and commenced their strange talking again.

"The devil!" growled Brock. "This is getting us nowhere. We've got to find some way of communicating with them."

Here my little beauty with the blue wood-flower in her hair solved the problem. She had been pressed closer to me in the crowding of the others; and now she tugged at my arm.

As I looked at her, she pointed first to us, then back at the space-shell, and then up into the clear blue heavens.

I didn't get it at first; so she repeated the gesture. Then I understood.

"She wants to know what we'd like to do—if we intend to fly away as we came," I said. "What will we tell her?"

"That we want to go with them," said Ticknor eagerly. "These people couldn't possibly have the equipment I need to build a time-machine. But—we mustn't overlook any chances."

I turned to the girl. I pointed to ourselves, to the multitude of gentle little folk standing around, and then toward the heart of the forest.

Her eyes lit up. She cried something in her soft voice. The forest dwellers smiled hospitably, and waved their bare arms.

The girl took my hand and the four of us started toward the denser woods, with the rest straggling out into single files as we left the small clearing. One look we sent behind to the space-shell; then we set our faces to the fore and plodded on to where our hosts—or captors, as their numbers would make them if they wished—had their dwelling-place.

A bizarre tribe, living in bizarre surroundings, in an age millions of centuries beyond our own. What would be our lot with them?

5

For a month we lived with these simple, kindly people in the wilderness village they led us to.

It was not much of a village; and their existence was extremely uncomplicated; but what little they had they seemed glad to share with us.

During that month we learned many things about the strange new Earth to which we had come after circling the universe. We learned these things by first learning the language of the people.

When your life hangs on it, you can learn a lot in a short time! In three weeks we had picked up more than the rudiments of their tongue. We were helped in this by the fact that their language was simple, clear, and composed of only a few thousand words. It seemed, indeed, like the clarified, simplified dregs of a language that once must have been voluminous and intricate.

At the end of the third week the girl with the blue flower and I walked alone in the forest. Since she had been the first to approach us, and perhaps because she was considered unusually intelligent, she had been assigned us as teacher. But after every "class" she and I were accustomed to strolling off together through the woods.

I was getting on pretty well with the language, for a thick-headed ex-newspaper reporter, well enough to understand, at last, a fractional part of the warning that I have no doubt she'd been try-

ing to give us since first we mastered a few words of their tongue.

In the weeks before that walk in the woods, we had noticed many things. One was the contrast between the undoubted brain capacity of these people, and the almost primitive way they lived.

Their only shelters were thatched bark huts, in which whole families huddled in a single small enclosure. Their only garments were the coarse, knee-length tunics, which were woven of strands pounded out of a certain bark.

They lived on a few vegetables that were unknown to us, and were only crudely cultivated; and on fish, which swarmed in the countless brooks and in the lake beside which we had left the shell. They hadn't any tools—not even stone axes—which accounted for the fact that they did not chop down the deadly purple trees.

Yet they certainly seemed competent enough to build a better civilization for themselves, if left alone. If left alone! It soon became evident to us that they did not build better or try to live more comfortably because of the fear—of some mysterious thing—that showed always in their soft, dark eyes.

More and more plainly, as day slipped after day in this seeming Eden in the ice fields, we came to realize that the keynote of their lives was that fear. And we noticed, too, that the fear seemed to be growing with each passing day. The people of the woods began to slink about, gazing now and then over their shoulders as though they feared pursuit. And always they gazed in the same direction—to the north, toward the center of the circle that made up their universe.

Even the girl with the blue flower (I never saw her without a fresh bloom twined in her silky, light hair) reacted in the same general way. In the midst of the most light-hearted moment, she would stop laughing at some blunder of language I had made—and suddenly into her eyes would spring a very frenzy of terror.

As the fourth week slipped along, the people had begun to act like a demented race. The tension in the air became a thing almost to be felt physically. And the girl—Gayta, I found, was her name—started and trembled every time she heard a twig snap in the forest.

And on that day, toward the end of the fourth week, I got some slight hint as to the reason for all this nervous tension.

"Gayta," I started by saying, "is it very cold here part of the time?"

When she had grasped the meaning of my broken, ungrammatical attempt at her language, she shook her head.

"No. Why?"

"I asked because I see your people stocking up big stores of fish from the lake—more than they could ever eat. I thought perhaps it was because the lakes and rivers became as the great white hardness around us, so that the fish might not be caught."

"It is always the same here," she replied. "Not warmer, not colder."

"Then why are the fish stored up?"

She avoided my eye. I saw, of a sudden, that she was trembling.

"Why?" I persisted.

"It is for *them*," she whispered at last. "Every thirty-five times the Bohga [sun] swings across the skies, *they* come to collect the stores of fish."

FOR the rest of the afternoon I wrestled with the language problem as Gayta tried to tell me precisely what was wrong. And at the conclusion of our talk, I hurried to seek out Ticknor and Brock.

They were in the hut that had been assigned to them, trying their hand at a

new way of broiling the fish that was the main staple of diet. Ticknor had burned his fingers, and Brock was grinning at him——

(As I look back now I see how remarkably contented we were becoming with this simple life among these likable people. To ourselves, we had admitted after the first few days that it would be impossible to build a time-machine with any materials or equipment we could contrive among these beings. But less and less did the thought bother us.)

I burst into the hut, full of the things I had learned—vaguely but alarmingly—from Gayta.

"Woodward!" said Ticknor, dropping his fish into the fire at my expression.

"What the devil!" said Brock, rising and filling the hut with his bulk. "You're white as a ghost. What's up?"

So I told them what I had learned from Gayta.

"I've found out what it is that hangs over the heads of these people," I began, "the thing that keeps them from trying to climb out of this primitive way of living—the thing that fills their eyes, and their lives, with that unholy fear.

"They're an enslaved race, even as we have guessed. And they are enslaved by something powerful and terrible. It is for their masters that they live. It is for them that they fish the streams and lakes so continually, and lay up these great surplus stores of cured fish we have noticed.

"Once every thirty-five days the masters send some of their number to collect the food. This is taken back to their own city——"

"City?" interrupted Brock swiftly. "What city? We saw no city when we dropped into this place."

"Their 'city' is the big collection of greenish mounds we saw in the center of the oasis," I told him. "I can't imagine what kind of dwelling-places they are; but that's beside the point.

"The masters collect this food every thirty-five days regularly. I got the idea that they sometimes collect other food, too—of a cannibalistic sort! But I can't be sure of that. Anyway, they take the stock home with them, and there follows a five-days' feast—a sort of festival. They gorge themselves on fish—and perhaps on the flesh of a few slaves—and they worship and make sacrifices to their god. Then there follows a period of thirty days during which, as far as I could get from Gayta's talk, they do nothing at all. They hibernate, perhaps; or go into some state of lethargy——"

"Impossible!" Brock interrupted again. "What kind of people could it be that fed only once a month, and that slept or went into a coma for the following four weeks?"

"I don't know that they are 'people'," I answered. And I think my face got a little whiter: Gayta's horror of the situation she was trying to tell me about had been very contagious. "Gayta's word to describe them was the one she has been using to denote 'things.' She just kept saying: 'The *things* are coming. They will take the food we have gathered—and one of our number, perhaps, for sacrifice to their god. That we never know. Sometimes long, long seasons pass and they take no one for sacrifice—sometimes they take one from us two times in succession.'"

"And they come here about once a month," repeated Ticknor.

"Yes. We happened to land here just a few days after their last visit."

"But, I say!" protested Brock. "There aren't more than two hundred and fifty people here. If these 'masters' sacrifice them to their gods, or eat them now and then, the slaves wouldn't last very long!"

"It seems there are thousands of other humans in the oasis," I told him. "Gayta made me understand that there are many other such villages in the woods as this. But they are kept scattered, and forbidden to communicate with one another."

Brock nodded. "I suppose that's to keep down rebellion. The ruling powers seem to have no mean order of intelligence. But—if they're as tyrannical as Gayta says, why hasn't there been revolt anyhow? Are the masters so numerous?"

"There are less than three hundred of them."

"Then why——"

"It's because of their god," I told him. "This god of theirs appears to be a strange and powerful creation. It is supposed to be able to read minds. When any man gets desperate and starts planning rebellion, the god reads that man's thoughts—and he is promptly put to death in the temple. So for some decades no revolt has flourished."

"You couldn't make out just what the masters are like?" persisted Brock.

"I could not. They are an alien race—that much at least I could pick up. They came here ages ago——"

"Across the ice fields?"

"No. The glaciers are impassable. As near as I could make out from Gayta's words and gestures, some upheaval of nature—perhaps an earthquake—split a ragged path in the ice from here to the smaller oasis near by—the one we noticed as we came down. This race lived in that other oasis. They had fished out the waters, and hunted out the woods, and they came here *en masse*. They found Gayta's ancestors and fat hunting and fishing. So they enslaved the people, and have been living here ever since."

"But what *are* they?" burst in Ticknor.

"I tell you I don't know. Gayta didn't speak of them as people. And when she tried precise descriptions I got lost in a fog of strange words."

"Their next visit here is soon?" said Brock.

"Damn soon! In the next few days!"

WELL, we talked that over for some time. Should we try to hide from the things during the days of their activity? But, as Brock pointed out, we couldn't hide the space-shell. And besides, if we didn't get caught this time, we would the next time or the one after that.

Should we get into the space-ship and use the rocket motor to find some other island in the ice where conditions might be less doubtful? Brock and I rather thought this was the thing to do. But Ticknor was dead set against it.

"You're forgetting our main purpose in life just now: to build a machine that will carry us back to our own century. These people here are in no position to help us. They haven't even steel—let alone the more complicated alloys I need. But their rulers are obviously a superior race. If we can make friends with them, we might find that they have at least some of the equipment and materials we need."

"And if we can't make friends with them?" said Brock.

"Let's take that chance when it comes," said Ticknor with a shrug. "I can't believe they're as ruthless as these folk make out. The woods people are nice, but they're not long on reckless courage."

"But I wouldn't call them cowards, either," said Brock. "And man, woman and child, they are petrified with fear of the beings they slave for. That doesn't sound as though there were much chance of 'making friends' with them."

But Ticknor's argument that we might somehow find opportunity with them to

build a machine that would carry us back across the thousands of centuries to our own era, prevailed over our objections.

With mingled hope and misgivings we waited for the "things," as Gayta called them, to come for their monthly rations. We made our way through the dark forest to the space-shell on the side of the lake, however. We would sleep in it that night, and stay close to it until the rulers came. Then, if we didn't like their looks, we could soar away from them to some other place.

"They can't be so inhuman as they're made out to be," said Ticknor, as we climbed into the shell for our night's rest. "Our woods friends are too easily frightened," he added for the dozenth time.

But I wasn't so sure of that myself. The look of frozen horror in Gayta's eyes. . . .

The "things" came next day.

6

NEXT day dawned mild and clear—as every day had since we'd come.

Earth, in the hundreds of millions of years, seemed to have gotten a better climate instead of a worse. The sun, if any cooler at all, was not perceptibly so. It hung in the clear blue heavens as brilliant and warm as it had over our world back in 1990. By first-hand observation we were able to give the lie to those scientists who insisted that the sun was rapidly dying. (The ice fields, as I have said, were melting; they were but one of the recurrent glacial epochs which, for no reason that any one knows, came and went on Earth even before our own day.)

For some time on that fateful morning, we kept to the shell. Indeed, we kept the door sealed, too, ready to ascend instantly if need be, while the three of us stood watch at the windows looking onto the forest. We wanted to see what the rulers of Gayta's people looked like before trusting ourselves to their mercies.

The hours crawled past, however, and there was no sign of any visitors. We began to get restless in the narrow confines of the cabin, breathing our artificial air, when the sun beckoned outside.

"We can't stay in here for ever," growled Brock at last. "And we don't even know if the—the things—are coming today. They might not get here till tomorrow. Let's get outside and wait. We can stay near the shell."

Ticknor and I were ready enough to agree. So we opened the hermetically sealed door, after a cautious look around, and stepped outside.

The day was even finer than it had seemed to us from the inside looking out.

It was like a day in late spring; warm and bland, but with a faint undercurrent of chill from the unbroken expanses of glacial ice stretching away on every side. We could imagine that if any winds blew, the green oasis in the ice would be miserably cold. But not once in the time we'd been there had there been even a breeze; so we could only guess about it.

Immediately behind us was the tiny lake, blue as sapphire under the radiant sun. Before, and to either side of us, stretched the emerald green forest lands.

"Not a bad place," Brock rumbled, arching his great chest in the thin, pure air. "Come on, let's stretch our legs."

"We ought to keep near the shell," said Ticknor.

"We can go toward the woods. There's nothing but the lake behind us; and nobody can approach from that direction."

So we strolled a few yards away from the little ship, toward the forests. And as we went we kept an alert lookout for movement from the woods, ready to race back to the shell with the first appearance of anything strange.

WE HAD gone perhaps fifty yards, and were about ready to walk back, when I had a peculiar premonition that all was not well.

There had been no movement either ahead of us or to right or left; but just the same I had a "hunch," as my grandfather used to call it.

I turned about to look back at the shell. . . .

With my heart sinking in my chest I blinked to be sure I was really seeing correctly and not suffering from some hideous optical illusion. Then I caught at Brock and Ticknor, and wordlessly pointed toward the shell.

"Good heaven!" whispered Brock, all color draining from under the tan of his face.

Ticknor said nothing—just stared with wide and unbelieving eyes. But I saw him moisten his lips with his tongue; I even thought to hear that tongue's dry rasp in the frozen silence that bound us.

Drawn up in line before the space-shell, cutting us off from the open metal door, were a dozen of the "things" Gayta had tried to describe to me—the enslavers of her people, and the "superior beings" Ticknor had tentatively thought we might "make friends" with! I can still laugh, mirthlessly, when I think of that phrase. They were monstrous—in appearance as well as in size.

Ten feet high, they were; with cylindrical bodies two feet through and varying in size hardly at all from their thick necks to their blunt tails which almost dragged on the ground between the short, massive legs on which they stood erect. Their arms had plainly, not many millions of years back, been forelegs. They were now long, powerful, triple-jointed limbs with four-fingered hands tipped with long claws.

Set atop the columnar necks were repulsive heads with great long jaws, pits for nostrils, and neither ears nor trace of foreheads. Crocodilian heads, they were.

Crocodilian! It is the exact word to describe them. Imagine, if you can, a short-tailed, blunt-nosed crocodile walking on its hind legs and using its forelegs—elongated, super-developed, and prehensile—as arms, and you have a fair picture of the things that stared unblinkingly at us as they towered in a line between us and the metal hull that was our only haven.

The reptilian impression was increased when we stared into those cold, unblinking eyes. Lizard eyes they were, without a doubt. And yet in them were glints of ample intelligence. Cold-blooded life had crawled up the scale of evolution in the countless ages of our circuit of the universe. What had resulted was neither lizard nor man—but lizard-men!

"Good heaven!" Brock breathed again. Then: "How . . . how did the things manage to cut us off? I'll swear they didn't come from the forests. . . ."

The question answered itself. The silent, glaring monsters were still dripping; they had come on us from behind, over—or possibly under—the waters of the lake.

Impulsively Brock's hand whipped down for the gun that was our sole weapon. But reluctantly it moved away again. Just one bullet in its barrel—and twelve or fourteen of the ten-foot lizard-men ranged against us. In addition, their unclad bodies were covered with horny-looking scales: a shot would have to hit its target squarely not to glance off the cylindrical, scale-armored bodies.

"Got to save that bullet," muttered Brock. "But what in heaven's name are we going to do?"

Neither Ticknor nor I tried to answer the question. Anyhow, it seemed to me

just then that a more important question was—what were *they* going to do?

The lizard-men must know we were not of their slaves: we were taller than the gentle forest folk—Brock by nearly a foot—and our ridiculous-looking 1990 garments stamped us as of an alien race.

But for a few seconds longer they did nothing—simply stood there slowly moving their crocodile jaws and glaring at us out of their pale, cold, crocodile eyes; while we stood rigid and stared back, feeling the very hair on our scalps crawl with loathing and horror.

Then the line of lizard-men moved. One of them, the tallest of the lot, began to stump on his short tree-trunks of legs —*toward the open shell door!*

"Charge them!" roared Brock, his face chalk-white. "We can't let them get in there."

Stung from our paralysis of fright, we raced toward the shell—and toward the menacing lizard-men. Mad? Of course we were. Stark mad for a moment as we visioned the damage the things might do to our shell. Our space-shell! The only avenue of escape we had!

And so we charged those towering horrors that outnumbered us six to one; and, seeming stupefied by our rashness, they waited motionless while we covered the few yards intervening between us.

But we were not entirely insane. We raced toward the lizard-men in a V, with Brock at the point. If we could manage to rip through their line and get into the shell——

Again I have to laugh, mirthlessly, as I think of that absurd hope. The lizard-men looked slow and clumsy. But I have never seen anything move so swiftly as they moved then.

Till we had almost reached them, they stayed motionless. Then, like darting tongues of light, the long arms of two of them shot out to bar us from the open door of the space-ship.

Brock hunched his great shoulders and plunged against the barrier of their arms. They gave a little, stiffened, then tossed him back as if he had been a child. Similarly they caught and thrust back Ticknor and me.

Brock picked up a tree-branch his hand fell on as he rolled on the soft turf. With a bellow he charged again, swinging his ponderous club as though it had weighed no more than a straw.

It crashed with a loud crack against the upflung arm of the nearest lizard-man. The arm went limp. Into the pale, cold eyes came an opalescent greenish fire. The uninjured arm shot out. The four-fingered hand caught Brock by the shoulder, plucked him up and threw him bodily twenty feet away.

Hopeless! Hopeless! But we battered insanely at the ten-foot things with fists and feet and stones. As well die in action as more slowly at a later hour.

MY FLESH still creeps as I remember the contact of my fists with that cold and armored hide—and the mounting glare of wrath in their green-flaming eyes.

And yet they didn't kill us. Incredible —except that the near future was to tell us horribly why.

Finally the lizard-men themselves charged; and, two to each of us, caught us in those great long arms and held us powerless in strands of cold, living gristle. And powerless, with death in our hearts, we stood and watched the rest of them move about their course of methodical and devilishly intelligent destruction.

The towering leader of the lizard-men entered the shell as he had started to do when we charged. We heard him croak

something—saw two of the others stump in to join him——

"They even talk!" gasped Ticknor.

They did. It was impossible not to admit that the croaking utterances we heard among the three in the shell were ordered sentences.

Then we heard crash after crash, saw through the near window the immense forms of the lizard-men, bent almost double in the cramped cabin, as they pulled out drawer after drawer and demolished the instruments and equipment they contained.

"The time-machine!" whispered Ticknor, his lips a white streak in his pallid face. "The time-machine!"

That carefully padded crate! Would they find that and smash it? It was not in a position for us to see it through the window; but it seemed impossible that the lizard-men would miss the big box.

They wrecked the rocket-motor; we could see that; and they utterly demolished the instrument and control board. And then they attacked the windows—as though they had brains enough to know that it would take a whole machine-shop to fit new windows into the hull with the gas-tight precision necessary for interstellar travel.

The windows, of the latest and best unbreakable glass known to late Twentieth Century science, resisted their efforts; whereupon, as though enraged by this failure of their enormous strength, three of them stumped to the forest, came back with a rough log, and, using it as a battering-ram, knocked one window clear out of its metal frame to fall with a clang on the cabin floor within.

That fixed it. Never again would the shell leave the ground.

Coldly the lizard-men released us and prodded us toward the forest. Brock's great muscles tensed, but in a moment his shoulders drooped. The shell was no longer a thing worth fighting for; and it was obvious that preservation of life could now be best attained by obeying our hideous captors.

Would they merely add us to the number of their slaves? Or would they reason that we were not sufficiently docile, and execute us before we could stir up rebellion? Only the future could tell us.

The frightful encounter with the "god" of the lizard-men will be told in next month's thrilling chapters of this story. Don't miss it.



"From among the tombstones he lifted in his arms a limp, lifeless thing which he threw in the boat before him."

Charon

By LAURENCE J. CAHILL

An unusual story, about a gray man who came back from the grave to comfort the dying and terrify the living

YOU still hear it said that there is something bloody and ghoulish about that newspaper *The Daily Express*. It likes news that is heart-chilling. Nobody will deny that, surely.

And there is the reason why my hair is supposed to be turning white when I'm not yet thirty-one years old. Does being

a reporter for *The Daily Express* shock the brown out of my scalp? Or are the roots of my hair doing something on their own account? I'd like to know as well as you. Meanwhile I keep well fed on this job, just as the peasants of Lower Austria eat arsenic to gain a healthy color. And no other job would suit me.

Reminds me a great deal of some of the things The Gray One himself said. One of them was, "If you don't get scared—it's as easy—as that." Such words you wouldn't be liable to forget in a hurry; for twenty people who saw The Gray One will swear on their coffins that he came from death, returned from the dead that sleep for ever, to fulfill five very strange errands before he died again.

That scoop made the greatest headlines in the history of the state. Newspaper stories that are red and sticky and coarse are made to order for *The Daily Express*. The ax-slayer two years ago who lopped off the left hands of his victims. *S. S. Mistral* floating into port with a question mark painted on its foredeck and no soul on board. A band of little children, all less than eight years old, teaching a Great Dane dog to attack a truant officer and jump for his throat. Escaped convicts trapped in an abandoned mine beyond Hill City, their voices wandering far underground and never heard again.

"Bring in the story that's queer and cold and spotted with goose-flesh, and we'll slam it on page one every time," declares McKenna.

He's the squarest-jawed and squarest-shooting editor in the game, and I'm right now thinking of that occasion when the telephone rang while he was beginning the six o'clock shift.

"What is it about, Chief?" I questioned.

The stillness of night, McKenna's motion to keep quiet, and that distant voice sizzling and frying in the receiver.

The message ended, and down on his desk McKenna set the telephone, and his hand was hard to see. Shaking. Into the pockets of his vest dived McKenna's ten fingers, and they routed out a monster cigar blacker than the shades around us. Trying to be cool and easy. Trying, and vainly this time, to show the whole round world that his nerves were in fine fettle.

"Bill." McKenna cleared his throat with a quick and raw sound. "Go out and grab this story. And so help you the God that made you, don't let anyone else get it."

There were three other reporters in the room dealing rummy next to the ice-water tank, but McKenna's order was for me. And there was something in his face that said to me I'd better not argue.

"Okay," I retorted.

"Do me right on this, Bill," he said, very unusually. He was pleading. "You're as smart a leg-man as there is in the trade. Get everything there is on this thing, and get it quick. Stay in the West End. Now listen. Today someone was dying out there on Larchmont Avenue where that epidemic has been cutting them off like flies, and somehow this stranger slipped into the house. He was dressed in gray, and he was tall. He went to the bedside and introduced himself as the advance agent of Death. Told the sick man that he came from the other world to help him die, and for him not to be frightened. Dying, he said, was easy if you knew how. The members of the family at the bedside were paralyzed and didn't know what to do. They didn't want to start a rough-house. The stranger talked like a man with brains. The sick man was glad the stranger came, and he passed away happy. The stranger took his leave by slipping out as he came in,

and nobody had strength to follow him."

In my opinion it was all a nut act, with extra frills. There was a tickling under my collar, however, proving that the hair on my neck was stiffening just a little.

"There's good evidence that once before this week that guy's gained his way to the side of the dying. At other places and addresses he's made an effort to get in—and doors were slammed in his face. Folks are afraid of him. He's at large." McKenna's oily cigar spluttered and showered sparks. "This is the first paper that's been notified. Police are on the job to catch him, but the other papers think they're heading off burglaries."

You'd get the idea McKenna wrote headlines with his jaw, to see it hunch while he talked.

"You can follow this guy into houses if you want to," said McKenna, but don't let yourself get into trouble. Don't offend the people out that way. It's that guy we want to find out about. He says he was dead once, says he? Find out what that means."

McKenna reached into his desk and took out a gun, which he laid in my hand. "You won't need this. Maybe. But that stranger in gray has a brainy technique. If you have to use weapons of any kind, make it plain enough that it's self-defense. Collar and corner all the story you can."

He sat back with a sigh. "Wait a minute, Bill."

A minute or two went by while he pondered every curious feature of it.

"Two or three times," he admitted, "we've looked foolish running wild stories that were built on nothing but hot air. If this isn't the real goods, don't bother to bring it back."

That nearly bowled me over. McKenna so excited he was cautious!

"But you can tell if it's good," he advised me, and I knew I'd better find it was good. "If I can smell news myself," said McKenna, "this is the genuine McCoy. A valet on Larchmont Avenue called in the tip and sold it for five dollars."

Impatience now seethed between McKenna's tongue and his teeth as often as he breathed.

"Go and get it. And don't fail."

"I won't, Chief," I promised.

Out on Larchmont Avenue, I made my telephone base the drug store on the corner of A Street. It was about six-thirty o'clock. I bought some razor blades and interviewed the clerk.

"Who's this death-watch that's annoying the neighborhood?" I asked.

He looked at me with a fishy, cold eye. "Oh, you heard, did you? Reporter?"

"Yes. Who is it?"

The drug clerk hesitated, peered at the door and shivered. The place apparently had been empty of customers for several minutes before I happened along. He must have been glad of a homely chance to talk to anyone, even me.

"How should I know? And I don't wanna."

"Why not?"

"Am I crazy?" He mixed himself a soda-and-lime and then absently threw it in the sink. "The cops are on the job. Thank Gawd."

"They'll handle it all right. I hear the neighborhood's nervous."

"All but the dead."

"What do you mean?"

He put down the empty soda-and-lime glass and licked his lips.

"Them that died weren't nervous."

The hair on my neck stirred again, but there was a draft pouring down my collar from the transom over the door.

"Can you say how you account for what you just told me?"

"*I* ain't tellin' you nothin'," he said with a dash of shrewdness. "I'm just sayin' what's been said by everybody in this block."

"That stranger must have a way with them," I suggested.

"With them about to depart this life, he does," admitted the clerk, soberly. "The Gray One has a way with 'em."

"*What?*" I questioned.

"He's known as 'The Gray One'," repeated the man behind the counter, his smooth face a little red and foolish. "He's successful with 'em, because he *knows* something."

"Good enough. Where is he seen?"

"In the rooms of the dyin'."

"But—before and after, where is he seen?"

"Nowhere."

I started to reach for my pencil, but put it away again.

"This looks like something that's too elaborate for ordinary inspection. Come on, this stranger's human. He was turned away from different places."

"Yes," the clerk conceded, laughing cynically. "Ya know what? They wouldn't let 'im in up the street here last night. That was at old Baxter's. Baxter was sick for three days with this epidemic and suffered horrible stuff. And he died screaming for The Gray One and stretched out his arms and fell outa the bed."

I was waiting for a crumb of real information. "Where is Baxter's?"

The clerk gave me the address with reluctance.

"Thanks."

DARKNESS had come when I left the drug store, street lights were on and the West End was settled for the night. One block away a policeman was stationed, well out upon the crossing. Looking along the street, I could see three more patrolmen, silently posted to catch him called The Gray One. Windows for the most part all along the way were brilliantly lit, although a few homes had no lights in their windows.

None of the bereaved families wanted their sick members comforted by The Gray One. I had never known anything like it in all my life.

I walked along the block, and tried to wonder what headlines McKenna could make out of this matter. I wondered again if it was true that I was the only reporter hunting "game".

Within a minute I came to the nearest cop and attempted to get a statement of what opinion the police had on the case.

"Seen him?" I hailed.

"Shut up."

Now, for all kinds of reasons the police are apt to be friendly with the newspaper craft. When they are not friendly, something is rotten—and it isn't necessary to go to Denmark to find what that is.

"What's the matter?" I parried.

He eyed me with Irish honesty. "No, I ain't seen him—that one—and I defy any man to know what to do if he did."

I grinned. "What's your orders?"

"Just orders. You know the kind." He took a breath. "Bring him in alive."

I put one question to see what the effect would be. "Expect to get him—alive?"

"You wouldn't be kidding me, would you?" He eyed me with an owlish glance.

I shook my head. "This isn't the place for a joke, officer."

Still more steadily, he eyed me. "Well, damn it, I agree with yuh. I didn't take my exams for nothin' like this."

"What's the latest about him tonight?"

"Nothin' yet, glory to the saints."

"Where would he show up next?"

"It'd be a bad guess. Where them are that's sickest."

"But how can he tell when these people are dying?"

The cop shrugged. "He knows what none of the rest know. This is a handy district for gossip. Everybody's checkin' up everybody else about the epidemic every five minutes. When the symptoms are fatal the whole town hears the verdict twelve hours in advance."

"What would you call him?"

"I'd say somethin' like a banshee."

"Who is pretty sick—you know—right now?"

"None near me," was the very grateful reply.

"I'll be moving along, officer. Goodnight."

His dead-serious face was calm, but his mouth sagged. With all his stout heart he didn't like being left alone.

AWAY from the lighted crossing, the trees made a tunnel of the street and dense black shadows over-edged one another. The epidemic was all around me. The little red cards dotted houses by the clusterful, and I walked among them, hoping that I didn't walk too safely. For I wanted to meet that death-watch. With every instant I calculated how far I was from the telephone at the corner of A Street and Larchmont Avenue, the wire that would connect with McKenna at his desk, in case I ran into this one who paralyzed the living and soothed the dying.

I knew I would not lack a story if I saw even as much as the color of his coat.

The Gray One. What kind of insane genius was this extraordinary person who feasted ghoul-like on the last moments of others and yet played on their thoughts so cleverly that they died grateful? From some casket or tomb he had risen, to walk dead-alive among the living. What cemetery did he come from? Or was he a hoax? There was no knowing what such a freak was capable of. I was armed, but imagined I would never use that gun. Better it would be, I figured, to take my chances, for I had no desire—nor have I ever had—to shoot a man down. I turned into the boulevard called Riverbank Drive.

A shrill police whistle racketed and rebounded. I spun on one heel, and saw the door of an address—it must have been four blocks away—burst open, and people tumble from the house.

I got there with fast sprinting. But confusion made it hard to profit by that moment. Another death had occurred in the West End, and *he* had been there. He had come and gone.

Police arrived with great speed. A police lieutenant cursed violently, barked hasty orders, and led a posse half strengthened by frightened citizens into the lawns between the houses. It was no use. The Gray One had dissolved like fog.

The hair on the nape of my neck quieted again.

The Gray One had come and gone. His clammy hands—were they clammy, coming from the grave?—had touched the fingers of the dying once more, while those about him had gazed at him nearly mad with horror. Who was The Gray One?

I remembered the information concerning the Baxter house. A few minutes of walking took me to the other end of Larchmont Avenue, and I went to the number given me by the drug clerk. I rang the bell and saw lights flash on all over the front of the house. After an extremely long interval a man came to the door in his shirt-sleeves, gripping an iron poker in his hand.

"I am a representative of the press working with the police in capturing this man who is alarming the section," I said, turning out my press badge. "Can you help by——"

"I don't know who you are," he said harshly, balancing the poker.

"A reporter for the *Star*," I explained.

"Get away," he ordered. "You look like him."

That hit me right between the eyes. "The Gray One?" I asked, and my own surprize made me sound stupid.

The poker lifted in his hand.

"You're mistaken," I replied. "Here is my identification——"

The door shut heavily in the midst of my remark, in my face. The earnest voice of the one in shirt-sleeves continued. "I've got a revolver and I'm loading it."

I let it go at that.

TRAMPING these streets alone and beginning to question whether we were all sweating after some shape made out of fog or vapor, I stepped over a curb and stopped short. The rustling of shrubbery convinced me as the movement of someone skulking not far away.

I gathered myself together and stepped off the sidewalk onto the lawn. I could see nothing at all; ten feet back from the street all was black as the sky overhead, but I knew that in my position I myself couldn't be seen. In a few moments bushes parted and out into the blue-yellow light of the street lamps stepped a man in gray.

Keeping quiet, I went toward him, advancing on grass which acted like a cushion. His hearing was acute or he smelled danger. At first he was facing in the other direction. Then he turned and lunged straight at my head. I dodged and lost my footing, but in the slack of his collar I wound my fingers and pulled him down also. For a moment we fought like savages. The swinging light of a street lamp almost blinded me. He backed off suddenly and spoke. "You damned fool!"

The voice gave it away. "Double or nothing," I answered. "And I suppose you're here because you can only sleep in the daytime."

"Same as you," grinned Ted Corbett, reporter for the *Herald-Telegram*. "What have you made out of it so far?"

"Just wasted time. And your score?"

"It's early yet. He's in the neighborhood, they tell me."

Corbett lit a cigarette.

"You'd better douse that light," I suggested. "He'll spot you. And you say you haven't seen him?"

A baffled, puzzled discontent was in Corbett's face. "One burglar busy at work, and a platoon of police moved out here to get him. Does McKenna think that's good for a spread-head?"

Headlines. Banners. Spread-heads. Streamers screaming across the width of the paper. Big news. Strange. Ugly. But *news*—for the breakfast-table stomach, the brain, the nerves. Jar 'em. Scare 'em.

I pictured McKenna waiting at his desk, grim as time itself and cold as ice now that the first excitement of the case was over. He and his voracious appetite for headlines. The thunder of Doomsday wouldn't tear him from that desk or mean any more to him than new headlines. Give him another smash story to build up the circulation. "And don't fail me, Bill."

Licking his fangs, and tasting his chops, McKenna. Scratching for news in different boneyards like a hound with a belly of cast-iron. An X-ray of his vital organs would probably show he had a heart the shape of a stick of type and just as thin.

But it was all right with me since Cor-

bett thought this night prowler called The Gray One was a burglar, for it bore out McKenna's claim that none of the other newspapers were on to The Gray One's real character.

Corbett and I parted with a wary exchange of glances.

WHILE convinced that Corbett had never heard of The Gray One, I intended to take no chances but to telephone McKenna what scraps of hearsay I could. It would be no story, but it would be a teaser worth headlines. I was walking rapidly to get to the drug store telephone, and was in the course of crossing a wide lawn that ran diagonally back of a corner house and came out on the next street. The corner house was a California-type bungalow. But for a false attic all the rooms were on the first floor, and brilliantly lighted. As I passed these lighted rooms I saw a sight that held me.

A bedroom window was flung open to the breeze, the curtains flopped idly, and I saw a sickroom scene—a death-bed scene. The unfortunate one I could not see but for his restless hand on the covers. Three people were in attitudes of expectancy and anguish about that room, three that I could count. A fourth person, male, rugged and fierce of appearance, stood almost wholly blocking a hall door and staring out into the darkness beyond. He waited. I figured he must be blocking the door against the coming of The Gray One, when I saw something that made my case-hardened reporter's heart leap in my throat.

The broad porch of this house circled half-way around one side, to where there was a front door. Even as I looked, a form in gray pressed closely against the door, tried it with his fingers and softly pushed it in.

The starch suddenly left me. With my experience in the reporter's game telling me that there were few things worth being afraid of, I nevertheless paused. When one hesitates, there is a sickness that grips him. I was sick.

I saw that deathroom scene again with a glance at that open window, and I had the will to jump with decision toward the porch. The thing then heard me, turned and stopped as I pounded on, and silently leaping away over the front of the porch, after another second or two whisked shadow-like across the street in the tricky light. I ran headlong after it, as if my own life and my own escape from death depended on stamping out that form or fog or vapor when I caught it.

I chased its trail until I realized that I was only chasing the shadows of harmless things. Where did it go? Where did *what* go?

Confused and exhausted, I staggered out of a driveway into A Street. On the crossing a patrolman braced himself and tugged at his holster. But first his left hand raised and he swiftly crossed himself. The buttons and insignia on his uniform sparkled, for rain was beginning to fall.

The copper recognized me and I passed him, breath spent, without saying a word.

Reaching the drug store, I entered the phone booth without speaking to the clerk. He was startled when I came in, and he dropped a soda-shaker.

"It's Bill," I called McKenna, "and I can't tell you much except that I saw that freak for one second and then he disappeared. I guess if I hang around out here he might show——"

"Get it, Bill," cut in McKenna with the voice of command. "Don't come back empty-handed and don't fail."

I said yessir and hung up.

Out into the rain I stepped again—it

was pouring briskly by this time—and I remember I felt more stubborn than discouraged. The riddle of The Gray One had twisted its fog tightly around my heart and I swore with myself to solve it.

The short collar of my suit didn't keep the rain out of my neck. I looked left and right and stood on the curb a moment.

A police squad car came out of Larchmont Avenue and headed due north, away from the West End, with its radio crackling as I could tell by the attitude of its two-man crew. I hailed it.

"What's up? Leaving this beat?" I hollered.

The driver slowed down at the rain-slippery corner. "Goin' across town," he answered. "Boss Dolan's sick."

I knew immediately whom he meant. One of those exceedingly thin hunches came to me, coupled with an unpraiseworthy wish to get out of the rain. Thunder was beginning to rattle.

"Give me a lift," I appealed.

"Jump in, reporter."

Pretty soft for Boss Dolan, I reflected, having such strong political ties that he could have an owl-car at his service to run errands whether he was well or ill. And Dolan had already been an invalid for several months.

ON HUMBOLDT STREET was Dolan's modest home, his front door was open, and a number of ward workers were gathered there as we came up the street.

"What's the word about the Boss?" I asked those I knew personally.

A wreath of pale, set faces seemed to arise around me.

"He's dyin'."

A young district doctor ran out of the house and clattered down to the ambulance that rested at the curb.

Was this too far away for The Gray One to operate? Would he dare to visit Boss Dolan?

"I'd like to go in, for a minute, sort of," I said.

A few shrugged their shoulders. "Why not wait?" said one with the ghastliest candor I can remember.

"That's foolish," another said. "Even a smile now might help. I think I'll go in. If you will," he inquired of me.

"Sure," I replied.

"With all his faults he was generally good to the rank and file of his ward," my companion whispered.

"He was," I subscribed truthfully.

I saw Boss Dolan, and saw something of sad interest to his admirers. That meant something that held delight for his enemies. He was slipping away and he was afraid. A reporter of an opposition paper could make much of this; but not I.

A cluck of sympathy sounded from the tongue of the man I had accompanied in.

"Tough," I murmured.

Boss Dolan was afraid.

The doctor toyed glumly with his watch fob as he stared at an assortment of utensils on a small table. Seizing a powder box, a vial and a small pestle and mortar that were on the table, he left the room for some final experiment. Some instants later I heard a clinking and tapping in the kitchen sink. It was mixed with the cadence of thunder somewhere over the house.

"Poor devil," whispered the one at my side, and he went forward to the place vacated by the doctor.

"Dolan," he uttered smoothly, and touched the sick man's hands.

A strange feeling dragged within me, and I breathed heavily.

"Don't let it get your goat, Dolan," spoke this ready sympathizer. "You can

take it easy—if you want. You're all slated, but you're not in any pain, and you're only a little nervous. It's the softest thing you ever saw. I know, and I'm here to tell you. See? If you don't get scared—it's as easy—as that. It's in my eye, Dolan. Y'know I'm not lyin'. Anybody who has been in the last hour knows that I know—look at my eyes, if you don't believe it. Ah! Well enough y'know I'm right, Dolan. It's the same for you as for all the rest. It was the same for me when I died. That was six months ago. For the first time I think they let somebody come back. Anyway, I did. To help you. It's a certain cinch. Lean on me, Dolan — it's a short road——"

I'm not going to describe the shock and the stupor this caused.

That's the effect this one had when he worked. That's why people were paralyzed by confusion and later harried out of their wits. The way of it all was a certain thing, and the thing crept in so slowly and softly that it was there and established before one could hark to it. As much as I was fully forewarned, I was caught in the spell of amazement all too soon before I was ready.

I SLOWLY gathered myself out of that daze. Yet before I stirred a foot, there was the slightest and the most harmless sound from some distance as far as the front door of the house. But at that disturbance The Gray One whipped about away from the bed, and poised on his toes. I then saw that his face was white, sickly, and unchangeable of expression. There was another sound beyond the room, perhaps a scraping in the hall. The Gray One leaped with a great spring away from the bed and was through the door. I gazed numbly where he had been and saw that Dolan had peacefully died.

"Got him. At last!"

A captain of police and two regulars surrounded The Gray One neatly, catching him as he began his last escape. As he wrenched and twisted in their grasp he hissed in that indescribable voice of his: "Let me alone, damn you! I'm here on my business—the special agent of Death. You can't hold *me,* that was at one time Kaye Ronn——"

Flash! as Walter Winchell says. I had the whole astounding story in the twinkling of an eye. But in the next breath The Gray One summoned all his strength.

Ten men couldn't have held him, and I was out there in the hall by then trying to help the cops. All I got for my trouble was a beautiful black eye. I wanted to save our mysterious prisoner for *The Daily Express* and nothing else, for an exclusive interview and photographs and quotations and signed statements.

That was a hope entirely in vain because The Gray One had other ideas. He fought like a beast, his mouth champing froth and his teeth making ribbons of his own lips.

"The telephone! Where's the telephone?" I yelled, thinking only of Editor McKenna.

It was natural that no one paid any attention to me. For at that point The Gray One broke loose and flew from the house. He *flew,* or so you would have said if you'd seen him. Landed on the sidewalk, anyway, without touching the steps, and away across the street and through an empty field.

The rain was coming down in vats, kicking up mud that splashed the tops of fence palings and even automobile hoods. You couldn't see very well, but the police were after The Gray One in three jumps.

When I had crossed the street and gone five yards farther, joining in the chase, I was plastered with mud. Accord-

ing to the weather records that was a cloudburst, and I could have told you as much while it fell. Did you ever choke in rain until you could hardly breathe?

Beyond the field was a graveyard and on the far border of it was a hopping, traveling shape that might have been The Gray One or gray streaks of rain.

Kaye Ronn!

The police started firing at that very uncertain target.

"Don't hit him," I shouted. "He hasn't done any harm. He's committed no crime."

It was unthinkable that *The Daily Express* should miss the chance to interview that strange figure while I was still so near him.

The name had been spoken only once, but once was enough. *Kaye Ronn.*

"There's no need to kill him," I protested to the police captain plunging through the field beside me. "You know how he got into the news six months ago. He was that fellow named Ronn who made a living taking supplies up the river, in a boat of his, to that lumber camp beyond Hill City. He took passengers across the river too, and he used to preach to them about death and damnation. But the way he got into the news six months ago was by belonging to one of those queer cult burial societies. They didn't believe in embalming. And when Ronn 'died' they just clapped him in a box and drove him to this graveyard here. But he wasn't dead. He'd just had a fit or something. And he wakes up and raps on the box and howls until they let him out."

The captain of police lowered his gun at that moment and I shouted in his ear.

"You see now why this Kaye Ronn was acting like he was in the West End, and at Dolan's. When he got out of that casket he was practically cuckoo. You know a thing like that would drive anybody crazy. And Ronn had a head start. He seems to figure he was dead as a doornail before he woke up in that casket. He thinks he's returned to life. So you see why he's tipping off other people who are dying—he figures it's his business to guide them along, and lend 'em a hand. You get it all now? He's elected himself as assistant to the Angel of Death, with errands to do at as many death-beds as he can get to. He's got away with five of those errands, anyway."

This case was so colossal that it was a weight upon the imagination, and I knew it would be well to unload the whole affair on McKenna as soon as possible. Was there a telephone in this no-man's-land away from Humboldt Street?

Continued gun-fire. The captain of police, who I thought had lowered his revolver after my explanation, had instead dropped the muzzle so he could the better feed more bullets into the chambers. He hadn't heard a word I had said, or anything else but the lashing of the rain. To him Ronn was a dangerous maniac.

WHERE the field ended and the graveyard began I don't know, and I learned the difference chiefly by barking my shins on tombstones. In those few minutes of the cloudburst, wind and rain had washed most of the grave hummocks flat, so that where tombstones were blown down there was no longer anything to identify one grave from another.

Snatches of voices. The storm drove words and parts of words against my ear. "River . . . sticks . . . sticks."

Lightning as tangled as a spider's web flashed down and showed the fugitive Kaye Ronn in a scene that could be compared to a nightmare. He was on the farther edge of the graveyard and had gained several yards on us. The "river"

ran by, known simply as the Creek, but in that locality more often called "Sticks River" from the fact that waste wood from the lumber mill frequently drifted on its current. That was what I had got in those storm-driven voices, the police directing one another by hollering "Sticks River."

And on the swollen brim of the river was Kaye Ronn drenched from head to feet like a symbolic figure in weedy garments. Upon the brink he could be seen, and not even the lightning could kill his grayness. He stooped over a boat, his own boat, tethered to the earth. And from among the grisly monuments and tombstones he lifted in his arms a limp, lifeless thing which he threw in the boat before him.

Then I knew that to know too much is sometimes perilous! For I shivered and my stomach revolted. I remembered ancient legends that fitted Kaye Ronn perfectly, everlasting tales brewed five thousand years ago, and I was scared stiff.

The police with bulldog efficiency had their minds on practical matters. By the same stake where Ronn had tethered his boat they found other craft, rowboats and sculls, riding on the flooded surface. This must have been a favored landing for boatmen who kept up a traffic between the Humboldt Street end of town and Hill City on the other bank.

"Sticks" River!

A disagreeable mixture of those ancient tales ran through my head, but I was in the first boat the police shoved off to overtake The Gray One.

And one more—only one more—sight of that peculiar character was given us when lightning slanted again. Crooked into a design like fiery fingers, the lightning leaped and showed Ronn standing tall and arrogant at the wheel of his vessel—at his knees that huddled thing he had raised on the edge of the graveyard.

Was The Gray One abandoning the dying to clutch at the dead themselves and take them with him?

To telephone McKenna at the first chance was a determination of mine nearly buried under by a horror never felt by any man but myself.

I was afraid of Kaye Ronn, and not because he had waked up in a casket before he died. I was afraid of the "river" we were crossing, and not because it was a deep creek in a canyon of clay. Afraid, and I say it today and I am not ashamed.

Of course, the soaked and bedraggled thing in the waste of The Gray One's boat may have been only a strip of tarpaulin pelted away by the wind and recovered again on the graveyard's edge.

This was the Twentieth Century, after all. Kaye Ronn was probably only Kaye Ronn, an eccentric riverman. And that night of fury and supernatural storm might not have changed the river a bit from the common stream it had always been.

Wonder always runs, like a river, deeper than common sense. For in my dismayed brain I was thinking how, when the world was young and Creation was just finished, and a lot of things were known that have been forgotten since, wise men said that everybody who died was carried away to Hell by Charon.

Charon was the immortal boatman who crossed the waters between Earth and Hell, constantly, taking away the dying with their last breath and removing them to the hereafter. And the term for the hereafter in those times, whether a pleasant hereafter or an evil hereafter, was Hell.

Oh, McKenna—waiting at the end of a busy line for news!

And the ancient boatman's name was Charon—which name happened to be said the same as if it had been Kaye Ronn. And the waters between Earth and Hell, over which Charon ferried the dead, were the waters of a river called the "Styx." Styx, the river. "Sticks" River. Kaye Ronn.

The burst of thunder that tailed the storm didn't originate in my mind, but there seemed to be a closely related connection.

The rain stopped. Lightning rippled almost playfully across the earth.

We had grounded on the farther bank. The fugitive was not to be seen and yet it was plain that he had foundered, capsized, or disappeared with all his possessions. In the expanded river stood a sign-post on which had once been printed "HILL CITY". The word "CITY" was split off and gone. The other half of the sign bearing the capitals "HILL", ending in a splintered arm, pointing down into the water. White splashes of clay dribbled from the letter I, making it an E. One word pointing toward the bottom of the river.

My chin came up as I shuddered, and I gazed overhead.

"What are you looking for," yelled a cop, "the soul of The Gray One?"

"No," I lied. "I'm wondering where those telephone wires go."

Hands of the Dead

By SEABURY QUINN

A gripping story of weird surgery and dual personality—
a tale of Jules de Grandin

"IF THERE were such a thing as a platinum blond tom-cat, I'm sure it would look like Doctor de Grandin." My dinner partner, a long-eyed, sleek-haired brunette in a black-crêpe gown cut to the base of her throat in front and slashed in a V below the waist behind, gestured with her oddly oblique eyes across the table toward Jules de Grandin. "He's a funny little fellow—rather a darling, though," Miss Travers added. "Just see how he looks at Virginia Bushrod; wouldn't you think she was a particularly luscious specimen of sparrow, and he——"

"Why should he watch Miss Bushrod, particularly?" I countered. "She's very lovely, but——"

"Oh, I don't think he's interested in her face, pretty as it is," Miss Travers laughed. "He's watching her hands. Everybody does."

I looked along the candle-lighted table with its ornate Georgian silver and lace-and-linen cloth until my eye came to rest upon Virginia Bushrod. Latest of the arrivals at the Merridews' house party, she was also probably the most interesting. You could not judge her casually. A pale, white skin, lightly tanned on beach and tennis court, amber eyes, shading to brown, hair waved and parted in dull-gold ringlets, curled closely on the back-curve of her small and shapely head. The dead-white gown she wore set off her bright, blond beauty, and a pair of heavy



"They pointed derisive fingers at me, and they were laughing at me."

gold bracelets, tight-clasped about her wrists, drew notice to her long and slender hands.

They were extraordinary hands. Not large, not small, their shapeliness was statuesque, their form as perfect as a sculptor's dream, with straight and supple fingers and a marvelous grace of movement expressive as a spoken word. Almost, it seemed to me as she raised the spun-glass Venetian goblet of Madeira, her hands possessed an independent being of their own; a consciousness of volition which made them not a mere part of her body, but something allied with, though not subservient to it.

"Her hands are rarely beautiful," I commented. "What is she, an actress? A dancer, perhaps——"

"No," said Miss Travers, and her voice sank to a confidential whisper, "but a year ago we thought she'd be a hopeless cripple all her life. Both hands were mangled in a motor accident."

"But that's impossible," I scoffed, watching Miss Bushrod's graceful gestures with renewed interest. "I've been in medicine almost forty years; no hands

which suffered even minor injuries could be as flexible as hers."

"They did, just the same," Miss Travers answered stubbornly. "The doctors gave up hope, and said they'd have to amputate them at the wrist; her father told me so. Virginia gave Phil Connor back his ring and was ready to resign herself to a life of helplessness when——"

"Yes?" I smiled as she came to a halt. Lay versions of medical miracles are always interesting to the doctor, and I was anxious to learn how the "hopeless cripple" had been restored to perfect manual health.

"Doctor Augensburg came over here, and they went to him as a last resort——"

"I should think they would," I interjected. Augensburg, half charlatan, a quarter quack, perhaps a quarter genius, was a fair example of the army of medical marvels which periodically invades America. He was clever as a workman, we all admitted that, and in some operations of glandular transplanting had achieved remarkable results, but when he came out with the statement that he had discovered how to make synthetic flesh for surgical repair work the medical societies demanded that he prove his claims or stop the grand triumphal tour that he was making of his clinics. He failed to satisfy his critics and returned to Austria several thousand dollars richer, but completely discredited in medical circles.

"Well, they went to him," Miss Travers answered shortly, "and you see what he accomplished. He——"

Her argument was stilled as Jane Merridew, who acted as her brother's hostess, gave the signal for the ladies to retire.

CHINESE lanterns, orange, red, pale jade, blossomed in the darkness of the garden. Farther off the vine-draped wall cast its shadow over close-clipped grass and winding flagstone paths; there were rustic benches underneath the ginkgo trees; a drinking-fountain fashioned like a lion's head with water flushing in an arc between its gaping jaws sent a musically mellow tinkle through the still night air. I sighed regretfully as I followed the men into the billiard room. The mid-Victorian custom of enforced separation of men and women for a period after dinner had always seemed to me a relic of the past we might well stuff and donate to a museum.

"Anybody want to play?" Ralph Chapman took a cue down from the rack and rubbed its felt-tipped end with chalk. "Spot you a dollar a shot, Phil; are you on?"

"Not I," the youth addressed responded with a grin. "You took me into camp last time. Go get another victim."

Young Chapman set the balls out on the table, surveyed them critically a moment, then, taking careful aim, made a three-cushion shot, and followed it with another which bunched the gleaming spheres together in one corner.

De Grandin raised a slender, well-manicured hand and patted back a yawn. "*Mon Dieu,*" he moaned to me, "it is sad! Outside there is the beauty of the night and of the ladies, and we, *pardieu,* we sit and swelter here like a pack of *sacré* fools while he knocks about the relics of departed elephants. Me, I have enough. I go to join the ladies, if——"

"May I try, Ralph?" Glowing in defiant gayety, lips wine-moist, eyes bright and wandering, Virginia Bushrod poised upon the threshold of the wide French window which let out on the terrace. "I've never played," she added, "but tonight I feel an urge for billiards; I've got a yen to knock the little balls around, if you know what I mean."

"Never too late to learn," young Chap-

man grinned at her. "I'm game; I'll pay you five for every kiss you make."

"Kiss?" she echoed, puzzled.

"Kiss is right, infant. A purely technical term. See, here's a kiss." Deftly he brought the balls together in light contact, paused a moment, then with a quick flick of his cue repeated the maneuver twice, thrice, four times.

"O-oh, I see." Her eyes were bright with something more than mere anticipation. It seemed to me they shone like those of a drunkard long deprived of drink when liquor is at last accessible.

"See here, you take the stick like this," began young Chapman, but the girl brushed past him, took a cue down from the rack and deftly rubbed the cube of chalk against its tip.

She leant across the table, her smooth brow furrowed in a frown of concentration, thrust the cue back and forth across her fingers tentatively; then swiftly as a striking snake the smooth wood darted forward. Around the table went the cue ball, taking the cushions at a perfect angle. *Click—click,* the ivory spheres kissed each other softly, then settled down a little way apart, their polished surfaces reflecting the bright lamplight.

"Bravo, Virginia!" cried Ralph Chapman. "I couldn't have made a better shot myself. Talk about beginner's luck!"

The girl, apparently, was deaf. Eyes shining, lips compressed, she leant across the table, darted forth her cue and made an expert draw shot, gathering the balls together as though they had been magnetized. Then followed a quick volley shot, the cue ball circled round the table, spun sharply in reverse English and kissed the other balls with so light an impact that the click was hardly audible.

Again and again she shot, driving her cue ball relentlessly home against the others, never missing, making the most difficult shots with the sure precision betokening long mastery of the game. Fever-eyed, white-faced, oblivious to all about her, she made shot follow shot until a hundred marks had been run off, and it seemed to me that she was sating some fierce craving as she bent above the table, cue in hand.

Phil Connor, her young fiancé, was as puzzled as the rest, watching her inimitable skill first with wonder, then with something like stark fear. At last: "Virginia!" he cried, seizing her by the elbow and fairly dragging her away. "Virginia, honey, you've played enough."

"Oh?" An oddly puzzled look gathered between her slim brows, and she shook her head from side to side, like a waking sleeper who would clear his brain of dreams. "Did I do well?"

"Very well. Very well, indeed, for one who never played the game before," Ralph Chapman told her coldly.

"But, Ralph, I never did," she answered. "Honestly, I never had a billiard cue in my hands before tonight!"

"No?" his tone was icy. "If this is your idea of being sporting——"

"See here, Chapman," young Connor's Irish blood was quick to take the implication up. "Ginnie's telling you the truth. There isn't a billiard table in her father's house or mine, there wasn't any in her sorority house; she's never had a chance to play. Don't you think I'd know it if she liked the game? I tell you it was luck; sheer luck——"

"At five dollars per lucky point?"

"Word of honor, Ralph," Miss Bushrod told him, "I——"

"You'll find my honor good as yours," he broke in frigidly. "I'll hand you my check for five hundred dollars in the morning, Miss——"

"Why, you dam' rotten swine, I'll break your neck!" Phil Connor leaped

across the room, eyes flashing, face aflame; but:

"Gentlemen, this has gone quite far enough," Colonel Merridew's cold voice cut through the quarrel. "Chapman, apologize to Virginia. Connor, put your hands down!" Then, as the apology was grudgingly given:

"Shall we join the ladies, gentlemen?" asked Colonel Merridew.

"IT WAS a rather shoddy trick that Bushrod girl played on young Chapman, wasn't it?" I asked de Grandin as we prepared for bed. "He's a conceited pup, I grant, vain of his skill at billiards, and all that; but for her to play the wide-eyed innocent and let him offer her five dollars a point, when she's really in the championship class—well, it didn't seem quite sporting."

The little Frenchman eyed the glowing tip of his cigar in thoughtful silence for a moment; then: "I am not quite persuaded," he replied. "Mademoiselle Bushrod—*mon Dieu,* what a name!—appeared as much surprized as any——"

"But, man, did you notice her dexterity?" I cut in petulantly. "That manual skill——"

"Précisément," he nodded, "that manual skill, my friend. Did it not seem to you her hands betrayed a—how do you say him?—a knowledge which she herself did not possess?"

I shook my head in sheer exasperation. "You're raving," I assured him. "How the deuce——"

"Tiens, the devil knows, perhaps, not I," he broke in with a shrug. "Come, let us take a drink and go to bed."

He raised the chromium carafe from the bedside table, and: "Name of a devil!" he exclaimed in disappointment. "The thing holds water!"

"Of course it does, idiot," I assured him with a laugh. "You wanted a drink, didn't you?"

"A drink, but not a bath, *cordieu.* Come, species of an elephant, arise and follow me."

"Where?" I demanded.

"To find a drink; where else?" he answered with a grin. "There is a tray with glasses on the sideboard of the dining-room."

The big old house was silent as a tomb as we crept down the stairs, slipped silently along the central hall and headed for the dining-room. De Grandin paused abruptly, hand upraised, and, obedient to his signal, I, too, halted.

In the music room which opened from the hallway on the right, someone was playing the piano, very softly, with a beautiful harpsichord touch. The lovely, haunting sadness of the *Londonderry Air* came to us as we listened, the gently-struck notes falling, one upon another, like water dripping from a lichened rock into a quiet woodland pool.

"Exquisite!" I began, but the Frenchman's hand raised to his lips cut short my commendation as he motioned me to follow.

Virginia Bushrod sat before the instrument, her long, slim fingers flitting fitfully across the ivory keys, the wide gold bracelets on her wrists agleam. Black-lace pajamas, less concealing than a whorl of smoke, revealed the gracious curves of her young body, with a subtle glow, as wisps of banking storm-clouds dim, but do not hide, the moon.

As we paused beside the door the sweet melody she played gave way to something else, a lecherous, macabre theme in C sharp minor, seductive and compelling, but revolting as a painted corpse already touched with putrefaction. Swaying gently to the rhythm of the music, she turned her face toward us, and

in the wavering candlelight I saw her eyes were closed, long lashes sweeping against pale-gold cheeks, smooth, fine-veined eyelids gently lowered.

I turned to Jules de Grandin with a soundless question, and he nodded affirmation. "But yes, she sleeps, my friend," he whispered. "Do not waken her."

The music slowly sank to a thin echo, and Miss Bushrod rose with lowered lids and gently parted lips, swayed uncertainly a moment, then passed us with a slow and gliding step, her slim, bare feet soundless as a draft of air upon the rug-strewn floor. Slowly she climbed the stairs, one shapely hand upon the carven balustrade, the dim night-light which burned up in the gallery picking little points of brightness from her golden wristlets.

"Probably neurotic," I murmured as I watched her turn left and disappear around the pillar at the stairhead. "They say she underwent an operation on her hands last year, and——"

De Grandin motioned me to silence as he teased the needle-points of his mustache between his thumb and finger. "Quite so," he said at length. "Precisely, exactly. One wonders."

"Wonders what?" I asked.

"How long we have to wait until we get that drink," he answered with a grin. "Come, let us get it quickly, or we need not go to bed at all."

BREAKFAST was no formal rite at Merridew's. A long buffet, ready-set with food and gay with raffia-bound Italian glassware, Mexican pottery and bowls, daisies, chickory and Queen Anne's lace, stood upon the terrace, while little tables, spread with bright-checked peasant linen, dotted the brick paving.

De Grandin piled a platter high with food, poured himself a cup of coffee and set to work upon the viands. "Tell me, good Friend Trowbridge," he commanded as he returned from the sideboard with a second generous helping of steamed sole, "what did you note, if anything, when we caught Mademoiselle Bushrod at her midnight music?"

I eyed him speculatively. When Jules de Grandin asked me questions such as that they were not based on idle curiosity.

"You're on the trail of something?" I evaded.

He spread his hands before him, imitating someone groping in the dark. "I think I am," he answered slowly, "but I can not say of what. Come, tell me what you noticed, if you please."

"Well," I bent my brows in concentration, "first of all, I'd say that she was sleep-walking; that she had no more idea what she was doing than I have what she's doing now."

He nodded acquiescence. "Precisely," he agreed. "And——"

"Then, I was struck by the fact that though she had apparently risen from bed, she had those thick, barbaric bracelets on her wrists."

"Holá, touché," he cried delightedly, "you have put the finger on it. It was unusual, was it not?"

"I'd say so," I agreed. "Then—why, bless my soul!" I paused in something like dismay as sudden recollection came to me.

He watched me narrowly, eyebrows raised.

"She turned the wrong way at the stairhead," I exclaimed. "The women's rooms are to the right of the stairs, the men's to the left. Don't you remember, Colonel Merridew said——"

"I remember perfectly," he cut in. "I also saw her turn that way, but preferred to have corroboration——"

THE clatter of hoofs on the driveway cut short his remarks, and a moment later Virginia Bushrod joined us on the terrace. She looked younger and much smaller in her riding-clothes. White breeches, obviously of London cut, were topped by a white-linen peasant blouse, gay with wool embroidery, open at the throat, but with sleeves which came down to the gauntlets of her doeskin gloves. For belt she wore a brilliant knit-silk Roman scarf, and another like it knotted turbanwise around her head, its glowing reds and greens and yellows bringing out the charming colors of her vivid, laughing face. Black boots, reaching to the knee, encased her high-arched, narrow feet and slender legs.

"Hello, sleepy-heads," she greeted as she sat down at our table, "where've you been all morning? Making up for night calls and such things? I've been up for hours—and I'm famished."

"What will it be, *Mademoiselle?*" de Grandin asked as he leaped up nimbly to serve her; "a little toast, perhaps—a bowl of cereal?"

"Not for me," she denied, laughing. "I want a man's-sized breakfast. I've ridden fifteen miles this morning."

As she peeled off her white-chamois gloves I caught the glint of golden bracelets on her wrists.

"We enjoyed your playing, *Mademoiselle,*" the little Frenchman told her smilingly as, obedient to her orders, he deposited a "man's-sized" plate of food before her. "The *Londonderry Air* is beautiful, but that other composition which you played with such *verve,* such feeling, it was——"

"Is this a joke?" Miss Bushrod looked at him through narrowed eyes. "If it is, I can't quite see the humor."

"*Mais non,* it is no jest, I do assure you. Music is one of my passions, and although I play but poorly, I enjoy to hear it. Your talent——"

"Then you've mistaken me for someone else," the girl cut in, a quick flush mounting to her face. "I'm one of those unfortunates who's utterly tone-deaf; I——"

"That's right," Christine Travers, virtually naked in a sun-back tennis blouse and shorts, emerged through the French windows and dropped down beside Miss Bushrod. "Ginnie's tone-deaf as an oyster. Couldn't carry a tune in a market basket."

"But, my dear young lady," I began, when a vicious kick upon my shin cut my protest short.

"Yes?" Miss Travers smiled her slow, somewhat malicious smile. "Were you going to tell Ginnie you've a remedy for tone-deafness, Doctor? Something nice and mild, like arsenic, or corrosive sublimate? If you'll just tell her how to take it, I'll see——"

"Doctar Trowbridge, Doctar de Grannun, suh, come quick, fo' de Lawd's sake!" Noah Blackstone, Merridew's stout colored butler, burst upon the terrace, his usual serene aplomb torn to shreds by sudden terror. "Come runnin', gen'lemens, sumpin awful's happened!"

"Eh, what is it you say?" de Grandin asked. "Something awful——"

"Yas, suh; sumpin dreadful. Mistu—Mistu Chapman's done been kilt. Sumbuddy's murdered 'im. He's daid!"

"Dead? Ralph Chapman?" Horror mounted in Virginia Bushrod's amber eyes as she seemed to look past us at some scene of stark tragedy. "Ralph Chapman—dead!" Unthinkingly, mechanically as another woman might have wrung her handkerchief in similar circumstances, she took the heavy silver fork with which she had been eating and bent it in a spiral.

SPRAWLED supinely across the bed, protruding eyes staring sightlessly at the ceiling, Ralph Chapman lay, mouth slightly agape, tongue thrust forward. It needed no second glance to confirm the butler's diagnosis, and it required only a second glance to confirm his suspicion of murder, for in those bulging eyes and that protruding tongue, no less than in the area of bruise upon the throat, we read the autograph of homicide.

"So!" de Grandin gazed upon the body speculatively, then crossed the room, took the dead boy's face between his hands and raised the head. It was as if the head and body joined by a cord rather than a column of bone and muscle, for there was no resistance to the little Frenchman's slender hands as the young man's chin nodded upward. "Ah—so-o-o!" de Grandin murmured. "He used unnecessary violence, this one; see, my friend"—he turned the body half-way over and pointed to a purpling bruise upon the rear of the neck—"two hands were used. In front we have the murderer's thumb and finger marks; behind is ecchymosis due to counter-pressure. And so great a force was used that not only was this poor one strangled, but his neck was broken, as well."

He passed his fingers tentatively along the outline of young Chapman's jaw; then: "How long has he been dead, my friend?" he asked.

Following his example, I felt the dead boy's jaw, then his chest and lower throat. "H'm," I glanced at my watch, "my guess is six or seven hours. There's still some stiffening of the jaw, but not much in the chest, and the forearms are definitely hard —yes, I'd say six hours at the least, eight at the most, judging by the advance of rigor mortis. That would place the time of death——"

"Somewhere near midnight," he supplied. Then, irrelevantly: "They were strong hands that did this thing, my friend; the muscles of our necks are tough, our vertebræ are hard; yet this one's neck is snapped as though it were a reed."

"You—you've a suspicion?" I faltered.

"I think so," he returned, sweeping the room with a quick, stock-taking glance.

"Ah, what is this?" He strode across the rug, coming to pause before the bureau. On the hanging mirror of the cabinet, outlined plainly as an heraldic device blazoned on a coat of arms, was a handprint, long slender fingers, the mounts of the palm and the delicately sweeping curve of the heel etched on the gleaming surface, as though a hand, dank with perspiration, had been pressed upon it.

"Now," his slim black brows rose in saracenic arches as he regarded me quizzically, "for why should a midnight visitant, especially if bent on murder, take pains to leave an autograph upon the mirror, good Friend Trowbridge?" he demanded.

"B-but that's a woman's hand," I stammered. "Whoever broke Ralph Chapman's neck was strong as a gorilla, you just said so. A woman——"

"Tell me, my friend," he interrupted, fixing me with that level, disconcerting stare of his, "do you not wish to see that justice triumphs?"

"Why, yes, of course, but——"

"And is it your opinion—I ask you as a man of medicine—that a man's neck offers more resistance than, by example, a silver table-fork?"

I stared at him dumfounded. Ralph Chapman had publicly denounced Virginia Bushrod as a cheat; we had seen her going toward his room about the time of the murder; within five minutes we had seen her give a demonstration of manual strength scarcely to be equaled by a pro-

fessional athlete. The evidence was damning, but——

"You're going to turn her over to the police?" I asked.

For answer he drew the green-silk handkerchief peeping from the pocket of his brown sports coat, wadded it into a mop and erased the handprint from the mirror. "Come, my friend," he ordered, "we must write out our report before the coroner arrives."

THE mortician to whom Coroner Lordon had entrusted Chapman's body obligingly lent his funeral chapel for the inquest. The jury, picked at random from the villagers, occupied the space customarily assigned to the remains. The coroner himself sat in the clergyman's enclosure. Witnesses were made comfortable in the family room, being called out one by one to testify. Through the curtained doorway leading to the chapel—ingeniously arranged to permit the mourning family to see and hear the funeral ceremonies without being seen by those assembled in the auditorium—we saw the butler testify to finding the body and heard him say he summoned de Grandin and me immediately.

"You give it as your medical opinion that death had taken place some six or seven hours earlier?" the coroner asked me.

"Yes, sir," I replied.

"And what, in your opinion, was the cause of death?"

"Without the confirmation of an autopsy I can only hazard an opinion," I returned, "but from superficial examination I should say it was due to respiratory failure caused by a dislocation of the spinal column and rupture of the cord. The dislocation, as nearly as I could judge from feeling of the neck, took place between the second and third cervical vertebræ."

"And how was the spinal fracture caused?"

"By manual pressure, sir—pressure with the hands. The bruises on the dead man's neck show the murderer grasped him by the throat at first, probably to stifle any outcry, then placed one hand behind his head and with the other forced the chin violently upward, thereby simulating the quick pressure given the neck in cases of judicial hanging."

"It would have required a man of more than usual strength to commit this murder in the manner you have described it?"

I drew a deep breath of relief. "Yes, sir, it would have had to be such a man," I answered, emphasizing the final word, unconsciously, perhaps.

"Thank you, Doctor," said the coroner, and called de Grandin to corroborate my testimony.

As the inquisition lengthened it became apparent Coroner Lordon had a theory of his own, which he was ingeniously weaving into evidence. Rather subtly he brought out the fact that the household had retired by eleven-thirty, and not till then did he call for testimony of the quarrel which had flared up in the billiard room. The painful scene was reenacted in minute detail; six men were forced to swear they heard young Connor threaten to break Chapman's neck.

"Mr. Connor," asked the coroner, "you rowed stroke oar at Norwood, I believe?"

Phil Connor nodded, and in his eyes was growing terror.

"Day before yesterday you won a twenty-dollar bet with Colonel Merridew by tearing a telephone directory in quarters, did you not?"

A murmur ran along the jury as the question stabbed young Connor like a rapier-thrust.

I saw Virginia Bushrod blanch beneath her tan, saw her long, slim hand go out

to clutch her lover's, but my interest in the by-play ceased as the final question hurtled like a crossbow bolt:

"Mr. Connor, where were you between the hours of twelve and two last night?"

The tortured youth's face flushed, then went white as tallow as the frightened blood drained back. The trap had sprung. He rose, grasping at the chair in front of him till lines of white showed on his hands as the flexor muscles stood out pallidly against his sun-tanned skin.

"I—I must refuse to answer——" he began, and I could see his throat working convulsively as he fought for breath. "What I was doing then is no affair——"

"Pardonnez-moi, Monsieur le Coroner," de Grandin rose and bowed respectfully, "I do not wonder that the young man is embarrassed. He was with me, and—believe me, I am grieved to mention it, and would not, if it were not necessary—he was drunk!"

"Drunk?" a slow flush stained the coroner's face as he saw his cherished case evaporating.

"Drunk?" the little Frenchman echoed, casting a grin toward the responsive jury. "But yes, *Monsieur.* Drunk like a pig; so drunk he could not mount the stairs unaided."

Before he could be interrupted he proceeded:

"Me, I am fond of liquor. I like it in the morning, I delight in it at noon; at night I utterly adore it. Last night, when I had gone to bed, I felt the need of stimulant. I rose and went downstairs, and as I reached the bottom flight I turned and saw Messieurs Connor and Chapman on the balcony above. They were in argument, and seemed quite angry. *'Holá, mes enfants,'* I called to them, 'cease your dispute and join me in a drink. It will dissolve your troubles as a cup of coffee melts a lump of sugar.'

"Monsieur Chapman would have none of it. Perhaps he was one of those unfortunates who have no love for brandy; it might have been he did not choose to drink with Monsieur Connor. At any rate, he went into his room and closed the door, while Monsieur Connor joined me in the dining-room.

"Messieurs," he bent another quick smile at the jurymen, "have you ever seen a man unused to liquor making the attempt to seem to like it? It is laughable, is it not? So it was last night. This one" —he laid a patronizing hand upon young Connor's shoulder—"he tipped his glass and poured the brandy down, then made a face as though it had been castor oil. Ah, but he had the gameness, as you say so quaintly over here. When I essayed a second drink he held his glass for more, and when I took a third, he still desired to keep me company; but then he scarce knew what he did. Three glasses of good cognac"—he fairly smacked his lips upon the word—"are not for one who does not give his serious thought to drinking. No, certainly.

"Before you could pronounce the name of that Monsieur Jacques Robinson our young friend here was drunk. *Mordieu,* it was superb! Not in more than twenty years have I been able to achieve such drunkenness, *Messieurs.* He staggered, his head hung low between his shoulders, and rolled from side to side; he smiled like a pussy-cat who has lately dined on cream; he toppled from his chair and lay upon the floor!

"I raised him up. 'Come, *Monsieur,'* I told him, 'this is no way to do. You are like a little, naughty boy who creeps into his father's cellar and gets drunk on stolen wine. Be a man, *Monsieur.* Come to bed!'

"Ah, but he could not. He could not walk, he could not talk, except to beg me

that I would not tell his fiancée about his indiscretion. And so I dragged him up the stairs. Yes, I, who am not half his size, must carry him upstairs, strip off his clothes, and leave him snoring in a drunken stupor. He——"

"Then you think he couldn't 'a' broke th' other feller's neck?" a juryman demanded with a grin.

De Grandin left his place, walked across the chapel till he faced his questioner and leant above him, speaking in a confidential whisper which he nevertheless managed to make audible throughout the room. "My friend," he answered solemnly, "he could not break the bow of his cravat. I saw him try it several times; at last I had to do it for him."

The verdict of the jury was that Ralph Chapman came to his death at the hands of some person or persons to them unknown.

DE GRANDIN poured a thimbleful of old Courvoisier into his brandy sniffer, rotated the glass a moment, then held it to his nose, sighing ecstatically. "You know, my friend," he told me as he sipped the cognac slowly, "I often wonder what became of them. It was a case with possibilities, that one. I can not rid my mind of the suspicion——"

"Whatever are you vaporing about?" I cut in testily. "What case, and what suspicion——"

"Why, that of Mademoiselle Bushrod and her fiancé, the young Monsieur Connor. I——"

"You certainly lied Phil Connor out of the electric chair," I told him with a smile. "If ever I saw a death-trap closing in on anyone, it was the snare the coroner had laid for him. Whatever made you do it, man? Didn't *you* want to see justice triumph?"

"I did," he answered calmly, "but justice and law are not always cousins german, my friend. Justly, neither of those young folks was responsible for——"

"Beg pardon, sor, there's a lady an' gentleman askin' fer Doctor de Grandin," interrupted Nora McGinnis from the doorway. "A Misther Connor an' Miss Bushrod. Will I be showin' 'em in, I dunno?"

"By all means!" cried de Grandin, swallowing his brandy at a gulp. "Come, Friend Trowbridge, the angels whom we spoke of have appeared!"

PHIL CONNOR looked embarrassed; a darkling, haunted fear was in Virginia Bushrod's eyes as we joined them in the drawing-room.

The young man drew a deep, long breath, like a swimmer about to dive into icy water, then blurted: "You saved my life, sir, when they had me on the spot last month. Now we've come to you again for help. Something's been troubling us ever since Ralph Chapman died, and we believe that you're the only one to clear it up."

"But I am honored!" said de Grandin with a bow. "What is the nature of your worriment, my friends? Whatever I can do you may be sure I'll do if you will take me in your confidence."

Young Connor rose, a faint flush on his face, and shifted from one foot to the other, like a schoolboy ill at ease before his teacher. "It's more a matter of your taking us into your confidence, sir," he said at length. "What really happened on the night Ralph Chapman's neck was broken? Of course, that story which you told was pure invention—even though it saved me from a trial for murder—but both Virginia and I have been haunted by the fear that something which we do not know about happened, and——"

"How do you say, you fear that some-

thing which you do not know about——" he began, but Virginia Bushrod cut in with a question:

"Is there anything to the Freudian theory that dreams are really wish-fulfilments, Doctor? I've tried to tell myself there is, for that way lies escape, but——"

"Yes, *Mademoiselle?*" de Grandin prompted as she paused.

"Well, in a misty, hazy sort of way I recollect I dreamt that Ralph was dead that night and that—oh, I might as well tell everything! I dreamt I killed him!

"It seemed to me I got up out of bed and walked a long, long way along a dark and winding road. I came to a high mountain, but oddly, I was on its summit, without having climbed it. I descended to the valley, and everything was dark; then I sat down to rest, and far away I heard a strain of music. It was soft, and sweet and restful, and I thought, 'How good it is to be here listening——' "

"*Pardon, Mademoiselle,* can you recall the tune you heard?" de Grandin asked, his small mustache aquiver like the whiskers of an alert tom-cat, his little, round blue eyes intent on her in an unwinking stare.

"Why, yes, I think I can. I'm totally tone-deaf, you know, utterly unable to reproduce a single note of music accurately, but there are certain tunes I recognize. This was one of them, the *Londonderry Air.*"

"Ah?" the little Frenchman flashed a warning look at me; then: "And what else did you dream?" he asked.

"The tune I listened to so gladly seemed to change. I couldn't tell you what the new air was, but it was something dreadful—terrible. It was like the shrieking and laughing of a thousand fiends together—and they were laughing at me! They seemed to point derisive fingers at me, making fun of me because I'd been insulted by Ralph Chapman and didn't dare resent it.

"I don't suppose you've ever heard of the Canadian poet Service, Doctor, but somewhere in one of his poems he tells of the effect of music on a crowd of miners gathered in a saloon:

"The thought came back of an ancient wrong,
And it stung like a frozen lash,
And the lust arose to kill—to kill . . .

"That's how that dream-tune seemed to me. The darkness round me seemed to change to dusky red, as though I looked out through a film of blood, and a single thought possessed me: 'Kill Ralph Chapman; kill Ralph Chapman! He called you a low cheat before your friends tonight; kill him for it—wring his neck!'

"Then I was climbing up the mountainside again, clambering over rocks and boulders, and always round me was that angry, bloody glow, like the red reflection of a fire at night against the sky. At last I reached the summit, weak and out of breath, and there before me, sleeping on the rocks, was Ralph Chapman. I looked at him, and as I looked the hot resentment which I felt came flooding up until it nearly strangled me. I bent over him, took his throat between my hands and squeezed, pressed till his face grew bluish-gray and his eyes and tongue were starting forward. Oh, he knew who it was, all right! Before I gave his neck the final vicious twist and felt it break beneath my fingers like a brittle stick that's bent too far, I saw the recognition in his eyes—and the deadly fear in them.

"I wasn't sorry for the thing I'd done. I was deliriously happy. I'd killed my enemy, avenged the slight he'd put on me, and was nearly wild with fierce, exultant joy. I wanted to call everybody and show them what I'd done; how those who called Virginia Bushrod thief and cheat were dealt with."

HER breath was coming fast, and in her eyes there shone a bright and gleaming light, as though the mere recital of the dream brought her savage exaltation. "The woman's mad," I told myself, "a homicidal maniac, if ever I saw one."

"And then, *Mademoiselle?*" I heard de Grandin ask soothingly.

"Then I awoke. My hands and brow and cheeks were bathed in perspiration, and I trembled with a sort of chilled revulsion. 'Girl, you've certainly been on a wish-fulfilment spree in Shut-eye Town,' I told myself as I got out of bed.

"It was early, not quite five o'clock, but I knew there was no chance of further sleep, so I took a cold shower, got into my riding-clothes, and went for a long gallop. I argued with myself while riding, and had almost convinced myself that it was all a ghastly dream when I met you and Doctor Trowbridge having breakfast.

"When you mentioned hearing the *Londonderry Air* the night before, I went almost sick. The thought crashed through my brain: 'Music at midnight—music at midnight—music luring me to murder!'

"Then, when the butler ran out on the terrace and told you Ralph was dead——"

"Precisely, *Mademoiselle,* one understands," de Grandin supplied softly.

"I don't believe you do," she contradicted with a wan and rather frightened smile. "For a long time—almost ever since my accident—I've had an odd, oppressive feeling every now and then that I was not myself."

"*Eh,* that you were someone else?" he asked her sharply.

"Yes, that's it, that I was someone different from myself——"

"Who, by example, *Mademoiselle?*"

"Oh, I don't know. Someone low and vile and dreadful, someone with the basest instincts, who—who's *trying to push me out of myself.*"

De Grandin tweaked the needle-points of his mustache, leant forward in his chair and faced her with a level, almost hypnotic stare. "Explain yourself—in the smallest detail—if you will be so good," he ordered.

"I'm afraid I can't explain, sir, it's almost impossible; but—well, take the episode in the billiard room at Colonel Merridew's the night that Ralph was killed. I gave him my word then, and I give you my solemn pledge now that never before in all my life had I held a billiard cue in my hand. I don't know what made me do it, but I happened to be standing on the terrace near the windows of the billiard room, and when I heard the balls click I felt a sudden overmastering urge, like the craving of a drug fiend for his dope, to go inside and play. It was silly, I knew I couldn't even hit a ball, much less make one ball hit another, but something deep inside me seemed to force me on—no, that's not it, it was as though my hands were urging me." She wrinkled her brow in an effort to secure a precisely descriptive phrase; then:

"It seemed as though my hands, entirely independent of me, were leading—no, *pulling* me toward that billiard table. Then, when I had picked up the cue I had a sudden feeling, amounting almost to positive conviction: 'You've done this before; you know this game, no one knows it better.' But I was in a sort of daze as I shot the balls around; I didn't realize how long I'd been playing, or even whether I'd done well or not, till Ralph accused me of pretending ignorance of the game in order to win five hundred dollars from him.

"That isn't all: I'd hardly been out of the hospital a month when one day I found myself in Rodenberg's department

store in the act of shoving a piece of Chantilly lace under the jumper of my dress. I can't explain it. I didn't realize I was doing it—truly I didn't!—till all of a sudden I seemed to wake up and catch myself in the act of shoplifting. 'Virginia Bushrod, what *are* you doing?' I asked myself, then held the lace out to the sales girl and told her I would take it. I didn't really want it, had no earthly use for it; but I knew instinctively that if I didn't buy it I would steal it."

Abruptly she demanded: "Do you approve of brightly-colored nails?"

"*Tenez, Mademoiselle,* that depends upon the time and place and personality of the wearer," he responded with a smile.

"That's it, the personality," she answered. "Bright carmine nails may be all right for some; they're not becoming to my type. Yet I've had an urge, almost an irresistible desire, from time to time to have my nails dyed scarlet. Last week I stopped in Madame Toussaint's for a manicure and pedicure. When I got home I found the nails of both my hands and feet were varnished brilliant red. I never use a deeper shade than rose, and was horrified to find my nails all daubed that way; yet, somehow, there was a feeling of secret elation, too. I called the salon and asked for Héloise, who'd done my nails, and she said, 'I thought it strange when you insisted on that vivid shade of red, Miss Bushrod. I didn't like to put it on, but you declared you wanted it.'

"Perhaps I did; but I don't remember anything about it."

De Grandin eyed her thoughtfully a moment; then:

"You have spoken of an accident you had, *Mademoiselle.* Tell me of it, if you please."

"It was a little more than a year ago," she answered. "I'd been over to the country club by Morristown, and was hurrying back to keep a date with Phil when my car blew out a tire. At least, I think that's what happened. I remember a sharp, crackling *pop,* like the discharge of a small rifle, and next instant the roadster fairly somersaulted from the road. I saw the earth rush up at me; then"—she spread her shapely hands in a gesture of finality—"there I was, pinned beneath the wreckage, with both hands crushed to jelly."

"Yet you recovered wholly, thanks to Doctor Augensburg, I understand?"

"Yes, it wasn't till every surgeon we had seen had said he'd have to amputate that Father called in Doctor Augensburg, and he proved they all were wrong. I was in the hospital two months, most of the time completely or partly unconscious from drugs, but"—her delicate, long-fingered hands spread once again with graceful eloquence—"here I am, and I'm not the helpless cripple they all said I'd be."

"Not physically, at any rate," de Grandin murmured softly; then, aloud:

"*Mademoiselle,* take off your bracelets!" he commanded sharply.

Had he hurled an insult in her face, the girl could not have looked more shocked. Surprize, anger, sudden fear showed in her countenance as she repeated: "Take—off——"

"*Précisément,*" the little Frenchman answered almost harshly. "Take them off, *tout promptement.* I have the intuition; what you call the hunch."

Slowly, reluctantly, as though she were disrobing in the presence of a stranger, Miss Bushrod snapped the clasps of the wide bands of gold which spanned her slender wrists. A line of untanned skin, standing out in contrast to her sun-kissed arms, encircled each slim wrist, testifying that the bracelets had been worn on beach and tennis court, as well as in her leisure

moments, but whiter still, livid, eldritch as the mocking grin of broken teeth within the gaping mouth-hole of a skull, there ran around each wrist a ring of cicatrice an inch or so above the styloid process' protuberance. Running up and down a half an inch or so from the encircling band of white were vertical scar-lines, interweaving, overlapping, as though the flesh had once been cut apart, then sewn together in a dove-tailed jointure.

Involuntarily I shrank from looking on the girl's deformity, but de Grandin scrutinized it closely. At length:

"*Mademoiselle,* please believe I do not act from idle curiosity," he begged, "but I must use the fluoroscope in my examination. Will you come with me?"

He led her to the surgery, and a moment later we could hear the crackling of the Crookes' tube as he turned the X-ray on.

MISS BUSHROD'S bracelets were replaced when they returned some fifteen minutes later, and de Grandin wore a strangely puzzled look. His lips were pursed, as though he were about to whistle, and his eyes were blazing with the hard, cold light they showed when he was on a man-hunt.

"Now, my friends," he told the lovers as he glanced at them in turn, "I have seen enough to make me think that what this lady says is no mere idle vagary. These strange influences she feels, these surprizing lapses from normal, they do not mean she suffers from a dual personality, at least as the term is generally used. But unless I am more mistaken than I think, we are confronted by a situation so bizarre that just to outline it would cast a doubt upon our sanity. *Alors,* we must build our case up from the ground.

"Tell me," he shot the question at young Connor, "was there anything unusual—anything at all, no matter how trivial, which occurred to Mademoiselle Bushrod a month—two months—before the accident which crushed her hands?"

The young man knit his brow in concentration. "No-o," he replied at length. "I can't remember anything."

"No altercation, no unpleasantness which might have led to vengeful thoughts, perhaps?" the Frenchman prompted.

"Why, now you speak of it," young Connor answered with a grin, "I did have a run-in with a chap at Coney Island."

"*Ah?* Describe it, if you please."

"It really wasn't anything. Ginnie and I had gone down to the Island for a spree. We think the summer's not complete without at least one day at Coney—shooting the chutes, riding the steeplechase and roller coasters, then taking in the side shows. This afternoon we'd just about completed the rounds when we noticed a new side show with a Professor Mysterioso or Mefisto, or something of the sort, listed as the chief attraction. He was a hypnotist."

"*Ah?*" de Grandin murmured softly, "and——"

"The professor was just beginning his act when we went in. He was extraordinarily good, too. Uncannily good, I thought. All dressed in red tights, like Mefistofeles, he was, and his partner—'subject' you call it, don't you?—was a girl dressed in a white gown with a blond wig, simulating Marguerite, you know. He did the darndest things with her—put her in a trance and made her lie stretched between two chairs, with her neck on one and heels on the other, with no support beneath her body, while six men stood on her; told her to rise, and she rose up three feet in the air, as though drawn by invisible wires; finally, he took half a dozen long, sharp knitting-needles

and thrust them through her hands, her forearms, even through her cheeks. Then he withdrew them and invited us to search her for signs of scars. It was morbid, I suppose, but we looked, and there wasn't the faintest trace of wounds where he had pierced her with the needles, nor any sign of blood.

"Then he called for volunteers to come up and be hypnotized, and when no one answered, he came down among the audience. 'You, Madame?' he asked Ginnie, stopping in front of her and grinning in her face.

"When she refused he persisted; told her that it wouldn't hurt, and all that sort of thing; finally began glaring into her eyes and making passes before her.

"That was a little bit too much. I let him have it."

"Bravo!" de Grandin murmured softly. "And then?"

"I expected he'd come back at me, for he picked himself up and came across the floor with his shoulders hunched in a sort of boxer's crouch, but when he almost reached me he stopped short, raised his hands above his head and muttered something indistinctly. He wasn't swearing, at least not in English, but I felt that he was calling down a curse on us. I got Virginia out before we had more trouble with him."

"And that was all?" de Grandin asked.

"That was all."

"Parbleu, my friend, I think it is enough to be significant." Then, abruptly: "This feminine assistant. Did you notice her?"

"Not particularly. She had a pretty, rather common sort of face, and long, slim, graceful hands with very brightly painted nails."

De Grandin pinched his pointed chin between a thoughtful thumb and finger. "Where did Doctor Augensburg repair your injured hands, *Mademoiselle?*" he asked.

"At the Ellis Sanitarium, out by Hackensack," she answered. "I was in Mercy Hospital at first, but the staff and Doctor Augensburg had some misunderstanding, so he took me out to Ellis Clinic for the operation."

The little Frenchman smiled benignly on the visitors. "I can understand your self-concern, *Mademoiselle,*" he told Miss Bushrod. "This feeling of otherhood, this impression that a trespasser-in-possession is inside of you, displacing your personality, making you do things you do not wish to do, is disconcerting, but it is not cause for great alarm. You were greatly hurt, you underwent a trying operation. Those things shock the nervous system. I have seen other instances of it. In the war I saw men make what seemed complete recovery, only to give way to strange irregularities months afterward. Eventually they regained normality; so should you, within, let us say"—he paused as though to make a mental calculation—"within a month or so."

"You really think so, Doctor?" she asked, pathos looking from her amber eyes.

"But yes, I am all confident of it."

"NAME of a most unpleasant small blue devil!" he swore as our visitors' footsteps faded on the cement walk outside. "I must make good my promise to her, but how—death of a dyspeptic hippopotamus!—how?"

"What?" I demanded.

"You know how dreams reflect the outside world in symbolic images. By example, you have kicked the covers off the bed, you are cold. But you are still asleep. How does the dream convert the true facts into images? By making you to think that you are in the Arctic and a

polar storm is raging, or, perhaps, that you have fallen in the river, and are chilled by the cold water. So it was with Mademoiselle Bushrod. She dreams she stands upon a mountain top, that is when she leaves her chamber. She dreams that she descends the mountain; that is when she walks downstairs. She hears a tune, of course she does, her hands, those hands which can not play a single note when she is waking, produce it. She dreams she reascends the mountain — climbs the stairs. *Ha,* then she sees before her her traducer, sleeping, helpless. She reaches forth her hands, and——

"What then, my friend? Are we to trust the symbolism of the dream still farther?"

"But," I began, and——

" 'But' be damned and stewed in hell eternally!" he cut in. *"Attendez-moi:* Those hands, those lovely, graceful hands of hers, are not her own!"

"Eh?" I shot back. "Not—good Lord, man, you're raving! What d'ye mean?"

"Precisely what I say," he answered in a level, toneless voice. "Those hands were grafted on her wrists, as the rose is grafted on the dogwood tree. Her radii and unlæ have been sawn across transversely; then other bones, processing with the wrist-joints of a pair of hands, were firmly fastened on by silver plates and rivets, the flexor muscles spliced with silver wire, the arteries and veins and nerves attached with an uncanny skill. It is bizarre, incredible, impossible; but it is so. I saw it with my own two eyes when I examined her beneath the fluoroscope."

HE LEFT the house directly after breakfast the next morning, and did not reappear till dinner had been waiting half an hour.

"Sacré nom," he greeted me across his cocktail glass, "what a day I had, my friend! I have been busy as a flea upon a dog, but what I have accomplished! *Parbleu,* he is a clever fellow, this de Grandin!

"I took down copious mental notes while Mademoiselle Bushrod talked last night, and so this morning I set out for Coney Island, *Grand Dieu des rats,* what a place!

"From one small show-place to another I progressed, and in between times I engaged in conversation with the hangers-on. At last I found a prize, a jewel, a paragon. He rejoices in the name of Snead—Bill Snead, to give him his full title—and when he is not occupied with drinking he proclaims the virtues of a small display of freaks. *Eh bien,* by the expenditure of a small amount of money for food, and something more for drink, I learned from him enough to put me on the trail I sought.

"Professor Mysterioso de Diablo was a hypnotist of no mean parts, I learned. He had 'played big time' for years, but by a most unfortunate combination of events he was sent to prison in the State of Michigan. The lady's husband secured a divorce, *Monsieur le Professeur* a rigidly enforced vacation from the stage.

"After that his popularity declined until finally he was forced to show his art at Coney Island side shows. He was a most unpleasant person, I was told, principally noted for the way he let his fancies for the fair sex wander. This caused his partner much annoyance, and she often reproached him bitterly and publicly.

"Now, attend me carefully. It is of this partner I would speak particularly. Her name was Agnes Fagan. She was born to the theatrical profession, for her father, Michael Fagan, had been a thrower-out of undesired patrons in a burlesque theater when he was not ap-

pearing as a strong man on the stage or lying deplorably drunk in bed. The daughter was 'educated something elegant', my informant told me. She was especially adept at the piano, and for a time entertained ambitions to perform in concert work. However, she inherited one talent, if no other, from her estimable parent: she was astonishingly strong. Monsieur Snead had often seen her amuse her intimates by bending tableware in knots, to the great annoyance of the restaurant proprietor where she happened to perform. She could, he told me solemnly, take a heavy table fork and twist it in a corkscrew.

"*Eh bien,* the lure of the footlights was stronger than her love of music, it appears, for we next behold her as the strong woman in an acrobatic troupe. Perhaps it was another heritage from her many-sided sire, perhaps it was her own idea; at any rate, one day while playing in the city of Detroit, she appropriated certain merchandise without the formality of paying for it. Two police officers were seriously injured in the subsequent proceedings, but eventually she went to prison, was released at the same time that the professor received liberty, and became his partner, the subject of his hypnotism during his performances, and, according to the evil-minded Monsieur Snead, his mistress, as well.

"She possessed four major vanities: her musical ability, her skill at billiards, her strong, white, even teeth and the really unusual beauty of her hands. She was wont to show her strength on all occasions. Her dental vanity led her to suffer the discomfort of having a sound tooth drilled, gold-filled and set with a small diamond. She spent hours in the care of her extremities, and often bought a manicure when it was a choice of pampering her vanity or going without food.

"Now listen carefully, my friend: About a year ago she had a quarrel with her partner, the professor. I recite the facts as Monsieur Snead related them to me. It seems that the professor let his errant fancies wander, and was wont to invite ladies from the audience to join him in his acts. Usually he succeeded, for he had a way with women, Monsieur Snead assured me. But eventually he met rebuff. He also met the fist of the young lady's escort. He was, to use your quaint American expression, 'knocked for a row of ash-cans' by the gentleman.

"La Fagan chided him in no uncertain terms. They had a fearful fight in which she would have been the victor, had he not resorted to hypnotism for defense. 'She wuz about to tear him into little bits, when he put 'is hand up and said, "Rigid",' Monsieur Snead related. 'An' there she was, stiff as a frozen statoo, wid 'er hand up in th' air, an' her fist all doubled up, not able to so much as bat a eye. She stood that way about a hour, I expect; then suddenly she fell down flat, and slept like nobody's business. I reckon th' professor gave her th' sleepin' order from wherever he had beat it to. He had got so used to orderin' her about that he could control her at a distance 'most as well as when he looked into her eyes.'

"Thereafter he was often absent from the show where he performed. Eventually he quit it altogether, and within a month his strong and pretty-handed partner vanished. Like *pouf!* she was suddenly nowhere at all.

"BY THE time the estimable Monsieur Snead had finished telling me these things he could impart no further information. He was, as I have heard it described, 'stewed like a dish of prunes', for all the while he talked I kept his tongue well oiled with whisky. Accordingly I

bid him farewell and pushed my research elsewhere. I searched the files of the journals diligently, endeavoring to find some clue to the vanishment of Mademoiselle Fagan. *Cordieu,* I think I found it! Read this, if you will be so good."

Adjusting my pince-nez I scanned the clipping which he handed me:

GIRL FALLS UNCONSCIOUS WITH STRANGE MALADY

Collapses on Roadway Near Hackensack—Absence of Disease Symptoms Puzzles Doctors

Hackensack, N. J., Sept. 17—Police and doctors today are endeavoring to solve the mystery of the identity and illness of an attractive young woman who collapsed on the roadway near here shortly after noon today, and has lain unconscious in the Ellis Clinic ever since.

She is described as about 30 years old, five feet two inches tall, and with fair complexion and red hair. Her hands and feet showed evidences of unusual care, and both finger- and toe-nails were dyed a brilliant scarlet. In her upper left eye-tooth was a small diamond set in a gold inlay.

She wore a ring with an oval setting of green stone, gold earrings in her pierced ears, and an imitation pearl necklace. Her costume consisted of a blue and white polka-dot dress, white fabric gloves, a black sailor hat with a small feather, and black patent leather pumps. She wore no stockings.

Alec Carter and James Heilmann, proprietors of an antique shop facing on the road, saw the young woman walking slowly toward Hackensack, staggering slightly from side to side. She fell in the roadway across from their store, and when they reached her she was unconscious. Failing to revive her by ordinary first aid methods, they placed her in an automobile and took her to the Ellis Clinic, which was the nearest point where medical aid could be secured.

Physicians at the clinic declared they could find no cause for her prolonged unconsciousness, as she was evidently neither intoxicated nor under the influence of drugs, and exhibited no symptoms of any known disease.

Nothing found upon her offered any clue to her identity.

"Well?" I demanded as I put the clipping down.

"I do not think it was," he answered. "By no means; not at all. Consider, if you please:

"Mademoiselle Bushrod's accident had occurred two weeks before, she had been given up by local surgeons; Augensburg, who was at the Ellis Clinic at the time, had just accepted her case.

"This strange young woman with the pretty hands drops down upon the roadway almost coincidentally with Mademoiseile Virginia's advent at the clinic. Do you not begin to sniff the odor of the rodent?"

"I don't think so," I replied.

"Very well, then, listen: The mysterious young woman was undoubtlessly the Fagan girl, whose disappearance occurred about this time. What was the so mysterious malady which struck her down, which had no symptoms, other than unconsciousness? It was merely that she had been once again put under the hypnotic influence, my friend. You will recall that the professor could control her almost as well when at a distance as when he stared into her eyes? Certainly. Assuredly. She had become so used to his hypnosis that his slightest word or wish was law to her; she was his slave, his thing, his chattel, to do with as he pleased. Unquestionably he commanded her to walk along that road that day, to fall unconscious near the Ellis Clinic; to lie unconscious afterward, eventually to die. Impossible? *Mais non.* If one can tell the human heart to beat more slowly, and make it do so, under power of hypnosis, why may one not command it to cease beating altogether, still under hypnotic influence? So far as the young Fagan person was concerned, she had no thought, no will, no power, either mentally or physically, which the professor could not take from her by a single word of command. No, certainly.

"We were told Mademoiselle Bushrod's accident came from a tire blow-out, *n'est-ce-pas?* I do not think it did. I inquired—most discreetly, I assure you—at and near the Ellis Clinic, and discovered that *Monsieur* the hypnotist visited that institution the very day that she was hurt, had a long conference with Doctor Au-

gensburg in strictest privacy and—when he came he bore a small, high-powered rifle. He said he had been snake-hunting. Me, I think the serpent which he shot was the tire of Mademoiselle Bushrod's car. That was the blow-out which caused her car to leave the road and crush her hands, my friend!

"Now, again: This Professor of the Devil, as he called himself appropriately, visited Doctor Augensburg at several times. He was in the room where the unknown woman lay on more than one occasion. He was at the clinic on the day when Augensburg operated on Mademoiselle Bushrod's hands—and on that day, not fifteen minutes before the operation was performed, the unknown woman died. She had been sinking slowly for some days; her death occurred while orderlies were wheeling our poor Mademoiselle Virginia to the operating-room.

"You will recall she was unknown; that she was given shelter in an institution which maintains no beds for charity or emergency patients? But did you know that Augensburg paid her bill, and demanded in return that he be given her unclaimed body for anatomical research, that he might seek the cause of her 'strange' death? No, you did not know it, nor did I; but now I do, and I damn think that in that information lies the answer to our puzzle.

"I do not have to tell you that the period between somatic death—the mere ceasing to live—and molecular, or true death, when the tissue-cells begin to die, is often as long as three or four hours. During this period the individual body-cells remain alive, the muscles react to electrical stimuli, even the pupils of the eye can be expanded with atropin. She had suffered no disease-infection, this unknown one, her body was healthy, but run down, like an unwound clock. Moreover, fifteen minutes after her death, her hands were, histologically speaking, still alive. What easier than to make the transplantation of her sound, live hands, to Mademoiselle Bushrod's wrists, then chop and maim her body in the autopsy room in such a way that none would be the wiser?

"And what of these transplanted hands? They were part and parcel of a hypnotic subject, were they not, accustomed to obey commands of the hypnotist immediately, even to have steel knitting-needles run through them, yet feel no pain? Yes, certainly.

"Very well. Are it not entirely possible that these hands which the professor have commanded so many times when they were attached to one body, will continue to obey his whim when they are rooted to another? I think so.

"In his fine story, your magnificent Monsieur Poe tells of a man who really died, yet was kept alive through hypnosis. These hands of Mademoiselle Fagan never really died, they were still technically alive when they were taken off—who knows what orders this professor gave his dupe before he ordered her to die? Those hands had been a major vanity of hers, they were skilled hands, strong hands, beautiful hands—*hélas,* dishonest hands, as well—but they formed a large part of their owner's personality. Might he not have ordered that they carry on that personality after transplantation to the end that they might eventually lead the poor Mademoiselle Bushrod to entire ruin? I think so. Yes.

"Consider the evidence: Mademoiselle Bushrod is tone-deaf, yet we heard her play exquisitely. She had no skill and no experience in billiards, yet we saw her shoot a brilliant game. For why should she, whose very nature is so foreign to the act, steal merchandise from a shopkeeper?

Yet she tells us that she caught herself in such a crime. Whence comes this odd desire on her part to have her nails so brightly painted, a thing which she abhors? Last of all, how comes it that she, who is in nowise noted for her strength, can twist a silver table fork into a corkscrew?

"You see," he finished, "the case is perfect. I know it can not possibly be so; yet so it is. We can not face down facts, my friend."

"It's preposterous," I replied, but my denial lacked conviction.

He read capitulation in my tone, and smiled with satisfaction.

"But can't we break this spell?" I asked. "Surely, we can make this Professor What's-his-Name——"

"Not by any legal process," he cut in. "No court on earth would listen to our story, no jury give it even momentary credence. Yet"—he smiled a trifle grimly —"there is a way, my friend."

"What?" I asked.

"Have you by any chance a trocar in your instruments?" he asked irrelevantly.

"A trocar? You mean one of those long, sharp-pointed hollow needles used in paracentesis operations?"

"Précisément. Tu parles, mon vieux."

"Why, yes, I think there's one somewhere."

"And may one borrow it tonight?"

"Of course, but—where are you going at this hour?"

"To Staten Island," he replied as he placed the long, deadly, stiletto-like needle in his instrument case. "Do not wait up for me, my friend, I may be very late."

HORRIFIED suspicion, growing rapidly to dreadful certainty, mounted in my mind as I scanned the evening paper while de Grandin and I sipped our coffee and liqueurs in the study three nights later. "Read this," I ordered, pointing to an obscure item on the second page:

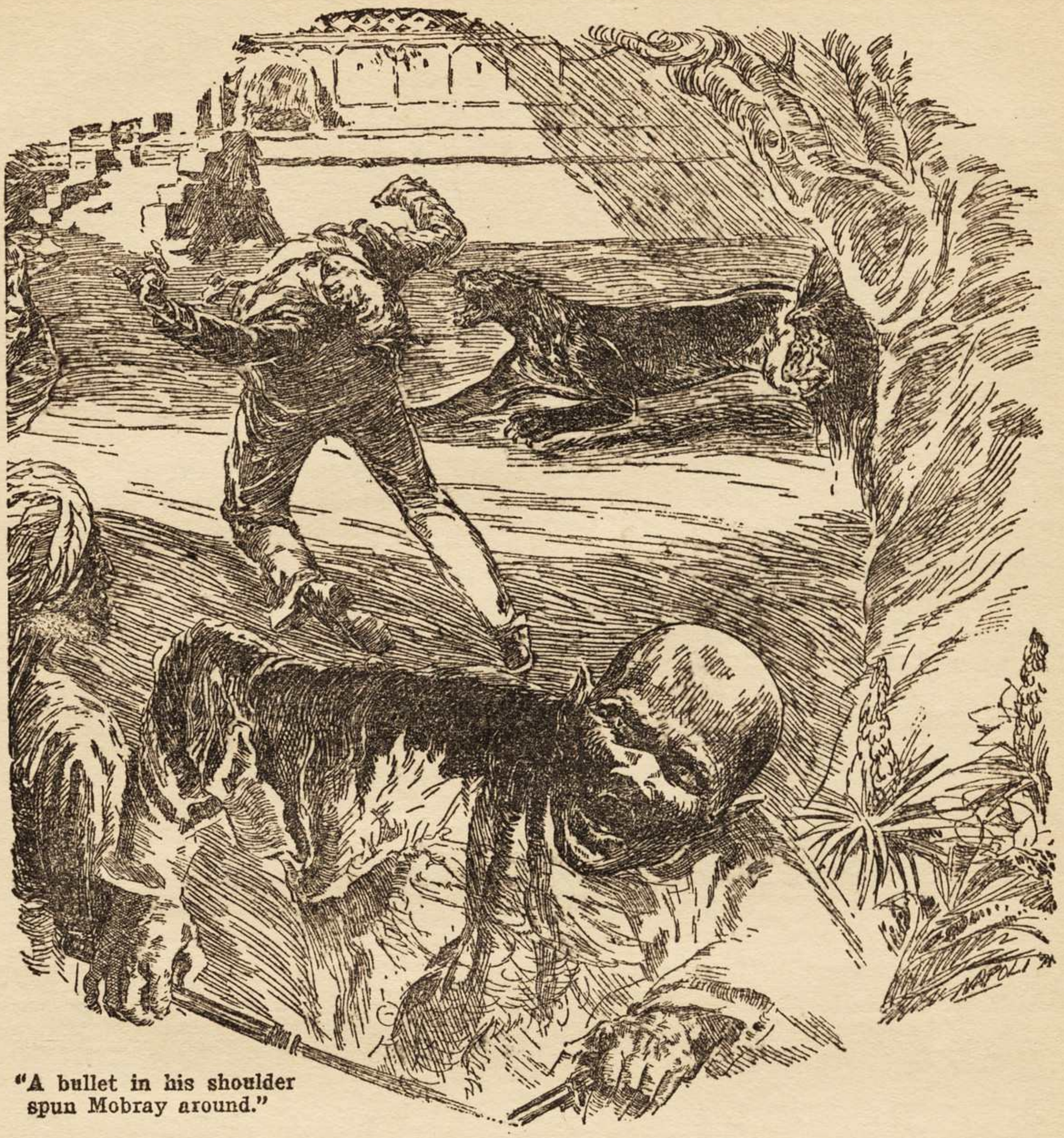
> St. George, S. I., September 30—The body of George Lothrop, known professionally on the stage as Prof. Mysterioso, hypnotist, missing from his rooming-house at Bull's Head, S. I., since Tuesday night, was found floating in New York bay near the St. George ferry slip by harbor police this afternoon.
>
> Representatives of the Medical Examiners' office said he was not drowned, as a stab wound, probably from a stiletto, had pierced his left breast and reached his heart.
>
> Employees at the side show at Coney Island, where Lothrop formerly gave exhibitions as a hypnotist, said he was of a sullen and quarrelsome disposition and given to annoying women. From the nature of the wound which caused his death police believe the husband or admirer of some woman he accosted resented his attentions and stabbed him, afterward throwing his body into the bay.

De Grandin read the item through with elevated brows. "A fortunate occurrence, is it not?" he asked. "Mademoiselle Bushrod is now freed from any spell he might have cast on her—or on her hands. Hypnotic suggestion can not last, once the hypnotist is dead."

"But—but you—that trocar——" I began.

"I returned it to your instrument case last Tuesday night," he answered. "Will you be good enough to pour me out a little brandy? Ah, thank you, my friend."





"A bullet in his shoulder spun Mobray around."

Black Bagheela

By BASSETT MORGAN

A story of brain transplantation, huge apes that spoke with the voices of men, and a swirling, dancing, black leopard-cat in the Maharajah's court

IF THERE existed under the hard surface of Captain Daunt's not unhandsome visage an assailable weakness, or if he possessed an Achilles heel, young Mobray, late of the Royal Navy, had failed to touch it. He tried every human means of persuasion.

"Give up the idea," said Captain Daunt.

"No. I'm finding my brother or his

remains. I hoped you would help me, but I've one more ace in the hole—Ti Fong."

"He's a very fine man to dodge," said Captain Daunt, "as your brother could tell you, maybe, if he could speak to you."

"I'm not afraid. His fast yacht has been seen in the vicinity of the Red God Island, and I've shown you the message picked up in a floating bottle and assured you I've checked the drift and the bottle could easily have come from that cursed island. I believe my brother is there. Daunt, don't you understand it's more to us than settling the estate, which can't be done until his death is proved or legally admitted? His wife and my mother are taking it hard. Nick's son, born since he disappeared."

"I know all that and I'm sorry, but there is nothing I can do about it," said Captain Daunt.

"You call at the Island of the Red God. You could get permission from Jornado to let me land and search." Captain Daunt was shaking his head when Mobray burst out, "Then I'm off to Sumatra to see Ti Fong."

"Make your will," said Captain Daunt. "Your brother tangled with that devil."

"Afraid of the Chink, Captain?"

"Enough to let you get away with that remark because I feel sorry for your mother, and your wife or sweetheart. Go along. I've warned you, and I'm busy taking two black panthers to His Highness the Maharajah of Awroot, up-country. Nice cats." He opened a door of an adjoining cabin, and Mobray saw two thicker shadows in the room corner, with blinking emeralds for eyes. One yawned, his pink throat and red muzzle set with fanged ivory.

"Beauties!" Mobray backed toward the door, however. "That mouth looked like an orchid of rare color, Captain."

"Genus 'Man-trap'," said Captain Daunt. "They roam this island you're interested in, though these were hand-raised from cubs. Listen, my lad, would a trip with me delivering these keep you from tangling with worse, which is one description of Ti Fong? Not that it matters to me what happens to you, only I hate letting him add you to his collection of odd achievements. We are foes, as you might put it politely."

"I'd like the trip with the cats, Captain Daunt." And the skipper was aware Mobray thought it might provide a chance to obtain further information in case acquaintance proved amicable.

The big chromium-plated car of the Maharajah waiting for him on the wharf with a uniformed chauffeur under the wheel was searing the eyes of all beholders in the hot Singapore sunlight. Captain Daunt exchanged his cap for a panama, whistled to the leopards, who stretched, yawned again and undulatingly slid within reach of leather collars he snapped around their necks, holding the chains in his hand.

Mobray stepped lively going to the deck. Daunt sauntered along, talking to the cats, which showed uneasiness at the crowded wharf and glittering automobile. It took soothing to keep them beside him while the car hummed through traffic and shot into the empty road down the peninsula. Mobray was ahead with the chauffeur.

THE car rolled into a walled court, and was received with some pomp. A short time later Mobray and Captain Daunt were entertained by the resplendent potentate in his best British manner, and the leopards lapped milk from a golden basin and stretched supine. Before he left, Daunt put them through a few tricks, most pleasing of which was a feline waltz

on their hind paws and leaping high to capture a flower Daunt tossed in the air. The prince was delighted and presented Captain Daunt with a black pearl in addition to the high price paid for the leopards, and after due courtesies the visitors were escorted to the car and whirled away.

"So that's part of the treasures of the Red God Island," said Mobray, "trained leopards. Why can't you trust me enough?"

"My lad, I rather like you. It isn't that. I've orders——" He interrupted himself to speak to the driver. "Put me down at Ira Singh's, the gold-beater. . . . If you want to see pretty jewelry, Mobray, come along. I'll have this pearl set for use."

In the bazar, Mobray watched Captain Daunt select a pendant setting on a chain of fine gold for his pearl, an ornament for a woman, which was boxed for him. The native said something Mobray did not understand.

"Wait outside and we'll go somewhere for dinner," said Daunt. "I'll pay for this trinket. He says I am foolish to be walking with you, Mobray, which means whoever got your brother is watching you. Ira Singh is a friend of mine."

Mobray walked down the block gazing at bazars lighted in the early darkness, looking like pirate caves of colorful loot. He walked back, up and down, and finally entered Ira Singh's bazar. Daunt-sahib was gone, said an obsequious clerk, but hard on his words came a native police officer barging into the place. The clerk yelped and took to his legs, a crowd after him. The singular occurrence alarmed Mobray. He hailed a ricksha and was driven to the wharf and Daunt's vessel. The gang-plank was drawn in, but Mobray leaped the intervening lane of water and climbed over the rail. He ran down to Daunt's cabin, which was dark. Snapping a cigarette lighter, he entered. Behind him the door was banked shut and a lock grated. He was a prisoner. Beside the lock, an iron bar clanged, though he could have sworn there was none on the door when he entered that noonday.

The throb of engines jarred the vessel. There were shouts and running feet overhead, and the navy man knew they were being towed stern-first into the stream, bound God alone knew where. He took it philosophically. He wanted a trip to Daunt's source of valuable cargo, and the Asiatic trickery of unknowns had granted his wish by an odd twist of adventure. Captain Daunt would be surprized to see him, probably, if he didn't drop him at the nearest opportunity.

But Mobray was not destined to see Captain Daunt, for that cruise. He sighted landmarks through his porthole, the spire of St. Andrew's Cathedral, Tanjong Ru and Tanjong Kantong, the Straits Islands dark against a moonlighted sea, praos flitting like black moths through webbed waves and silver; and he slept soundly.

NEXT morning his door was unlocked and opened by a tall, urbane Chinese speaking excellent English, who listened to Mobray's protest.

"You came on board uninvited, Mr. Mobray. Captain Daunt is not on the vessel. He is the guest of the Lord Ti Fong."

Mobray controlled a grin of satisfaction at the joke on Daunt, who warned him about the mysterious Ti Fong.

"No need of keeping me a prisoner," he said. "I'm a navy man, quite willing for a voyage and rather anxious to meet this Ti Fong. I obtained leave of absence to search for my brother out here." The Chinese nodded.

"And a bottle was found containing a

message from him from the Island of the Red God, where we hope to land, Lieutenant Mobray."

"You know the whole story, evidently, and you're going there! Good. I'm in luck. Anything I can do?"

"In the absence of Captain Daunt, perhaps you would be willing to fill his position on the vessel."

"Look here, you've taken this craft over. Piracy. You can't expect me to head your villainy, you know. I've been abducted."

"Could you prove that statement in a court of inquiry?" asked the bland Asiatic, and Mobray considered before answering. Into a space of silence came the suave voice of the Chinese. "You are searching for Sir Nicolas Mobray who came out here to obtain a pair of Celestial Singers to adorn his fine English estate. The fame of those birds has stirred ornithologists to their lees. A pair of them among the white and purple peacocks of Athelstane would make Sir Nicolas the proudest peer in Britain."

"You know my brother is alive," shot from Mobray.

"The splendor of the Celestial Singers," went on the Chinese, "took centuries to produce, the eighteen-foot tail of the cock of Ku, the coloring of the peacock, the song of the nightingale . . . a man would commit crimes to possess them."

Mobray's throat tightened, his scalp began to prickle. Premonition crawled over his courage. Nick was in bad with these Chinks, perhaps their prisoner. Nick had the lordly scorn of white men for Asiatics and was unfamiliar with the sinister vengeance of the East.

"Who are you?" broke from him.

"Loo Yee, doctor, Lieutenant Mobray. I assure you of your brother's existence on the Island of the Red God, where no vessel may drop anchor except this schooner. Rocks protect the island and the sea leaps like wolves on three sides, unfathomably deep. Guns guard the lagoon anchorage. But this vessel with a white man on the bridge may run in, so we are glad to have you take command and use your opportunity to search the island for your brother. And breakfast is waiting us."

Mentally limp, Mobray followed to a good meal, hearing the interesting conversation of Doctor Loo Yee on everything except the things vital to himself, while he cogitated his predicament. Trapped. Nick alive on the island where only this boat could anchor. Guilty of piracy if he accepted Loo Yee's terms. . . . Well, to hell with quibbling. He'd sail in and find Nick.

"I'm with you," he announced, interrupting politics from Loo Yee, "though Daunt will accuse me of piracy and his word is as good as mine. I can't expect my abductor to speak in my defense either, I suppose."

"You are erecting future bridges to cross. Wait for those until you have seen the Celestial Singers, and the black bagheelas dancing in the jungle."

From that hour the voyage was a pleasant adventure outwardly, though Mobray knew trouble was coming. The cold black eyes of Loo Yee held the unblinking malignancy of a snake's. His brilliant conversation covered unplumbed hellery afoot. There were dark stains on deck and in the crew's quarters, never obliterated, which looked like blood and savored of wholesale slaughter of Daunt's crew when the vessel was seized.

Mobray, wearing one of Daunt's drill suits and a gold-banded cap, was a mere nautical figurehead when the vessel sighted the island. Far out in the indigo blue sea stretched a white spit on which squatted an amazing image carved of red rock from which the island was named.

Palms shimmered behind a coral beach of the lagoon. Mountains rose farther back, dark with jungle growth. The island was shaped like a severed black hand with a thumb and forefinger forming the anchorage, and on that thumb the Red God squatted.

THE throb of drums came over the sea at a great distance and grew louder, more menacing, as they approached. Doom . . . doom . . . doom . . . went a giant drum through affrighted agitation of smaller tom-toms. Behind the Red God the sun dropped in a blaze on the sea, and fires on shore winked through the palms. On the vessel, evil-looking Dyaks put on fancy sashes and wore waved knives, the formidable kriss of the race that fathered piracy. It meant slaughter, and Mobray was the traitor leading death to the island. Loathing his role, he was helpless to escape it.

"You will go ashore alone, unhampered," said Loo Yee. "They expect Captain Daunt. May your search prove profitable! Being unexpectedly detained, Captain Daunt put you in charge of his vessel."

A boat was lowered. From shore a booming voice hailed the ship. A small fire was lighted on the coral beach and Mobray's hair rose as he saw the slouching form of a great ape among natives peering over the water as he rowed the boat nearer.

"All dressed up, Daunt," came as if words zoomed from the pipes of an organ.

Mobray held the dripping oars. An ape spoke! He couldn't believe his eyes and ears. Frankly frightened, he backed the boat. A gun cracked from the ship. A bullet whined and kicked up coral dust. Natives, at a snarl from the ape, dashed into the lagoon water and seized him. Shots came thickly from Loo Yee's men as Mobray was dragged ashore and up the coral to sheltering shrubbery.

"I'm not Daunt, of course," he panted. "Daunt disappeared. A Chinese named Loo Yee has his vessel . . . abducted me . . . forced me to land. My name is Mobray."

The paws of the ape held him, claws dug into the flesh of his shoulders, slid nearer his windpipe.

"Mobray?" boomed that incredible voice. "How do I know you aren't lying? What's your word worth?" The claws were around his throat. His hands tugged at the hairy wrists of the ape uselessly. His breath was going.

"My brother Nicolas . . . is here," he gasped. "Better fight Loo Yee . . . and his gang . . . than me. . . . Take me to . . . Jornado . . . tell him——"

Then he was flung to the natives, and the great ape was giving orders like an army captain. A howl like a beast's broke from his throat, quivered in the night above the unceasing noise of drums, echoed on distant rocks. Mobray was borne swiftly through darkness and rustling growth to lights, the sound of babbling water, the dark wall of a house, lamps, revealing a room with heavy Dutch furniture. Natives wearing only loin-rags held him, bound him to a massive chair with a high narrow back. The lashings around arms and trunk and legs held him motionless, his feet were between the lower rungs, high above the floor, and he was helpless to move anything but his head.

Turning that, he saw a divan along one wall, heaped with cushions, and on it a woman, queerly handsome, hybrid, with long-lidded eyes of a Manchu, skin of a white woman. On a taboret near by burned a flame on a small silver lamp. The peculiar odor of poppy gum transcended

flower scent coming through open doors and windows.

But Mobray's head turned again as a girl came down wide stairs, wrapped in a flowered silk sarong to her arm-pits, young, lovely, her dark eyes startled as she saw him. An instant later a cannon boomed. The lamp flame swayed. A sharp cry broke from the girl. She ran to the woman on the couch, spoke, and Mobray decided her speech was Chinese. Getting no reply she approached Mobray, gliding on bare feet, tinkling as she came shaking a circlet of golden bells on her ankles.

"English?" she asked, and as he nodded she went on. "Who are you? Where is Captain Daunt? Why are the cannons shooting?"

All hell was breaking loose in the jungle after each blast of the big gun, the trumpeting howl of great apes from near and far gathering closer, streaking past toward the lagoon shores. The girl's eyes were bright with alarm as she ran to the door and stood peering into further darkness, calling once or twice in words Mobray did not understand. Even in that tumult and the chaos of his thoughts, Mobray had eyes for her young loveliness; but he felt his hair standing on its roots when out of the night a sinuous embodiment of gloom flowed to a place beside her bright-flowered sarong and lifted its rounded head under her spread fingers. Mobray stared at those fingers with their almond-shaped nails like pink pearls rubbing the blackness of a leopard's head, as unawarely as if it had been a house dog.

A second black beast appeared. Twin emeralds glowed in pairs beyond the door, moving up and down, back and forth. Mobray counted a dozen and forgot to count because one was gliding as the clouds travel, toward the couch where the older woman lay. It took time to bare its teeth and hiss at him, and the girl turned, leaped, caught the beast by the neck scruff and spoke sharply. To Mobray's terrific relief the leopard sat on its tail beside the couch and allowed the woman to fondle its head and seemed listening to an explanation from her regarding the man bound to the chair.

"For God's sake, let me loose," begged Mobray, "or call off those cats."

"You do not answer," complained the girl querulously.

"I was too scared to speak. My name is Mobray, my brother Sir Nicolas——" But she halted his words by the change of her face.

"You—you are Sir Nick's brother, come here to find him? Oh, he hoped you would come!"

"Then he is alive."

"Captain Daunt, where is he? Why don't you speak? Your tongue is not tied."

"I was taken prisoner on Daunt's vessel by Chinese. I know nothing of him except that he is the guest of Ti Fong, they said."

"Ti Fong!" cried the woman on the couch, instantly wrenched from dreaminess that not even the apes' howling had disturbed. The living gloom that slipped inside the door on feet of silence was electrified by the women's fear.

"Call off your cats," begged Mobray. "If they kill me you won't know about the danger coming with Ti Fong."

The girl whirled, spoke, beat their black muzzles with her small folded fists, drove them outside. Mobray faced the older woman whose one hand held the neck of the leopard at her side.

"Ti Fong can not come here," she said, challenging him to contradict her. "Only Daunt's vessel may enter the lagoon."

"That may be true. But they evidently

abducted Captain Daunt. Ti Fong's men are on his vessel in the lagoon now, unless they have landed. And it sounds to me as if your cannons were so busy sinking the boat they are giving Ti Fong plenty of chance to make a landing. I'm a navy man and my ideas run to nautical tactics and sea warfare. It's only a guess . . . but where is Jornado who owns and runs this island? He ought to be told. I'm no friend to Ti Fong, I assure you. I'd like to be in the fight to keep him from landing."

A quick exchange of words between the two brought action. The girl snatched a knife from somewhere and cut his bonds.

"Get me a gun and do something about the leopards."

"I go with you, *Tuan.*"

"I'm not a *tuan.* Nick has the title. I'm Dick Mobray. May I ask your name? It'll be handier to know it."

"Mayala Jornado, and this is my mother."

"Jornado's daughter," Mobray said and turned to the mother. "You will not regret cutting my lashings. I'm on Jornado's side."

A moment later he realized the foolishness of his speech. The leopards trailed him and the girl as she seized his hand and ran down a jungle trail too dark for him to find a way, toward the lagoon. The worst din was over, but yowls from the trees made him aware of the great apes in those upper terraces. On shore a big fire lighted a shambles, what remained of Dyaks of the crew fallen into the apes' hands. Daunt's men were avenged, and his vessel lay shorn of her upper works after the guns finished with her. Mobray was too late to fight. The girl led him toward two huge orang-outangs at the edge of the firelight, who stared as he approached. Mobray hated the quiver of his flesh that seemed cowardice, but the dismembered flesh of Dyaks revolted him and showed the way apes disposed of humans.

Then a cry froze his blood.

"Dick." One ape came toward him, still staring, and in those eyes he saw recognition and surprize, human attributes. "Dick . . . oh God, you don't know me . . . no wonder . . . Dicky, it's me . . . what they made of me . . . your brother Nick. . . . That devil Ti Fong . . . I tried to buy his cursed birds . . . then lost my head and tried to take them. . . . Wait till you've seen them, Dick. But I'm talking too fast . . . my brain isn't what it used to be. . . . Dick . . . you can't believe . . . no wonder." And the ape slouched away, shamed, slumping toward a palm bole, where it leaned, the great shoulders heaving in anguish, its forehead against one arm along the tree.

Mobray stood rooted to the spot with terror that he had lost his own reason, that his mind facing incredible horror had snapped. It was the girl who went and laid a hand on the arm of this monstrosity and spoke softly, that steadied his nerve.

"There seems no doubt you are Lieutenant Richard Mobray," boomed from the other ape. "Sir Nicolas recognizes you . . . and *my name once was Jornado.* Like your brother, I offended Ti Fong, who makes apes of us both. You'll believe what seems impossible, presently, Mobray, just as I believed that"—he pointed to a headless torso of a Dyak on the coral sand—"when he said Ti Fong took Daunt's vessel, made Daunt his prisoner, and sent the vessel here. Unfortunately the Dyak didn't know the rest of the scheme, but we haven't seen the end of it yet. They didn't land intact, because you gave warning. For that I am grateful. We'll go to the house now. You've had a shock that needs digesting to believe."

"You . . . you killed them all? Doctor Loo Yee also?" asked Mobray. He was startled at the sudden rage of the man-ape.

"Loo Yee, no! The surgeon, cleverest of them all. Nick, you hear that? Loo Yee was on board. He's escaped us." And the man-ape called Jornado howled to the apes in the trees in their lingo. Mobray saw the leopards sniff at human flesh and turn away daintily, but the smell of blood affected them. Jornado caught the neck of one and flung the animal savagely toward the jungle. The others disappeared after it.

Again the girl grasped his hand and they returned to the house where natives brought brandy and a glass for Mobray and he drank a tumblerful before his flesh ceased quivering.

"Come out here where it's dark, Dick," called the voice of his brother, the same inflections, the tones magnified, and Mobray sat on the porch hearing the dreadful tale of master surgery that dealt worse than death and after-hells to Sir Nicolas Mobray.

"I've got one hope, Dick, that I can go through it again and have this brain, this ego restored to the body of a human. You could do that for me. You could round up those devils and force them to operate again. Otherwise death is the only way out."

In the darkness Mobray clutched hope. He lost his horror of this uncouth shape that spoke his brother's thoughts and asked so tenderly about Nick's wife and little son. Loo Yee was on the island and would be captured, he said with child-like optimism. The jungle was as silent as it had been noisy.

"You go to bed, Dick, in the big front room that was mine. I like sleeping in a tree better. Tomorrow you'll see the birds."

A servant showed Mobray to a room with an old four-poster bed and heavy furnishings shipped to the island a century before, when the Dutch were stripping its lagoon of pearls, its jungle of Birds of Paradise, before they abandoned it and—for services rendered a high official—it came into the possession of Jornado. Mobray heard from his brother how Jornado had stolen the pair of Celestial Singers from Ti Fong and was captured, and his brain transplanted into the skull of a huge orang-outang before he was landed on the island.

AT DAWN Mobray was awakened by bird songs of such singular ecstasy that he went to the window. Fine wire screened an enormous expanse of gardens with orange trees in flower and golden fruit, drapes of wine-red bougainvillea, flame trees, hibiscus, and the seductive perfume of ylang-ylang. On tall perches birds of shimmering plumage poured forth their love-songs, their long tails swaying with iridescent colors to the carpet of flame-tree petals beneath. Jornado's daughter was holding cupped hands filled with rice, and she saw him and beckoned. By her smile the night horror might have been a bad dream, pleasantly ended by morning.

Dressed, he came down to watch her feed the Celestial Singers. Sun dappled the gardens, made living jewels of the birds and an Eden of the old stone house despite its incongruous solidity in a tropic setting that called for airy bamboo building. The stoop flanked a pool fed from a mountain stream. Ripe oranges fell from the trees and plopped into the water, bounded down the steps, those soft sounds like the ghost echoes of drums that had boomed in the night recalling realities in a dream nuance that began when Jornado's daughter finished feeding the

birds and sat beside him on the old stone steps that were tilted by crowding jungle roots.

He had fallen under the spell of youth, a girl's beauty and soft voice, the passionate wooing of tropic beauty in lush growth, and forgot she was a mystery his mind refused to accept, Jornado's daughter, until she spoke of those things.

"All night I worried about Captain Daunt. He is our friend. Tell me what happened to him."

Mobray mentioned the trip with the black leopards to the Maharajah's palace, the visit to the jewel-shop.

"Probably he had that big pearl made into an ornament for you," he said. "But I never dreamed of a girl on the Island of the Red God . . . never of a girl like you, Mayala."

"I was born here just a few days before Jornado was brought here—as you see him. He stole Ti Fong's daughter who is my mother, and Ti Fong's Celestial Singers. And Ti Fong never forgets. He is a terrible man. My mother feared him, and her mother feared him and killed herself to escape from him though she was his wife."

"Ti Fong's daughter—your mother," he murmured.

"And she is clever like him, but not cruel. Come and see her with the leopards . . . the bagheelas. . . ."

She led him through green tunnels of ferns and flowering vines where the air was perfumed and moist as warm wet gauze. Mobray thought they came miles to the clearing, a natural glen of grass above which vines grew from tree to tree in a green trellis heavy with flowers hanging like colored flames. At the edge of the clearing they halted. Leopards lay, or stalked back and forth, or sat around Ti Fong's daughter who pulled their ears, rubbed their pelts, talked to them in a crooning purr, resting. And when she rose and lifted her hand a tom-tom began throbbing, a little flute played a tune, the players hidden beyond the vines, and Ti Fong's daughter coaxed the leopards to leap over her head; she coaxed them to form figures like circus tumblers with a row of cats resting their paws against one another and others on their backs until the pyramid loomed high and an agile young cat bounded to the top and stood erect. At her word the towering wall of velvet crumpled and became cats again, dancing on their hind paws, leaping to swipe at hanging orchids or crunch them in their scarlet muzzles.

Mobray watched entranced, forgetting everything but the sight. Then as Ti Fong's daughter made a circle of the cats, the girl beside Mobray clutched his fingers and touched her own lips in a warning gesture, though he had been motionless, hardly breathing.

In the circle Ti Fong's daughter knelt under flickering shadows threaded with sun-gold. The drums beat faster, the flute was silent. Watching intently, Mobray lifted a hand to rub his eyes. Where the woman had crouched a black leopard sat and the woman was nowhere. Legerdemain! But clever as magic. The cat danced as no leopard ever danced, gorgeously swaying, twirling on her hind paws, spinning until there was a dark nimbus swelling as a humming top seems to spread, then diminishing as Mobray watched until he saw it was not a leopard, but the woman whirling, and the black fur blanching to the color of her flesh and dark sarong. He had time to notice the circle of leopards, ears laid back, fangs bared, scarlet muzzles twitching, snapping at empty air, as a dog will snap if his master blows in his face; as if they sensed the dreaded powers of darkness evoked by her who ruled them. And when the

weird spell broke, they slunk, mewing, nearer her and fawned, their tails dragging the grass.

Mayala's hand was drawing him back over the path.

"If I could only do as she does," the girl sighed. "I dance with them, but I can not become one of them."

Mobray opened his lips to say it was a trick, an optical illusion, but changed his impulse because of a howl that rang out suddenly, the cry of a great ape booming, vibrating on the quiet heat, silencing the myriad sounds of rustlings and insects in the jungle, and the twittering of birds. The song of Celestial Singers was broken off. Coming near the wire enclosure he saw the birds' heads under their wings as they gripped the high perches.

"Something has happened," cried the girl, running.

MOBRAY ran after her to a break in the trees where they could see the long white thumb of coral and the Red God like a grotesque setting of a thumb-ring.

Streaking the blue sea, leaping like a stone ricochetting over the waves from the speed at which it flew, was a power-launch, and lashed to the stern was a barred cage from which a voice howled.

Mobray knew that voice. He froze in his tracks at its message, booming over the water, growing fainter, dying away.

"Jornado, they trapped me. It's Nick Mobray. Ti Fong's launch came in during the fight and lay hidden. Look . . . Ti Fong's boat . . . out there."

Forgetting the girl, Mobray raced toward the spit, staring where that bounding power-launch flew to a rendezvous with a vessel barely discernible.

The island was all noise, the bedlam of the night tore loose again. But Mobray was staring, focussing his gaze at sea, and he saw the vessel, low, rakish, streaked black and white like an orca, turning abeam to glide along as the launch slowed down.

A cannon shot crashed. A puff of smoke floated and broke and vanished. There was a splash where the ball fell short of Ti Fong's vessel, and before another shot was fired, the cage was swung on her, the launch was towing behind and she streaked for the far horizon.

Mobray was scrambling up the feet of the Red God, climbing to its knees and shoulders by rough apertures of its crude carvings. He stood beside the great ear, shorter than its hanging lobe, staring at the sea, the tropic sun blazing on his bare head, his senses swimming dazedly. And he saw the man-ape called Jornado swinging toward the god and swarming up beside him.

"You saw?" growled the mighty voice. "You heard. They outwitted us, but how could I guess Ti Fong sent in Daunt's steamer with his own men to have us busy fighting them away while he sent in the launch to lie hidden? God knows what devils it has landed! We'll have to scour the jungle to find them. They can't escape, but the pity is that Nick, your brother, is in Ti Fong's hands again. It means a more hellish vengeance. Your brother tried to take Ti Fong's pair of Celestial Singers as I took the parent pair. The birds were killed. Making Sir Nick into a companion for me is not enough for Ti Fong. You heard what he cried out at first?"

Mobray couldn't speak. The man-ape, Jornado, swung beside him; the mighty voice had the organ sorrow of a requiem, the eyes held grief, but the sea for Mobray was heaving up and down, the long white spit was waved like a kriss to his eyes.

" 'Jornado,' he called, 'shoot and end me . . . don't let Ti Fong put me in a cir-

cus . . . he says——' Then they must have hit him, though he yelled again, as you heard," growled Jornado.

"Nick," gasped Mobray, "a circus!" A moment later he slumped and was sliding down the shoulder of the Red God. A huge hairy arm caught him from that fall, and Mobray was carried through the jungle to the house over the shoulder of Jornado the ape.

HE WAKENED on the stoop, lying on a couch in the ineffable peace of that perfumed shade. Mayala was lifting his head, holding a lime drink to his lips. His hands grasped her, felt the warm strength of her wrists, clung because they were blessed flesh and blood and youth and things he could comprehend.

"The sun was too much for you," she murmured.

"Not the sun . . . hells, devils, mysteries . . . and Nick!" His voice cracked on his brother's name. He sat up, still grasping the girl's arms. "Tell me I've dreamed. Assure me none of it happened. I've been whanged on the head and lost my mind."

"No, no, you're quite well. The sun on the Red God is always fierce. The red rock draws heat."

She did not understand that he craved a denial of what happened. And he thought the lime drink was drugged, for the spasm of horror passed and he lay in a languid waking coma hearing the oranges plop and splash as they fell into the pool, hearing distant sounds that did not mean anything to him or matter until the sun was low and there was no golden spidery gleam of it on the pool.

Mayala brought him food, turtle broth, cold roasted chicken, bread and fruit, and he ate hungrily. She played on a silk-stringed, moon-shaped guitar and sang little Chinese love-songs for him, and the stars came out, the moon rose presently and the house was very still. Then she left him, and he went upstairs to bed and wakened to the music of the Celestial Singers and watched her feed them again. But there was a new distraction below.

A group of island natives came through the jungle and interrupted the bird-feeding. They carried a man in a hammock of twisted vines and came up the steps of the stoop. Looking down, Mobray saw it was a white man, alive but utterly spent, dark hair streaked over his forehead and cheeks. But Mobray knew him. He ran down the stairs, startled out of lethargy and bad dreams.

The bearers halted at the door, and Mobray laid a hand on the man's wrist. The weary head turned and the eyes opened.

"Mobray," whispered a croaking voice.

"Daunt!" came Mobray's cry, and the bearer went inside to where Jornado sat in a great chair in the cool, dark living-room beside the silk cushions of the couch where Ti Fong's daughter sat, her small, ivory-tinted hand caressed by the paws of the ape.

"It's Captain Daunt!" Mobray cried as the woman rose.

"And about done for," croaked Daunt. "The devil made me swim ashore after they got what they came for. He's put it over again, Jornado. My fault! Give me some brandy and I'll talk."

On the couch, with natives massaging his body with scented oils, Captain Daunt's hoarse voice gathered strength to tell his story, from the time Ira Singh warned him in the jewel shop he was foolish to be in company with Lieutenant Mobray.

"Somebody grabbed Ira Singh and slugged me. Ti Fong's men evidently followed us after we got out of the Maharajah's car. They move like eels any-

way. They got in the bazar, and next time I got breath I was being hustled with a bag over my head to Ti Fong's yacht. I expected the worst, but he wanted to use me. I'm more valuable to him at large, evidently. He sent in my vessel, knowing you'd use the cannons when you found out the trick, and he gave me my choice of piloting his launch in while the noise was loudest and hiding it, or—well, never mind his alternative. I took the safe way for myself. Then I had to be a party to the abduction of—your brother, Mobray. I wish to Got it wasn't true. I wanted to live as I am. Somebody has to fetch supplies here and take out cargo. I guess you know by this time what's been going on. Jornado is my friend and partner. I failed to save him from Ti Fong's vengeance, but I'm the only link between him and his lady and Mayala, and necessities. . . . If it was just Jornado, he'd get along on the island. But the women——"

Mobray nodded. He blamed Daunt for his forced treachery, but recognized the reason. After all, Nick had blundered into the vengeance of a master-devil when he tried to take Ti Fong's remaining Celestial Singers.

"Why did Ti Fong want Sir Nick?" growled Jornado's voice.

"He's insane, of course," said Daunt, "the most terrible madman ever spawned by hell. It suits his Asiatic whim to sell his captive to some zoo or circus as an orang-outang able to speak. A trained ape. We've got to stop it. The minute my vessel can navigate I'm after him. And I know every lane of the animal cargo game. I know all the dealers. I'll head him off. Just let me get over that swim and the coral scratches, and get my boat in shape. And Jornado, you might start men working on her. You might look over her and tell me how badly she's damaged."

While Captain Daunt slept in Mobray's bed, the others were on the vessel with torchlights and the work of repair was already begun. Mobray's career, Jornado's seamanship, swarms of natives whose forebears had sailed those seas in beautifully built dugouts before the Romans settled Londinium, were clearing the wreckage and repairing the deck-house and steering-gear, the severed cargo slings and emergency sailing-gear. And on the rail, against the buxom figurehead of the bows sat Mayala, plucking the silk strings of her moon-guitar and singing love-songs.

Captain Daunt slept the sun around, waking only to eat and drink and sleep again. The swim from Ti Fong's vessel had been a test for his iron endurance, but the native massage, the food and rest restored him amazingly and he was working with the others on the third day after he landed. In a week the vessel was fit for a cruise. And during that week Mobray had explored much of the island with Mayala. He had watched daily the circle of leopards put through their tricks. He had seen again and again that transformation of Ti Fong's daughter into the guise of a leopard and restored again to her own form. Almost he believed what Mayala said:

"It is true. Many native people have that gift. I wish I could be a black bagheela." Mobray's arm caught her closer.

"You stay as you are. Some day you're coming away from this island, to see other places . . . some day, when Nick——" He could not speak of his brother sanely even yet.

"But if I could become a black bagheela, I would go with you. I would break into Ti Fong's kampong and kill him."

"I wouldn't let you take the risk," said Mobray. But with the girl soft and warm

in his arms he was staring into the clearing where Ti Fong's daughter crouched, the outlines of her form blurred darkly, trembling as she shook off human shape and became a leopard dancing, leaping lithely to bring down hanging orchids and bits of vine.

There were no tom-toms and flutes that day to drive parokeets and lories from the surrounding trees. Birds darted in drifts of brilliant color from branch to branch. A big green parrot circled a vine and hung upside-down above the dancing bagheela. A swipe of her paw struck it lifeless, and tossing it like a ball she played as a cat with a mouse, gay feathers strewing the grass.

Mayala caught her breath and drew Mobray silently away.

"Never have I seen her kill anything before. She is never cruel. It shows she is wholly bagheela, not even her kindness left of my mother. How awful if she should ever be hungry when she turns to bagheela!"

Mobray tried to comfort Mayala as they sat on the stone steps of the pool watching oranges bobbing. The girl seemed depressed by the metamorphosis of her mother into a merciless cat killing for amusement, but Mobray marveled at the ancient witchcraft of the dark ages and reeking jungles and forests.

Captain Daunt barged on their brooding and dispelled it by handing the girl a little box. In it was the black pearl on its chain, which he dropped over her head, and said:

"If I hadn't stopped to have the Maharajah's pearl fixed so you could wear it, we wouldn't be in this mess, Mayala."

"Then what can I do to make up to you, Captain?" she asked.

"A pretty big favor. Let me sell a pair of Celestial Singers to the Maharajah. It's going to take plenty to pay the price Ti Fong will ask for his prisoner."

"Captain Daunt, don't hesitate about the price," cried Mobray. "I haven't it, but his estate, everything he has."

"That would take time to negotiate. Besides, it's my carelessness that let Ti Fong's men on the island."

"Take the birds," cried Mayala. "Only they need such care on a voyage. I must go with them."

"I thought of that. Not you, Mayala. Perhaps your mother. Jornado wouldn't let you go. I've talked to him and we agreed about it." And from the thick foliage of an ancient tree boomed the voice of Jornado:

"Sir Nicolas was our guest and we let that devil Ti Fong get hold of him. We must make amends. So Bibi-ti will go with the birds. She knows the cruelty of Ti Fong as none of us do. She is of his house and knows the anguish of her own mother who was Ti Fong's wife before she killed herself to escape him. She has seen the world beyond these shores, where she has lived with grief for fifteen years and never once complained or wished aloud that she could return to the land of the living. Perhaps she will find amusement in seeing other places again, and other . . . people." And the mighty voice of Jornado ended in a sigh of sorrow, a sigh of renunciation.

Mobray felt the stark tragedy of Jornado as never before, doomed to live in his half-world, neither man nor beast, retaining the intelligence and fine attributes of a man imprisoned in beast form, chained to the daily torture of hideous grotesquery before the woman he loved, separated from her by worse than death. He was glad to be aboard the vessel in the rush of last-minute preparations when the big cage containing a pair of Celestial Singers was carried beside the black-

swathed figure of Bibi-ti. As the vessel forged away they saw Jornado standing on the Red God's shoulder with Mayala beside him waving.

BIBI-TI devoted herself to the birds until the vessel docked at Singapore for Captain Daunt to go ashore. It was anchored far from shore and a sharp watch set with Mobray in command. Ti Fong's spies would inform him of its arrival, and they feared the terrible power of his evil tentacles reaching into every port.

There on deck, watching the distant city like a marble hand on the arm of the long Johore peninsula, Bibi-ti told Mobray of Jornado's tragedy. The blue-eyed, red-headed sea captain had seen her in her father's house feeding the Celestial Singers. He had taken them and her, as mad a love idyl as the tropics ever fostered, and for weeks they were happy until the day Jornado disappeared. Captain Daunt took her to the island, where instead of her lover, the soul and brain of him was brought in the ape's body, just before Mayala was born.

"I had my daughter or I should have gone mad or killed myself. And I delved into the ancient mysteries that Ti Fong taught me in childhood and practised them among the bagheelas."

Daunt's respect for her was profound, when Captain Daunt was rowed out to the vessel bursting with news.

"Ti Fong sold Nick to the Maharajah. I called on the nabob and he's complaining of trickery. He paid enormously and his purchase refuses to 'talk' and seems dying, refuses food. The only good feature is that in the Maharajah's court the crowd can't gape and jeer. And he'll look at the birds. If they please him he'll buy. I've got us an audience with him."

"I must go with you to coax the birds to sing," said Bibi-ti.

"Of course," Daunt agreed.

She was wrapped in a black sari and veiled like a Moslem woman for the ride to the Maharajah's court, and only on the journey did Daunt confide his most important news.

"I asked him to have Ti Fong present, Bibi-ti."

Under the veil she trembled as Daunt assured her no harm could possibly come of the meeting, but both men walked close to the veiled figure as they were ushered into the court where the Maharajah sat beside the Chinese. A mere inclination of heads acknowledged the nabob's introduction. Their eyes were on the hapless transformation of a once proud peer, chained to the bole of a living tree. Its head lifted. Around the skull was the puckered brand of its ignominy, the mark of surgical skill of the dread Ti Fong's henchmen. The dull eyes quickened at sight of Mobray. The black lips moved, but only a croak of despair was uttered and the shamed head drooped again.

Near the Maharajah lay his two tame leopards, lazy as full-fed house-cats until the visitors entered. Then they were afoot, ears back, teeth showing in snarls, spitting as they glared at the veiled figure. The Maharajah tried to soothe them between courteous amenities and explanations.

"Captain Daunt, I have complained to Ti Fong of a bad bargain. The ape he sold me does not speak, but he has offered to prove his claims for the creature today. As a dealer in rare animals I knew you would be interested in my new possession."

MOBRAY was briefly fascinated by the aspect of triumph in the yellow mask of Ti Fong's face. Black eyebrows cut horizontally across the dome-shaped,

shaven poll. The nostrils were dark apertures of the flattened nose, the lips a thin dark line. He wore a magnificent robe embroidered in gold and green dragons, the wide sleeves concealing his hands.

"The ape shall speak. You will hear him beg for favors," he said, striding toward the tree while the Maharajah rose and tried to quiet the spitting leopards that glared with burning green eyes at the quivering folds of Bibi-ti's wrappings. Mobray saw the black veil fall.

"Not here, not that dance here," he gasped at her, but was too late. The sari dropped. A black leopard began that slow, swaying dance of the jungle, terrible to watch in the court where punkahs moved with restful pause and swing, peace-conveying where there was no peace, but only primal madness, monstrous cruelty and impending doom piping to the *danse macabre*.

Mobray did not see the whip in Ti Fong's hands hurled high, until the lash whined through the air and the ape howled and leaped as its chains clashed and a long red snake oozed blood where the lash had coiled around its body and lifted skin.

"You fiend! You devil!" boomed the agonized howl. "God, Dick, shoot me and end this misery. I only want to die quickly."

Mobray leaped at the Chinese, but a gun spat from his left hand, a bullet in his shoulder spun Mobray around.

Ti Fong was running toward the iron door-grilles, firing again. The dancing leopard leaped. A ribbon of soft flowing red unfurled from her flank. The tame leopards were mad and the court seemed full of snarling, spitting cats. There was a mewing screech as one landed on the ape's shoulders, the snap of jaws on a spinal column, a shake and an unearthly screeching of the dancing bagheela as she leaped in fury, driving back a tamed cat that had shaken the ape limp.

From the safety beyond the grilled iron doors the Maharajah saw his pampered pets trying to climb the walls to escape the she-leopard. His court was a bloody arena. Utterly cowed, their tails lashing, their fangs showing, they crouched while the dancing leopard caught up the black sari in her teeth and tossed it. On her hind paws she stood quivering and turning like a top. The sari covered her. The white teeth and the red mouth blurred before their eyes, and as the spinning slowed down they saw a woman's black hair, white face and red lips.

She glided to the doors which His Highness opened and flew to the cage of Celestial Singers. Her voice crooned, her hands caressed them while Mobray knelt beside the dying ape-man.

He lifted the grotesque head to his shoulder, seeing only the intelligent eyes glazing fast, hearing only the hoarse echo of his brother's voice:

"I'm glad it is ended, Dick. Forget all this if you can. I'm not suffering at all. I've heard that the big cats paralyze by that neck hold. Odd adventure, wasn't it? You'll carry on till my boy can take things over. Don't tell them what happened. And don't try to take vengeance on Ti Fong, it's too risky . . . Dick . . . I fancy I hear music——"

In the outer court the Celestial Singers broke into glorious melodic song and on the wings of music the soul of a man in torture escaped its prison of grotesque flesh.

Captain Daunt heard a car roaring away. Ti Fong had escaped. The sailor stood with a hand at Salute to Death but his mind was planning reprisals as the Maharajah slipped into the court and

snapped chains on the collars of his leopards.

"Command me," he said to Mobray. "Anything in my power shall be done to honor him who was your brother. There is a tomb in the grounds where lies an illustrious warrior of my ancestors that his presence would honor, and its silence is no deeper than shall be mine about what I have seen today. Captain Daunt, any price you name shall be paid for the Celestial Singers, that they may sweeten his rest with their songs. How may I serve you and the lady further?"

In the zenana, the skin wound of Bibiti was dressed and she rested while a flower-covered, flag-wrapped form was sealed in a tomb of carved marble with priestly chanting and rites of honor.

When again Daunt saw her, she had shed the last stoic silence of that *alter ego* at her command.

"Take me home to Jornado," she pleaded. "The circumference of Earth is all too short a distance to run from Ti Fong. Had his aim today been as deadly as his powers of darkness, I would never see my child and Jornado again. Take me home."

Through the night roared the Maharajah's shining car with armed guards bringing them to Daunt's vessel.

"He's licked us again," commented Captain Daunt.

"At least my quest for my brother is ended," said Mobray. "Ended in the only way possible, rest and peace for him. And I begin to see the oriental argument for Nirvana since Asia spawns devils like Ti Fong."

Color

By A. LESLIE

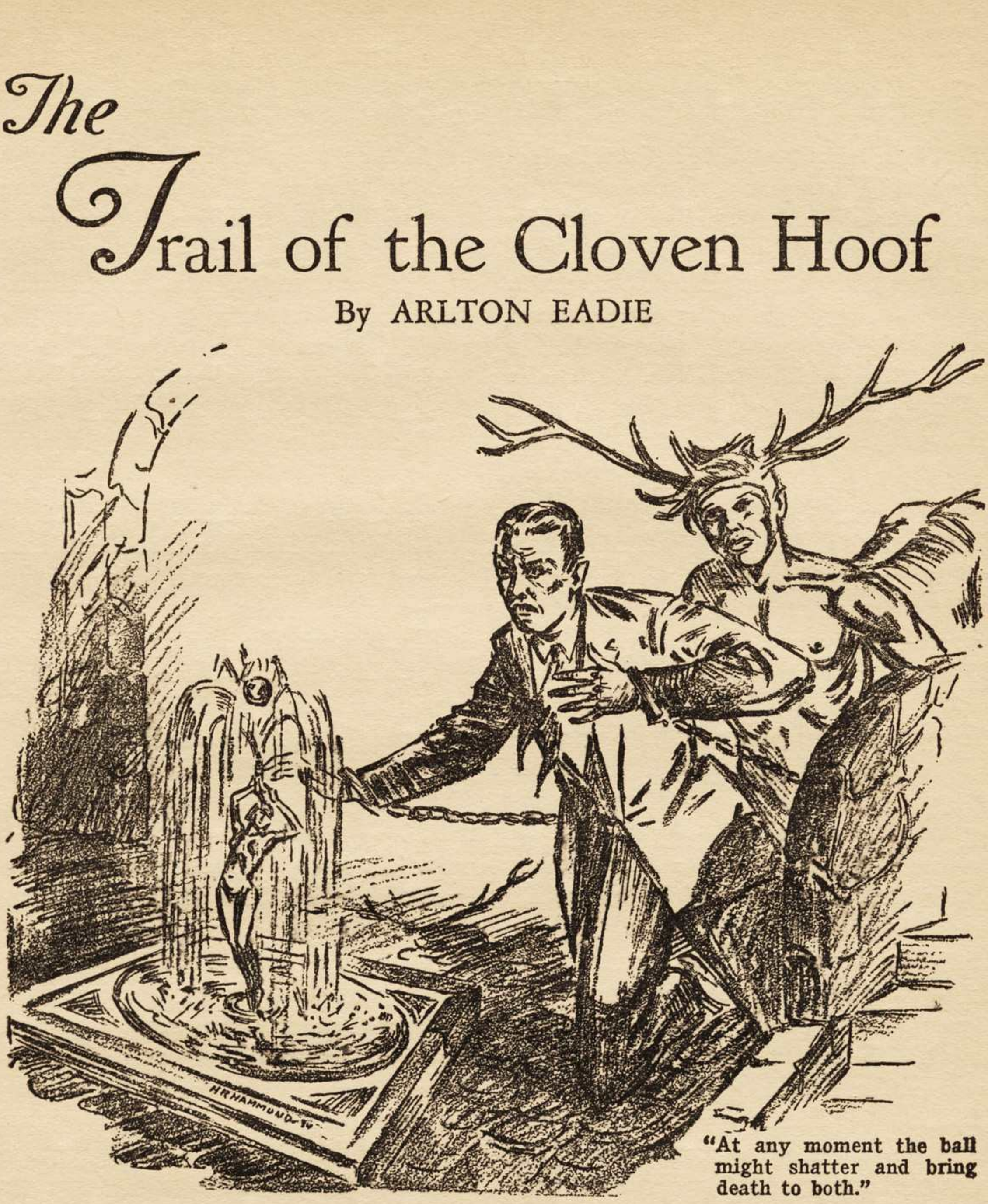
Violet winds whispering
Beneath a yellow moon,
Blue shadows dancing
To a river's silver croon.

White the stars and black the sky,
Gray the rising mist,
Where the frost with ashen lips
The brown earth kissed.

Amber lances flinging
From a purple cloud
As the dawn with scarlet stains
The night's pallid shroud.

The Trail of the Cloven Hoof

By ARLTON EADIE



"At any moment the ball might shatter and bring death to both."

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? The 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

This story began in WEIRD TALES for July

Silas Marle has bequeathed his entire fortune to him on that very condition. Accompanied by Ronnie, he motors to Moor Lodge, Marle's former home, and in a safe there finds 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 chemical formula whereby this may be effected is contained in a sealed envelope, which Hugh replaces, 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 supposed secret agent in the pay 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.

The explosion completely destroys the lower portion of Jake's body, and Marle, leaving the remains lying on the Moor, hurries home, thinking his 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 window of Moor Lodge, and when he examines the spot where the apparition stood, he finds the unmistakable trail of cloven hoofs.

Apparently eager to help Hugh, Ronnie succeeds in casting suspicion on Inspector Renshaw, a Scotland Yard man who has been sent to investigate, and when that officer disappears with Joan Endean, Ronnie openly declares that Renshaw is really Professor Felger in disguise. Ronnie and Hugh make their way to Felger's Sanatorium and enter the cellars, where the so-called friend, using a cunning stratagem, chains Hugh to the wall and boldly proclaims that he is the professor himself. Having at last secured Marle's secret formula, he has manufactured enough detonating gas to annihilate a regiment, and Hugh is destined to be the first victim of its deadly power.

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IN SPITE of his iron self-control, Hugh Trenchard's face grew a shade paler at the calmly uttered threat. He had not been deaf to the hiss of venomous hatred that had swept like a sinister undercurrent through the other's words. The man was in deadly earnest. Short of a miracle happening, Hugh was doomed.

Yet he could have faced the adverse fortune of war with greater stoicism if it had been brought about by a fair duel of wits. His jaw tightened ominously as he recalled how his faith and trust in Ronnie's much-protested friendship had enabled his false comrade and ally to throw dust in his eyes with such ease and effectiveness. All unknowingly he had shown his opponent every card as soon as it had come into his hand. No wonder the game had gone against him!

"Well, Mr. Brewster—or Felger—or Bräuschütter—or whichever of your crook aliases you prefer to be called by—I've had the misfortune to knock up against some pretty low-down skunks in my time, but I don't think there's one of them that wouldn't feel physically sick if he had to share the same jail-cell as you!"

Hugh was watching his man keenly as he spoke, and for an instant it seemed as if his tone of withering contempt had pierced the armor of his suave self-satisfaction. For the fraction of a second his scowling brows met on a forehead to which the hot blood had suddenly mount-

ed. Then he shrugged and laughed as though his humor had been tickled by an excellent joke.

"I suppose your temper is still a bit raw, so I will make some allowance, and for the present overlook the bad taste of your last remark," he said pleasantly. "But it seems to me, my dear Doctor Trenchard, that your quite natural irritation at finding yourself outwitted by a more subtle mind than your own is making you unappreciative of the delicate finesse by which that result has been achieved. For instance, take the method by which I eliminated Silas Marle——"

"Then it was *you* who murdered him?"

Professor Felger lifted his shoulders in a pitying shrug.

"That is a fact which you certainly should have discovered long before this. Why, I even went so far as to anticipate that you would suspect me, seeing that I was the only person in the upstairs floor of Moor Lodge at the time. The only precaution I took before striking the blow was to make sure that Miss Endean had already left the house, and I was pleasantly surprized at the readiness with which you assumed her to be the guilty party. Taking everything into consideration, I think you must admit it was a very neat piece of work."

"And so heroic!" Hugh cried in a tone of biting sarcasm. "I wonder that you are not ashamed to boast of the murder of a helpless old man!"

"Why should I have spared him? Why should I have shown him more mercy than he showed the half-witted lad who had learnt his secret?" Felger retorted in swift defense. "The moment it suited Marle's purpose, he doomed Crazy Jake to a horrible death, and exulted when he thought his secret was safe. But Jake did not perish in the explosion. I was awaiting his arrival here, and as soon as I heard the report I guessed what had happened, and hurried across the Moor until I came to his body—or what remained of it. No wonder Marle was certain that his victim could not survive—he was a mere fragment of a man. But, strangely enough, the head—the seat of the intellect and the memory—was but slightly injured. It seemed the very essence of madness even to dream of retaining life in such a mutilated torso; yet if I could do so I might still learn the secret that he was on his way to tell me that night. I was desperate, and I took a desperate chance. By a stroke of great good fortune I had at the time a large stag in my operating-room. I had been using the animal for a series of experiments which, though of great interest to me, would not have been appreciated by those who administer your narrow-minded vivisection laws. The animal was still living, though the man was to all appearances dead. I resolved to attempt what no other surgeon had attempted before. . . ."

Professor Lucien Felger paused in his narrative, glanced at the watch on his wrist and shook his head with an air of disappointment as he continued:

"I fear there is not sufficient time for me to give you a technical description of the operation, or rather the series of operations, which followed. Without undue egotism I can assure you that my daring and unprecedented conception deserves to rank as the crowning triumph of reconstructive surgery. But do not imagine that my triumph was lightly won. For the first three weeks after the beginning of the experiment I did not snatch more than twenty minutes' sleep at a stretch. By day and by night I watched my patients—or perhaps I should say my one composite patient—tending, observing, taking notes and even photographs which, when embodied in my forthcoming work,

will electrify the whole scientific world. In the end the result exceeded my most sanguine anticipations, but I will not seek to hide the fact that at least some of my success was due to the undoubted atavistic traits which existed in my human subject. Jake was, both mentally and physically, one of those curious 'throw-backs'—reversions to ancestral type—which occur now and then, subtle reminders (to those that have eyes to observe and brains to understand) of the former lowly origin of the biped race which now dominates the earth. Doubtless this accidental factor explains the readiness with which the tissues and sinews united, and the almost perfect functioning which resulted in the union. Be that as it may, I can claim some credit for the centaur-like creature which at last emerged—a creature with the strength and fleetness of a stag combined with the intelligence—naturally small, unfortunately—of a man. The fictitious Frankenstein was supposed to have created a monster—I, in sober truth, have evolved from two distinct animal types the monstrosity that has become celebrated as 'The Terror of the Moor'."

HUGH had listened in amazement, so absorbed in the fate of the half-witted Jake that he had forgotten his own perilous situation.

"You mean to stand there and tell me you have linked a four-footed beast to the body of a human being——"

"*Half* a body," Felger corrected gravely.

"And condemned him to an existence in that diabolical shape?"

The professor laughed.

"The shape is a mere accident due to the only material I had at hand," he explained, soft-voiced and imperturbable. "My one object was to preserve the mind, the memory of the shattered frame, so that I could learn the secret of the detonating gas. But Jake in his new form proved sadly intractable. He sulked and refused to speak. I had to humor him by allowing him to roam the moors at night, where, wearing a helmet made from the antlered skull of the animal that had restored him to life, he indulged his crazy fancy by proclaiming himself the King of the Moors. It was on one of his excursions that he met and fell in love with Joan Endean."

"He—*what?*" Hugh Trenchard cried thickly, a sudden surging fear almost choking his utterance.

"He happened to catch sight of her on the night on which he carried off Marle's body, and her beauty completely captivated his crazy desire. For whole weeks I couldn't get a word out of him except ravings about her shining hair, her red lips, her smooth, rounded limbs——"

"Cut it out, curse you!" shouted Trenchard, goaded beyond endurance by the mental picture which rose before him.

Felger's lips parted in a slow smile as he saw the effect of his words.

"That is precisely what I told Jake at the time," he drawled, "but do you think I could make the poor sap change his tune? He got more goofy every day, and began to throw out hints that he was about tired of playing King-o'-the-Castle all on his lonesome. He wanted a little playmate, and he told me flat that he wasn't going to talk about old Marle's chemical formula until he got one. But I humored him a bit, and finally got him to promise that he would tell the secret of the gas to Joan Endean. Well, he's going to tell her tonight, and I'm going to be near enough to hear what it is."

"Tonight?" ejaculated Trenchard. "It's you that's crazy—not Jake! Don't you remember that Miss Endean is far away beyond your reach by now?"

"True," Felger answered, and once again Hugh detected the note of mocking triumph hidden in the silk-smooth tones. "But a telephone message from your dear old pal Ronnie Brewster, telling her that you were waiting for her here, would soon bring her flying into the trap like a little, fluttering bird!"

Hugh Trenchard reeled under the shock as his mind plumbed the depths of the intended villainy against the girl he loved. His breathing became deep and rapid as that of an exhausted runner; queer flashes of red appeared before his staring eyes. He tore at the constricting chain with the fury of a maniac. His fingers itched to close about the throat of the man who had masqueraded as his friend.

"You cad! You foul, unspeakable cad!" In his fury Hugh hurled every scathing epithet which came into his seething brain. "I thought you had some dregs of honor and decency, but now I can see that you have never so much as understood the meaning of either word. You filthy reptile—you fighter of women!"

The suave demeanor dropped from Felger like a cloak, revealing the brute beast beneath. Clenching his fist, he drove it full in the face of his helpless captive, laughing like an exultant fiend as he saw him crash to the ground.

"You shall pay for each one of those words with an hour of exquisite agony, Hugh Trenchard! In imagination you shall die a thousand deaths before you gladly welcome the real thing at the finish. Wait till I return—then I'll show you something that will make the most devilish device of Chinese torture look like a toy to amuse a kid. Wait—*just wait*—that's all!"

Abruptly Felger turned on his heel and strode away. Trenchard saw the reflection of his electric torch grow dimmer and dimmer; then came the dull clang of a distant door, and he was alone in a darkness which, though impenetrable, was not blacker than his own despairing thoughts.

His situation was such as might have appalled the stoutest heart. Yet things might have been worse. At least his hands and feet were free, and the length of the chain permitted a certain radius of movement. His electric flashlight still remained with him, though he dared not avail himself of its light now in case the battery should fail later on, when he might need it badly. His revolver, of course, was in the professor's keeping, and he raged inwardly when he recalled how neatly he had been tricked into handing it over to his enemy. Never before had he so appreciated the inherent truth of the old Western adage: "When you need a gun, you need it badly."

But Hugh Trenchard was not one to waste time yearning for the unattainable. As soon as he was satisfied that his captor had really left him to himself, his first action was to make a thorough test of the chain and the staple which secured it to the stone pillar of his prison. But a very few minutes of strenuous exertion demonstrated the unwelcome fact that he could never hope to free himself without the aid of a file or a specially tempered saw.

Desisting from his vain attempt, he seated himself on the heap of straw and gave himself up to reflection. But his every thought was a torture in itself; every second the suspense became more intolerable; any certainty, however dreadful, was to be preferred to these dragging hours of haunting dread. His enforced inaction, while his Joan might, for all he knew, be even then hastening toward the net spread by Felger, was harder to bear than the thought of his own approaching

fate. Slowly but surely he felt that his nerve was leaving him; he was sure of it when the sudden scurry of a rat in the straw brought him to his feet tensed and trembling.

"Come, come!" he said aloud, with a laugh that was somewhat shaky. "This will never do."

Reseating himself on his bed of straw, he resolutely forced his thoughts into a different channel by reviewing the events that had happened since his first arrival on Exmoor. The revelation that had identified Professor Felger with Ronnie Brewster was like the beam of a search-light focussed on those hitherto dark and mysterious crimes. Everything that had confused and bewildered him was now so clear that he marvelled how he had ever been baffled. The seemingly supernatural voice of the Terror, which he and Joan had heard in the library of Moor Lodge, had come from Ronnie himself. The letter, making the assignation at the Devil's Cheesepress, which had so mysteriously appeared on the hall-stand, had been left there by the same man, who, he remembered now, had been the last to leave the house. Ronnie, too, had been in the vicinity of the Cheesepress when Hugh had been attacked, and he had been careful to get rid of the inconvenient presence of Sergeant Jopling before the appointed hour. Now he could understand how his so-called friend had been able to appear on the scene so promptly after he, Hugh, had been felled senseless to the ground.

It was no mystery, now, how Ronnie had managed to find the hidden door leading to Marle's laboratory. And of course it was he who had held Hugh up at the pistol's point and demanded the key of the safe. Afterward it would have been a simple thing for a man with Ronnie's medical training to fake a chloroform attack, feign unconsciousness, and thus divert suspicion from himself. But the most brilliant master-stroke of the whole elaborate plot was Ronnie's audacious plan of disguising himself as the professor—his real self, in fact—and pretending to enter the Sanatorium. Even if the truth had been suspected, the fact of his acknowledged disguise (as the man he was really impersonating) would have completely baffled discovery and exposure.

The riddle of Dawker's strange words when he had paid his stealthy visit to Moor Lodge was now a riddle no longer. He had found out that Ronnie and the professor were one and the same, and he was trying to make capital out of his discovery. Having failed with Hugh, he had attempted to blackmail Ronnie, and had been silenced for ever with a bullet. But—Hugh saw it clearly now—the fatal shot had been fired *before* Ronnie had rung up the police, the report which had sounded while the conversation was in progress being merely that of a blank cartridge which had been fired by Ronnie for the purpose of establishing his own alibi. Afterward he had thrown the weapon out of the window into the front garden, where it had been found by Joan just previous to her arrest. There never had been a third actor in that midnight drama, the story of a "slightly built youth like a girl in man's clothes" being but a cunning attempt to cast suspicion on Joan. Nor had Ronnie's ingenuity ended there, for after Inspector Renshaw had pretended to arrest the girl, Ronnie had contrived to convince both Hugh and Sergeant Jopling that the detective was none other than Professor Felger in disguise.

Hugh Trenchard held the master-clue at last. But at what a price had his knowledge been bought! The readiness and completeness with which Professor Felger had thrown off his mask was in itself an ominous sign. Never would he

have revealed his real identity unless he was sure that his secret would soon be buried in the grave. A man who had already taken two lives to attain his purpose, would he be likely to shrink from a third victim, when that victim knew as much as Hugh Trenchard?

Thus far proceeded Hugh's train of thought. Then, like an overstrained harp-string, it snapped abruptly. Out of the surrounding blackness, with no sound of gliding footstep or rustling movement to herald its coming, Hugh felt the touch of cold steel on his bare, upturned throat.

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INSTINCTIVELY he threw up his hand and grabbed at the hovering weapon, but to his utter amazement it receded beneath his touch, as though it were floating in the air. Hugh wrenched his flashlight from his pocket, slid the switch, and the mystery was explained. The steel that had touched his throat was the blade of a file which dangled at the end of a long cord from a small round opening in the vaulted roof. Nor was this all. Looking down at him through the circular aperture was the familiar face of Detective-Inspector Renshaw of Scotland Yard.

"Snap off that light!" came the detective's urgent command in a whisper just loud enough to reach the ears of the shackled man. When Hugh had obeyed, he went on rapidly. "Get busy with that file, and work as you have never worked before. Felger may be in on you at any moment. If you can manage to saw through your chain before he comes, spring on him the moment he enters and take him by surprize. It's your only chance."

With unsteady fingers Hugh untied the cord, which Renshaw immediately pulled up.

"Can't you let me have a gun?" he begged.

"I'm afraid I can't," returned the detective. "I've loaned my shooter to Miss Endean—maybe she'll be needing it even worse than you."

"Joan! Surely she has not ventured into this place?"

"She surely has," came the whispered reply from above. "You'll never find that girl shirking her duty because of a bit of peril. Why, she's been carrying her life in her hands for three months."

"Her duty?" gasped Hugh. "Did you say her duty?"

"I did, and I'll say more. The girl you know as Joan Endean is really the daughter of Sir Arnold Edgeworth, the chief of the British Secret Service, and she's one of the smartest investigators on the job. She was sent down here not so much to secure the secret formula for our Government as to prevent it falling into the hands of a possible enemy. I thought you'd queer her game unless you kept away from her, so I pitched you the yarn that she was known to the police—which was quite true, though not in the usually understood sense. She's got nerve, has that girl—she even got herself certified as a lunatic in order to get inside that Sanatoriun of Felger's. But things got too warm and she was forced to make her escape with her task unfinished. She's back again now, though, and I'm willing to bet she'll put 'paid' to Felger's long overdue account before she quits the house."

"How did you find that trap-door in the roof there?"

"She discovered that when she was here last. They used it for the purpose of lowering food to the Terror when he was stabled down there. But there's no time for talk. Work at that chain of yours, and work as though you were working for your life."

Hugh Trenchard needed no further urging. Any form of exercise was a positive relief after his long spell of enforced, nerve-sapping inaction. Making a swift circuit of the stone pillar, so that the tautened chain was forced against the masonry as immovably as if it were in the jaws of a vise, he plied the file with a fierce joy. It was awkward at first, working in the dark, but as soon as the serrated edge of the tool had bitten the first slight groove the absence of light did not trouble him much. For a full hour he worked without pause, until the continuous friction of his fevered strokes had made the blade of the file too hot to be held by the naked hand. Yet the notch in the steel chain link, that was the result of his labor, seemed disappointingly slight. Barely a quarter of the tough steel had been sawn through. At the same rate of progress it would take him another three hours to complete his task.

But he had no intention of giving up. Two minutes' rest was all he allowed himself as a respite for his cramped and aching arm. Then he once again seized the file and resumed his monotonous task. Backward and forward—backward and forward went the file, its short, sharp, grinding strokes sounding with the mechanical regularity of a steam-driven piston rod, and at every stroke tiny grains of the disintegrated steel went to swell the little shining heap at the foot of the pillar. If it had not been for these indications he might have doubted whether he was making any progress at all. Hope and fear alternately possessed his mind as he worked at his task—seemingly as endless as the labors of Sisyphus.

Backward—forward . . . backward—forward. Backward—though his cramped muscles felt as though they were constricted by iron bands. Forward—though the handle of the tool felt like a searing iron against his blistered palm. Backward—forward. Backward——

Above the low, rhythmical grind of steel against steel, another and different sound came to Hugh Trenchard's ears. It was the noise of heavy bolts being drawn, and only too well he knew that it heralded the return of Professor Felger. Desperately he exerted his whole strength on the chain, but the half-severed link still held firmly. His labor had been in vain!

Hastily thrusting the file into his pocket and throwing straw over the telltale heap of filings, he seated himself in such a position as to conceal with his body the portion of the chain on which he had been working, resting his bowed head on his hand in an attitude of dejection that was not wholly assumed. The knowledge that he had been so near to freedom made his failure all the harder to bear. Yet, even in the bitterness of heart which that knowledge brought, Trenchard's keen ears did not fail to note that the man who had entered had not re-fastened the door behind him. If only he could convey that intelligence to Inspector Renshaw or Joan! She, at least, was armed, and——

"GOOD evening, Doctor Trenchard." The smooth accents of Professor Felger cut into his thoughts. Standing well beyond the limit of the chain, his captor was regarding him with a mocking smile. "So our noble hero is growing despondent? Curious—is it not?—what an inferiority complex can be induced in a naturally rebellious spirit by such a simple thing as a chain. I fancy those Norman barons of bygone ages possessed a much greater insight into psychology than we give them credit for, when they compelled their serfs to wear a collar as the symbol of servitude. It is a fascinating study, this strange influence which a few steel links have over the mental outlook of

the man on whom they are riveted, and I can but regret that I can not demonstrate it more fully just now. For one thing, there will not be time; for another, it would be profitless to enlighten a mind which will soon be incapable of appreciating any knowledge. Still, I can accommodate you with some light of a more material nature."

Professor Felger raised his hand to a switch that had hitherto escaped Hugh's notice, and immediately a single electric globe in the vaulted roof burst into radiance, flooding the prison with its white glare.

"Presently you will understand my motive in providing you with such an excellent illumination," Felger went on, "though it is extremely doubtful whether you will thank me for it. But it is necessary for the success of the coming entertainment that you should have the fullest use of your eyes."

Hugh Trenchard made no reply, but his observant eyes did not fail to note every one of the professor's subsequent actions. And these were extraordinary enough to have merited attention, even if they had been enacted under less sinister conditions.

Crossing to the center of the floor, he stooped and lifted up a hinged circular slab of stone, revealing a sunken, funnel-shaped basin, in the middle of which was a brass nozzle. The professor reached down and turned a tap, and immediately a fine jet of water sprang from the nozzle, ascending about a yard into the air before curving outward like a glittering plume and falling in a shower of tiny drops into the surrounding basin. Professor Felger straightened and stood with his hands in his pockets watching it with an expression of placid satisfaction.

"A pretty contrivance, is it not?" he remarked at length. "I fear, however, that you do not appreciate its full beauty—yet! Wait until the basin is full of water: then I'll show you something. Nothing alarming, my dear sir, nothing alarming—merely a little demonstration of centrifugal force."

When the water had reached the brim of the shallow basin and was beginning to escape through the drainage holes which had evidently been placed near the rim to prevent it overflowing, Felger withdrew his hand from his pocket, and Hugh saw, with a sense of puzzled astonishment, that it was grasping a globe of greenish glass about the size of an ordinary cricket ball.

Without a word, Felger leant over and carefully placed the transparent sphere in the center of the tiny fountain, where it remained dancing up and down in the grip of the continuous stream, in precisely the same manner as the colored balls which form elusive targets in some shooting galleries.

"At first sight it seems impossible that such an unstable force as a rapidly moving column of water should be capable of neutralizing the weight of the ball, but such a condition is maintained only so long as the ball is accurately balanced, as it were, in the center of the stream. When the erratic movements of the ball carry it sufficiently to one side, it topples over—as it is about to do now——"

As he spoke the ball's downward path failed to bring it within the power of the jet, and it fell with a little splash into the water in the basin. Professor Felger chuckled softly as he saw the bewilderment reflected on Hugh Trenchard's face. Rack his brains as he might, Hugh failed to grasp the meaning of this seemingly senseless piece of child's-play.

"Oh, our little game is not finished by any means," Felger went on. "Having fallen into the water, the centrifugal

force once more comes into play, bringing the little ball nearer and ever nearer the jet in the center, until at last the upward stream catches it and once more sends it merrily aloft. So——"

Again the gleaming sphere began its dance in the air, again it escaped from the stream and fell, only to be again caught and whirled upward. Not a word was spoken by either of the men as they watched the process repeated time after time, until, a chance spurt of the fountain having sent the ball a trifle higher than usual, it rebounded, not into the water-filled basin, but onto the stone floor, where it was shattered in pieces.

"And that, my dear Doctor Trenchard, is the whole point of this little demonstration. Ninety-nine times out of a hundred the glass ball will be precipitated into the basin, where the water will break its fall and enable it to reach the jet again. But the hundredth time it will be projected beyond the rim of the basin and will shatter itself on the stone. On this particular occasion it has taken exactly nineteen and one quarter minutes before the smash came. But my previous experiments have shown that there is a great divergence in the various times which elapsed before the end came. Sometimes the ball would dance uninjured for over an hour; sometimes it would be shattered in a few minutes. It is pure chance whether it takes seconds or hours. It is, in vulgar parlance, just a gamble. As far as you are concerned, Hugh Trenchard, it's going to be *a gamble with death!*"

A cold sweat broke out on the forehead of the fettered captive. There was a suave and devilish malignancy in the coldly precise voice of Professor Felger that was more terrifying than any blustering threat.

"Speak out like a man—if you call yourself one!" cried Hugh. "Why don't you kill me now, and end this torture?"

Felger's eyebrows flickered upward in an expression of mild surprize.

"My dear sir, your—er—your little ordeal has not so much as begun so far. As for my taking you at your word, and killing you offhand, that—considering the novel means I intend to employ—would be far too risky to my own life. When at last you quit this earthly vale of tears—that is the nicest way of putting it that I can call to mind on the spur of the moment—I shall be far away from here. Knowing how completely I have succeeded in fooling everybody connected with this case, you may well believe that I have not overlooked the obvious precaution of securing for myself what is vulgarly termed 'a slick get-away.' Long before the little ball has finished its last gavotte, I shall be beyond the coasts of England. Nor will I travel alone, for I shall have a very beautiful and interesting companion in the lady whom you have hitherto known as Miss Joan Endean."

"You'll find your science is at fault there!" Hugh cried with a ringing laugh. "Joan would rather die a thousand deaths than allow you to lay your filthy hands on her. She knows you for what you really are."

"Indeed?" The professor's tone expressed no more than the tolerance with which one may explain an obvious thing to an unruly child. "But have you stopped to ask yourself how long she will *continue* to know me for what I am? An injection of a few drops of the memory-stealing *Datura obliterare*, and both my past misdeeds, as well as the all-important formula of the detonating gas, will be wiped from her mind. As for yourself, she will be utterly unconscious that such a person as Hugh Trenchard has ever existed."

"You devil!" raged Hugh, vainly straining at his chain. "You fiendish devil!"

"Spare your mouthings," said Felger in

a voice of cold contempt. "I have the same dislike that every possessor of a scientific mind has of mere empty forms of speech. Be silent! and listen to me. The glass ball with which I conducted the last experiment was, of course, empty. But this" — he carefully drew another from his pocket and held it aloft for Hugh's inspection — "this one, I say, though to all intents and purposes its very counterpart, contains a concentrated liquid solution of the detonating gas invented by the late Silas Marle. Before I leave this room I shall place this glass sphere on the jet of the fountain—and you shall stand there, chained, and watch it dance. And when it ceases to dance, you will cease to live! For the moment the glass is shattered, the gas will envelop you, changing your living tissues into a deadly explosive, converting you into a human grenade that will blow your soul to eternity!"

With a swift but precise movement, he placed the gas-filled sphere on the leaping fountain, then swiftly crossed the floor. At the door he paused and looked around.

"Farewell, Hugh Trenchard!" he cried with a mocking salute. "Let me wish you a swift and pleasant journey into the Great Unknown. My forthcoming journey with your sweetheart will not be so swift as yours, but it will be more pleasant, and there will be more certainty as to the destination. Any last message for the fair Joan? No? Then it only remains for me to give you my parting benediction. *Requiescat in pace!*"

The door slammed. Hugh Trenchard was alone with the dancing globe of death.

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For several minutes Hugh Trenchard stood rigid and motionless, staring as if hypnotized at the tiny sphere of glass that leaped and gyrated under the impulse of the glittering stream which issued from the nozzle of the fountain. Suddenly he bit his lip to restrain a cry of horror. The ball had missed the propelling jet of water. With widened eyes he followed its downward plunge, and a gasp of relief escaped him as he saw it fall into the water which bubbled in the basin below. Yet it had missed the stone margin by less than an inch. The narrowness of his escape from death roused him to the necessity of immediate action, for only too well did he know that the slightest impact of the glass ball against a solid substance would mean the shattering of the frail envelope, the release of the imprisoned gas, and then——

He felt no inclination to follow his speculations any further, nor was there anything to be gained by so doing. While life remained to him he must try his best to circumvent the deep-laid plot of the scientist whose misapplied genius had evolved that elaborate and diabolical apparatus of death. Henceforward "Work" must be his watchword. Now or never must he exert his wits and muscles, or before long they would be stilled forever by the fate which must inevitably overtake him if he delayed.

With an effort of will he tore his gaze from the glittering ball which had just recommenced its mazy dance in the air, and, pulling the file from his pocket, he applied it to the stubborn steel of his chain. He had worked hard before, but now he plied the tool with the frenzy of a madman, for he knew that he was striving for something even more precious than life itself. Joan—his Joan!—was in the clutch of that scheming villain—even now she might be vainly calling on him for the aid that he would willingly have sacrificed his life to give. The maddening thought nerved his flagging muscles to even great-

er effort. The blade of the file grew hot beneath the continued friction of his frenzied strokes. Its handle became moist and slippery with the blood which oozed unheeded from his raw and blistered palm. But the steady grind of steel on steel continued without pause or falter, and accompanying it—a grim reminding spur to his efforts—was the musical purling of the fountain which, like a pretty child innocently playing with a deadly bomb, alternately tossed and caught the gleaming ball of death.

Suddenly another sound came to Hugh Trenchard's ears. From the direction of the hidden door came the slow, stealthy creaking of ponderous bolts being withdrawn. Again he whipped the file back into his pocket and threw himself on the straw at the base of the column. A thousand wild thoughts seethed in his brain. Was it the professor returning? Scarcely that, for he would have no need to exercise caution in his approach. He thrust the idea of Felger's return from him and knitted his brows in thought. The next instant he was on his feet, his heart beating a wild tattoo, his brain humming with the reaction as despair gave place to returning hope.

Until that moment he had completely forgotten that Inspector Renshaw was inside that house of mystery. Who else would be likely to seek him out except the man from Scotland Yard? Filled with a certitude that his deliverance was near, Hugh Trenchard raised his voice in a joyous shout.

"Help, help! This way, inspector! Come right in, and hurry. Help!"

But no cheery answering cry came from the gloom which shrouded the door. The second bolt was drawn with the same slow caution as the first. Then came the creaking of hinges as the heavy door was opened, and, after a pause, closed again. Still the mysterious visitant gave no audible sign of his presence; yet Hugh was certain that some one had entered and was watching him from the shadows.

Who had come to him, and for what purpose? Was he about to be confronted with a friend or a foe?

Hugh's straining eyes searched the depths of the gloom that clustered about the farther end of his prison, and at length his gaze was concentrated on a patch of darker shadow which seemed to have shifted slightly. The next moment the new-born hope was dead in his heart. From the shrouding darkness two faintly luminous eyes were watching him fixedly. Transfixed, Hugh stood motionless, his brain almost giving way beneath its weight of horror as he realized that, alone, unarmed, and shackled to a chain of steel, he was at last face to face with the dreaded 'Terror of the Moor!

THEN ensued a spell of unbroken silence that was thick with unspoken terror. This last blow of Fate crushed the last vestiges of hope from Hugh Trenchard's heart. A wave of utter despair almost swamped his reason—but with it came that desperate courage that is born of despair. Forcing his horror-frozen features into a smile, he called to the invisible apparition.

"Jake!"

Another, shorter pause, then:

"Who are you?" said the deep, booming voice that Hugh had heard on the Moor.

"Your friend, I hope"—never had Hugh spoken with such heartfelt conviction as when he voiced that wish—"but at least I am a companion in misfortune. Come nearer, Jake. I want to talk to you."

There was a slight, hesitant pause, and then there emerged into the circle of bril-

liance cast by the shaded lamp a creature so extraordinary and bizarre that it seemed more like the grotesque fantasm of a hashish-dream than an organism of actual flesh and blood. *It was the upper portion of a man's body united to the body of a large stag!*

In his secret heart Hugh Trenchard had flatly disbelieved Professor Felger's boast respecting the unparalleled operation by which he had kept alive the mutilated body of Silas Marle's victim, but here, standing before his eyes, was the living proof. And as he looked, his wonder gave place to an ungrudging admiration of the surgical skill of the man who had accomplished such an apparent impossibility. The co-ordination of movement between the muscles of the man and beast was perfect; his actions had an easy naturalness that was amazing. There could be no question of deception, for the man's body was bare, and Hugh could see distinctly where the human skin merged into the reddish-brown hide of the deer. Except that the animal portion was that of a stag instead of a horse, the composite creature exactly resembled the centaurs which are depicted in sculpture in the famous frieze of the ancient Greek Parthenon at Athens. Small wonder that such a monster had gained the title of "The Terror of the Moor"!

Yet, despite his terrifying aspect, there was nothing fierce in the creature's demeanor. He came forward slowly, his chin sunk upon his massive chest, an expression of sadness that was piteous in its hopelessness delineated on his weather-tanned features. His first words seemed to give the key to this unexpected change.

"Where is the pretty lady?" he asked in a fretful tone. "Who has taken her away?"

With an effort Hugh suppressed the awful train of thought which started at the question. Everything depended on keeping the Terror in his present state of quiescence.

"What pretty lady?" he asked in as casual a tone as he could assume.

"The pretty lady who was upstairs. I found her hiding—for Jake can see in the dark, you know—and she would have shot me with a shiny pistol which she had. But I told her that I was her friend and would not hurt so much as one of her golden hairs. And as we talked the Master came and seized her from behind, and took away her pistol. He carried her away, but he told me she would soon come back to me. Then I could teach her all about the moors, and the forests, and the secret paths through the bogs and marshes; show her the deep stone caves in the hearts of the tors, and the mossy dells where the wild-flowers grow. For I am the Monarch of the Moors, and they have no secrets from me!" A transient gleam of his old fierceness flashed in his eyes as he threw back his head, but it vanished as he went on plaintively: "Where has the pretty lady gone to? Do you know?"

Trenchard's brain had been working feverishly during the foregoing speech. Beyond a doubt Jake was referring to Joan Endean, and Hugh could well imagine with what fantastic promises the wily professor had kept him quiet while he effected his escape with the girl. Maybe it would be possible to turn this creature's whim to some account.

"Yes," he nodded. "I think I know who has taken her."

"Who?" demanded Jake, clenching his hands and bracing his arms until the great muscles stood out. "Tell me who!"

"Before I tell you, you must do something for me," Hugh bargained.

"Anything—only tell me."

Hugh Trenchard pointed to the dancing glass globe.

"Catch that pretty ball—but very, very carefully—and hand it to me."

But the half-witted creature turned away with a petulant gesture.

"Jake does not want to play with a ball —he wants to find the pretty lady."

Trenchard's heart sank. It would be hopeless to attempt to convey to that primitive intelligence the deadly possibilities of that glittering ball. Yet at any moment the thing might shatter and bring death to both. Mastering his chagrin, he uttered an approving laugh.

"Quite right!—this is no time to play. The pretty lady needs our help, and we must follow her at once. But"—he went on, silencing the other's eager exclamation —"the wicked man who has stolen her away has also chained me up so that I can not show you where she is. Help me to break this chain and I will lead you to her."

Without a single word Jake advanced to where Hugh stood. Seizing the slack of the chain with both hands, he put forth the strength of his mighty muscles, bracing his hoofed feet on the uneven floor and throwing his immense weight on the chain with a sudden jerk. The weakened link parted like a strand of pack-thread. Hugh Trenchard was free at last!

IT WAS the work of a moment to catch the gas-charged ball and transfer it safely to an inner pocket. Then he turned to his new-found ally.

"You know Professor Felger?"

The creature nodded eagerly. "Yes, he is my Master."

"Where is he?"

"He is going to fly away in a bird-machine," was the unhesitating answer.

An airplane? Hugh Trenchard bit his lip. Here was an unexpected complication. If Felger was already in the air, all hope of a successful pursuit would be over. Then would Joan be lost to him indeed! Hoping against hope, he turned with a quick question.

"Where does the Master keep his bird-machine? In this house?"

"No," Jake shook his head. "It is hidden in a cave on Cow Castle. But yesterday we got it out and I helped to feed it for its journey."

"Feed it?" It was some seconds before the puzzled Hugh grasped the meaning of the queer expression. Petrol for the engine—of course that was what the simple-minded lad meant. Felger had been filling the tanks for a long journey. He intended to start from his secret hangar on Cow Castle—would it be possible to reach that spot before he took off?

Cae Castle (to give it its correct designation, the "Cow" being merely a local corruption) was well known to Hugh Trenchard—as indeed it must be to every lover of Exmoor. Lying about five miles northwest of the village of Withypool, near where the Sheardon Water joins the River Barle, three circular hills rise from the floor of the valley, the loftiest of which is the "castle" in question. But it is a castle without battlements or even the crumbling remnants of stone walls. The name is a mere tradition which has been handed down unbroken from the prehistoric days when this eminence was a stronghold of the ancient Britons. The only remaining traces of its former warlike use are the earthen rampart, nowhere more than ten feet high, and the shallow depression which marks the course of the ancient fosse. Measured in a direct line, its distance from the Torside Sanatorium was but a trifle under eight miles, but—and at the thought Hugh's heart began to beat high with returning hope—there was no direct road between the two places, and

such roads as existed in the Valley of the Barle were little better than mere tracks, strewn with rocks and, in places, mere quagmires.

If he but had a good horse between his legs he might be able to beat Felger yet. A horse? He looked at the clean-molded limbs of the great man-animal which stood by his side; and in it he saw the final answer to his problem. Here, ready to hand, eager and willing, was as swift a mount as any man could desire. Mounted on the back of the erstwhile Terror of the Moor, he could yet snatch victory from the very jaws of defeat!

In a few words he explained his plan to Jake, and to his joy he found him no less eager than himself.

"Yes, yes," cried the cloven-hoofed centaur as they ascended the stairs and emerged into the open. "I know a hundred paths and tracks known only to the great herds of deer of which I am the King. Mount on my back. Mount, and away!"

The man-beast crouched on the ground to let Hugh bestride his broad back. An instant later he was on his feet and galloping straight across the wild Moor, pointing with unerring instinct straight to his goal.

HUGH was no expert bare-backed rider, and it took him some time before he found a secure seat on his novel steed. It was only by sitting well forward, racing-fashion, and grasping the long, coarse hair of the stag's withers that he avoided being thrown. For the going was certainly rough, consisting as it did of a series of lightning-like bounds, occasionally varied with a sharp, chopping gallop. The beast seemed to be in the air far more frequently than on the ground. There would be a few minutes of fairly steady progress over the heather; then the muscles of the mighty haunches would bunch together for a spring, and the next moment it would be flying through the air like an arrow, in a leap that would easily have cleared a five-barred gate.

But if the going was hard, the pace was hot. Breathless, and not a little concerned about the safety of his neck, Hugh clung on like grim death and saw the nearer details of the landscape streaming past him like a badly operated cinema film. But on and on went his nightmare steed, swift as the wind and seemingly as tireless. Now the great hoofs would be cleaving the long grass with a gentle swishing sound; now they would be rattling over loose shingle or bare, naked rock; now splashing through some shallow stream; now muffled in a ghost-like swoop over green cushions of spongy moss. Once the sure-footed beast threaded an apparently non-existent ledge across the face of a dizzy crag, where a single false step would have hurled both to instant death. Once they found their progress barred by a wide, rushing river—one of the lower reaches of the Barle. But the cloven-footed steed dived with a mighty plunge which sent the water splashing in a myriad glistening jewels, breasting the swift current with gallant strokes until, panting, dripping, but refreshed by its ice-cold bath, it scrambled up the farther bank and resumed the breakneck pace.

Disdaining to use the little rustic bridge —which would have meant a detour of a few hundred yards—the stag again took water, and when it emerged, Hugh, dashing the water from his eyes, saw rising from the valley of the river, isolated and forbidding, the towering mass of the prehistoric stronghold.

The Terror halted and, for the first time since the beginning of that nightmare ride, spoke:

"Look!" he said, pointing.

Half-way up the slope of the hill, two twin stars had appeared, winding slowly upward to the summit. It needed no second glance for Hugh to recognize them as the headlights of Felger's car. He was nearing his destination, while they had still the steep slope of the mountain to climb.

Now would the muscles and sinews of the Terror of the Moor be put to their final test. It would be a matter of seconds whether they arrived just in time—or just too late.

31

STARK, grim, mysterious, the ancient hill-fortress loomed before them, seemingly as impregnable as it had been in the ages before the trumpet-blare of the Roman legions had echoed from its rock-bound slopes. And even now, when the skin-clad, blue-painted wielders of bow and spear, who had manned its ramparts in the dim, far-off past, were now moldering dust, it was still a place of considerable natural strength. Its broad summit, 1,400 feet in circumference, stood over two thousand feet above the level of the sea. Except where the rough road had appropriated the easiest inclines of approach, its sides were steep enough to daunt the heart of the boldest rider.

But the Terror of the Moor appeared to feel no qualms. Stooping over the shelving bank of the stream, he drank deeply of the ice-cold water, as though well aware of the ordeal that lay before him; then, without pause or hesitation, he set off with undiminished speed. The narrow space of level ground was covered in a flash, and they were at the foot of a hill so vast that its bulk seemed to blot out the stars above. Then the nerve-racking ascent began.

Hugh Trenchard, keenly on the alert, tried in vain to ascertain the method by which the stag-man guided his course. A hundred times he turned and twisted to avoid some jutting boulder or impassable crag. But his track, though necessarily devious, was ever in the same direction, and always it headed upward. Whether he trusted to blind instinct, or whether his nightly roaming of the Moor had made him familiar with the approach to the isolated hill, Hugh could not determine. But never once did the Terror have to retrace his steps. Again and again they reached a place whence it seemed as if no living creature, other than a bird, could proceed another foot. But always the Terror managed to surmount or circumvent the obstacle and mount to heights dizzier still.

At first Hugh could not help wondering why Jake did not take the easier gradient which Felger was following in the car. But on glancing to the right he saw the reason. They were almost on a level with the white glare of the headlights. Jake was counting on the more direct, though more dangerous, route to bring him to the summit before the arrival of the car. Yet it was clear that the final spurt would be a race neck to neck. Hampered as he was by Hugh's weight on his back, the iron endurance of the Terror was beginning to flag at last. His breath grew labored, his movements slower, the shaggy hair to which Hugh clung was soaked in sweat.

"Let me get off and follow as best I can," Hugh urged as he noted these signs.

The Terror shook his head impatiently.

"You would go to your death without my guidance," he gasped. "Set your weight well forward on my shoulders, hold tight, and trust to me. I'll make it yet!"

And make it he did, though by the bare margin of a chance-gripped root

which held firm when a crumbling ledge of rock disintegrated into a shower of cascading fragments beneath their combined weight. Spent and panting, Jake drew himself over the brow of the cliff and lay, safe indeed, but for the time being prostrate with sheer exhaustion. And at the same moment the headlights of Felger's car came into sight on the farther side of the plateau, and by their light Hugh saw the outlines of a small monoplane standing facing a gap in the earthen rampart, apparently in readiness for an immediate flight.

Naturally the professor anticipated finding the plateau deserted, and there was no attempt at concealment in his actions. Alighting from the car, he opened the rear door and lifted out an inert body. The blood began to throb quickly in Hugh Trenchard's temples as he saw that it was Joan, bound hand and foot. Keeping in the shadows, he began to creep forward, his hand caressing the smooth surface of the deadly gas-bomb in his pocket.

Apparently Felger decided that the girl's bonds had served their purpose, for he drew a knife from his pocket and quickly severed them.

"We have a long journey before us, my dear," Hugh heard him say, "and I shall be too busily occupied to do that after we have once taken off from the ground. But pray do not let your freedom lead you into a foolish attempt to escape. You and I are the only two people in the world who know the secret of the detonating gas, and thus you are doubly precious in my eyes. Come now, will you enter that airplane of your own accord, or shall I have to tie you up again?"

JOAN rose to her feet and faced him, her slender figure outlined blackly against the fierce white glare of the headlamps. Hugh could see that her head was held fearlessly and proudly erect, as if she realized the peril of her position and was resolved to face it without flinching.

"You have won so far, Professor Lucien Felger," she said in a voice that never quivered. "You may even succeed in forcing me to accompany you wherever you may be bound. But rest assured that your triumph will extend no further. You will have to travel very far indeed before you can reach a land where the extradition laws do not hold good—a much farther distance, in fact, than you could safely cover in a machine as small as the one you have here. And do you think that I will remain silent after we have landed? If you do, then you must be mad indeed! I know you for what you are, and I will proclaim your guilt from the housetops. There are few towns in Europe from which one can not get into touch with a British consul. After I have had ten minutes' conversation with one, your career will be ended."

Professor Felger's shoulders lifted in an elaborate shrug.

"That would be deplorable—would it not?—for a man with such gifts as I possess to end his career on a vulgar British gallows, like any common, uneducated crook." Suavely as he spoke, there was a cold, rasping ring in the words. "But, fortunately, that is not likely to happen. Oh," he gave a bark of laughter, "I have not the slightest doubt of your perfect readiness to denounce me, as you threatened, but you must realize that in order to detail my crimes to your most estimable British consul, *you must first be able to remember them.*"

A faint smile dawned on Joan Endean's features.

"Remember them?" she echoed. "Sooner than I would forget them, I would forget my own identity!"

"Indeed?" purred Felger. "There is many a true word spoken in jest, Miss Endean, and even such an apparent impossibility as the one you have just mentioned may come to pass. Have you forgotten that I hold the secret of the so-called Apple of Lethe—the tincture of which steals the memory without leaving so much as a trace behind? One little injection, and your mind will become as a clean sheet of paper on which I can write as I will."

In spite of her courage the girl recoiled.

"No, no! you would not dare——"

"Dare?" he repeated, and Hugh saw that his countenance had taken on such a diabolical look as he never thought a human face was capable of. "You shall see how much I will dare to ensure myself being the sole possessor of the secret of Marle's detonating gas!"

He darted forward as he spoke and seized her wrist in an iron grip. Disregarding her struggles, he brought forward his left hand, and Hugh caught the silvery glint of a poised hypodermic syringe.

At the sight of the imminent peril of the girl he loved, all Hugh Trenchard's carefully pre-arranged plan of action scattered like chaff before the wind. Like an avenging fury he bore down on the struggling pair; his clenched fist shot out like a battering-ram. But Felger heard the quick footfalls on the rocky ground, and, releasing the girl, tried to dodge. Had Hugh's blow found its intended mark on the point of the other man's chin, the fight would have been ended. But Felger's sudden movement made the blow land on his shoulder, sending him sprawling backward on the ground.

"Take that, you swine!" cried Hugh in a voice of thunder. "You have a man to deal with now!"

In his rage and indignation he had quite forgotten that he was unarmed; but it was not long before he was reminded of it. Twisting like an eel, Felger wrenched an automatic from his pocket and promptly covered him.

"Stick 'em up, curse you!" he rasped, rising to his feet without shifting his aim. "So you've managed to dodge the globe of gas, eh? Well, I've a few words to say to you before I dispatch you in a manner which will *not* fail. Up with 'em!"

HUGH'S hands were already in the air, and Felger's lips drew back in a tigerish grin as he saw the promptness of the movement. But the next moment the grin vanished, to give place to a stare of gaping fear. Poised in Hugh's right hand was the deadly glass ball which contained the detonating gas!

"I strongly advise you not to fire, Professor," warned the young man quietly. "If you do, there will be more victims than one. Probably you recognize the glass ball which I hold in my hand? In that case it is needless for me to explain to you what will happen if I let it drop on the rock at my feet. And you may rest assured that I *shall* drop it the moment you fire."

"And doom the girl you love to certain death?" sneered the professor.

"A clean and certain death is preferable a thousand times to the living death which you intended to inflict on her," Hugh answered sternly.

"Yes, yes!" Joan cried eagerly. "And if my death will save the soldiers of my country from being exposed to the gas that would turn them into living bombs, I shall at least not have died in vain!"

A long pause of silence followed her words. Baffled by this unexpected turn, Felger stood biting his thin lips, his eyes

alternately searching the faces of the man and the girl. But in neither could he read the slightest sign of fear or irresolution. His crafty brain was not slow in recognizing the fact that he had failed when success was almost within his grasp. Slowly, reluctantly, he lowered the muzzle of his weapon.

"Stalemate!" he said with the air of a veteran gambler who sees his stake raked in.

Hugh Trenchard shook his head grimly.

"Checkmate—as far as you're concerned," he corrected.

"I think not," said Felger coolly. "Life is too precious for heroics. Better call it a drawn game. You take your girl, and I'll take the secret of the gas, and we'll call it quits."

"Agreed!" cried Hugh, and so unexpected was his ready acceptance that Joan looked at him in surprize.

"But, Hugh——" she began to remonstrate, but he silenced her with a gesture.

"Wait. Leave everything to me."

Apparently Felger was only too glad to agree to the truce. Without a word he moved to the airplane and clambered into the pilot's cockpit. There he rapidly took from a locker a leather flying-helmet and a pair of goggles, Hugh watching him closely the while.

Professor Felger settled himself in his seat and depressed the starting-lever, and immediately the twin blades of the propeller began to revolve. Its low humming grew to a dull roar as the revolutions increased. The plane began to move in its preliminary run along the ground before taking off, and it was not until then that the thing happened for which Hugh Trenchard had been waiting.

Half turning in his seat as the plane ran past the spot where Hugh and Joan were standing, their figures starkly outlined against the headlamps of the car, Felger levelled his automatic and emptied its contents at the pair in one long, treacherous fusillade.

But Hugh was prepared. Not for one instant had he thought that the outwitted spy would accept defeat without one last bid for victory, and this was precisely the form that Hugh had anticipated his vengeance would take. It had not been by chance that Hugh had taken his stand in front of the car, where his figure, showing sharp and clear against the glare of the headlights, offered a tempting target. Now, at Felger's first suspicious movement with his pistol-hand, he caught Joan in his arms and leapt aside, allowing the dazzling white beams to shine full in the eyes of the perfidious villain who had thus broken his word.

Dazed, half blinded by the sudden glare, Felger fired at random, one shot splintering the lens of a headlight, the rest droning harmlessly away into the darkness.

As the first report rang out, Hugh raised his hand and threw the gas-charged globe into the rear cockpit of the moving plane. He saw it drop out of sight behind the fuselage, but, owing to the noise of the engines, he could not tell whether his death-dealing missile had fallen intact on the cushioned seat or shattered against the woodwork.

Felger, all unconscious of his sinister cargo, clicked over a lever and the airplane began to move with increasing speed toward the edge of the plateau. It was barely half-way across when Joan suddenly gripped the arm of the man by her side.

"Look!" she gasped, white and trembling. "The Terror of the Moor!"

IT WAS indeed the half-human monster. Huge, silent, menacing in his very bulk, he stood full in the path of the on-rushing plane, his four feet firmly planted on the ground, his dual bodies braced as though to withstand the coming shock. Calm and inexorable as some mis-shapen Nemesis, the light of implacable hatred shining in his luminous eyes, he must have appeared to the terror-stricken Felger like some phantom of retributive justice, a Frankenstein monster about to wreak his long-delayed vengeance on the man who had brought him into existence.

Nearer and nearer came the whirling propeller until it seemed as if the next second would see the centaur stag scattered to the winds in shreds of mangled flesh. Then it was that the Terror gathered his mighty muscles and leapt.

Like a speeding arrow he rose from the ground, not sideways, not backward, but forward, straight over the zooming blades. He landed somewhere on the body of the plane. The two watchers had a fleeting glimpse of a confused mass of lashing hoofs and struggling human limbs; then the inclined pinions of the plane swooped it upward, and like an uncaged bird the machine rose and headed for the distant silver streak of the sea.

With set, expectant faces, Hugh and Joan waited and watched. Quickly the roar of the engine dwindled to a musical hum; the dark shadow of the plane itself merged into the sable veil of the night.

"It must have passed the coastline by now," said Hugh, voicing his thoughts aloud. "That means——"

Even as he spoke, a trail of glowing crimson leaped from the cloudless sky, and, after what seemed an interminable interval, a dull, rending *boom* floated to their ears, as amid a tangled and twisted mass of wreckage the Terror of the Moor and the man whose misapplied genius had brought it into being, together flashed into flaming death.

Not until the last hissing fragment had plunged into the distant sea did Hugh Trenchard break the silence.

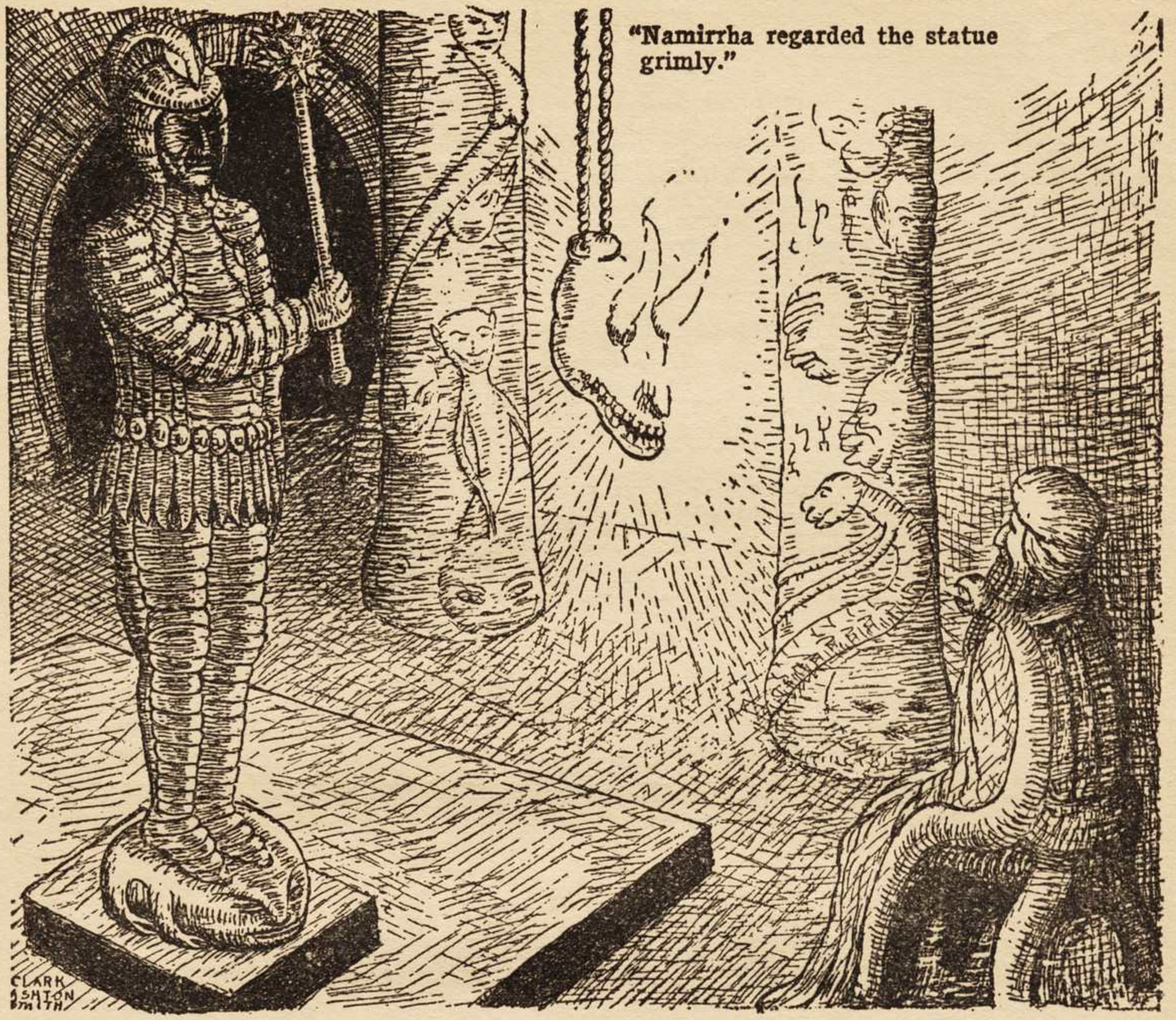
"God grant that so may perish every device that tends to foster man's inhumanity against man," he said gravely.

"Amen," murmured the girl by his side. "A greater Power than our puny efforts has decreed that the secret of the dread gas shall remain to me alone. But I have no intention of parting with my knowledge, for war is terrible enough without such a fiendish method of slaughter. If a day of conflict between rival nations must dawn again, then let clean fighting and the fortitude inspired by a righteous cause be the arbiters which confer victory or defeat. As far as I am concerned, the secret of Marle's formula shall remain a mystery for all time."

Clinging closely to him, she raised her face to his, and in her radiant eyes Hugh Trenchard read the answer to the most entrancing mystery of all.

[THE END]





"Namirrha regarded the statue grimly."

The Dark Eidolon

By CLARK ASHTON SMITH

A powerful, vivid and eery tale of the tremendous doom that was loosed upon the kingdom of Xylac by a vengeful sorcerer

Thasaidon, lord of seven hells
Wherein the single Serpent dwells,
With volumes drawn from pit to pit
Through fire and darkness infinite—
Thasaidon, sun of nether skies,
Thine ancient evil never dies,
For aye thy somber fulgors flame
On sunken worlds that have no name,
Man's heart enthrones thee, still supreme,
Though the false sorcerers blaspheme.

—*The Song of Xeethra.*

ON ZOTHIQUE, the last continent of Earth, the sun no longer shone with the whiteness of its prime, but was dim and tarnished as if with a vapor of blood. New stars without number had declared themselves in the heavens, and the shadows of the infinite had fallen closer. And out of the shadows, the older gods had returned to man: the

gods forgotten since Hyperborea, since Mu and Poseidonis, bearing other names but the same attributes. And the elder demons had also returned, battening on the fumes of evil sacrifice, and fostering again the primordial sorceries.

Many were the necromancers and magicians of Zothique, and the infamy and marvel of their doings were legended everywhere in the latter days. But among them all there was none greater than Namirrha, who imposed his black yoke on the cities of Xylac, and later, in a proud delirium, deemed himself the veritable peer of Thasaidon, lord of Evil.

Namirrha had built his abode in Ummaos, the chief town of Xylac, to which he came from the desert realm of Tasuun with the dark renown of his thaumaturgies like a cloud of desert storm behind him. And no man knew that in coming to Ummaos he returned to the city of his birth; for all deemed him a native of Tasuun. Indeed, none could have dreamt that the great sorcerer was one with the beggar-boy, Narthos, an orphan of questionable parentage, who had begged his daily bread in the streets and bazars of Ummaos. Wretchedly had he lived, alone and despised; and a hatred of the cruel, opulent city grew in his heart like a smothered flame that feeds in secret, biding the time when it shall become a conflagration consuming all things.

Bitterer always, through his boyhood and early youth, was the spleen and rancor of Narthos toward men. And one day the prince Zotulla, a boy but little older than he, riding a restive palfrey, came upon him in the square before the imperial palace; and Narthos implored an alms. But Zotulla, scorning his plea, rode arrogantly forward, spurring the palfrey; and Narthos was ridden down and trampled under its hooves. And afterward, nigh to death from the trampling, he lay senseless for many hours, while the people passed him by unheeding. And at last, regaining his senses, he dragged himself to his hovel; but he limped a little thereafter all his days, and the mark of one hoof remained like a brand on his body, fading never. Later, he left Ummaos and was forgotten quickly by its people. Going southward into Tasuun, he lost his way in the great desert, and was near to perishing. But finally he came to a small oasis, where dwelt the wizard Ouphaloc, a hermit who preferred the company of honest jackals and hyenas to that of men. And Ouphaloc, seeing the great craft and evil in the starveling boy, gave succor to Narthos and sheltered him. He dwelt for years with Ouphaloc, becoming the wizard's pupil and the heir of his demon-wrested lore. Strange things he learned in that hermitage, being fed on fruits and grain that had sprung not from the watered earth, and wine that was not the juice of terrene grapes. And like Ouphaloc, he became a master in devildom and drove his own bond with the archfiend Thasaidon. When Ouphaloc died, he took the name of Namirrha, and went forth as a mighty sorcerer among the wandering peoples and the deep-buried mummies of Tasuun. But never could he forget the miseries of his boyhood in Ummaos and the wrong he had endured from Zotulla; and year by year he spun over in his thoughts the black web of revenge. And his fame grew ever darker and vaster, and men feared him in remote lands beyond Tasuun. With bated whispers they spoke of his deeds in the cities of Yoros, and in Zul-Bha-Sair, the abode of the ghoulish deity Mordiggian. And long before the coming of Namirrha himself, the people of Ummaos knew him as a fabled scourge that was direr than simoom or pestilence.

Now, in the years that followed the going-forth of the boy Narthos from Ummaos, Pithaim, the father of Prince Zotulla, was slain by the sting of a small adder that had crept into his bed for warmth on an autumn night. Some said that the adder had been purveyed by Zotulla, but this was a thing that no man could verily affirm. After the death of Pithaim, Zotulla, being his only son, was emperor of Xylac, and ruled evilly from his throne in Ummaos. Indolent he was, and tyrannic, and full of strange luxuries and cruelties; but the people, who were also evil, acclaimed him in his turpitude. So he prospered, and the lords of hell and heaven smote him not. And the red suns and ashen moons went westward over Xylac, falling into that seldom-voyaged sea, which, if the mariners' tales were true, poured evermore like a swiftening river past the infamous isle of Naat, and fell in a worldwide cataract upon nether space from the far, sheer edge of Earth.

Grosser still he grew, and his sins were as overswollen fruits that ripen above a deep abyss. But the winds of time blew softly; and the fruits fell not. And Zotulla laughed amid his fools and his eunuchs and his lemans; and the tale of his luxuries was borne afar, and was told by dim outland peoples, as a twin marvel with the bruited necromancies of Namirrha.

IT CAME to pass, in the year of the Hyena and the month of the star Canicule, that a great feast was given by Zotulla to the inhabitants of Ummaos. Meats that had been cooked in exotic spices from Sotar, isle of the east, were spread everywhere; and the ardent wines of Yoros and Xylac, filled as with subterranean fires, were poured inexhaustibly from huge urns for all. The wines awoke a furious mirth and a royal madness; and afterward they brought a slumber no less profound than the Lethe of the tomb. And one by one, as they drank, the revellers fell down in the streets, the houses and gardens, as if a plague had struck them; and Zotulla slept in his banquet-hall of gold and ebony, with his odalisques and chamberlains about him. So, in all Ummaos, there was no man or woman wakeful at the hour when Sirius began to fall toward the west.

Thus it was that none saw or heard the coming of Namirrha. But awakening heavily in the latter forenoon, the emperor Zotulla heard a confused babble, a troublous clamor of voices from such of his eunuchs and women as had awakened before him. Inquiring the cause, he was told that a strange prodigy had occurred during the night; but, being still bemused with wine and slumber, he comprehended little enough of its nature, till his favorite concubine, Obexah, led him to the eastern portico of the palace, from which he could behold the marvel with his own eyes.

Now the palace stood alone at the center of Ummaos, and to north, west and south, for wide intervals of distance, there stretched the imperial gardens, full of superbly arching palms and loftily spiring fountains. But to eastward was a broad open area, used as a sort of common, between the palace and the mansions of high optimates. And in this space, which had lain wholly vacant at eve, a building towered colossal and lordly beneath the full-risen sun, with domes like monstrous fungi of stone that had come up in the night. And the domes, rearing level with those of Zotulla, were builded of death-white marble; and the huge façade, with multi-columned porticoes and deep balconies, was wrought in alternate zones of night-black onyx and porphyry hued as with dragons'-blood.

And Zotulla swore lewdly, calling with hoarse blasphemies on the gods and devils of Xylac; and great was his dumfoundment, deeming the marvel a work of wizardry. The women gathered about him, crying out with shrill cries of awe and terror; and more and more of his courtiers, awakening, came to swell the hubbub; and the fat castradoes diddered in their cloth-of-gold like immense black jellies in golden basins. But Zotulla, mindful of his dominion as emperor of all Xylac, sought to conceal his own trepidation, saying:

"Now who is this that has presumed to enter Ummaos like a jackal in the dark, and has made his impious den in proximity and counterview with my palace? Go forth, and inquire the miscreant's name; but, ere you go, instruct the imperial headsman to make sharp his double-handed sword."

Then, fearing the emperor's wrath if they tarried, certain of the chamberlains went forth unwillingly and approached the portals of the strange edifice. It seemed that the portals were deserted till they drew near, and then, on the threshold, there appeared a titanic skeleton, taller than any man of earth; and it strode forward to meet them with ell-long strides. The skeleton was swathed in a loin-cloth of scarlet silk with a buckle of jet, and it wore a black turban, starred with diamonds, whose topmost foldings nearly touched the lofty lintel. Eyes like flickering marsh-fires burned in its deep eye-sockets; and a blackened tongue like that of a long-dead man protruded between its teeth; but otherwise it was clean of flesh, and the bones glittered whitely in the sun as it came onward.

The chamberlains were mute before it, and there was no sound except the golden creaking of their girdles, the shrill rustling of their silks, as they shook and trembled. And the foot-bones of the skeleton clicked sharply on the pavement of black onyx as it paused; and the putrefying tongue began to quiver between its teeth; and it uttered these words in an unctuous, nauseous voice:

"Return, and tell the emperor Zotulla that Namirrha, seer and magician, has come to dwell beside him."

Hearing the skeleton speak as if it had been a living man, and hearing the dread name of Namirrha as men hear the tocsin of doom in some fallen city, the chamberlains could stand before it no longer, and they fled with ungainly swiftness and bore the message to Zotulla.

Now, learning who it was that had come to neighbor with him in Ummaos, the emperor's wrath died out like a feeble and blustering flame on which the wind of darkness has blown; and the vinous purple of his cheeks was mottled with a strange pallor; and he said nothing, but his lips mumbled loosely as if in prayer or malediction. And the news of Namirrha's coming passed like the flight of evil night-birds through all the palace and throughout the city, leaving a noisome terror that abode in Ummaos thereafter till the end. For Namirrha, through the black renown of his thaumaturgies and the frightful entities who served him, had become a power that no secular sovereign dared dispute; and men feared him everywhere, even as they feared the gigantic, shadowy lords of hell and of outer space. And in Ummaos, people said that he had come on the desert wind from Tasuun with his underlings, even as the pestilence comes, and had reared his house in an hour with the aid of devils beside Zotulla's palace. And they said that the foundations of the house were laid on the adamantine cope of hell; and in its floors were pits at whose bottom burned the nether fires, or stars could be seen as

they passed under in lowermost night. And the followers of Namirrha were the dead of strange kingdoms, the demons of sky and earth and the abyss, and mad, impious, hybrid things that the sorcerer himself had created from forbidden unions.

Men shunned the neighborhood of his lordly house; and in the palace of Zotulla few cared to approach the windows and balconies that gave thereon; and the emperor himself spoke not of Namirrha, pretending to ignore the intruder; and the women of the harem babbled evermore with an evil gossip concerning Namirrha and his concubines. But the sorcerer himself was not beheld by the people of the city, though some believed that he walked forth at will, clad with invisibility. His servitors likewise were not seen; but a howling as of the damned was sometimes heard to issue from his portals; and sometimes there came a stony cachinnation, as if some adamantine image had laughed aloud; and sometimes there was a chuckling like the sound of shattered ice in a frozen hell. Dim shadows moved in the porticoes when there was neither sunlight nor lamp to cast them; and red, eery lights appeared and vanished in the windows at eve, like a blinking of demoniac eyes. And slowly the ember-colored suns went over Xylac, and were quenched in far seas; and the ashy moons were blackened as they fell nightly toward the hidden gulf. Then, seeing that the wizard had wrought no open evil, and that none had endured palpable harm from his presence, the people took heart; and Zotulla drank deeply, and feasted in oblivious luxury as before; and dark Thasaidon, prince of all turpitudes, was the true but never-acknowledged lord of Xylac. And in time the men of Ummaos bragged a little of Namirrha and his dread thaumaturgies, even as they had boasted of the purple sins of Zotulla.

But Namirrha, still unbeheld by living men and living women, sat in the inner halls of that house which his devils had reared for him, and spun over and over in his thoughts the black web of revenge. And in all Ummaos there was none, even among his fellow-beggars, who recalled the beggar-boy Narthos. And the wrong done by Zotulla to Narthos in old time was the least of those cruelties which the emperor had forgotten.

Now, when the fears of Zotulla were somewhat lulled, and his women gossiped less often of the neighboring wizard, there occurred a new wonder and a fresh terror. For, sitting one eve at his banquet-table with his courtiers about him, the emperor heard a noise as of myriad iron-shod hooves that came trampling through the palace-gardens. And the courtiers also heard the sound, and were startled amid their mounting drunkenness; and the emperor was angered, and he sent certain of his guards to examine into the cause of the trampling. But peering forth upon the moon-bright lawns and parterres, the guards beheld no visible shape, though the loud sounds of trampling still went to and fro. It seemed as if a rout of wild stallions passed and re-passed before the façade of the palace with tumultuous gallopings and capricoles. And a fear came upon the guards as they looked and listened; and they dared not venture forth, but returned to Zotulla. And the emperor himself grew sober when he heard their tale; and he went forth with high blusterings to view the prodigy. And all night the unseen hooves rang out sonorously on the pavements of onyx, and ran with deep thuddings over the grasses and flowers. The palm-fronds waved on the windless air as if parted by

racing steeds; and visibly the tall-stemmed lilies and broad-petaled exotic blossoms were trodden under. And rage and terror nested together in Zotulla's heart as he stood in a balcony above the garden, hearing the spectral tumult, and beholding the harm done to his rarest flower-beds. The women, the courtiers and eunuchs cowered behind him, and there was no slumber for any occupant of the palace; but toward dawn the clamor of hooves departed, going toward Namirrha's house.

When the dawn was full-grown above Ummaos, the emperor walked forth with his guards about him, and saw that the crushed grasses and broken-down stems were blackened as if by fire where the hooves had fallen. Plainly were the marks imprinted, like the tracks of a great company of horses, in all the lawns and parterres; but they ceased at the verge of the gardens. And though every one believed that the visitation had come from Namirrha, there was no proof of this in the grounds that fronted the sorcerer's abode; for here the turf was untrodden.

"A pox upon Namirrha, if he has done this!" cried Zotulla. "For what harm have I ever done to him? Verily, I shall set my heel on the dog's neck; and the torture-wheel shall serve him even as these horses from hell have served my blood-red lilies of Sotar and my vein-colored irises of Naat and my orchids from Uccastrog which were purple as the bruises of love. Yea, though he stand the viceroy of Thasaidon above Earth, and overlord of ten thousand devils, my wheel shall break him, and fires shall heat the wheel white-hot in its turning, till he withers black as the seared blossoms." Thus did Zotulla make his brag; but he issued no orders for the execution of the threat; and no man stirred from the palace toward Namirrha's house. And from the portals of the wizard none came forth; or if any came, there was no visible sign or sound.

So the day went over, and the night rose, bringing later a moon that was slightly darkened at the rim. And the night was silent; and Zotulla, sitting long at the banquet-table, drained his wine-cup often and wrathfully, muttering new threats against Namirrha. And the night wore on, and it seemed that the visitation would not be repeated. But at midnight, lying in his chamber with Obexah, and fathom-deep in slumber from his wine, Zotulla was awakened by a monstrous clangor of hooves that raced and capered in the palace porticoes and in the long balconies. All night the hooves thundered back and forth, echoing awfully in the vaulted stone, while Zotulla and Obexah, listening, huddled close amid their cushions and coverlets; and all the occupants of the palace, wakeful and fearful, heard the noise but stirred not from their chambers. A little before dawn the hooves departed suddenly; and afterward, by day, their marks were found on the marble flags of the porches and balconies; and the marks were countless, deep-graven, and black as if branded there by flame.

Like mottled marble were the emperor's cheeks when he saw the hoof-printed floors; and terror stayed with him henceforward, following him to the depths of his inebriety, since he knew not where the haunting would cease. His women murmured and some wished to flee from Ummaos, and it seemed that the revels of the day and the evening were shadowed by ill wings that left their umbrage in the yellow wine and bedimmed the aureate lamps. And again, toward midnight, the slumber of Zotulla was broken by the hooves, which came galloping and

pacing on the palace-roof and through all the corridors and halls. Thereafter, till dawn, the hooves filled the palace with their iron clatterings, and they rang hollowly on the topmost domes, as if the coursers of gods had trodden there, passing from heaven to heaven in tumultuous cavalcade.

Zotulla and Obexah, lying together while the terrible hooves went to and fro in the hall outside their chamber, had no heart or thought for sin, nor could they find any comfort in their nearness. In the gray hour before dawn they heard a great thundering high on the barred brazen door of the room, as if some mighty stallion, rearing, had drummed there with his forefeet. And soon after this, the hooves went away, leaving a silence like an interlude in some gathering storm of doom. Later, the marks of the hooves were found everywhere in the halls, marring the bright mosaics. Black holes were burnt in the golden-threaded rugs and the rugs of silver and scarlet; and the high white domes were pitted pox-wise with the marks; and far up on the brazen door of Zotulla's chamber the prints of a horse's forefeet were incised deeply.

Now, in Ummaos, and throughout Xylac, the tale of this haunting became known, and the thing was deemed an ominous prodigy, though people differed in their interpretations. Some held that the sending came from Namirrha, and was meant as a token of his supremacy above all kings and emperors; and some thought that it came from a new wizard who had risen in Tinarath, far to the east, and who wished to supplant Namirrha. And the priests of the gods of Xylac held that their various deities had dispatched the haunting, as a sign that more sacrifices were required in the temples.

Then, in his hall of audience, whose floor of sard and jasper had been grievously pocked by the unseen hooves, Zotulla called together many priests and magicians and soothsayers, and asked them to declare the cause of the sending and devise a mode of exorcism. But, seeing that there was no agreement among them, Zotulla provided the several priestly sects with the wherewithal of sacrifice to their sundry gods, and sent them away; and the wizards and prophets, under threat of decapitation if they refused, were enjoined to visit Namirrha in his mansion of sorcery and learn his will, if haply the sending were his and not the work of another.

Loth were the wizards and the soothsayers, fearing Namirrha, and caring not to intrude upon the frightful mysteries of his obscure mansion. But the swordsmen of the emperor drave them forth, lifting great crescent blades against them when they tarried; so one by one, in a straggling order, the delegation went toward Namirrha's portals and vanished into the devil-builded house.

Pale, muttering and distraught, like men who have looked upon hell and have seen their doom, they returned before sunset to the emperor. And they said that Namirrha had received them courteously and had sent them back with this message:

"Be it known to Zotulla that the haunting is a sign of that which he has long forgotten; and the reason of the haunting will be revealed to him at the hour prepared and set apart by destiny. And the hour draws near: for Namirrha bids the emperor and all his court to a great feast on the afternoon of the morrow."

Having delivered this message, to the wonder and consternation of Zotulla, the delegation begged his leave to depart. And though the emperor questioned them

minutely, they seemed unwilling to relate the circumstances of their visit to Namirrha; nor would they describe the sorcerer's fabled house, except in a vague manner, each contradicting the other as to what he had seen. So, after a little, Zotulla bade them go, and when they had gone he sat musing for a long while on the invitation of Namirrha, which was a thing that he cared not to accept but feared to decline. That evening he drank even more liberally than was his wont; and he slept a Lethean slumber, nor was there any noise of trampling hooves about the palace to awaken him. And silently, during the night, the prophets and the magicians passed like furtive shadows from Ummaos; and no man saw them depart; and at morning they were gone from Xylac into other lands, never to return. . . .

Now, on that same evening, in the great hall of his house, Namirrha sat alone, having dismissed the mummies, the monsters, the skeletons and familiars who attended him ordinarily. Before him, on an altar of jet, was the dark, gigantic statue of Thasaidon which a devil-begotten sculptor had wrought in ancient days for an evil king of Tasuun, called Pharnoc. The archdemon was depicted in the guise of a full-armored warrior, lifting a spiky mace as if in heroic battle. Long had the statue lain in the desert-sunken palace of Pharnoc, whose very site was disputed by the nomads; and Namirrha, by his divination, had found it and had reared up the infernal image to abide with him always thereafter. And often, through the mouth of the statue, Thasaidon would utter oracles to Namirrha, or would answer interrogations.

Before the black-armored image there hung seven silver lamps, wrought in the form of horses' skulls, with flames issuing changeably in blue and purple and crimson from their eye-sockets. Wild and lurid was their light, and the face of the demon, peering from under his crested helmet, was filled with malign, equivocal shadows that shifted and changed eternally. And sitting in his serpent-carven chair, Namirrha regarded the statue grimly, with a deep-furrowed frown between his eyes: for he had asked a certain thing of Thasaidon, and the fiend, replying through the statue, had refused him. And rebellion was in the heart of Namirrha, grown mad with pride, and deeming himself the lord of all sorcerers and a ruler by his own right among the princes of devildom. So, after long pondering, he repeated his request in a bold and haughty voice, like one who addresses an equal rather than the all-formidable suzerain to whom he has sworn a fatal fealty.

"I have helped you heretofore in all things," said the image, with stony and sonorous accents that were echoed metallically in the seven silver lamps. "Yea, the undying worms of fire and darkness have come forth like an army at your summons, and the wings of nether genii have risen to occlude the sun when you called them. But, verily, I will not aid you in this vengeance you have planned: for the emperor Zotulla has done me no wrong and has served me well though unwittingly; and the people of Xylac, by reason of their turpitudes, are not the least of my terrestrial worshippers. Therefore, Namirrha, it were well for you to live in peace with Zotulla, and well to forget this olden wrong that was done to the beggar-boy Narthos. For the ways of destiny are strange, and the workings of its laws are sometimes hidden; and truly, if the hooves of Zotulla's palfrey had not spurned you and trodden you under, your life had been otherwise, and the name

and renown of Namirrha had still slept in oblivion as a dream undreamed. Yea, you would tarry still as a beggar in Ummaos, content with a beggar's guerdon, and would never have fared forth to become the pupil of the wise and learned Ouphaloc; and I, Thasaidon, would have lost the lordliest of all necromancers who have accepted my service and my bond. Think well, Namirrha, and ponder these matters: for both of us, it would seem, are indebted to Zotulla in all gratitude for the trampling that he gave you."

"Yea, there is a debt," Namirrha growled implacably. "And truly, I will pay the debt tomorrow, even as I have planned. . . . There are Those who will aid me, Those who will answer my summoning in your despite."

"It is an ill thing to affront me," said the image, after an interval. "And also, it is not well to call upon Those that you designate. However, I perceive clearly that such is your intent. You are proud and stubborn and revengeful. Do, then, as you will, but blame me not for the outcome."

So, after this, there was silence in the hall where Namirrha sate before the eidolon; and the flames burned darkly, with changeable colors, in the skull-shapen lamps; and the shadows fled and returned, unresting, on the face of the statue and the face of Namirrha. Then, toward midnight, the necromancer rose and went upward by many spiral stairs to a high dome of his house in which was a single small round window that looked forth on the constellations. The window was set in the top of the dome; but Namirrha had contrived, by means of his magic, that one entering by the last spiral of the stairs would suddenly seem to descend rather than climb, and, reaching the final step, would peer *downward* through the window while stars passed under him in a giddying gulf. There, kneeling, Namirrha touched a secret spring in the marble, and the circular pane slid back without sound. Then, lying prone on the curved interior of the dome, with his face over the abyss, and his long beard trailing stiffly into space, he whispered a prehuman rune, and held speech with certain entities who belonged neither to hell nor the mundane elements, and were more fearsome to invoke than the infernal genii or the devils of earth, air, water and flame. With them he made his compact, defying Thasaidon's will, while the air curled about him with their voices, and rime gathered palely on his sable beard from the cold that was wrought by their breathing as they leaned earthward.

LAGGARD and loth was the awakening of Zotulla from his wine; and quickly, ere he opened his eyes, the daylight was poisoned for him by the thought of that invitation which he feared to accept or decline. But he spoke to Obexah, saying:

"Who, after all, is this wizardly dog, that I should obey his summons like a beggar called in from the street by some haughty lord?"

Obexah, a golden-skinned and oblique-eyed girl from Uccastrog, Isle of the Torturers, eyed the emperor subtly, and said:

"O Zotulla, it is yours to accept or refuse, as you deem fitting. And truly, it is a small matter for the lord of Ummaos and all Xylac, whether to go or stay, since naught can impugn your sovereignty. Therefore, were it not as well to go?" For Obexah, though fearful of the wizard, was curious regarding that devil-builded house of which so little was known; and likewise, in the manner of women, she wished to behold the famed Namirrha, whose mien and appearance were still but a far-brought legend in Ummaos.

"There is something in what you say," admitted Zotulla. "But an emperor, in his conduct, must always consider the public good; and there are matters of state involved, which a woman can scarcely be expected to understand."

So, later in the forenoon, after an ample and well-irrigated breakfast, he called his chamberlains and courtiers about him and took counsel with them. And some advised him to ignore the invitation of Namirrha; and others held that the invitation should be accepted, lest a graver evil than the trampling of ghostly hooves should be sent upon the palace and the city.

Then Zotulla called the many priesthoods before him in a body, and sought to resummon those wizards and soothsayers who had fled privily in the night. Among all the latter, there was none who answered the crying of his name through Ummaos; and this aroused a certain wonder. But the priests came in greater number than before, and thronged the hall of audience so that the paunches of the foremost were straitened against the imperial dais and the buttocks of the hindmost were flattened on the rear walls and pillars. And Zotulla debated with them the matter of acceptance or refusal. And the priests argued, as before, that Namirrha was nowise concerned with the sending; and his invitation, they said, portended no harm nor bale to the emperor; and it was plain, from the terms of the message, that an oracle would be imparted to Zotulla by the wizard; and this oracle, if Namirrha were a true archimage, would confirm their own holy wisdom and reestablish the divine source of the sending; and the gods of Xylac would again be glorified.

Then, having heard the pronouncement of the priests, the emperor instructed his treasurers to load them down with new offerings; and, calling unctuously upon Zotulla and all his household the vicarious blessings of their several gods, the priests departed. And the day wore on, and the sun passed its meridian, falling slowly beyond Ummaos through the spaces of afternoon that were floored with sea-ending deserts. And still Zotulla was irresolute; and he called his wine-bearers, bidding them pour for him the strongest and most magistral of their vintages; but in the wine he found neither certitude nor decision.

Sitting still on his throne in the hall of audience, he heard, toward middle afternoon, a mighty and clamorous outcry that arose at the palace-portals. There were deep wailings of men and the shrillings of eunuchs and women, as if terror passed from tongue to tongue, invading the halls and apartments. And the fearful clamor spread throughout all the palace, and Zotulla, rousing from the lethargy of wine, was about to send his attendants to inquire the cause.

Then, into the hall, there filed an array of tall mummies, clad in royal cerements of purple and scarlet, and wearing gold crowns on their withered craniums. And after them, like servitors, came gigantic skeletons who wore loin-cloths of nacarat orange and about whose upper skulls, from brow to crown, live serpents of banded saffron and ebon had wrapped themselves for head-dresses. And the mummies bowed before Zotulla, saying with thin, sere voices:

"We, who were kings of the wide realm of Tasuun aforetime, have been sent as a guard of honor for the emperor Zotulla, to attend him as is befitting when he goes forth to the feast prepared by Namirrha."

Then, with dry clickings of their teeth, and whistlings as of air through screens of fretted ivory, the skeletons spoke:

"We, who were giant warriors of a race forgotten, have also been sent by Namirrha, so that the emperor's household, following him to the feast, should be guarded from all peril and should fare forth in such pageantry as is meet and proper."

Witnessing these prodigies, the wine-bearers and other attendants cowered about the imperial dais or hid behind the pillars, while Zotulla, with pupils swimming starkly in a bloodshot white, with face bloated and ghastly pale, sat frozen on his throne and could utter no word in reply to the ministers of Namirrha.

Then, coming forward, the mummies said in dusty accents: "All is made ready, and the feast awaits the arrival of Zotulla." And the cerements of the mummies stirred and fell open at the bosom, and small rodent monsters, brown as bitumen, eyed as with accursed rubies, reared forth from the eaten hearts of the mummies like rats from their holes and chittered shrilly in human speech, repeating the words. The skeletons in turn took up the solemn sentence; and the black and saffron serpents hissed it from their skulls; and the words were repeated lastly in baleful rumblings by certain furry creatures of dubious form, hitherto unseen by Zotulla, who sat behind the ribs of the skeletons as if in cages of white wicker.

LIKE a dreamer who obeys the doom of dreams, the emperor rose from his throne and went forward, and the mummies surrounded him like an escort. And each of the skeletons drew from the reddish-yellow folds of his loin-cloth a curiously pierced archaic flute of silver; and all began a sweet and evil and deathly fluting as the emperor went out through the halls of the palace. A fatal spell was in the music: for the chamberlains, the women, the guards, the eunuchs, and all members of Zotulla's household even to the cooks and scullions, were drawn like a procession of night-walkers from the rooms and alcoves in which they had vainly hidden themselves; and, marshaled by the flutists, they followed after Zotulla. A strange thing it was to behold this mighty company of people, going forth in the slanted sunlight toward Namirrha's house, with a cortège of dead kings about them, and the blown breath of skeletons thrilling eldritchly in the silver flutes. And little was Zotulla comforted when he found the girl Obexah at his side, moving, as he, in a thralldom of involitient horror, with the rest of his women close behind.

Coming to the open portals of Namirrha's house, the emperor saw that they were guarded by great crimson-wattled things, half dragon, half man, who bowed before him, sweeping their wattles like bloody besoms on the flags of dark onyx. And the emperor passed with Obexah between the louting monsters, with the mummies, the skeletons and his own people behind him in strange pageant, and entered a vast and multi-columned hall, where the daylight, following timidly, was drowned by the baleful arrogant blaze of a thousand lamps.

Even amid his horror, Zotulla marvelled at the vastness of the chamber, which he could hardly reconcile with the mansion's outer length and height and breadth, though these indeed were of most palatial amplitude. For it seemed that he gazed down great avenues of topless pillars, and vistas of tables laden with piled-up viands and thronged urns of wine, that stretched away before him into luminous distance and gloom as of starless night.

In the wide intervals between the tables, the familiars of Namirrha and his other servants went to and fro incessantly,

as if a fantasmagoria of ill dreams were embodied before the emperor. Kingly cadavers in robes of time-rotten brocade, with worms seething in their eye-pits, poured a blood-like wine into cups of the opalescent horn of unicorns. Lamias, trident-tailed, and four-breasted chimeras, came in with fuming platters lifted high by their brazen claws. Dog-headed devils, tongued with lolling flames, ran forward to offer themselves as ushers for the company. And before Zotulla and Obexah, there appeared a curious being with the full-fleshed lower limbs and hips of a great black woman and the clean-picked bones of some titanic ape from there-upward. And this monster signified by certain indescribable becks of its finger-bones that the emperor and his favorite odalisque were to follow it.

Verily, it seemed to Zotulla that they had gone a long way into some malignly litten cavern of hell, when they came to the end of that perspective of tables and columns down which the monster had led them. Here, at the room's end, apart from the rest, was a table at which Namirrha sat alone, with the flames of the seven horse-skull lamps burning restlessly behind him, and the mailed black image of Thasaidon towering from the altar of jet at his right hand. And a little aside from the altar, a diamond mirror was upborne by the claws of iron basilisks.

NAMIRRHA rose to greet them, observing a solemn and funereal courtesy. His eyes were bleak and cold as distant stars in the hollows wrought by strange fearful vigils. His lips were like a pale-red seal on a shut parchment of doom. His beard flowed stiffly in black-anointed banded locks across the bosom of his vermilion robe, like a mass of straight black serpents. Zotulla felt the blood pause and thicken about his heart, as if congealing into ice. And Obexah, peering beneath lowered lids, was abashed and frightened by the visible horror that invested this man and hung upon him even as royalty upon a king. But amid her fear, she found room to wonder what manner of man he was in his intercourse with women.

"I bid you welcome, O Zotulla, to such hospitality as is mine to offer," said Namirrha, with the iron ringing of some hidden mortuary bell deep down in his hollow voice. "Prithee, be seated at my table."

Zotulla saw that a chair of ebony had been placed for him opposite Namirrha; and another chair, less stately and imperial, had been placed at the left hand for Obexah. And the twain seated themselves; and Zotulla saw that his people were sitting likewise at other tables throughout the huge hall, with the frightful servitors of Namirrha waiting upon them busily, like devils attending the damned.

Then Zotulla perceived that a dark and corpse-like hand was pouring wine for him in a crystal cup; and upon the hand was the signet-ring of the emperors of Xylac, set with a monstrous fire-opal in the mouth of a golden bat: even such a ring as Zotulla himself wore perpetually on his index-finger. And, turning, he beheld at his right hand a figure that bore the likeness of his father, Pithaim, after the poison of the adder, spreading through all his limbs, had left behind it the purple bloating of death. And Zotulla, who had caused the adder to be placed in the bed of Pithaim, cowered in his seat and trembled with a guilty fear. And the thing that wore the similitude of Pithaim, whether corpse or ghost or an image wrought by Namirrha's enchantment, came and went at Zotulla's elbow, waiting upon him with stark, black, swol-

len fingers that never fumbled. Horribly he was aware of its bulging, unregarding eyes, and its livid purple mouth that was locked in a rigor of mortal silence, and the spotted adder that peered at intervals with chill orbs from its heavy-folded sleeve as it leaned beside him to replenish his cup or to serve him with meat. And dimly, through the icy mist of his terror, the emperor beheld the shadowy-armored shape, like a moving replica of the still, grim statue of Thasaidon, which Namirrha had reared up in his blasphemy to perform the same office for himself. And vaguely, without comprehension, he saw the dreadful ministrant that hovered beside Obexah: a flayed and eyeless corpse in the image of her first lover, a boy from Cyntrom who had been cast ashore in shipwreck on the Isle of the Torturers. There Obexah had found him, lying beyond the ebbing wave; and reviving the boy, she had hidden him awhile in a secret cave for her own pleasure, and had brought him food and drink. Later, wearying, she had betrayed him to the Torturers, and had taken a new delight in the various pangs and ordeals inflicted upon him before death by that cruel, pernicious people.

"Drink," said Namirrha, quaffing a strange wine that was red and dark as if with disastrous sunsets of lost years. And Zotulla and Obexah drank the wine, feeling no warmth in their veins thereafter, but a chill as of hemlock mounting slowly toward the heart.

"Verily, 'tis a good wine," said Namirrha, "and a proper one in which to toast the furthering of our acquaintance: for it was buried long ago with the royal dead, in amphoræ of somber jasper shapen like funeral urns; and my ghouls found it, whenas they came to dig in Tasuun."

Now it seemed that the tongue of Zotulla froze in his mouth, as a mandrake freezes in the rime-bound soil of winter; and he found no reply to Namirrha's courtesy.

"Prithee, make trial of this meat," quoth Namirrha, "for it is very choice, being the flesh of that boar which the Torturers of Uccastrog are wont to pasture on the well-minced leavings of their wheels and racks; and, moreover, my cooks have spiced it with the powerful balsams of the tomb, and have farced it with the hearts of adders and the tongues of black cobras."

Naught could the emperor say; and even Obexah was silent, being sorely troubled in her turpitude by the presence of that flayed and piteous thing which had the likeness of her lover from Cyntrom. And her dread of the necromancer grew prodigiously; for his knowledge of this old, forgotten crime, and the raising of the fantasm, appeared to her a more baleful magic than all else.

"Now, I fear," said Namirrha, "that you find the meat devoid of savor, and the wine without fire. So, to enliven our feasting, I shall call forth my singers and my musicians."

He spoke a word unknown to Zotulla or Obexah, which sounded throughout the mighty hall as if a thousand voices in turn had taken it up and prolonged it. Anon there appeared the singers, who were she-ghouls with shaven bodies and hairy shanks, and long yellow tushes full of shredded carrion curving across their chaps from mouths that fawned hyena-wise on the company. Behind them entered the musicians, some of whom were male devils pacing erect on the hindquarters of sable stallions and plucking with the fingers of white apes at lyres of the bone and sinew of cannibals from Naat; and others were pied satyrs puffing their goatish cheeks at hautboys made

from the femora of young witches, or bagpipes formed from the bosom-skin of negro queens and the horn of rhinoceri.

They bowed before Namirrha with grotesque ceremony. Then, without delay, the she-ghouls began a most dolorous and execrable howling, as of jackals that have sniffed their carrion; and the satyrs and devils played a lament that was like the moaning of desert-born winds through forsaken palace harems. And Zotulla shivered, for the singing filled his marrow with ice, and the music left in his heart a desolation as of empires fallen and trod under by the iron-shod hooves of time. Ever, amid that evil music, he seemed to hear the sifting of sand across withered gardens, and the windy rustling of rotted silks upon couches of bygone luxury, and the hissing of coiled serpents from the low fusts of shattered columns. And the glory that had been Ummaos seemed to pass away like the blown pillars of the simoom.

"Now that was a brave tune," said Namirrha when the music ceased and the she-ghouls no longer howled. "But verily I fear that you find my entertainment somewhat dull. Therefore, my dancers shall dance for you."

He turned toward the great hall, and described in the air an enigmatic sign with the fingers of his right hand. In answer to the sign, a hueless mist came down from the high roof and hid the room like a fallen curtain for a brief interim. There was a babel of sounds, confused and muffled, beyond the curtain, and a crying of voices faint as if with distance.

Then, dreadfully, the vapor rolled away, and Zotulla saw that the laden tables were gone. In the wide interspaces of the columns, his palace-inmates, the chamberlains, the eunuchs, the courtiers and odalisques and all the others, lay trussed with thongs on the floor, like so many fowls of gorgeous plumage. Above them, in time to a music made by the lyrists and flutists of the necromancer, a troupe of skeletons pirouetted with light clickings of their toe-bones; and a rout of mummies bounded stiffly; and others of Namirrha's creatures moved with monstrous caperings. To and fro they leapt on the bodies of the emperor's people, in the paces of an evil saraband. At every step they grew taller and heavier, till the saltant mummies were as the mummies of Anakim, and the skeletons were boned like colossi; and louder the music rose, drowning the faint cries of Zotulla's people. And huger still became the dancers, towering far into vaulted shadow among the vast columns, with thudding feet that wrought thunder in the room; and those whereon they danced were as grapes trampled for a vintage in autumn; and the floor ran deep with a sanguine must.

As a man drowning in a noisome, night-bound fen, the emperor heard the voice of Namirrha:

"It would seem that my dancers please you not. So now I shall present you a most royal spectacle. Arise and follow me, for the spectacle is one that requires an empire for its stage."

ZOTULLA and Obexah rose from their chairs in the fashion of night-walkers. Giving no backward glance at their ministering phantoms, or the hall where the dancers bounded, they followed Namirrha to an alcove beyond the altar of Thasaidon. Thence, by the upward-coiling stairways, they came at length to a broad high balcony that faced Zotulla's palace and looked forth above the city roofs toward the bourn of sunset.

It seemed that several hours had gone by in that hellish feasting and entertain-

ment; for the day was near to its close, and the sun, which had fallen from sight behind the imperial palace, was barring the vast heavens with bloody rays.

"Behold," said Namirrha, adding a strange vocable to which the stone of the edifice resounded like a beaten gong.

The balcony pitched a little, and Zotulla, looking over the balustrade, beheld the roofs of Ummaos lessen and sink beneath him. It seemed that the balcony flew skyward to a prodigious height, and he peered down across the domes of his own palace, upon the houses, the tilled fields and the desert beyond, and the huge sun brought low on the desert's verge. And Zotulla grew giddy; and the chill airs of the upper heavens blew upon him. But Namirrha spoke another word, and the balcony ceased to ascend.

"Look well," said the necromancer, "on the empire that was yours, but shall be yours no longer." Then, with arms outstretched toward the sunset, and the gulfs beyond the sunset, he called aloud the twelve names that were perdition to utter, and after them the tremendous invocation: *Gna padambis devompra thungis furidor avoragomon.*

Instantly, it seemed that great ebon clouds of thunder beetled against the sun. Lining the horizon, the clouds took the form of colossal monsters with heads and members somewhat resembling those of stallions. Rearing terribly, they trod down the sun like an extinguished ember; and racing as in some hippodrome of Titans, they rose higher and vaster, coming toward Ummaos. Deep, calamitous rumblings preceded them, and the earth shook visibly, till Zotulla saw that these were not immaterial clouds, but actual living forms that had come forth to tread the world in macrocosmic vastness. Throwing their shadows for many leagues before them, the coursers charged as if devil-ridden into Xylac, and their feet descended like falling mountain crags upon far oases and towns of the outer waste.

Like a many-turreted storm they came, and it seemed that the world sank gulfward, tilting beneath the weight. Still as a man enchanted into marble, Zotulla stood and beheld the ruining that was wrought on his empire. And closer drew the gigantic stallions, racing with inconceivable speed, and louder was the thundering of their footfalls, that now began to blot the green fields and fruited orchards lying for many miles to the west of Ummaos. And the shadow of the stallions climbed like an evil gloom of eclipse, till it covered Ummaos; and looking up, the emperor saw their eyes halfway between earth and zenith, like baleful suns that glare down from soaring cumuli.

Then, in the thickening gloom, above that insupportable thunder, he heard the voice of Namirrha, crying in mad triumph:

"Know, Zotulla, that I have called up the coursers of Thamorgorgos, lord of the abyss. And the coursers will tread your empire down, even as your palfrey trod and trampled in former time a beggar-boy named Narthos. And learn also that I, Namirrha, was that boy." And the eyes of Namirrha, filled with a vainglory of madness and bale, burned like malign, disastrous stars at the hour of their culmination.

To Zotulla, wholly mazed with the horror and tumult, the necromancer's words were no more than shrill, shrieked overtones of the tempest of doom; and he understood them not. Tremendously, with a rending of staunch-built roofs, and an instant cleavage and crumbling down of mighty masonries, the hooves descended upon Ummaos. Fair temple-

domes were pashed like shells of the haliotis, and haughty mansions were broken and stamped into the ground even as gourds; and house by house the city was trampled flat with a crashing as of worlds beaten into chaos. Far below, in the darkened streets, men and camels fled like scurrying emmets but could not escape. And implacably the hooves rose and fell, till ruin was upon half the city, and night was over all. The palace of Zotulla was trodden under, and now the forelegs of the coursers loomed level with Namirrha's balcony, and their heads towered awfully above. It seemed that they would rear and trample down the necromancer's house; but at that moment they parted to left and right, and a dolorous glimmering came from the low sunset; and the coursers went on, treading under them that portion of Ummaos which lay to the eastward. And Zotulla and Obexah and Namirrha looked down on the city's fragments as on a shard-strewn midden, and heard the cataclysmic clamor of the hooves departing toward eastern Xylac.

"Now that was a goodly spectacle," quoth Namirrha. Then, turning to the emperor, he added malignly: "Think not that I have done with thee, however, or that doom is yet consummate."

It seemed that the balcony had fallen to its former elevation, which was still a lofty vantage above the sharded ruins. And Namirrha plucked the emperor by the arm and led him from the balcony to an inner chamber, while Obexah followed mutely. The emperor's heart was crushed within him by the trampling of such calamities, and despair weighed upon him like a foul incubus on the shoulders of a man lost in some land of accursed night. And he knew not that he had been parted from Obexah on the threshold of the chamber, and that certain of Namirrha's creatures, appearing like shadows, had compelled the girl to go downward with them by the stairs and had stifled her outcries with their rotten cerements as they went.

THE chamber was one that Namirrha used for his most unhallowed rites and alchemies. The rays of the lamps that illumed it were saffron-red like the spilt ichor of devils, and they flowed on aludels and crucibles and black athanors and alembics whereof the purpose was hardly to be named by mortal man. The sorcerer heated in one of the alembics a dark liquid full of star-cold lights, while Zotulla looked on unheeding. And when the liquid bubbled and sent forth a spiral vapor, Namirrha distilled it into goblets of gold-rimmed iron, and gave one of the goblets to Zotulla and retained the other himself. And he said to Zotulla with a stern imperative voice: "I bid thee quaff this liquor."

Zotulla, fearing that the draft was poison, hesitated. And the necromancer regarded him with a lethal gaze, and cried loudly: "Fearest thou to do as I?" and therewith he set the goblet to his lips.

So the emperor drank the draft, constrained as if by the bidding of some angel of death, and a darkness fell upon his senses. But, ere the darkness grew complete, he saw that Namirrha had drained his own goblet. Then, with unspeakable agonies, it seemed that the emperor died; and his soul floated free; and again he saw the chamber, though with bodiless eyes. And discarnate he stood in the saffron-crimson light, with his body lying as if dead on the floor beside him, and near it the prone body of Namirrha and the two fallen goblets.

Standing thus, he beheld a strange thing: for anon his own body stirred and arose, while that of the necromancer remained still as death. And Zotulla

looked on his own lineaments and his figure in its short cloak of azure samite sewn with black pearls and balas-rubies; and the body lived before him, though with eyes that held a darker fire and a deeper evil than was their wont. Then, without corporeal ears, Zotulla heard the figure speak, and the voice was the strong, arrogant voice of Namirrha, saying:

"Follow me, O houseless phantom, and do in all things as I enjoin thee."

Like an unseen shadow, Zotulla followed the wizard, and the twain went downward by the stairs to the great banquet hall. They came to the altar of Thasaidon and the mailed image, with the seven horse-skull lamps burning before it as formerly. Upon the altar, Zotulla's beloved leman Obexah, who alone of women had power to stir his sated heart, was lying bound with thongs at Thasaidon's feet. But the hall beyond was deserted, and nothing remained of that Saturnalia of doom except the fruit of the treading, which had flowed together in dark pools among the columns.

Namirrha, using the emperor's body in all ways for his own, paused before the dark eidolon; and he said to the spirit of Zotulla: "Be imprisoned in this image, without power to free thyself or to stir in any wise."

Being wholly obedient to the will of the necromancer, the soul of Zotulla was embodied in the statue, and he felt its cold, gigantic armor about him like a strait sarcophagus, and he peered forth immovably from the bleak eyes that were overhung by its carven helmet.

Gazing thus, he beheld the change that had come on his own body through the sorcerous possession of Namirrha: for below the short azure cloak, the legs had turned suddenly to the hind legs of a black stallion, with hooves that glowed redly as if heated by infernal fires. And even as Zotulla watched this prodigy, the hooves glowed white and incandescent, and fumes mounted from the floor beneath them.

Then, on the black altar, the hybrid abomination came pacing haughtily toward Obexah, and smoking hoofprints appeared behind it as it came. Pausing beside the girl, who lay supine and helpless regarding it with eyes that were pools of frozen horror, it raised one glowing hoof and set the hoof on her naked bosom between the small breast-cups of golden filigree begemmed with rubies. And the girl screamed beneath that atrocious treading as the soul of one newly damned might scream in hell; and the hoof glared with intolerable brilliance, as if freshly plucked from a furnace wherein the weapons of demons were forged.

At that moment, in the cowed and crushed and sodden shade of the emperor Zotulla, close-locked within the adamantine image, there awoke the manhood that had slumbered unaroused before the ruining of his empire and the trampling under of his retinue. Immediately a great abhorrence and a high wrath were alive in his soul, and mightily he longed for his own right arm to serve him, and a sword in his right hand.

Then it seemed that a voice spoke within him, chill and bleak and awful, and as if uttered inwardly by the statue itself. And the voice said: "I am Thasaidon, lord of the seven hells beneath the earth, and the hells of man's heart above the earth, which are seven times seven. For the moment, O Zotulla, my power is become thine for the sake of a mutual vengeance. Be one in all ways with the statue that has my likeness, even as the soul is one with the flesh. Behold! there is a mace of adamant in thy right hand. Lift up the mace, and smite."

Zotulla was aware of a great power within him, and giant thews about him that thrilled with the power and responded agilely to his will. He felt in his mailed right hand the haft of the huge spiky-headed mace; and though the mace was beyond the lifting of any man in mortal flesh, it seemed no more than a goodly weight to Zotulla. Then, rearing the mace like a warrior in battle, he struck down with one crashing blow the impious thing that wore his own rightful flesh united with the legs and hooves of a demon courser. And the thing crumpled swiftly down and lay with the brain spreading pulpily from its shattered skull on the shining jet. And the legs twitched a little and then grew still; and the hooves glowed from a fiery, blinding white to the redness of red-hot iron, cooling slowly.

For a space there was no sound, other than the shrill screaming of the girl Obexah, mad with pain and the terror of those prodigies which she had beheld. Then, in the soul of Zotulla, grown sick with that screaming, the chill, awful voice of Thasaidon spoke again:

"Go free, for there is nothing more for thee to do." So the spirit of Zotulla passed from the image of Thasaidon and found in the wide air the freedom of utter nothingness and oblivion.

But the end was not yet for Namirrha, whose mad, arrogant soul had been loosened from Zotulla's body by the blow, and had returned darkly, not in the manner planned by the magician, to its own body lying in the room of accursed rites and forbidden transmigrations. There Namirrha woke anon, with a dire confusion in his mind, and a partial forgetfulness: for the curse of Thasaidon was upon him now because of his blasphemies.

Nothing was clear in his thought except a malign, exorbitant longing for revenge; but the reason thereof, and the object, were as doubtful shadows. And still prompted by that obscure animus, he arose; and girding to his side an enchanted sword with runic sapphires and opals in its hilt, he descended the stairs and came again to the altar of Thasaidon, where the mailed statue stood impassive as before, with the poised mace in its immovable right hand, and below it, on the altar, the double sacrifice.

A veil of weird darkness was upon the senses of Namirrha, and he saw not the stallion-legged horror that lay dead with slowly blackening hooves; and he heard not the moaning of the girl Obexah, who still lived beside it. But his eyes were drawn by the diamond mirror that was upheld in the claws of black iron basilisks beyond the altar; and going to the mirror, he saw therein a face that he knew no longer for his own. And because his eyes were shadowed and his brain filled with shifting webs of delusion, he took the face for that of the emperor Zotulla. Insatiable as hell's own flame, his old hatred rose within him; and he drew the enchanted sword and began to hew therewith at the reflection. Sometimes, because of the curse laid upon him, and the impious transmigration which he had performed, he thought himself Zotulla warring with the necromancer; and again, in the shiftings of his madness, he was Namirrha smiting at the emperor; and then, without name, he fought a nameless foe. And soon the sorcerous blade, though tempered with formidable spells, was broken close to the hilt, and Namirrha beheld the image still unharmed. Then, howling aloud the half-forgotten runes of a most tremendous curse, made invalid through his forgettings, he ham-

mered still with the heavy sword-hilt on the mirror, till the runic sapphires and opals cracked in the hilt and fell away at his feet in little fragments.

Obexah, dying on the altar, saw Namirrha battling with his image, and the spectacle moved her to mad laughter like the pealing of bells of ruined crystal. And above her laughter, and above the cursings of Namirrha, there came anon like a rumbling of swift-risen storm the thunder made by the macrocosmic stallions of Thamogorgos, returning gulfward through Xylac over Ummaos, to trample down the one house that they had spared aforetime.

The Feast in the Abbey

By ROBERT BLOCH

The story of a grisly horror encountered in a weird monastery in the forest

A CLAP of thunder in the sullen west heralded the approach of night and storm together, and the sky deepened to a sorcerous black. Rain fell, the wind droned dolefully, and the forest pathway through which I rode became a muddy, treacherous bog that threatened momentarily to ensnare both my steed and myself in its unwelcome embrace. A journey under such conditions is most inauspicious; in consequence I was greatly heartened when shortly through the storm-tossed branches I discerned a flicker of hospitable light glimmering through mists of rain.

Five minutes later I drew rein before the massive doors of a goodly-sized, venerable building of gray, moss-covered stone, which, from its extreme size and sanctified aspect, I rightly took to be a monastery. Even as I gazed thus perfunctorily upon it, I could see that it was a place of some importance, for it loomed most imposingly above the crumbled foundations of many smaller buildings which had evidently once surrounded it.

The force of the elements, however, was such as to preclude all further inspection or speculation, and I was only too pleased when, in reply to my continued knocking, the great oaken door was thrown open and I stood face to face with a cowled man who courteously ushered me past the rain-swept portals into a well-lighted and spacious hallway.

My benefactor was short and fat, garbed in voluminous gabardine, and from his ruddy, beaming aspect, seemed a very pleasant and affable host. He introduced himself as the abbot Henricus, head of the monkish fraternity in whose headquarters I now found myself, and begged me to accept the hospitality of the brethren until the inclemencies of the weather had somewhat abated.

In reply I informed him of my name and station, and told him that I was journeying to keep tryst with my brother in Vironne, beyond the forest, but had been arrested in my journey by the storm.

These civilities having been concluded, he ushered me past the paneled antechamber to the foot of a great staircase set in stone, that seemed hewn out of the very wall itself. Here he called out sharply in an uncomprehended tongue, and in a moment I was startled by the sudden appearance of two blackamoors, who seemed to have materialized out of nowhere, so swiftly silent had been their coming. Their stern ebony faces, kinky hair and rolling eyes, set off by a most outlandish garb—great, baggy trousers of red velvet and waists of cloth-of-gold, in Eastern fashion—intrigued me greatly, though they seemed curiously out of place in a Christian monastery.

The abbot Henricus addressed them now in fluent Latin, bidding one to go without and care for my horse, and ordering the other to show me to an apartment above, where, he informed me, I could change my rain-bedraggled garments for a more suitable raiment, while awaiting the evening meal.

I thanked my courteous host and followed the silent black automaton up the great stone staircase. The flickering torch of the giant servitor cast arabesque shadows upon bare stone walls of great age and advanced decrepitude; clearly the structure was very old. Indeed, the massive walls that rose outside must have been constructed in a bygone day, for the other buildings that presumably were contemporaneously erected beside this had long since fallen into irremediable, unrecognizable decay.

Upon reaching the landing, my guide led me along a richly carpeted expanse of tessellated floor, between lofty walls tapestried and bedizened with draperies of black. Such velvet finery was most unseemly for a place of worship, to my mind.

Nor was my opinion shaken by the sight of the chamber which was indicated as my own. It was fully as large as my father's study at Nîmes—its walls hung in Spanish velvets of maroon, of an elegance surpassed only by their bad taste in such a place. There was a bed such as would grace the palace of a king; furniture and other appurtenances were of truly regal magnificence. The blackamoor lighted a dozen mammoth candles in the silver candelabra that stood about the room, and then bowed and withdrew.

Upon inspecting the bed I found thereupon the garments the abbot had designated for my use during the evening meal. These consisted of a suit of black velveteen with satin breeches and hose of a corresponding hue, and a sable surplice. Upon doffing my travel-worn apparel I found that they fitted perfectly, albeit most somberly.

During this time I engaged myself in observing the room more closely. I wondered greatly at the lavishness, display and ostentation, and more greatly still at the complete absence of any religious paraphernalia—not even a simple crucifix was visible. Surely this order must be a rich and powerful one; albeit a trifle worldly; perchance akin to those societies of Malta and Cyprus whose licentiousness and extravagance is the scandal of the world.

As I thus mused there fell upon my ears the sounds of sonorous chanting that swelled symphonically from somewhere far below. Its measured cadence rose and fell solemnly as if it were borne from a distance incredible to human ears. It was subtly disturbing; I could distinguish neither words nor phrases that I knew, but the potent rhythm bewildered me. It welled, a malefic rune, fraught with insidious strange suggestion. Abruptly it ceased, and I breathed unconsciously a sigh of relief. But not an instant during

the remainder of my sojourn was I wholly free from the spark of unease generated by the far-distant sound of that nameless, measured chanting from below.

2

NEVER have I eaten a stranger meal than that which I partook of at the monastery of the abbot Henricus. The banquet hall was a triumph of ostentatious adornment. The meal took place in a vast chamber whose lofty eminence rose the entire height of the building to the arched and vaulted roof. The walls were hung with tapestries of purple and blood-royal, emblazoned with devices and escutcheons of noble, albeit to me unknown, significance. The banquet table itself extended the length of the chamber —at one end unto the double doors through which I had entered from the stairs; the other end was beneath a hanging balcony under which was the scullery entrance. About this vast festal board were seated some two-score churchmen in cowls and gabardines of black, who were already eagerly assailing the multitudinous array of foodstuffs with which the table was weighted. They scarcely ceased their gorging to nod a greeting when the abbot and I entered to take our place at the head of the table, but continued to devour rapaciously the wonderful array of victuals set before them, accomplishing this task in a most unseemly fashion. The abbot neither paused to motion me to my seat nor to intone a blessing, but immediately followed the example of his flock and proceeded directly to stuff his belly with choice titbits before my astounded eyes. It was certain that these Flemish barbarians were far from fastidious in their table habits. The meal was accompanied by uncouth noises from the mouths of the feasters; the food was taken up in the fingers and the untasted remains cast upon the floor; the common decencies were often ignored. For a moment I was dumfounded, but natural politeness came to my rescue, so that I fell to without further ado.

Half a dozen of the black servants glided silently about the board, replenishing the dishes or bearing platters filled with new and still more exotic viands. My eyes beheld marvels of cuisine upon golden platters—verily, but pearls were cast before swine! For these cowled and hooded brethren, monks though they were, behaved like abominable boors. They wallowed in every kind of fruit—great luscious cherries, honeyed melons, pomegranates and grapes, huge plums, exotic apricots, rare figs and dates. There were huge cheeses, fragrant and mellow; tempting soups; raisins, nuts, vegetables, and great smoking trays of fish, all served with ales and cordials that were as potent as the nectar of nepenthes.

During the meal we were regaled with music from unseen lutes, wafted from the balconies above; music that triumphantly swelled in an ultimate crescendo as six servitors marched solemnly in, bearing an enormous platter of massy, beaten gold, in which reposed a single haunch of some smoking meat, garnished with and redolent of aromatic spices. In profound silence they advanced and set down their burden in the center of the board, clearing away the giant candelabra and smaller dishes. Then the abbot rose, knife in hand, and carved the roast, the while muttering a sonorous invocation in an alien tongue. Slices of meat were apportioned to the monks of the assemblage on silver plates. A marked and definite interest was apparent in this ceremony; only politeness restrained me from questioning the abbot as to the significance of the company's behavior. I ate a portion of my meat and said nothing.

To find such barbaric dalliance and kingly pomp in a monastic order was indeed curious, but my curiosity was regrettably dulled by copious imbibing of the potent wines set before me at the table, in beaker, bumper, flask, flagon, and bejeweled cup. There were vintages of every age and distillation; curious fragrant potions of marvelous headiness and giddy sweetness that affected me strangely.

The meat was peculiarly rich and sweet. I washed it down with great drafts from the wine-vessels that were now freely circulating about the table. The music ceased and the candle-glow dimmed imperceptibly into softer luminance. The storm still crashed against the walls without. The liquor sent fire through my veins, and queer fancies ran riot through my addled head.

I sat almost stupefied when, the company's trenchermannish appetites being at last satisfied, they proceeded, under influence of the wine, to break the silence observed during the meal by bursting into the chorus of a ribald song. Their mirth grew, and broad jests and tales were told, adding to the merriment. Lean faces were convulsed in lascivious laughter, fat paunches quivered with jollity. Some gave way to unseemly noise and gross gesture, and several collapsed beneath the table and were carried out by the silent blacks. I could not help but contrast the scene with that in which I would have figured had I reached Vironne to take my meal at the board of my brother, the good curé. There would be no such noisome ribaldry there; I wondered vaguely if he was aware of this monastic order so close to his quiet parish.

Then, abruptly, my thoughts returned to the company before me. The mirth and song had given place to less savory things as the candles dimmed and deepening shadows wove their webs of darkness about the banquet board. Talk turned to vaguely alarming channels, and cowled faces took on a sinister aspect in the wan and flickering light. As I gazed bemused about the board, I was struck by the peculiar pallor of the assembled faces; they shone whitely in the dying light as with a distorted mockery of death. Even the atmosphere of the room seemed changed; the rustling draperies seemed moved by unseen hands; shadows marched along the walls; hobgoblin shapes pranced in weird processional over the groined arches of the ceiling. The festal board looked bare and denuded—dregs of wine besmirched the linen; half-eaten viands covered the table's expanse; the gnawed bones on the plates seemed grim reminders of mortal fate.

THE conversation was ill-suited to further my peace of mind—it was far from the pious exhortations expected of such a company. Talk turned to ghosts and enchantments; old tales were told and infused with newer horror; legends recounted in broken whispers; hints of eldritch potency passed from wine-smeared lips in tones sepulchrally muted.

I sat somnolent no longer; I was nervous with an increasing apprehension greater than I had ever known. It was almost as if I *knew* what was about to happen when at last, with a curious smile, the abbot began his tale and the monkish presences hushed their whispers and turned in their places to listen.

At the same time a black entered and deposited a small covered platter before his master, who regarded the dish for a moment before continuing his introductory remarks.

It was fortunate (he began, addressing me) that I had ventured here to stay the evening, for there had been other travelers whose nocturnal sojournings in these

woods had not reached so fortunate a termination. There was, for example, the legendary "Devil's Monastery." (Here he paused and coughed abstractedly before continuing.)

According to the accepted folk-lore of the region, this curious place of which he spoke was an abandoned priory, deep in the heart of the woods, in which dwelt a strange company of the Undead, devoted to the service of Asmodeus. Often, upon the coming of darkness, the old ruins took on a preternatural semblance of their vanished glory, and the old walls were reconstructed by demon artistry to beguile the passing traveler. It was indeed fortunate that my brother had not sought me in the woods upon a night like this, for he might have blundered upon this accursed place and been bewitched into entrance; whereupon, according to the ancient chronicles, he would be seized, and his body devoured in triumph by the ghoulish acolytes that they might preserve their unnatural lives with mortal sustenance.

All this was recounted in a whisper of unspeakable dread, as if it were somehow meant to convey a message to my bewildered senses. It did. As I gazed into the leering faces all about me I realized the import of those jesting words, the ghastly mockery that lay behind the abbot's bland and cryptic smile.

The Devil's Monastery . . . subterrene chanting of the rites to Lucifer . . . blasphemous magnificence, but never the sign of the cross . . . an abandoned priory in the deep woods . . . wolfish faces glaring into my own . . .

Then, three things happened simultaneously. The abbot slowly lifted the lid of the small tray before him. ("Let us finish the meat," I think he said.) Then I screamed. Lastly came the merciful thunder-clap that precipitated me, the laughing monks, the abbot, the platter and the monastery into chaotic oblivion.

When I awoke I lay rain-drenched in a ditch beside the mired pathway, in wet garments of black. My horse grazed in the forest ways near by, but of the abbey I could see no sign.

I staggered into Vironne a half-day later, and already I was quite delirious, and when I reached my brother's home I cursed aloud beneath the windows. But my delirium lapsed into raving madness when he who found me there told me where my brother had gone, and his probable fate, and I swooned away upon the ground.

I can never forget that place, nor the chanting, nor the dreadful brethren, but I pray to God that I can forget one thing before I die: that which I saw before the thunderbolt; the thing that maddens me and torments me all the more in view of what I have since learned in Vironne. I know it is all true, now, and I can bear the knowledge, but I can never bear the menace nor the memory of what I saw when the abbot Henricus lifted up the lid of the small silver platter to disclose the rest of the meat. . . .

It was the head of my brother.



The Shattered Timbrel

By WALLACE J. KNAPP

A strange tale of a weird surgical operation and its ghastly results

OVER all these ponderous volumes on the desk before me I have pored. Krestenivnikov's *Conditioned Reflexes of the Parietal Lobe*, Ebbingbaum's reprints from *Neurologie Centralblatt*, even the rare *Derangements cérébro-spinales* I have read over and over, seeking a clue. Hopeless. All hopeless. I, whom Schmerzholt, the world's greatest physio-biologist, called the most promising assistant he ever had, face a blank wall.

How I remember our excitement the first few times we performed the modern miracle. Even Schmerzholt's funny little beard danced up and down and his eyes behind their powerful lenses glinted, as the monkey that had actually been dead for two weeks raised its paw to claw at the life-restoring stream pouring into its arteries. If we had been publicity-seekers, the successful culmination of my chief's lifetime of experimenting would have put us on the front page of newspapers all over the world; but for some reason the little German held back.

"*Nein*, Wally, ve are not ready yet."

But Nancy Follett, when I told her about it that night, could not understand the delay.

"Why, darling, bringing the dead back to life! It's wonderful. When people learn about it, someone will be sure to offer you a salary big enough so that we can get married."

"We'll be married without waiting for that, sweetheart," I told her. "and in less than two months. Schmerzholt told me that after he gets back from the Experimental Biologists' Conference in Berlin, he'll give me a month's vacation."

"Marvelous! Let's drive somewhere and do something."

I begged off. The breakneck speed at which she drives that blue roadster of hers is breath-taking for a staid scientist like me. Besides, I wanted to stay there and plan what we'd do for the next two months.

Before Schmerzholt sailed, however, he outlined enough research to keep me busy for a year, not including the time necessary to look after our resurrected monkeys, a job that demanded almost the entire attention of one person; but Jim Briggs, Doctor Briggs with a string of letters after his name, even if he is younger than I, told him not to worry.

Still, my duties did cut into the time I had hoped to spend with Nancy. When you are trying to grow a cutaneous tissue synthetically, and need to add a drop of some solution or other every half-hour for ten days, there's little chance of covering much country, even with a speed demon like Nancy for a driver. She's unhappy unless she's hitting fifty miles or better; but that, I suppose, is what I should expect from the red-headed elf who was so soon to marry me.

We scientists are agnostics about telepathy, waiting the results of further investigation. But I know how uneasy I felt around the laboratory that afternoon.

Nothing went right. One of the monkeys ended the state of coma in which it had existed ever since before Schmerzholt's departure, by dying. The howling of the dogs we use for experimental purposes got more on my nerves than usual. And the shrill telephone ring so startled me that I dropped the pan of analine I was carrying across the operating-room.

Briggs was nearest the phone, but he just stood there looking at me and at the spreading red pool on the spotless tile.

I reached the phone first. The voice was breathless and choked as it asked for Doctor Knapp. I licked my dry lips and answered.

"Oh, Doctor, there's been an accident, a terrible accident. Miss Follett is——"

"Dead?" I rasped. "Where? When?"

WE BEAT the ambulance to the scene of the auto wreck. Nancy's blue car still remained rammed against a tree, but the farmer in the neighboring house and the two occupants of the truck that had been hugging the wrong side of the turn had pulled her out of the wreck and laid her on a blanket.

It seemed impossible to believe she was dead, but though she had not a cut or a visible bruise, her heart had stopped beating. I was bent over her when the ambulance clanged up. I pushed back the doctor. No hands but mine should touch her. If anything remained to be done for her—that gave me the idea. My choking cry brought Briggs to his knees beside me.

"What is it, Wally?" he demanded.

"We've got to get her to the laboratory."

At first the ambulance driver refused. It was his duty to take her to the hospital, but I insisted. Afterward he testified in court that I threatened to kill him. I don't know, but it ended with his driving and with me in the rear, my arms about Nancy and my voice screaming for more speed.

By myself I took her to our operating-room, immaculate except for the angry red spot on the tile, like a little lake of blood.

Briggs, arriving afterward, said he pounded for ten minutes on the locked door before he made me hear and let him in. Then he gasped. On the operating-table, covered by a surgical sheet, lay the dead body of the girl I had expected to marry.

"What are you going to do, Wally?" he cried.

"We've brought animals back to life," I told him. "I'm going to revive Nancy."

"You're out of your head."

"Maybe, but science saved monkeys. Science is going to save my sweetheart or I'm through with it for ever. And you're going to help me."

I caught him as he was sidling out of the room. Vainly he protested. I demanded his help. Mine would be the responsibility, but alone I could not do what I planned. Finally he sterilized me and buttoned me into my operating-gown, though still protesting.

"But look here," I thundered. "Every doctor in the land would pronounce her dead, wouldn't they?"

He tried Nancy's pupillary reflex.

"She's dead," he admitted.

"And unless we do something, she'll remain dead. So if we can do anything at all for her, she'll be better off than now."

As we rigged up the teeter board, I could see that though he said nothing, he was set against what I proposed to do, but I went ahead. I bound the girl I loved to a sort of seesaw; then, biting my lips, I made my incisions. As I had watched Schmerzholt, so now I pumped in the

epinephrin reagent to stimulate her heart action, the hepatin for its effect on her liver, the leucholchyle for nervous system tone, all in a blood and saline solution from which the coagulating matter had been filtered. And from time to time I glanced up at Briggs, whose eyes, all I could see above his mask, remained fixed on the pulmonamic machine with which he was trying to start her breathing. With his gloved right hand he gently teetered the board back and forth, eight times a minute.

Outside it grew dark. Inside the operating-room, dripping in the air heated to lessen shock, we watched, blinking in the glare of overhead lights. I was dimly conscious of people knocking at the door, but we did not open it. When the telephone bell annoyed me, I hurled a pair of hæmostats at it and sent the apparatus crashing to silence on the tile. And still we watched, feeding the life-giving fluids into the body and waiting for them to take effect.

Yes, waiting, because, somehow, I had no thought of failure. The reason Schmerzholt went to the added expense of buying monkeys for his experiments was because their reactions parallel human reactions. If they had been restored after two weeks of death, Nancy must come back to me.

Briggs called my attention to the blood on my gown, dripping from the lip I had been worrying with my teeth as I worked. But I did not stop to change. Just then, I thought I saw a slight movement of her mouth, but when it was not repeated, I called it a product of my tensed imagination.

It was Briggs who first detected the trembling of Nancy's eyelids. That gave new vigor to our exhausted bodies and we kept on until finally she gave a little moan and slightly moved the hand that wore the engagement ring I had given her.

And then Briggs slumped to the floor.

I could not stop to help him. Even though Nancy had begun to breathe again, slowly, I could not leave her, even for an instant. Not until the black of the windows turned to gray and I knew she was safe did I open the laboratory door. Outside, Mrs. Follett, dry-eyed and gray, sat folding and refolding her handkerchief. I gave her instructions and stumbled to a cot in our smoking-room. I slumped onto it.

When I awoke, I discovered they had moved her to the hospital, since our laboratory had no facilities to care for her. Quickly I drove over, still haggard. The doctor began questioning me, but all I said was that I had given her a blood transfusion to replace what she had lost in the accident. For a moment he looked at me queerly.

"She's still unconscious," was his answer to my question. "From the shock, of course."

The next day I was given the same report. She was, however, as I saw her, resting easier, breathing quicker and with a better color. But it was four days before she opened her eyes, and then those hazel eyes that used to sparkle at me were glazed. When I saw she did not recognize me yet, I soon left.

Mornings and evenings I made my pilgrimage to Nancy's bedside, but when a week passed and still she had not spoken or recognized anyone, the family began to worry. Hour after hour the girl lay unmoving, her lusterless eyes fixed vacantly on the ceiling, saying nothing, apparently hearing nothing. Finally they decided to call in a specialist. I tried to have them put it off until Schmerzholt's arrival, for we were expecting him in ten days, but they were frantic.

THEY made a good choice. I don't suppose there is a neuropathologist of greater skill than Doctor Parker in the Midwest. He made a thorough examination, but I could see how puzzled he was, and while he talked in hopeful generalities to Mr. and Mrs. Follett, to me he acknowledged that he was at sea.

"It looks like pressure on the brain somewhere, but although I've used this new X-ray technique, there isn't the slightest evidence of lesion. Even an injury to the spinal column would partly account for her condition, if we could find any. You found no trace immediately after the accident?"

I assured him that I had no explanation. I still do not know what—except shock—could have stopped her heartbeats without leaving a wound. And so, after promises to keep her under observation, Doctor Parker left and I waited for Schmerzholt.

Finally he arrived, tanned and vivacious, but he sobered instantly when he saw me, and by the time I had told him the whole story, he was so furious that he choked. I had thought that when a scientist like Schmerzholt had devoted a quarter-century to the problem of methods of restoring human life, the acme of delight would be the report of its successful use, but instead he became more enraged than I have ever seen him. He bombarded me with German oaths.

"You fool!" he ended. "*Aber* tell me instantly, how is she?"

"Getting better all the time. She is still dazed, but Doctor Parker thinks——"

"Dazed?" snapped Schmerzholt. "Dazed? Have you from the observation of our monkeys learned nothing, blockhead? Don't you know what to that lovely girl you have done?"

I tried to stammer a question.

"Don't you know," he shrieked, "that the instant blood stops flowing through the brain a chemical change takes place? You revive her body, perhaps, but her brain, what of her brain? Dead! Dead!"

Briggs tried to divert his anger by quoting what I had said to him.

"We thought anything at all that we could do for her would be better than to leave her dead."

The little German whirled on him.

"So? Eh, so you made her—what do they call those Haitian imbeciles?—a zombie? And he—he loves her, so he wants her to live an idiot? A lifetime of torture for everyone? And perhaps you will think you must marry her, *dummkopf*. Look what happens when I go away. If I had been here, I would have broken all the instruments, and chloroformed you, first. If it had not been impossible, do you think I would not have experimented with people? Well, now where are you going?"

After all, what could I say to him? I went out slowly, stopped at the storeroom, and then on to the hospital. There I saw the girl I loved better than anything in the world, as beautiful as ever, but with the dull eyes of an idiot. To my kisses on her fiery hair, her lips, her fingers, she made no response. Then from my pocket I drew a tiny bottle and emptied its few flakes of powder into a glass. In my arms I clasped her as I held it to her lips. The nurse, coming in, found me kissing a corpse.

They kept the name of the poison I used out of the papers, for, after all, if people knew how painlessly death may be summoned, more of them might seek it. But everything else made front page headlines.

THE story I told at my trial was so fantastic that none of the jury believed it. When Briggs testified that Nancy had

been dead in the first place, they thought his words an attempt to shield a friend. From the beginning, I knew there could be only one possible sentence.

But now, as I wait for the death guard, I have only one ambition. Somewhere in one of these ponderous volumes on the desk before me may hide the secret of a way to awaken the brain as it is possible to start heart and lungs functioning. My time on earth is short now, but if I keep looking . . .

What? They are waiting for me in the death chamber? Then I must go. Nancy, you understand. You'll be waiting for me. Nancy! Nancy!

Wharf Watchman

By EDGAR DANIEL KRAMER

When the harbor lights are winkin'
Through the dusk that hides the day,
Though 'tis little folks are thinkin'
That I'm wanderin' away,
Lord, I'm laughin', while I'm roamin'
From the shadow-haunted quays,
An' the stars, white in the gloamin',
Lead me out across the seas.

As upon my rounds I'm goin'
With a lantern in my hand,
There is no one to be knowin',
An' folks wouldn't understand,
If I told them I was sailin'
To be walkin' the bazars,
Where the temple bells are wailin'
To the pale moon an' the stars.

When the harbor bells are cryin'
Through the smother of the mist,
That comes when day is dyin',
I am keepin' an old tryst,
Where the gulls an' winds are screamin',
Where the salt spray stings my lips,
An', contrary to all seemin',
Lord, I'm followin' the ships.

Death in Twenty Minutes

By CHARLES HENRY MACKINTOSH

Doctor Graeme little thought how his death's-head spider plot would redound on his own head—a story about an Egyptian mummy

THIS is exciting . . . waiting here in my darkened study, with only the reading-lamp lighted on my desk, to hear the shrill, harsh cries of the newsboys calling the Extra! He will rate an Extra, surely: the good, the great, the learned Doctor Barrion. That is the measure of fame in our America—to rate an Extra—and Doctor Barrion is—or may I say already, *was?*—famous. A bit too famous, perhaps, for his own health. "We are sorry, Doctor Graeme, but the committee appointed to choose a curator has decided in favor of Doctor Barrion, because of his wide fame as the author of the Amen monographs." He-he-he! Amen monographs! I shall be the one, Doctor Barrion, to write the last of your Amen monographs . . . an end to your growing fame, an end to your career, and to your interference with mine. Amen . . . so let it be!

I wonder whether he is now unwrapping the bitumen bandages from that fine female mummy I so freely contributed to his new curatorship. Always with his own hands, eh?—because of the scarabs and other amulets often wound in with the bandages . . . so tempting to curio-hunters and so easy to abstract! He-he-he! There is one amulet wound in with that mummy's bandages you would have done well to allow some curio-hunter to abstract, Doctor Barrion . . . but it is too late to think of that now, isn't it? One does not lightly change the habits of a lifetime.

It is costing me something, too. My mummy—not a very good mummy, but a genuine one—and one of my two death's-head spiders from Hawaii. It was clever of me to think of my death's-head spider in this connection. It is no larger than a scarab. Strange that so tiny a creature can distill death in twenty minutes! They say it is the only poisonous thing in that Paradise of the Pacific, and very rare even there, found only in the deep woods, where my two specimens were found. Now I have only one.

I may need it for that young snip, Skipsworth, who took so great secret satisfaction in condoling with me upon the committee's decision. That sneer on his face! Damn him and all of them! "And besides, they thought Doctor Barrion had the kindlier, stronger character."—A deliberate insult! Kindlier, maybe—none but weaklings are "kind"—but *stronger!* Well, we shall soon learn who has proved the stronger. I am as strong as Death, Doctor Barrion; strong as Death, and not kind. You will not like your death . . . but then I did not like your life, and I am stronger than you, Doctor Barrion. He-he-he!

Why don't they hurry with that Extra? Surely they won't hold so rare a piece of news for the morning editions. I can't bear to sit here waiting, waiting, till morning—yet I shall if I must. I have waited so many years already . . . surely I can wait through one more night. I wonder what they will make of it, those newspapermen. Of course they will bring in the old idea of a priestly curse upon

tomb-robbers. How mad it always made dear Doctor Barrion to be classed with tomb-robbers! But they will bring that up, of course, for the titillation of their readers' superstitions.

Strange that so practical a people as ours should be so superstitious. We whose duty it is to deal with the long dead, to "rifle" their tombs and to "desecrate" their bodies . . . *we* are not superstitious. We couldn't afford such a luxury as superstition in our business, could we, Doctor Barrion? *We* are not superstitious. We are scientists, you and I, cold, rational *scientists*. He-he-he!

But perhaps even Doctor Barrion will recant during those last twenty minutes! He may rave and sob. He may shriek prayers and promises to the priests of Amen. I wish I could be there to hear. . . . But it is better to wait quietly in my darkened study with my servants below to swear that I have not been out since dinner, if any swearing should be necessary. It won't be. I have planned so surely and so well. No one can connect me with the poor, dear doctor's mysterious death. It will be the curse of Amen-Ra upon a grave-robber! A fine end for you, my dear, famous, imperious colleague!

WAS that a cry from the end of the street? "Wuxtry!" Yes, yes! they are calling the Extra! Oh, come closer, cry! Come closer quickly! Let me hear it clearly, the glad tidings of—what was that? A knock on my study door? But I left the strictest orders I was on no account to be disturbed!

"Is that you, Williams?"

No answer. Strange . . . and annoying that my orders should be disregarded. Yet, on second thought, it may be an additional security, that my voice shall be heard from my locked study. He-he-he! Not bad, that! "Doctor Graeme was in his study with the door locked all evening! I heard his voice . . ." so the good Williams, on the witness stand.

But I am mad to think so! There will be no occasion for any witnesses. No trial. No witnesses. "Death by misadventure." A nice funeral . . . to which I shall go in my Easter Sunday outfit, after sending an appropriate wreath. More expense . . . but it must all be regarded as an investment. The committee can have no other choice than Doctor Graeme *this* time. What's that?

I swear, this waiting has given me the jitters! I thought I heard someone in the room with me . . . but the door is locked; yes, it is *locked,* I say, and no one can get in. Fool! I must get myself a little drink. Here . . . here's to you, Doctor Barrion, wherever, whatever, you are now! *Salve atque vale!*

Good God! How did *you* get in? The door is locked, *locked,* I tell you. I . . . you . . . what is it you want, *Doctor Barrion?* What is that strange phosphorescence about you? Is this some schoolboy trick? What! *You came to bring me back my death's-head spider?* What's that in your hand? The spider? Impossible . . . it's death to the touch! But maybe it is dead. Maybe the bitumen-bandages smothered it. I was afraid of that . . . but what am I saying? I know nothing of any death's-head spider! God! It *isn't* dead! I saw it *move!*

Be careful man, for God's sake! There's *death* in your hand! No . . . no . . . keep it away from me! It's death, I tell you . . . horrible, agonizing death . . . *death in twenty minutes*. . . .



The Supreme Witch*

By G. APPLEBY TERRILL

THE logs that had just been laid on the fire were wet, and as the powerful yellow flames wrapped them round, long, hissing spurts of steam broke the silence.

At the table with its wine-bottles, glasses and candles four men sat—Jacobite conspirators; for they were met in the interests of the Stuart king in exile, James the Third—the Pretender, the Government styled him. The four were: the parson, the messenger from King James, Mr. Gartshore the scrivener, and "Old Jem" Lambardiston, the lord of the manor.

Mr. Gartshore was pondering a question of finance, for an answer to which the others waited. Eventually he spoke:

"Not much above five thousand pounds. Tell his Majesty five thousand guineas."

The messenger made a note; and this concluded the business of the evening. The parson's inclination now was to go. He was ill at ease sitting in Old Jem's house. Nothing short of the Stuart agent's presence in it would have enticed him over the threshold; for not only had he and Old Jem quarreled hotly in the very first hour of their acquaintance, some eighteen months before, rarely speaking since, but Old Jem was reputed to have been a thoroughly bad man all his days, and, in his eighty-seventh year, to be ever ready to gibe at good, to talk with satisfaction of his own misdeeds, and to approve those of others. The only spark in his soul which was not a gleam of evil (it was commonly said) was a sincere wish that James III could be placed on the throne of his fathers.

So far, tonight, the affairs of the exile had fully occupied Old Jem. But, with the deliberations finished, it was not improbable that his tongue would turn in malice to themes and assertions which would sharply wound the parson. At least, thus the parson reasoned; and his ears were alert for an attack as he hesitated betwixt remaining and showing discourtesy to the company by taking his leave.

However, Old Jem tended to be silent. Sunken a little in his chair, he watched the messenger fold his papers. Anon he motioned him to fill his glass; and, draining his own, he blinked, and closed his eyes, breathing thickly.

*From WEIRD TALES for October, 1926.

The parson, though becoming drawn into converse with Mr. Gartshore, looked at his host. Strive as he would, he could feel no touch of that pity which the old so often stir in one; he could feel only detestation for the aged face in repose. Partly encircled by a tumbled, very white peruke, and now colored high by wine, it was, for all its deep lines, fleshy still. The under lip, tinged with purple, hung loose, the mouth seeming to leer lazily; yet, because of the great puckers about it, it was no weak mouth, but ruthless, brow-beating.

"There is a lad in Parliament," said the messenger, buttoning his waistcoat over his papers, "a Mr. Faunce, that spoke cleverly on the witchcraft statutes. We should gain him to our side."

"I have seen to it," said the scrivener. He drank, and put down his glass slowly. "Witchcraft!" he exclaimed, a thrill of anger in his voice. "That is some credit to this year 1736, it hath witnessed the snuffing out of the witchcraft laws—and therefore of witchcraft. For the law, and the law only, made witchcraft. . . . To think that in our day—twenty-five, twenty years back—the law of England was murdering women and little girls for witchcraft! . . . Mr. Parson, sir, I grant you there was witchcraft in Israel. But, declare to me, was there ever such in England?"

"Nay, there was not," answered the parson emphatically.

Old Jem's eyes opened. Faded and watery, they nevertheless bent on the parson a strong, unwavering gaze, and the limp under lip stiffened truculently.

"Take back your nay, parson," he said, "for I have been in witchraft. Ay, I have been in it—head and shoulders in as great a piece of witchcraft as witch ever did—and the place of it no farther off than our town down yonder."

Over his face a shadow came—the kind of shadow that the parson would least have expected to find there. It hinted that once Old Jem had met with something which had appalled even his iron mind.

"In our town?" said the parson. "I have not heard——"

"Certes you have not. 'Twas away back in King Charles' time — nigh to three-score years ago. They who were in it with me are long since dead, and 'twas a thing we had no wish to talk of, and hoped we should forget." Old Jem shook his head, with his lips pursed and his eyes cloudy. "I have forgot no scrap, no jot."

"*Voilà,* then, Mr. Lambardiston," said the messenger, "give us the story."

"No," said Old Jem, taking up his snuff-box. "I would not have spoke this much, but the wiping out of the witch laws by these perky fellows who are too wise to believe in magic hath left me in a fume. And when Gartshore there, and Parson——"

He stopped, surveying the scrivener and parson in turn. "So ye deem it an empty tale, Gartshore, and you too, Parson?" For a few seconds his lips pressed together tightly, his face ever setting harder, decision growing in his eyes, which smoldered with exasperation. "Very well!" he cried; "ye shall have the tale; and if ye will go to the jail tomorrow ye shall find some records that will savor of its truth." He raised himself and leaned forward with his arms on the table.

The messenger breathed "Good!" Mr. Gartshore muttered something apologetic, and the parson's interest vanquished his inclination to go.

"Now listen," said Old Jem.

His voice was wonderfully powerful for his years; and he gave his narrative with an orderliness and ease that were to

be anticipated from one who in the past had been reckoned one of the finest Tory orators in the House of Commons.

"TO BEGIN with," he said, "I must go back to the year '67—1667, when I was a lad of seventeen. Witchcraft trials were frequent enough thenadays, as you do know; and at the autumn assize here we had the case of a woman who lived in this very town. Her name was Shafto—Ellen Shafto. She was a widow whose man had been killed in the great Four Days Fight with the Hollander fleet. She had two young children, a boy and a girl, and was of no ripe age herself, say, twenty-eight. And a pretty woman she was, dark-haired, slim, and smiling, with a sweet curve to the jaw and a taking poise of the head—as I had begun to note. But, despite her prettiness and her poverty, she was known as a very honest woman. Having been, ere she came hither, needle-maid to some modish madam, she kept herself and her children by sewing for the gentlefolk roundabout here.

"Now there was another woman—I forget how called—who was her neighbor and did work of a like kind; and betwixt her and Mrs. Shafto jealousy and quarreling arose.

"After a while it chanced that this woman's right hand and arm became swelled, so that she was sorely pained and could not sew. Old Doctor Peters, the leech, could in no wise get rid of the swelling and was puzzled to discover a cause for it.

"A bruit spread that Mrs. Shafto had bewitched the arm, accomplishing this by standing at her window with a silk kirtle across her own arm and her eyes held on the other woman's house. At her trial, under threat of torture, Mrs. Shafto pleaded guilty and was sentenced to be hanged.

"Now mark this well. She was to be hanged in the market-place, opposite the Red Bull inn. On the morning a great and savage crowd was gathered there, groaning and yelling and bent to seize her ere she reached the gallows-tree and to give her a rougher death than by the rope. For witchcraft is a crime that oft will drive a populace to a frenzy.

"I was looking on from the Red Bull, ill enough pleased by the scene—being young, and the witch so comely; and close on nine o'clock, the hour for the hanging, everything appeared the horrider to me because of the strange quality of the daylight. It was November—for the assize had come late. The sun was but little risen, and shone weakly through a gap it had melted in the thick murk which floated over us. The market-place was partly shadows and partly a blotch of queer, heavy, yellow light, wherein the faces of those who tiptoed to see if Mrs. Shafto were near—faces with teeth showing and eyes wide open—had the look of waxen masks.

"Of a sudden the bell in the clockhouse commenced to ring nine. The multitude was stricken silent on the instant. All were bewildered because Mrs. Shafto was not come. But presently we caught the sound of a huge, angry cry from near the jail. And soon it was known that the sheriff, aware of what the mob intended, had called Ralph Timmins, the hangman, to him and bidden him hang Mrs. Shafto privily, which he did forthwith in her cell, putting the rope over a beam.

"My father, who was in the jail with the sheriff, told me afterwards that neither the sheriff nor he went to see the execution done. They stood with divers others in the passage by the main door, it being

well-nigh dark save where a flood of the dull, yellow light fell, this coming to them through the window of a room whereof the door, opening upon the passage, was swung wide back.

"And anon, my father said, Ralph Timmins walked down the stone stairs to them, and was near to falling at the last step on account of the gloom; and saluting the sheriff, he quoth: 'Sir, I have put the young witch away, as your worship bid.' "

Old Jem stopped to pour some wine. Presently the scrivener asked:

"And the woman's arm?"

"Mended from that day," said Old Jem. "Oh, Ellen Shafto was a witch, doubt it not; and maybe her power was far vaster than she showed. But she is not the witch of my tale—the supreme witch that was more potent than a score of Ellens.

"Now harken again:

"It was, I said, in '67 that Ellen Shafto was hanged. For the next twelve years I came but little to these parts, but, my father dying in '79, I removed hither from London.

"In a short while I learned that Ellen Shafto's children, the lad now aged twenty-one and the girl eighteen, still dwelt near the town; and one day I met this girl in the street. I knew her as soon as I saw her, for she woke my recollection of her mother. She was younger, fresher, even slighter, but she had the same dark curls, the same sweet curve of the jaw, the same alluring poise of the head. Only in the expression of her face did she differ much. The mother was wont to be smiling, the daughter's lips pouted (though in a pretty fashion), and her eyebrows, with the line of a little frown between them, warned one of a temper.

"I stopped her, asking her name—which she told me was Nora—and inquiring how she and her brother lived.

"Shyly, but giving me no further curtsy than that with which she had halted, she said that her brother had received a gift of money from the lady in London in whose service their mother had been. With this money he had leased a trifle of land, which he farmed, and she dwelt with him.

"I spoke with her for several minutes, and had meant to drop a couple of guineas into her palm; but I noted a stormy sparkle in her eyes when the coins clinked in my pocket, so I let them fall back; and I lifted not my fingers to her chin as I turned away—from memory of that stormy sparkle.

"But there and then I was mightily in love with Nora Shafto; and I knew that the winning of her was now to be the aim of my life, and that she would fight me hard."

OLD Jem's eyes, which seemed growing dimmer and dimmer as he lost himself more surely in the past, half lit for a moment and swept to the parson—who discovered straightway, to the discomfiture of his conscience, that in one thing at least he had estimated Old Jem unjustly.

"I ask your pardon, Parson," quoth Old Jem, "for what I shall say next. But to give you a full understanding of my story I must speak plainly."

His eyes moved from the parson.

"As I said, I was mightily in love with Nora Shafto. I had no thought to marry her—though when 'twas too late I would have wed her a dozen times over if that could have brought her to me. That she was a witch's daughter, and might be a witch herself, was naught to me. I was the sort of man who would have enjoyed

to wed a witch for the fun of it—were she a witch of birth. But I was not the sort of man to wed a needle-woman's daughter—were she white-souled as an angel.

"And certes, Nora Shafto was that, so far as accepting my love was concerned. She *could* have loved me. For a brief while, during which she let me speak often with her, I saw her affection for me grow—grow radiant—burn forth. But that was before she knew I meant not marriage. Afterwards—for months afterwards, I followed her, waylaid her, besought her, vainly. The flame which had burned was dead. I offered her what she would—gems by the handful, gold and more gold, till she had the chance to beggar me well-nigh! She answered nay to all; not even a kiss did I get from her save a flick of one which I snatched.

"That was by the horse-pool below the town, of an evening in May of '80. I had intercepted my young paragon, and most lovely was she to see, a-stand with her head thrown back and her color bright, holding me at a distance with her look. The frowning line was plain betwixt her eyebrows, her eyes were all anger, and there were revealed—one near each nostril—two little stern furrows which somehow made her face appear old without taking away its youthfulness—a strange blending that was hauntingly beautiful.

"But of late her tongue and manner had so scathed me that I could keep my temper only by the hardest effort. And this evening, being presently jabbed by a retort from her, I exclaimed:

" 'Nora, verily you are a little spite! You answer nothing but bitterness and spite to all I say, and I have never spoke a word to you that was not love and gentleness—till now.'

"She was in no way disconcerted by my new tone. She seemed rather to feel braced and of better self-assurance by reason of it. There was less anger in her face, and a good deal more of bold contempt, which is a thing to make one seethe, coming from a person of low birth.

" 'Ay, you were very gentle, Mr. Lambardiston—thinking to fill my ears with toys,' said she, using a common phrase of the time. 'Farthing toys,' she added, her eyes most scornful.

" 'Farthing toys is a lie,' I said. 'And that you know well.' I strove to master myself. 'Nora, I promised—I promise, to put round your fingers, round your neck, round your pretty curls, toys worth the ransom of this town. . . . You will do all the gaining, I shall do all the spending——'

"She moved her shoulders quickly, lifting her chin higher and looking deliberately away from me.

" 'Ay, that's your sleek prating,' she said in a slow, loathing way,—'you will do all the spending! . . . And you blamed me for a liar! *You—that will do all the spending!* . . . Oh!' cried she, looking back to me—and I saw in her eyes that she hated me—'Oh, why doth it not choke you—that damned lie? *You* will spend some bits of gold, but *I*—*I* must spend my soul—my soul! . . . Mr. Lambardiston whines to me to buy him a little diversion —*with my soul.* "Let us two voyage through loveland," quoth he. And *I* am to pay for his voyage—*with my soul!* Faugh! you blackguard cur!'

"Nora Shafto was ready with words, and her voice was of a better-bred quality than fitted her station—for after her mother's hanging a lady of the district had taken her into her house and cared for her well until her own death. But this denouncement had more barbed wit than anything she had given me yet—and it smarted me mightily; though I covered

this with a laugh, deeming that a kiss would be ample amends for the invective, and determining that this instant I would take it.

"There was a horseman riding slowly up the lane towards us, but I cared not for him, and stepped across to Nora with a word of my intent. I noted that, instead of seeking to dart aside, she put her hand to the basket of flower roots, dug from the hedge, which she was carrying; and then my hands clapped on her shoulders and my lips touched a corner of her mouth as she jerked it past me.

"She stamped swiftly on my foot—I wore but shoes—threw off one of my hands, whirled, and got free, the basket dropping to the ground and emptying forth its plants. From amid these she whipped up a dull, stout knife.

" 'So that is Mr. Lambardiston!' she gasped. 'Mr. Lambardiston—of the great gentry that visit the law on poor folk. Mr. Lambardiston, that was made deputy sheriff a se'nnight since. An attacker of maids!' She showed me the knife. 'I want you to try again,' she said; 'for yonder comes a gentleman that shall swear I killed you fairly.'

"I had a good mind to try again. But the fellow on horseback had flipped up his nag, and was trotting forward all a-grin; and I had no sword with which to stay him from interference, whereas a very long iron was jogging by his leg. Withal, as Nora had fleered, I was deputy sheriff, and could not but cut an unseemly figure in the affair, which, by an argument with the arriving knave, might be much noised.

"So I turned from her, limping with my hurt foot.

" 'You witch's jade!' I said; 'you have the black temper of a witch yourself.'

"I heard her draw in her breath at that. I heard her move, as though she meditated to cast herself on my back. But then she spoke mockingly:

" 'I knew it!' cried she. 'I knew your brute's mouth would go to my poor mother. . . . Oh, ay, I have a witch's temper, Mr. Lambardiston, and witch's craft enough to keep myself out of your hands however you strive.'

"At this last idle saying—as I deemed it—I faced about for a moment and quietly bade her cease from dangerous words of witchcraft. For though I never would have repeated them to her harm, the horseman was now within earshot.

"Having given which warning, I went home.

"Two days afterwards her brother, Francis Shafto, a big, dour-visaged fellow, placed himself surlily, with extreme impudence, in my path as I was entering the town. He threatened that if I so much as spoke to Nora henceforth, he would so beat me with his cudgel that I should lie abed for many a week; and he added 'twas his belief no magistrate or judge would do other than hold him justified in this.

"It was plain that I must have him cleared out of the place. I wrote that same day to a friend, captain of a second-rate of the navy; and a week after this, half a dozen sailors went to Shafto's farm and impressed Master Francis for the sea—most lawlessly, I confess.

"Hearing that he was taken off, with Nora left swooning from the fury with which she had struggled to tear him from the sailors, I felt I had done cleverly. His release would be an additional bribe to offer Nora. . . .

"I had not done cleverly; I had done fatally.

"THE first hint I got of the truth was a report that the seamen, on their road to the coast with Francis Shafto, had been charged into by a vicious bull. Then followed the news that no bull had attacked them, but a black filly, which, bursting suddenly through a gate, had raced straightway upon them and, biting, lashing, trampling, like a fiend, had badly torn one man, broken the leg of another, and killed a third outright. Francis Shafto, whose hands were tied because of fight he had made at the farm, was the first to be knocked down, but was not harmed by the beast, which presently, setting her teeth in his coat, began to drag him away; but a sailor, who by now had drawn his whinger, struck her on the shoulder, whereat she dropped Shafto and clattered off fast.

"I was starting forth for London when I had these tidings. Beyond being somewhat pleased that Shafto was unhurt, I was little interested. But returning hither a few days later to renew matters with Nora, I was prettily astounded to find that she was in jail, accused of having changed herself into a black filly and slain a sailor with the hope to rescue her brother.

"I will tell you what was evidenced against her. The filly, when driven off by the blow from the whinger, was seen again by no man, nor was anyone in the countryside to be found who owned her or remembered to have seen her. At the time of the onset Nora was a day gone from home, having told her friends that she would privily follow the press-party and, it might be, persuade some folk to attack it for her. She came back on the day after the filly's attack. She was very wearied and draggled and white, *and in great pain from a cut across her shoulder,* which had been done, she said, by striking against a fence in the dark.

"Now the tale of the filly and the whinger had reached here before her; and, everyone knowing of her mother, tongues were already a-wag. It needed but the cut on Nora's shoulders to set the town mad with excitement. Never had there been so clear a case of a child inheriting evil magic! And the strength of this magic in Nora! She was a far more dangerous witch than ever her mother was. The magistrates were clamored at to commit her to prison, and this was done ere she had been home many hours—a crowd lingering about the jail till nearly midnight, roaring and threatening to break in to her, and everyone saying that no man could account himself safe while she were alive.

"I knew not whether to believe Nora a witch or to flout the notion, but I did know one thing—she should be neither hanged nor harmed, if my influence could shield her; and I was very certain it could.

"Forthwith, using my sheriff powers, I proclaimed penalties against any that should make a turmoil outside the jail; and I called out and stationed therein a score of train-bandmen, armed to the eyelids. I used the rough of my tongue to the magistrates who had caused the arrest and detention of Nora instead of flogging the mob that had clamored against her.

"And then I went to Nora.

"My purpose was to dispel her fears at once, to tell her that I would see she was not put on trial at the assize, that indeed I would get her freed ere the week was out. And as I strode with the chief turnkey to her cell I was sure she would read much of this in my face, and, in her relief and gratitude, give me a kinder welcome than of late.

"When the fellow had unbarred the door, I bade him begone to a distance,

and, swinging back the door myself, I entered the cell.

"Nora greeted me with a gasp of her breath, with stormshine in her eyes. Despite that I came to a standstill, she moved, facing me, to the far wall. Leaning against it, with her head held back and touching it, she commenced to rage at me, her voice low for the most part, yet often thrown hither and thither by her passion—the palms of her hands now and again beating upon the wall.

"What need to tell you her speech? 'Twas the old tale of hate over again, yet now twice as bitter, with its accusation that I had planned her brother's carrying-off, whereby I was responsible for the pass she was come to.

"For a space she would heed no word of mine. But anon she began to listen to my protest that I would avert all peril from her—obtain her quick release. While harkening, she seemed to cool fast from her rage, her palms lying quite still against the wall, her eyes lacking luster. Her face had become wooden, as the saying is. This I little liked.

" 'For your favor,' she said, on my pausing, 'I am to love you? Is that the compact?'

" 'Scarce a compact,' I answered. 'I am not so mean a man I will not save you unless you shall love me. No, no, Nora; yet I shall hope you will change to me; and mark you this—if you do, your brother shall swiftly be libertied from the navy.'

" 'Ah-h,' she said softly, a dreaminess in her eyes—eyes that were much my study when I was with her; they were so fluent of expression, so beautiful. 'Ah-h,' she said, 'in truth—in truth, there is no villain worse than you in all this villain world! For see, you are high-placed, with my poor life and my brother's much in your power; wherefore you should be of stern honor, Mr. Lambardiston—should you not?—that we and such as we could ever trust you. But what are you?' She breathed between her set teeth with a hissing sound. 'If my mother's spirit is here beside me,' she said, 'of which I am very sure, what must she think of you? Have you no whit of shame, striving to break me in the room where my mother doubtless stands?'

" 'Why doubtless here?' I asked.

"She looked upwards. Following her glance, I saw above us a balk of dark oak spanning the cell. I exclaimed loudly; for I was moved by the cruel thoughtlessness which had caused Nora to be placed in the very room in which her mother was hanged.

" 'You shall be taken out of this,' I said, making a step to summon the turnkey.

"But far from thanking me, she brought me to a halt by declaring she would liefer remain, and would entreat Mr. Palmer, the governor of the jail, to put her back in this cell, did I have her removed.

"The dreaminess had gone from her eyes, but for some seconds it came again. I could not tell whether she spoke chiefly to me or to herself when she said:

" 'I do remember my mother very well, though I had her for so little a time. She was a dear, sweet mother, and I know doth yearn to hearten me now that I am accused as she was. . . . I think I am more near to her in this room than I could be elsewhere on earth.' Her voice sank, becoming a moan, soft—scarce unhappy. 'I have wanted my mother. None knows how much! She was all tender love, and the world is loneliness and cruel as stone. I shall be glad to go away to my mother, though I would it were not by the hangman.'

"Then her eyes, meeting mine squarely, lit of a sudden. There was a quick rousing of her mind and body. She started from the wall and bent towards me. 'But rather would I go by hanging, rather by the roasting-post, than come to you—you sneaking dog! Ay, an hundred times rather!'

"It was clear she could not be reasoned with that day. I turned on my heel, wasting no more words; and, walking from the jail, I decided that my best plan would be to seem to abandon her until she had been put in greater fright than she was in at present. I would let her stand her trial, which I doubted not would result in her condemnation; and then I would secure a pardon."

Old Jem sipped from his glass. Setting it down, he relapsed in his chair and clasped his hands, without having looked at any of his auditors. His gaze brooded darkly on the wall opposite him.

"She was tried at the summer assize. She pleaded 'not guilty', and was not threatened with torture to make her alter that. For the judge was old Jack Phillips, no firm believer in witchcraft—as his words to the jury showed. But the jury took only a few minutes to find her guilty; and she was condemned to be hanged in the market-place, where her mother was to have been flung off.

"Already I had arranged almost fully about getting the pardon; and after the case Jack Phillips threw in his weight with me; and I had the pardon in my hands with forty hours to spare. But I meant to bring Nora fairly to the ground, with no fight left in her, this time. I had charge of the execution—Holden, the sheriff, being bedridden—and I intended to say naught of the pardon until my pretty one was within a few minutes of being carted forth to the gibbet, and the uproar of the mob, sounding from the market-place, should tell her that, outside the prison, she would have no safety, despite her pardon, except she drove forth with me and my train-bandmen and lodged in my house.

"I would forbid any sheltering of her in the jail. And by a gift of drink to the mob I should have inflamed it to an extraordinary ferocity, such as, in her stubbornest hate of me, she could not dream to face. Oh, I had Miss Nora in a rare trap from which there was no escape but into my doorway.

"With her pardon under my pillow, I slept complacent of mind through the night which she would deem to be her last.

"I STARTED for the jail early in the morning—the clearest, sweetest July morning I had ever known, with the hills beyond the woods wondrous outstanding and gleaming in the sunlight. I went afoot to enjoy the air, having ordered my coach to be at the jail for my return with Nora.

"Her hanging was to be at nine, opposite the Red Bull. Passing behind the market-place, I felt the air a-tremble from the vast confusion of voices coming thence; and at intervals these uplifted in a shout of execration against her that nigh stunned one—which noise reaching me as I paused before the jail to warn a group of persons that I should permit no gathering there, was like the tumbling down of thousands of planks of wood.

"I smiled to think what a tempest would burst when the news of the pardon spread (I had increased my train-bandmen to fifty), and to think what indignation would be shown by sundry gentlemen who were to meet me in the jail—when it was disclosed to them that the pardon (which they would have expected instant tidings of) was by no means newly

arrived. These same gentlemen—Palmer the governor, Captain Jones and Sir Hugh Gerrow, justices—were prone to take offense at my high-handed acts, as they termed them.

"However, I saw not how the latter two received the tidings; for about half after eight, they being not yet come, I informed Palmer, bidding him tell them, and went up to Nora's cell. On my way I met Ralph Timmins, the hangman, who had put her mother to death by means of the beam in the cell. He was an oldish man now, with his thin beard streaked white and brown.

" 'There be a riot of howling in the market-square, your worship,' said he. ' 'Tis as it was in her mother's time, or worse, I'd affirm.' He rubbed his chin with his knuckles. 'A queer, sad business, sir—these two. Both so pretty to look on and like as a pair o' pink roses.'

" 'You will have no hanging today, Ralph,' I answered; 'she is pardoned. But you shall nothing lose in fees.' Unwilling to stay even long enough to get out some gold for him, because of my eagerness to greet Nora, I added: 'Wait for me below.'

"The door of Nora's cell was open, two turnkeys standing by the threshold. I gestured them away and walked in. I could perceive that Nora had gone white at the sound of my approach. Perchance she knew not my step—thought one was come to take her to the cart. When I confronted her the color began to come again to her cheeks; and the line of the little frown between her eyebrows was deeper than I had ever discerned it. She held herself rigid, the fingers of one hand gripping motionlessly a cluster of her dark curls.

"Well, I showed her the pardon. I lifted my finger, telling her to listen to the outcry in the market-place, which was borne to us; and I explained to her that only by taking refuge in my house could she preserve herself from the savage anger of the town. Not until that last did her face lose its stoniness, did her eyes cease from looking balefully into mine.

"She raised them towards the beam; her fingers twitched amid her curls. 'Oh, my mother—mother! mother!' she said, her lips so quivering that I believed she would fall to sobbing.

" 'Now, come at once with me, Nora,' I said gently.

"She gave but one sob, a strange, sighing one, and her gaze returned to me.

" 'What if I ask Mr. Palmer to harbor me here?'

" 'I will not allow him.'

" 'I had wagered that—bully of every man!' Then she spoke with greater steadiness. 'You believe you are the winner betwixt us, but I believe I quoth true when I said I had witch's craft enough to keep myself out of your hands.'

" 'Come,' I said.

"She took her fingers from her curls and pointed to the pardon. 'Until that is given to Mr. Palmer, his warranty to release me, you can not force me to stir, or force any man to stir me, bully whom you shall. And I will not stir except Mr. Palmer comes hither to bid me, or Mr. Drew doth bid me.'

"Drew was the chief turnkey, one of the two who had been conversing with her. He had been present at her mother's death, and—I suspect—had been pitying to the daughter.

"Frail though Nora's argument was, I made no dispute. I should get her more quickly to my coach by bending to her whim. I started immediately to go down to Palmer, beckoning to Drew to accom-

(Please turn to page 134)

Coming Next Month

M'GRATH came upon the glade almost before he knew it. The moon hung in the low branches, blood-red, high enough to illumine it and the throng of people who squatted in a vast semicircle about it, facing the moon. Their rolling eyes gleamed milkily in the shadows, their features were grotesque masks. None spoke. No head turned toward the bushes behind which he crouched.

He had vaguely expected blazing fires, a blood-stained altar, drums and the chant of maddened worshippers; that would be voodoo. But this was not voodoo, and there was a vast gulf between the two cults. There were no fires, no altars. But the breath hissed through his locked teeth. In a far land he had sought in vain for the rituals of Zambebwei; now he looked upon them within forty miles of the spot where he was born.

In the center of the glade the ground rose slightly to a flat level. On this stood a heavy iron-bound stake that was indeed but the sharpened trunk of a good-sized pine driven deep into the ground. And there was something living chained to that stake—something which caused McGrath to catch his breath in horrified unbelief.

He was looking upon a god of Zambebwei. Stories had told of such creatures, wild tales drifting down from the borders of the forbidden country, repeated by shivering natives about jungle fires, passed along until they reached the ears of skeptical white traders. McGrath had never really believed the stories, though he had gone searching for the being they described. For they spoke of a beast that was a blasphemy against nature—a beast that sought food strange to its natural species. . . .

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(Continued from page 132)

pany me, so that Palmer could send him back for Nora. Then it came to my mind that her boast anent witch's craft might have some subtle meaning. What if she were planning to kill herself? At once I swung round and went to the entrance of the cell, whither the second turnkey was advancing. Nora stood much as I had left her.

"I intercepted the turnkey, whispered that he should watch her narrowly. Then, giving one more glance at the sweetly molded face and the eyes balefully following me, I rejoined Drew.

"I found Palmer and Jones and Sir Hugh Gerrow standing in a passage within the main door, with Ralph Timmins a yard or two from them waiting expectantly for me. Within a minute Palmer had dispatched Drew to bring Nora to us, and then I had leisure to note that Jones and Gerrow were even more cholerically silent than I had anticipated. I surmised that they had been examining my motive in taking Nora to my house.

"I let them have my back, and gazed along the passage to the stone stairs, looking for Nora to appear round the bend of them. Anon I recollected Ralph Timmins and gave him three guineas, which moved him to very many thanks. These, however, I scarce heeded, for I was watching the stairs again, exasperation growing in me as I realized that Nora was contriving somehow a long delay.

" 'Palmer,' I said presently, 'that girl is making a to-do of sorts—the little ingrate! I beg you go yourself and fetch her.'

"I heard him take a step behind me. But then he spoke to Timmins:

" 'Ralph, go you and tell Drew to hasten with her.'

" 'Ay, go, Ralph,' I said.

TIMMINS mounted the stairs at his sharpest pace. My three guineas were spurring him. Yet when full time enough was passed for him to have reached Drew and one of them be back with Nora, no one came.

" 'They are seeking her hood or dusting her kirtle, or more like she is swooned with happiness,' said Jones, on Palmer himself remarking that Ralph was somewhat long gone.

" 'Nay, tell the truth as it is,' said Gerrow. 'The maid is not over-raptured with Lambardiston. . . . And, deuce take me!' he added, with his spleen coming to the surface, 'I can not tell why we stay to see the meeting of the child and the gentleman.'

"There was a considerable sneer about the last word which whipped my attention pretty smartly from the stairs. I faced round, and was on the point of retorting hotly, when I was diverted by the casting open of a door beside us. Three of my train-bandmen stepped forth from a room. They saluted us, and two of them marched off. The third, a sergeant, paused to shut the door.

" 'Nay, leave it,' said Jones. 'We get some daylight thus. . . . Faith!' he continued, as the sergeant went away, 'how queerly dark it hath grown in this last minute! A storm is on us.'

" ' 'Tis the suddenest thing,' said Gerrow with astonishment. He lifted his cane towards the barred aperture above the main door. 'Not a minute ago the sky yonder was fresh blue, Palmer; I was looking at it. See it now, the smokiest brown I ever beheld'—he broke off with an extraordinary gulp, flicking down his cane and jabbing the end hard upon the paved floor—'I—ever—beheld,' he repeated, sheer amazement in his voice, '*save once*, a wintry morning nigh thirteen

(Please turn to page 136)

BACK COPIES

Because of the many requests for back issues of WEIRD TALES, the publishers do their best to keep a sufficient supply on hand to meet all demands. This magazine was established early in 1923 and there has been a steady drain on the supply of back copies ever since. At present, we have the following back numbers on hand for sale:

1928	1929	1931	1932	1933	1934
----	Jan.	Jan.	Jan.	Jan.	Jan.
----	----	Feb.-Mar.	Feb.	Feb.	Feb.
Mar.	Mar.		----	Mar.	Mar.
----	----	Apr.-May	Apr.	Apr.	Apr.
----	----		----	May	May
----	June	June-July	June	June	June
July	----		July	July	July
Aug.	----	Aug.	Aug.	Aug.	Aug.
----	----	----	Sept.	Sept.	Sept.
Oct.	----	Oct.	Oct.	Oct.	Oct.
Nov.	----	Nov.	Nov.	Nov.	Nov.
Dec.	----	----	Dec.	Dec.	Dec.

These back numbers contain many fascinating stories. If you are interested in obtaining any of the back copies on this list please hurry your order because we can not guarantee that the list will be as complete as it now is within the next 30 days. The price on all back issues is 25c per copy. Mail all orders to:

WEIRD TALES

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years ago, when I stood in this very passage, and Ralph Timmins was gone up to hang this girl's mother—*this girl's mother!* . . . Jones, Palmer, do you mark the marvel of it? Here I stood, with Amphlett the sheriff, and with Harry Lambardiston—Lambardiston's father. And up above there was death for a witch, as there was near to have been for her daughter in this hour—and that up above too, for there would have been dangerous trouble in the market-place had she gone thither. List, you can hear the tumult from it. So we heard it then—and through this doorway——'

"Gerrow moved athwart the room's doorway, and instantly his spare, elderly face was illumined by a sickly, yellow light, which showed him staring with something akin to fear, with his lips working.

" 'Yea, there it is!' he cried, pointing shakily through the doorway. 'There is the selfsame sky that was over us.'

"Now, having been preoccupied by Nora's tardiness, I had not noticed the change to gloom until Jones spoke of it. In my surprize at perceiving how deep an obscurity was about us, save in the yellow light's path, I straightway forgot my anger against Gerrow; and, listening while he spoke of that other morning, I found myself remembering much that my father had said anent their standing in this passage. And when the dull, yellow glow swam over Gerrow's face I recalled vividly indeed how my father had spoken of the yellow light pouring through this very doorway—and in an instant, for no reason that I knew of, I felt my heart cold and heavy.

"I went to Gerrow's side and glanced through the doorway to the window beyond; and at that verily I got a shock. The sky was the sky of the morning when Mrs. Shafto was hanged. *It was that same November sky*—not a similitude made by the overcasting of the July sky. For the sun, seemingly, had fallen back from the height whence it shone as I walked to the jail, and was little risen; and it shone feebly through a gap molten in the thick murk—just as it had when I looked on it from the Red Bull in my boyhood. Its turbid light then had rendered Mrs. Shafto's coming death increasedly dreadful to me; but now, ere I had gazed on it five seconds, there slid over me a horror—on this morning when no execution was to be done!—a hundredfold worse than that which qualmed me when execution really was to be.

" 'Gerrow!' I breathed; and I looked at him.

"He was gripping his chin tightly. His eyes were expanding, vacant. His mien was that of one dismayed to stupefaction by something he has discovered.

" ' 'Tis thirteen years ago,' he said, slurredly, for his grip was hampering his mouth. 'This day is thirteen years ago—we are in November, '67. . . . How can it be?'

" 'Gerrow!' I cried.

"His vacant eyes sought me. A startled glitter sprang up in them. He gaped, taking his hand from his chin and holding it, limp-fingered, towards me.

" 'Lambardiston,' he said, 'how like to your father you are! Why—why, *you are he!* Harry—Harry Lambardiston, old friend!'

"His hand dropped in affection on my shoulder. I clasped his arm to push it away, but I heard Jones speak to Palmer, and his words arrested me in the act.

" 'Palmer,' he quoth heavily, 'my dear cousin, Ned Olpherts, is dead at last of the wounds the French gave him at Martinique.'

"Well did I know that Jones' cousin, Olphert, lingering with wounds received when fighting under Admiral Harman at Martinique, had died in November, '67.

"Palmer replied not, except to mumble of the fort at Tangier, and of the Moormen—seeming to believe himself in Africa, where once he had served.

"And then from the clockhouse began to ring forth the hour of nine.

"I clutched hard on Gerrow's arm; for, though the sounds were not very near us, each stroke seemed to club my senses; and, what with the horrid yellow light, I was become giddy—helplessly giddy. And bemused too was I, in the strangest fashion, during a space. For, having reeled against a wall, pulling Gerrow with me, I leaned there thinking that my weakness and unaccountable dread were disgraceful to me who had gained such a repute for stout courage at the fight on Long Marston Moor; and full a minute must have passed ere I remembered that it was my father who fought at Long Marston—six years before I was born.

"I thrust Gerrow's arm from me. Still leaning, I noted that the others stood very quiet, their faces set in a wholly bewildered expression, yet their eyes restless, in a lethargic manner, dwelling now on mine, now on each other's.

"FOR a space we stayed thus without a word; each man, I should say, striving to adjust the disorder which he knew his thoughts were in, and wondering if all were as distraught as he.

"Then we were aroused—even as I perceived that the yellowness was going from the light and the passage brightening somewhat—by a footfall on the stone stairs.

"Ralph Timmins was descending alone. He came from step to step slowly, and despite the gloom that remained, and his

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distance from me, I saw that there was yet in his face a far greater confusion than had ever been in my companions. Confusion!—it was the completest astoundment! Save that his pale blue eyes were wide open, as though from some waxing torment of his mind, he was in a stupor. He seemed a man midway between a dream that was terrible and an awakening that was more terrible. Above his streaked beard his cheeks were marble-white.

"Slowly he moved down. At the last step he tripped, nearly pitching on his head.

"It was then that Gerrow's voice rose in a very wail. 'Oh, see that!' he cried. 'What means it? What witch's craft is on us!'

"I had seen, with my father's saying of how Ralph Timmins had stumbled at the bottom step darting like a sword-blade through my brain. That stumble, and Gerrow's final words, discovered the truth to me.

"*I knew—ay, I knew* what Timmins, coming drag-foot straight to me with his eyes now on my face, desperately questioning me, was going to say. *I knew!* My poor, wondrous little Nora, who deemed she had witch's craft enough to keep herself from me! How supremely had she wrought with her magic!

"Timmins stopped, and saluted me.

" 'Sir,' he said, 'I have put the young witch away, as your worship bid.'

"Knowing, I had waited petrified. But his words stung me to life—to madness. I shrieked twice or thrice, making the passage echo—Timmins crouching and wilting before me. With both hands I seized his neckcloth, tearing it off him as I strove to smash him against the wall. I struck him on the face. I wrung out my sword, cursing him, promising him every agony that man can inflict on man. Then—I can not tell why, save that I was bereft of reason—I shouted:

" 'Bring her! Go, bring her down to me!'—menacing him with my point.

"He moved his hands hopelessly.

" 'Your worship, she is dead.'

" 'Bring her!' I screamed.

"He turned and went to the stairs. He mounted and was gone behind their bend; and once more I was watching those empty stone stairs. I felt a hand patting my arm. 'Twas Jones; for Gerrow, some way behind me, was saying: 'Look, blue sky and clear sunlight! . . . Man, open that door, I am nigh swooning.' And the main door grated open, which would be done by Palmer's hand.

"I took not my eyes from the stairs. I listened strainedly; and at last the sound of slow steps, the steps of someone descending sideways with a burden, came to me from beyond the bend. And then appeared Nora's little feet in their gray hose —extended in the air, the shoon fallen off. I saw her kirtle edge; I saw her knees, swathed in her kirtle, half arched upon Timmins' arm. In another second I should have seen her face. But I could not endure that much. I leapt round with fresh and frantic screams and ran out to my coach."

Old Jem put his hand over his eyes, remaining very still for a while.

"After the rain yesterday," he said, his voice gone wan and low, "I went walking, and came home by the horse-pool. I halted in the lane, thinking much on Nora. This is December month, but 'twas May to me in the lane; and how clear I could see Nora with her sweet, angered face, her poor little basket of flower roots—and her old knife, which I would, with all my heart, she had drove

through and through me. . . . Nora, dead these six-and-fifty years!"

He flung down his hand, raising his chin.

"There then," said he, "is my answer to you gentlemen who are so mighty scornful of witchcraft. Why Nora changed not into a bird or moth to escape me, why she spelled me not blind or cripple, I can not say. But in what she did, showed she not the supremest witchcraft that could be? She changed the sky, she threw back the year to thirteen years before; and while we in the passage were but half under her magic, which was enough for her, she so spellbound Ralph Timmins and Drew, the turnkey, that without ado they hanged her from the beam in the cell, believing they were hanging her mother. . . . I made no endeavor afterwards to punish these fellows. Think you I would have spared them if the circumstances were not as I have told you?"

OF THE listeners it was the parson who spoke. The hints of great sorrow which had come from Old Jem had not been without effect on him. So that, hateful though the picture of his host in early manhood was, he was no longer void of pity.

"Mr. Lambardiston," he said, and his tones were gentle, "I hold your story of this awful happening to be true in every word—so far as that happening was understood by you and others. But I deem you have erred as to the real nature of it . . . I can not believe it was any witchcraft of Nora Shafto that took her from you."

"Could aught save witchcraft have done it?" exclaimed Old Jem with rising anger.

"Yes," answered the parson. For a moment he was silent, then:

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SUGGESTIONS as to stories for the Weird Story Reprint section have been pouring in lately. Most of the requests are for the reprint of stories from old issues of WEIRD TALES, which is now completing its twelfth year. We will give careful consideration to these requests, as far as we can, keeping always before us the desires of the greatest number. It is because of numerous requests that we are reprinting in this issue *The Supreme Witch* by the late G. Appleby Terrill. And next month we will reprint another favorite, that strange ghost story by the late Henry S. Whitehead: *The Fireplace,* which was very popular when it was first published in our pages ten years ago.

Best Stories of 1934

Julius Hopkins, of Washington, D. C., writes to the Eyrie: "The November WT is an excellent issue and I thoroughly enjoyed every story in it. However, two stories stand out in my mind as the best ones in this issue. I pick for first place the last part of *The People of the Black Circle* because of its very exciting and fast-moving conclusion. The second-best story, in my estimation, is *The Golden Glow.* When one considers the possibilities of such rays as are used by the professor in this story, he will find that it may not be long before such things will be in actual use. My selections of the twelve best stories in WT during 1934, judging by their uniqueness and originality, are as follows: *The Solitary Hunters, Black Thirst, Vampires of the Moon, Scarlet Dream, The Satanic Piano, The Colossus of Ylourgne, They Called Him Ghost, The Isle of Dark Magic, The Three Marked Pennies, The People of the Black Circle, The Black God's Kiss,* and — guessing on this one — *Black God's Shadow.*"

Against Serial Stories

W. C. Murray, of Fort Warren, Wyoming, writes to the Eyrie: "I have been reading WEIRD TALES magazine since January, 1927, when I bought my first copy. I have not missed a copy since. I thought *Queen of the Lilin* in the November issue exceptionally good. Let us keep our magazine weird. How about more horror tales such as *The Copper Bowl* by George Fielding Eliot and *The Coffin of Lissa* by August Derleth? I would very much like to read *The Coffin of Lissa* again in the WT reprint. . . . Here's to more short stories, *no* serials, and more vampire and horror and torture tales."

A Suggested Reprint

Alonzo Leonard, of Portsmouth, Ohio, writes: "For those readers who so tumultuously clamor for interplanetary thrillers under the delusion that they are *weird* stories, I suggest that you republish Frank Belknap Long's supreme story, *The Devil-God,* which appeared in June 1925. 'Nuff sed."

Gripped in Suspense

Claude H. Cameron, of Toronto, writes: "C. L. Moore again scores with *The Black God's Kiss.* It is . . . a superb piece of workmanship and it held me gripped in suspense until I finished it. That is sufficient. The character of Jirel may become as famous to us as Conan. I vote her first place. Stories like *The Pistol* I like because they are somewhat believable. Gurwit is excellent at any time. H. Bedford-Jones' *The Sleeper* was written in the proper vein with just the right amount of allusion. I detest weird stories whose very weirdness is removed by laborious explanations of intent. Your readers are not morons. As has often been stated by your readers, the truly desirable weird

tale is weird by virtue of what is suggested. Howard's *The People of the Black Circle* is very good; I will remember it for some time to come. . . . In the November WT, there is no question but that S. Gordon Gurwit wins first place for *The Golden Glow*. I do not favor too many interplanetary yarns or science stories in WEIRD TALES, but Gurwit's story was so well thought out and so perfectly written that I can not avoid giving him first place. Second comes Paul Ernst—*Concert to Death*. Sufficient to say that I believe the story will outlive the author. Howard's story, *The People of the Black Circle*, had a very satisfactory conclusion. I vote it as a suitable companion piece to Jack Williamson's recent masterpiece. All in all, the November issue is well up to the top in the usual high standard I have come to expect. Now for something in a different vein—somehow Price's yarn, *Queen of the Lilin*, left me cold. The idea and entire plot is threadbare from use. Furthermore, it wasn't as smooth a job as I had grown accustomed to expect from this master craftsman. . . . Gurwit's story far outshadows Price's yarn any way I look at them. *Nude With a Dagger* also falls into the class of the stale plot."

The Golden Glow

Jack Darrow, of Chicago, writes to the Eyrie: "For first place in the November issue my choice goes without a doubt to *The Golden Glow* by S. Gordon Gurwit. I like the author's style. I got a big kick out of the fact that the warring nations could do nothing at all except swallow their pride and give in. E. Hoffmann Price with his *Queen of the Lilin* was very entertaining. I am glad that Price is writing more often than he used to. The cover by M. Brundage is a nice piece of work, but there is nothing weird about it. Keep the covers weird. . . . *The People of the Black Circle* ended well. The shortest tale, John Flanders' *Nude With a Dagger*, was a peach. Let's hear more from him."

The Prophet's Beard

Fred Anger, of Berkeley, California, writes to the Eyrie: "By the beard of the prophet! Several things concerning the November issue have aroused my ire, and several others have done just the opposite. *Queen of the Lilin* surpasses all the others by its sheer beauty. It certainly takes E. Hoff-

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mann Price to write weird literature. I hope that you intend to print a great deal more of his work. S. Gordon Gurwit was rather disappointing. His story, *The Golden Glow*, failed to register; perhaps it is my dwarfed mentality, but it seems to me that this story was only the general run of death-ray, world-saver tales. Robert E. Howard brought his serial, *The People of the Black Circle*, to a very nice close; it takes second place on my voting list. *A-n-d*, speaking of Robert E. Howard reminds me of our friend Conan. Robert Bloch's nasty crack about our blood-thirsty hero has certainly started something. For the past day the grindstones of Angerville have been whetting my ax, and I am now ready to charge into the fray waving the banner of Conan the Cimmerian. I used to consider Conan a vile and despicable hero, but I have changed and he is now foremost in my estimation as a hero. Bring on your tale by Bloch, *The Secret in the Tomb*, and I'll cut it to the ground. Paul Ernst and Kirk Mashburn seem to leave a blank space; indeed, so boring did I find *Voodoo Vengeance* that I lapsed into peaceful slumber while reading it. Next let us turn to that small but nevertheless immense atrocity, *Feigman's Beard*, by August W. Derleth. Call it hexerei, call it witchcraft or anything you please, but it was rank. Ditto, only more vehemently, to *Nude With a Dagger*." [To it, ye loyal Conan supporters. A story by Robert Bloch appears in this issue. *The Secret in the Tomb* will be published later.—THE EDITOR.]

Short Comments

Adolphe de Castro, former American consul at Madrid, and co-author with Ambrose Bierce of *The Monk and the Hangman's Daughter*, writes: "I have been a fairly constant reader of WEIRD TALES, and among many delights have enjoyed the art of Price, particularly in his latest story, *Queen of the Lilin*."

Miss Mary L. Briggs, of Los Angeles, writes: "Much as I dislike scientific thrillers, *The Golden Glow* held my attention. *Voodoo Vengeance* was gripping and colorful. I would like weirder cover designs. If not an author's page, couldn't there be photographs of contributors?"

Mrs. Jane Howard, of Marlin, Texas, writes: "Robert E. Howard's serial story, *The People of the Black Circle*, is one of his very best."

The Dust of Death

Ernest Krah, of Trenton, New Jersey, writes to the Eyrie: "Though I am not addicted to writing fan letters, I must say that I have been reading WEIRD TALES for a number of years, and I consider it the best of

My favorite stories in the January WEIRD TALES are:

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its kind on the market, for it surpasses anything else I have ever read. The weirder the better to my satisfaction. A number of years ago I read a story in your magazine that I must say was one of the best stories I have ever read, the kind that makes the chills run up and down your spine. The author's name, the year and month I do not remember, but the title of the story, I think, is *Fungus Isle*, I would appreciate your giving it to us again as a reprint." [We have printed several stories about fungi, but none entitled *Fungus Isle*. The story you ask for is probably *The Dust of Death* by Geoffrey Hewelcke, which appeared in WEIRD TALES for May, 1931. The story was 20,000 words in length, too long to use as a reprint.—THE EDITOR.]

About that Slave-Girl

A reader in New York City who merely signs himself "T" writes to the Eyrie: "I have been a reader of stories of the supernatural for many years, and of WEIRD TALES since I discovered the magazine. Thank heaven for a magazine that does not 'type' its stories. Your stuff is really first rate (and my business is teaching literature, my hobby the study of the ancient civilizations of Greece and Rome). Indeed yours is the only non-professional publication I always read. Not long ago you had a letter in the Eyrie from somebody who wanted good ghosts, and I want to send my thanks for a few. . . . Also you had in the Eyrie a note from someone who wanted to see on the covers M. Brundage's conception of one or two beautiful girls chained in the slave marts—crouching in terror or exposed nude upon block. I'd like to see such a picture."

Your Favorite Story

The Golden Glow by S. Gordon Gurwit easily took first place in your estimation among all the stories in our November issue, as shown by your votes and letters to the Eyrie. The concluding installment of Robert E. Howard's serial story about Conan, *The People of the Black Circle*, was next. Let us know what stories you like best in our magazine, as that will help us to fill each issue with the kind you want. Write a letter to the Eyrie, or fill out the vote coupon on page 142 of this issue.

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THE SUPREME WITCH

(Continued from page 139)

"Mr. Lambardiston, this is to be a reply to your question, 'Could aught?' 'Tis no attempt to interpret—I would not dare so to interpret—the happening. . . . Of poor little Nora Shafto you have used the word 'supreme'. Bethink you, is not that word often given to a Veritable Power far asunder from witchcraft? The Supreme Power which stayed the sun upon Gibeon and the moon in the valley of Ajalon, which thrust back the shadow on the sun-dial, could with equal ease have transmuted the years for you that were in the jail—decreeing that thus should Nora, who, for all her childish vauntings of witchcraft, was truly 'white-souled as an angel'——" The speaker paused. "Decreeing that thus should Nora go to her mother," he ended mercifully.

For the color had ebbed from Old Jem's cheeks, the very purple of his lips was mud-hue, and consternation and growing despair were in his face.

"I had not thought of that!" said the old man whisperingly. "If that should be the right answer to all of it, Parson!" Then a new expression crossed his face, and during an instant his voice was firmer. "For Nora's sake I hope it is, for that means heaven for her! . . . But if it *is* the answer, Parson—*what is going to become of me?*"

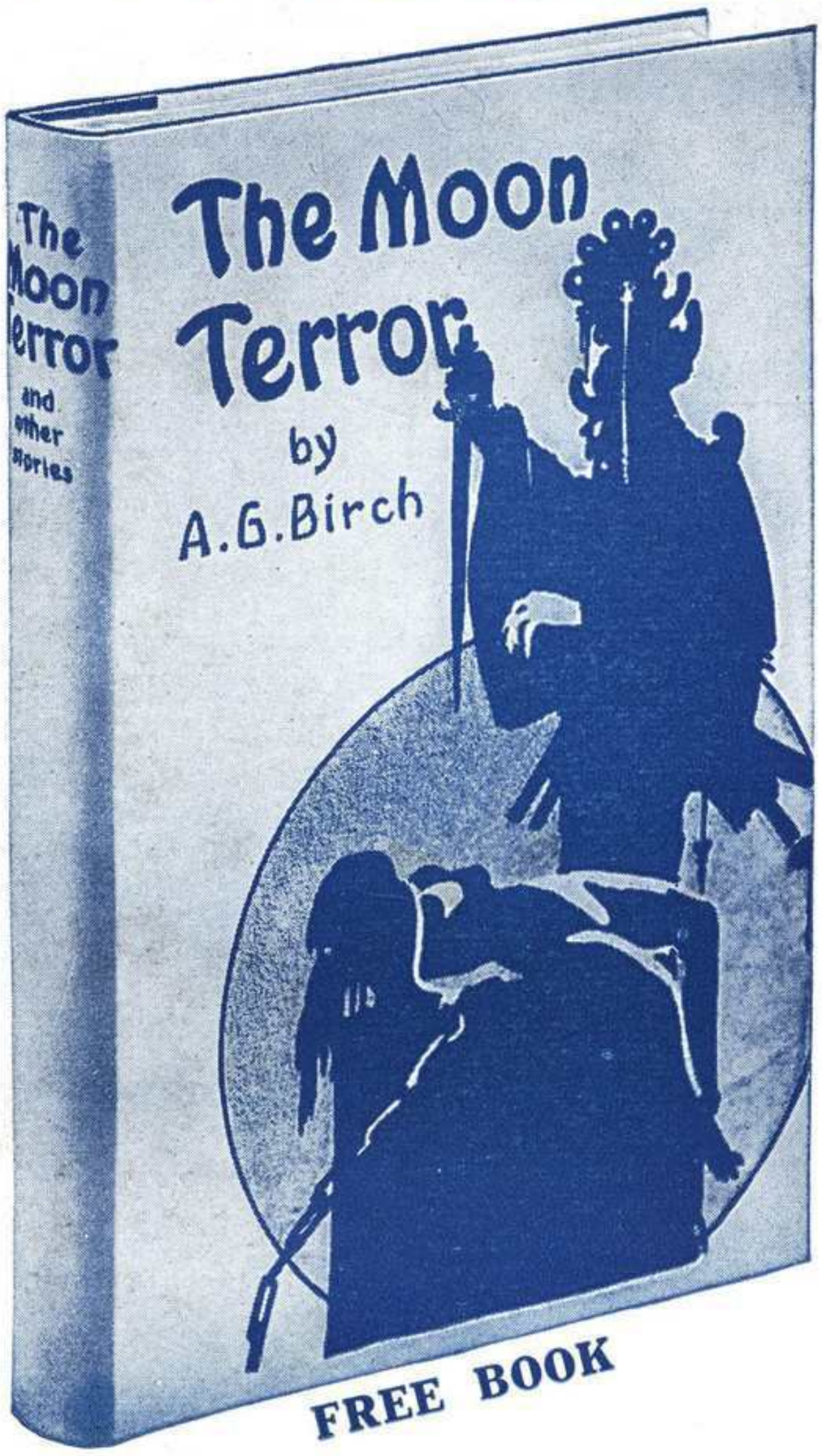
"I believe such things as that hope for Nora's sake do make some little plea for us," said the parson quietly. "Also——"

The courtly king's messenger nudged the scrivener with his knee. The two got up and lit their pipes at the far end of the room, noting that the parson left his chair and took one beside Old Jem.

And not until they perceived these two clinch some matter with a long handclasp, did the smokers go back to the table.

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