SEPTEMBER, 1935

THE WEIRD TALES

Vol. 26, No. 3

Weird Tales

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THE BLUE WOMAN

a weird mystery story

By JOHN SCOTT DOUGLAS

Paul Ernst

Arlton Eadie

Robert Bloch

Clark Ashton Smith

Another exciting

DOCTOR SATAN

story in this issue

Brundage

A MAGAZINE OF THE BIZARRE AND UNUSUAL

Weird Tales

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WEIRD TALES ISSUED 1st OF EACH MONTH

The Blue Woman

By JOHN SCOTT DOUGLAS

The strange and eery mystery of a beautiful woman whose body glowed in the dark with an uncanny blue radiance

LUDWIG MEUSEL rolled over irritably in the four-poster he had carved with his own hands. It had been the intention of the German wood-carver to ask his wife to come to bed. Five minutes before, she had turned out the light.

"Mona," he started to grumble, only to have the word die in his suddenly tight throat.

Meusel's plump body went rigid with terror. His Mona—what had happened to her? Fragmentary dark tales he had heard as a boy in Germany leapt into his mind. Tales of witchcraft, of werewolves. But how could such things touch his Mona, mother of his four children? And here in America?

A ray from the street light at the corner toched her lovely face and soft, midnight hair. By its faint radiance, her fair face was seemingly drained of all color. Her eyes were wide and dark with horror as she stared at her own reflection in the full-length mirror.

Meusel stared dazedly from the reflection to the woman, cold chills darting down his spine. No light touched her body, which was covered with a diaphanous nightgown. It was in shadow; and yet it was visible like a marble statue on which a pale-blue light was cast.

Visible? No, more than that—it glowed! Glowed with a faintly blue radiance! And the reflection in the mirror also glowed with a bluish light.

Meusel felt the hair rising on his head as his eyes darted about the room. No optical illusion, this! There was no other light save the ray which touched his wife's face and hair—and it was yellow, not blue. There was no mirror which could throw the light on her body, save the one into which she stared with a horrified fascination.

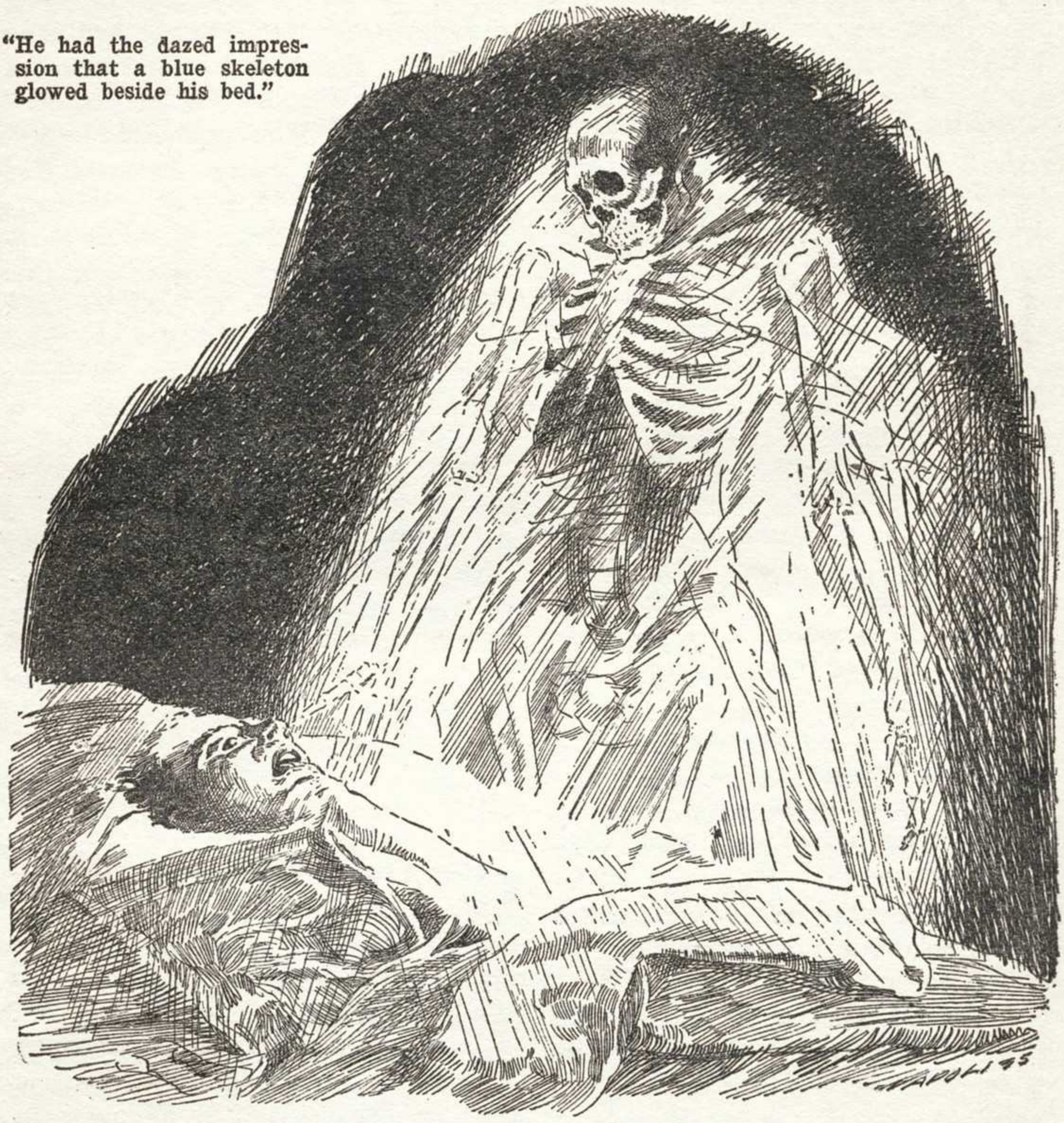
Overwhelming was his desire to cry out: "Mona! Vat is? Effen in darkness your body is more bright than by day! *Mein Gott!*"

But Meusel's lips would not move, his tight throat would make no sound. Fear pinched his heart with icy fingers, as forgotten stories flashed in a dark procession through his mind. She had done something wrong, and this was her punishment? She was in league with unnamable creatures of the darkness? His gentle Mona! He could not believe it!

No! If she were evil, she would know! And yet she stared at her reflection with terror-wide eyes. She had discovered perhaps when she had turned out the light that her body glowed bluely in the mirror. She had stepped to the mirror, unbelieving, frightened. And now she could not draw her eyes away.

Meusel shuddered. Strong was his desire to flee from this thing which he did not understand. But he had been proud of his beautiful young wife. That pride even at this moment surmounted the clammy repugnance and fear which gripped him.

"Mona," he said in a voice he contrived to make petulant, "ain't you coming to bed, yet?"



"He had the dazed impression that a blue skeleton glowed beside his bed."

"Yes, Ludwig," she faltered.

Meusel felt himself shrinking from contact with her as she stepped into bed. Ashamed of his disloyalty, he could not goad himself to offer comfort. He was afraid even to question her. In the stories he had heard as a boy, exposure of a witch always brought calamity upon the exposer.

SHE lay face down, scarcely breathing. Presently, when she believed him asleep, her breathing quickened. Her shoulders began shaking. She started to sob softly. She tried to check her sobs; and then they began afresh.

Meusel's damp body grew taut. He wanted to ask some of the numerous questions which were pounding in his head, but he did not dare. He was afraid to let her know that he knew. All night he lay stiffly by her side, afraid that if he once relaxed his vigilance she might do him some bodily harm. Like a witch—or a vampire!

In the morning, she was red-eyed from

weeping; but she made no explanation. By daylight, he was unable to observe that bluish radiance. But her face was pale and haggard. Steadily, month after month, Mona had been losing the freshness which, as an out-of-work chorus girl, she had possessed. Now her thinness was pronounced. His heart was pinched with pity as he left her at the breakfast table, staring at space with brooding eyes. All that day while he repaired antique furniture in his little shop below their living-quarters, Meusel thought of his young wife . . . and wondered.

Three months before, she had been working for the Kindall Watch Company. She had been brought home one day by a company doctor, and she was sobbing. Meusel was too dazed by his wife's strange behavior to comprehend much of what the doctor had told him about poisoning and "six months to live." Afterward, company officials had come with papers. They had explained, too, but Meusel had not understood very well. Mona had told him to sign a paper which she had referred to as a "release," and he had signed because he had trusted her knowledge of American ways. Then, to his amazement, they had given him a check for thirty thousand dollars. He had cashed it, but without a clear understanding of why it had been given to her. Something about illness; but he had not believed it serious.

He had built a little secret drawer behind the bureau, and put the money there. Mona had tried to talk to him about the thing later, making plans for her children; plans he was to carry out when she was gone. Meusel had told her to be still. It was not good, this talk of death! He put it down to some silly woman's notion. He would not permit her to discuss it. She was sick, perhaps, but she would be well again. He knew her better than any doctor.

Still, it came to Meusel as he went about his work that a change had come over Mona since that day the doctor had brought her home. She had brooded overmuch, and some mornings she had not gotten up. He had humored her, thinking she would get over her silly notion sooner or later. Now he wondered if she had tricked him about that thirty thousand dollars. Had she sold her soul for money? Why should a good woman be paid so much for an illness which did not impress him as being very genuine? Meusel was troubled.

That night the glowing electric blueness of her body was unmistakable. . . . So for three weeks the strain between them grew into a higher and higher barrier, and Meusel did not dare unburden himself.

Then one day when the visiting doctor had left, she looked more tired than usual. There was a grim quality about her mouth, a strange determination in her eyes.

HARASSED by doubt and fear, he could not sleep that night. When she believed him asleep, however, she arose. Meusel watched through half-closed eyes —watched in an agony of indecision. He saw her slip across the room to the bureau and silently pull it away from the wall. She was taking money from its secret hiding-place—but still he did not dare say anything. She slipped it into her purse, wrote something on a piece of paper, and then dressed.

To Meusel, this was the last staggering proof of her guilt. A vampire or witch she must be! He wanted to leap from bed to accuse her, but a paralyzing fear restrained him. If she possessed some evil power of which he knew nothing, she would not hesitate to bring that infernal power to use against him.

Not until she had left silently, closing

the door after her, did he dare move. Then he leapt from bed, and stole to the door. Opening it to a crack, he saw that the children's bedroom door was open. Perspiration broke out on Meusel's round face.

Witches — children! Confusedly old stories clamored through his mind. Witches eating children at their feasts! He could even remember an old color plate showing such a scene.

"*Mein Gott!*" Meusel thought. "Effen her own children, she would eat!"

His own fear forgotten in alarm over his children, he was about to rush out. But Mona appeared, her cheeks damp, sobbing softly. She was not carrying one of the children! Meusel went weak with relief. He watched her going down the stairs, and his tight throat would not permit him to say a word to stop her.

And then, when the outside door closed, he remembered the note. His hands trembled as he switched on the light and examined it. His breath caught short.

"*Ach, Himmel!*" he groaned. "She *is* a witch!"

Meusel put on his spectacles to read the note again:

Dearest Ludwig—

I am going away so that you and my darling children will always remember me as I now am. I have but little longer to live, even though you will not believe this. And with each passing day, I must grow more ugly.

You must not try to find me. In time you will learn what has happened. Try not to judge me too harshly. You made me very happy before this terrible thing happened, and I love you, Ludwig. That is why I cannot make my suffering yours.

I have taken some of my money. The rest you must keep for our children.

MONA.

"Ugly!" Meusel shuddered. "Ugly as a witch! She is telling me that she is becoming servant of evil one, yet, my beautiful Mona! *Ach!* That is what she mean by terrible thing which happen to her!"

ONE week later, Ludwig Meusel was seated uneasily in the inner sanctum of the offices bearing the name, "*Kenneth Keith, Private Investigator.*" The German wood-carver clasped and unclasped his plump hands nervously. He had just completed a recital of his wife's strange behavior, placing his own interpretation upon it. Across the desk from him sat a lean-faced young man with cool steel-gray eyes and an unruly thatch of red hair.

"You believe me, *ja?*" the German asked anxiously.

Ken Keith shifted his lean, greyhound body in the swivel chair, his wide mouth tightening. "I believe all you've told me. Two hours ago, I might not." He shrugged. "I believe you; that's enough. But why didn't you come to me before?"

Meusel stared uncomfortably at the carpet. "For veek I been asking myself, 'Vat vill I do?' Children ask me, 'Papa, ven vill mama come home?' I t'ink maybe yet I vill go to police. But they vill say, 'Meusel, vy you kill your vife, yet?' I didn't know vat to do. I see piece in paper saying that you solve crime that fool policemen——"

"Harchmond case?" asked young Keith.

"So? Vell, I come hoping maybe you find my Mona."

Keith tapped the desk with long fingers. "You say you were frightened of your wife for three weeks, and you want her back?"

Meusel's round face grew damp. "*Ach,* I didn't know vat I vant! Eff Mona, she don't return, I go to jail-house, no? Eff she return, I live in fear of I don't know vat!"

Keith rose. "Meusel, I advise you to report your wife's disappearance to the Missing Persons Bureau. That clears you. But it won't bring back your wife. It would be better if you'd forget her."

"So?" Meusel snorted. "You vill not try to find her, no?"

"On the contrary," said Keith, "I'll bend every effort to finding her. But things won't ever be the same again for you, Meusel. You had better make up your mind to that."

The wood-carver went out shaking his head. When the outside door had closed, Keith punched a button on his desk. Miss Tibbs entered primly. Her severe mouth settled in a disapproving line as she watched him slip an automatic into a holster under his arm.

He glanced up. "Miss Tibbs, among the clippings I asked you to file this morning was one on a blue woman at Lake Placid. Please bring it to me."

"Quite ridiculous, I must say! Anyone knows that no woman——"

"Is blue," finished Keith. "But this woman, as it happens, appears to radiate a blue light by dark."

"Fiddlesticks!" snapped Miss Tibbs.

"One other thing," said Keith. "Reserve a seat on the chair-car on the N. Y. C."

"You have an appointment with Mr. Fordley in fifteen minutes," she said reprovingly.

"Money!" Keith snapped his fingers. "This is a test of skill, Miss Tibbs. The thrill of the chase. Can't you understand that?"

Miss Tibbs' mouth pursed primly. "I don't know what you're talking about."

"I believe you, Miss Tibbs. Now will you get that clipping?"

Miss Tibbs stiffly departed, returning in two minutes with a clipping over a Lake Placid date-line. It ran:

Justin Kindall, son of the famous watch manufacturer, the late Hugo Kindall, was found supposedly murdered on the densely wooded shore of Lake Stevens at ten o'clock last night by his brother, Rex Kindall, near whose summer cabin the corpse was discovered. Evidence pointing to murder with a knife was further complicated by the statement of Rex Kindall's gardener that he had heard a cry about nine-forty-five and had seen a yellow-haired, scantily clothed "blue woman" hurrying through the woods. He maintains that the mystery woman's color was not the blueness of cold, possible in one flimsily clad, but had a blue quality which he could see despite the darkness. Because of his improbable story, Todd Haskall, the gardener, is being held for further questioning.

Ken Keith had kept the clipping because he worked on the theory that every crime repeats itself. Miss Tibbs had filed thousands of clippings he had given her for similar reasons.

The story Ludwig Meusel had told him, and the clipping on his desk, were totally without parallel. That it was the same woman, Keith did not doubt. Todd Haskall had everything to lose and nothing to gain by sticking to his story of the "blue woman." And Meusel was too unimaginative a man to have invented his story.

No! there must be a "blue woman," and that woman must be Mona Meusel. She had worked for the Kindall Watch Company . . . and now one of the brothers, Justin Kindall, had died from a knife-thrust. Strong connection—but no motives! And why should a woman possessing thirty thousand dollars suddenly disappear, only to reappear under damning circumstances? Meusel had been extremely vague about the nature of her "accident" at the factory.

And why did she emit a blue radiance?

The case whispered of black magic; of unexplainable, sinister things Ken Keith had witnessed in Haiti—and never understood; of voodoo and vampirism. And yet it had individual aspects which made it in Keith's experience a case without parallel.

Thoughtfully he picked up the bag which always stood packed beside his desk, and strode purposefully out. Miss Tibbs was signing for a telegram. Keith tore it open. It read:

Sheriff botching matters—Read paper for story of brother's murder—Believe Haskall innocent—Could you come immediately?

COBB KINDALL.

Keith tossed the telegram to his secretary. "Wire Kindall at Lake Placid that I'm on my way." And he was gone.

COBB KINDALL met Keith at the station. A quietly dressed, ruddy-cheeked man with a trim gray mustache, he appeared ill at ease as he escorted the lanky, red-headed detective to his limousine. When the limousine was flying toward the town, he turned.

"Ghastly business, this, Keith! You read the accounts?"

The detective nodded.

"Of course this blue woman—sensational newspaper stuff! I've talked to Haskall; told him to soft-pedal that wild tale. But he won't budge—stubborn old fellow, Haskall. Been with the family for years—devoted to Justin. He couldn't have done it. That's why you're here."

"Sorry," said Keith. "I don't work that way. If you want me to find who killed your brother—that's different."

Kindall gave him a sharp glance; then shrugged. "A nice distinction. Very well; that's what I do want. It will clear Haskall, I'm sure."

"And may," Keith suggested, "involve someone else."

"You mean Rex?" His voice was terse. Then his eyes shadowed. "Yes, it may involve any of us. Even I may be the murderer, Keith. But you must find him. You see, none of us is safe until he is found."

"Some partnership agreement?"

"My father's will," said Kindall. "The watch company he built up was left in trust. My brothers, Justin, Rex, and Robin, and my only sister, Sarah, each owns an equal portion—or receives an equal share of the earnings, rather—until we die. The provision of the trust is that none of us may sell our shares; but in the event of a death of the original sons, their share may pass to male heirs, but only to the extent their father would have benefited. I'm the only one whom that clause would benefit, for my brothers and my sister have not married. But you see the point, Keith. Justin's death gives each of us now a quarter of the income from the trust, instead of a fifth as was the case while he was alive. Each of us, you might say, stood to gain by his death."

"Am I to believe that you suspect one of your brothers or your sister?"

"Emphatically not! I can believe nothing of the sort!"

"You would prefer to believe that that blue woman——"

"What rot, Keith! If Haskall were a drinking man——" Kindall shook his well-shaped head. "He must have seen a woman. But if she were blue, as he so preposterously insists, how could he tell what color she was in the darkness?"

Keith smiled grimly, remembering Meusel's words.

"Am I to understand that the five Kindalls were staying at Rex Kindall's summer lodge?"

"No; at mine. Rex's lodge is across a small arm of the lake from mine. We were having a reunion—business and pleasure. Justin went over to see Rex last night, trying to patch up a trifling quarrel over a disagreement in company policy."

"Rex," said Keith, "is in the habit of disagreeing with the others?"

"He's touchy. No; don't form any preconceived notions about Rex! He built his own lodge to be away from us; but he's one of us."

Keith was touched by Cobb Kindall's loyalty. Rare, that quality! He might be ruthless in running down the murderer of his brother. But until that one were

proved guilty, it would remain one for all and all for one.

Keith thought again of the blue woman, wondering where she came into the picture. Motives! He could see no motive for her; plenty for each of the Kindalls. Why had she been paid $30,000? For an "accident," as Meusel thought? Or was that merely wool over Meusel's eyes to hide the real reason? Had a secret love affair existed between Mona Meusel and Justin Kindall, dating back to her chorus-girl days? Was the money blackmail? Why, then, had she killed him? Surely after living a circumspect life for eight years, an affair of the past could not come up to plague her. Blackmail—an idea!

"Suppose," Keith said slowly, "that Todd Haskall had come upon you in the act of killing Justin, Mr. Kindall. Would he have revealed the murderer?"

"Heavens, man!" Cobb Kindall cried hoarsely. "Don't you suppose I've considered that angle? The possibility that Rex——" His jaw hardened. "No, it's that woman! It must be her!"

"Some woman in Justin's past, perhaps?"

Kindall smiled bleakly. "He had a period of sowing wild oats."

"I see. And Rex?"

"Not Rex! He's a confirmed woman-hater! . . . Well, here we are. Mortuary. Nothing significant in Justin's wound, I think."

AN OBSEQUIOUS attendant ushered them into a basement room. As he reached for the light switch, Kindall said huskily:

"No lights yet, Tabor."

Gripping Keith's arm, he piloted him through the darkened room.

There was a charnel scent in the air which caused cold shivers to crawl down Keith's back. The room had the cold dankness of a tomb. Ahead, however, was a faint radiance which grew brighter as he neared the opposite wall. He could feel Kindall's hand trembling on his arm.

Kindall stopped, and coughed—a quick, nervous cough. The charnel scent was so strong that Keith's flesh seemed to crawl. His eyes becoming adjusted to the darkness, Keith realized with a start that the radiance was some phosphorescent substance on the forehead of the corpse. The glow seemed to make the glassy eyes of the dead man glitter. Strange in this dark room! The detective's poise was shaken.

He thought of obscene symbols painted on the forehead in India. Of voodoo marks. The very simple explanation of the symbol escaped him because he could not avoid trying to find a connection between it and the apparent occult powers exemplified by the blue woman.

"Curious thing!" Kindall's strangely hoarse voice made him start. "Figure one—done with some radio-active paint."

"Of course!" Keith's voice was strained. "I was looking for something difficult. Naturally you've noticed the design of that figure one."

"My God, man! Could I avoid doing that? It's the same shape as the figure one painted on the Kindall See-at-Nite clocks. Must be radium paint, too."

"Done," said Keith, thinking of Mona Meusel, "by someone who has worked in your plant. Peculiar shape, that one. Practise would be needed to imitate it."

"But what does it mean?"

"There are twelve figures on a clock," said Keith dryly, "and only four Kindalls remaining."

There was a long pause, during which the silence hung heavy.

"Six," said Kindall grimly. "My two boys. Seven, if you count my wife, who could never be an heir to the trust."

"Seven, then," said Keith. "You are

faced by something that your reason rejects as impossible, Kindall. A blue woman! And yet I have talked with the husband of that blue woman no later than this morning! Have you ever heard of a certain Mona Meusel?"

"Can't say I have. But, Keith, a blue woman! Preposterous!"

"Preposterous—but true! She is not, however, really blue. Haskall simply described his impression. The woman does give forth blue emanations, at least at night."

"Like the emanations from the figure one on Justin's forehead?"

"Not precisely, Kindall. We can scarcely suppose any woman could paint her whole body with a radium paint."

"No," Kindall agreed. "She would be hideously burned."

"Exactly! So there must be another explanation."

Kindall called to the waiting attendant: "Lights, Tabor."

EXCEPT for the head, the body was covered with a sheet. This Keith removed to make a brief examination. There were three wounds, one of which had pierced the heart.

"The sheriff has the knife?"

"It wasn't found."

"Suppose we talk now with the sheriff and Haskall."

From neither man, however, could Keith glean any important information.

They departed in the limousine for the boat landing on Lake Stevens, the wilder of the two lakes touching the town of Lake Placid. As they walked down the hill to the landing with Curry, Kindall's capable driver, Keith glimpsed a lodge here and there through the trees bordering the lake. Save for these evidences of civilization, the gloom-shrouded lake might have been located anywhere in the Canadian wilds.

They climbed into the sea-sled, and Curry tinkered with the engine. A few minutes later, it was laying the black waters back in two white folds as it rose on the glistening surface. The sun was setting, and there was a chill in the air.

"One thing I forgot to tell you," Kindall shouted, trying to raise his voice above the roar of powerful cylinders firing in rotation. "The Countess Eritha Koeler is staying with us. German countess, in her own right. Lovely woman!"

Keith nodded.

"Of course she wanted to leave after this—this tragedy. But this sea-sled is our only means of transportation, Rex's speed-boat being temporarily out of commission. We had to take this boat into town with the body. Couldn't ask the countess to accompany us on *that* trip! And I haven't been able to get back for her. A million details!"

It was a distinct shock to Keith when, rounding the next wooded point, he saw a brilliantly lighted two-story log lodge through the trees. Lighted as if for a ball! The towering evergreens pressing close to the lodge, however, explained the lights. A gloomy, depressing place it must be, at best. And now, after the murder of one of the family! . . .

Kindall was pointing at a log cabin across a small neck of water about a quarter of a mile wide. "Rex's place."

Big trees overshadowed it, making it dwindle into the lengthening curtains of darkness. The place gave an impression of being overgrown, neglected and desolate. Somewhere in the dripping undergrowth near the murk-shrouded cabin a murder had been committed the night before. A cry had shattered the awesome silence of those woods. Haskall had seen a "blue woman"—or had he seen Rex Kindall killing his brother? And if Mona Meusel had murdered Justin, what could

have been her motive? Haskall claimed that the "blue woman" had yellow hair —and Mona Meusel's was midnight black. An illusion of that startled moment—or a fabrication to protect Rex? And how could any fabrication of Todd Haskall's come so close to the amazing facts presented by Ludwig Meusel?

A swarthy, heavy-set man with dark, glowering brows came down to the boat landing to meet them. "Is this any time to be inviting guests, Cobb?" he demanded sullenly.

"My brother, Rex," Cobb Kindall explained. "This is Mr. Keith, a private detective I called in, Rex."

"Your pretty countess has been pacing the floor all day," Rex said, ignoring the introduction. "If you must invite people here, why can't you remember them?"

"I'll see that she is taken to Lake Placid the first thing in the morning. But I'm not going to ask Curry to make another trip today."

"A private detective!" Rex snorted. "What next, Cobb? Haven't we enough trouble here already?"

Cobb calmly turned to Curry. "We'll be leaving for town about nine."

"The sheriff was poking around here," Rex went on heatedly. "Of course he didn't have a big enough boat to transport the countess' luggage. You'd think she was coming for a summer."

"Mr. Keith," Cobb said evenly, "has a theory about that blue woman."

"Paugh!" Rex grunted. "Blue woman!"

He stalked down to the landing, climbed into a small row-boat, and rowed toward his cabin, his bull-like neck set at a stiff angle.

"Rex and Justin were very close," Cobb said, as they walked up the stone flagging. "Naturally he's cut pretty deeply by what's happened."

A DAPPER man just under middle age rose languidly from a porch chair as they ascended the steps. "Hi, Cobb," he said breezily.

Cobb frowned. The man wore white flannels and a brown jacket coat.

"My youngest brother, Robin," he explained. "Mr. Keith."

"Glad to know you, Keith," Robin said, gripping the detective's hand heartily. "Family are all down on me. Say I should be wearing black. Can't see it! Ugly color, black. Depressing. Aren't we depressed enough already? Need something to give us a lift, eh?"

"Dinner ready?" Cobb asked curtly.

"Fifteen minutes. Just time to wash up, Keith. Glad you're here."

Robin showed the red-headed detective upstairs to a front room overlooking the dark, shimmering lake. "Justin's room," he explained. "Family will howl, but you'll have to make the best of it. No other suitable for a guest. Countess Eritha here, you know. We seldom all descend on Cobb *en masse*. When we do, it pinches."

Keith had scarcely washed when there was a light knock on his door. Opening it, he saw a frail woman. Peculiar-looking, she was, and yet somehow hauntingly lovely. Her hair was done in red-gold coils about her head; her skin was dead-white, her blue eyes haggard.

"I heard about you from Cobb," she said breathlessly. "I—I'm the Countess Eritha Koeler."

Keith nodded.

She glanced uneasily up and down the vacant hall.

"I—I'm terrified here," she faltered. "I didn't know, until I came here, what strange people the Kindalls are. Except Cobb Kindall. And this lodge! I have the feeling every minute that something —something terrible is about to happen."

Keith waited, saying nothing.

"I—I wonder if—if you would take me to town tonight. I can't bear to stay under this roof another night. They are all such—such odd people, *ja?*"

Keith pitied her. She looked so frail and shaken. But he shook his red head.

"I'm sorry," he said. "But how could I take you? I could not operate the boat. And I understand you have a lot of luggage."

"*Ja!*" She seemed to wilt. "In the morning, then, I will leave. It is uncomfortable to be a guest when such a thing have happened, *nein?*"

WHEN Keith entered the dining-room, he saw at the head of the table a spinster with badly dyed yellow hair. Neither the hair dye nor the heavy application of cosmetics could hide the hardness of the woman's eyes and face, nor the lines etched there by time. Keith knew even before the introduction that this must be the sister, Sarah Kindall.

She acknowledged the introduction with a curt nod. When Keith was seated, the family began with their fruit cocktails. The uncomfortable silence was broken only occasionally when Robin addressed some flippant remark to the countess.

Finally, the meal finished, and cigarettes lighted, Robin grinned at his sister. "Lucky the sheriff didn't take you into custody, Sarah."

Her eyes narrowed behind the smoke from her cigarette, grew hard.

"Explain yourself, Robin."

He shrugged. "Blue woman—yellow hair. Sort of fits you, Sarah."

She crushed out her cigarette, almost savagely. "Your humor," she said icily, "is in poor form, Robin."

"As always," he said cheerfully, winking at Keith.

"Come, Keith," Cobb Kindall said hastily to the detective. "We'll have our cigars in the garden."

A small, rustic garden it was, taking advantage of standing trees and a running spring. For a long time the two men walked and smoked in silence. Then, abruptly, Cobb Kindall remarked:

"Wonder Sarah doesn't kill Robin sometime. Always flippant. Sarah has no sense of humor."

"All you Kindalls are different," Keith said. "Was your brother Justin like any of you?"

"Like Robin, a little. Better sense of the fitness of things, though."

"He irritated your sister as much as Robin?" Keith asked casually.

Cobb gave him a sidelong glance. "Sometimes more. She excuses Robin. Youngest brother." Then he added quickly: "Never meant anything, however. Sarah and Justin just never hit it off."

"Little I can do tonight," Keith said. "Think I'll turn in. Tomorrow I'll go over to your brother's."

"Yes. Rex will be in better humor tomorrow."

"With your permission, I'll go over some letters that are on Justin's desk. Just possible—feminine handwriting, you know."

"Go ahead, Keith. I'm putting everything in your hands."

WHEN they entered the sumptuous lodge, it was ablaze with lights. Robin stood gazing into the fire, a cigarette in one hand.

Cobb said: "Robin, you'd think there was a celebration!"

Robin smiled—a whimsical smile. "Wouldn't you? Fräulein Koeler's idea. Says she hates darkness. Not a bad idea. I shoved up the voltage. Sort of human, the countess."

Cobb's face relaxed. "She's retired?"

Robin nodded. "Just."

Keith went upstairs, leaving the two

brothers to talk. For nearly an hour he read Justin's letters. Nothing pertinent in the lot. Keith sighed, dropped onto his bed to think for some minutes, and then retired.

A light sleeper, he was awakened by a faint splashing sound. He automatically glanced at his watch. Two-five. Hearing the sound again, Keith jumped out of bed.

From the window he could see nothing for a moment. Stars above, but no moon. The opposite shore was drenched in blackness. The lake, a dark, glistening mirror. A mirror broken in one point by a ripple of bluish light! Keith tensed. Yellow hair streamed on the water. Slim white arms rose and sliced the water.

Keith's pulses pounded. A faint bluish radiance seemed to form an aura around the swimmer. The rising and diving arms were a pale, luminous blue. The blue woman!

Her face he could not see in the darkness, nor from that distance. She was swimming toward this shore. Returning from Rex's cabin? She would strike shore a quarter of a mile from the house. Her nude body gleamed with a ghostly radiance as the swimmer stroked swiftly toward shore.

That yellow hair! Keith thought of Sarah Kindall. She was strong, lean and hard. Capable, he guessed, of a long swim, a long hike, a long ride. But—capable of murder? He remembered her eyes as she had looked at Robin through her cigarette smoke. Hard eyes!

Keith slipped hurriedly into his clothes, and dashed down the stairs. From the front porch, he saw the swimmer rise out of the water and wade leisurely toward shore. That luminous quality about her made her unreal—an apparition.

Keith was not to be deceived. He flew down the steps. Silent as was his flight, it was not sufficiently so. He saw the yellow head turn quickly. Then the ghostly figure dashed into the woods.

Keith bolted. He heard the crackling of underbrush ahead, and came up short in a blind alley of intertwined vines and brush. He veered off toward the lake, found a trail skirting the shore, and plunged along it. He could no longer hear the crackling.

He paused, his heart pounding. No sound! Then, far off, the hoot of an owl caused a sudden chill to dart down his spine.

The detective started ahead. Coming to the point where he had seen the blue woman emerge from the water, he plowed through the brush. Striking a match, he searched for footprints. There were none! A moss-covered log jutted out into the water; slight, damp depressions in the moss showed where the swimmer had walked. But he could not tell the size of the swimmer's foot. The match burned Keith's fingers, and he dropped it.

It occurred to him that this blue woman might not be Mona Meusel at all. Possible there were two such women in the world? Not knowing what caused that luminous blueness, it was hard even to guess. Certain, however, that the swimmer's hair was similar to Sarah Kindall's.

Returning to the trail, he moved along slowly, striking matches and looking for a chance footprint.

Suddenly a branch cracked far behind him—a sound like the crack of a gun in the stillness. Keith whirled, and raced down the trail. Another branch cracked, and another. But the runner must be far ahead of him.

Arriving at the garden, Keith circled the house. But the sounds had ceased,

and nowhere could he find any trace of the swimmer.

ABRUPTLY a shrill cry set Keith's nerves quivering. He rounded the house at a run, and darted up the stairs, two at a time. A light was switched on, and Keith saw Robin at the switch.

"Beastly habit of yours, Keith. Screaming at night!"

Keith felt certain Robin would joke on his own death-bed; but he was in no mood for humor. His lean face grim, he scanned the faces of the people who stood in shaken silence in the hall. Cobb, Robin, Sarah Kindall! And then Keith's jaw hardened. Sarah's hair lay in damp, yellow tendrils on her purple dressing-gown. *Damp!*

That could wait! The Countess Eritha!

She opened the door at that moment, her eyes wide with horror.

"Oh!" she cried tremulously. "I knew I shouldn't spend another night in this house!"

Keith observed that there was a peculiar symbol on her forehead. A figure three!

"What made you scream?" he asked.

"I—I don't know, exactly. Perhaps I dreamed it. But I thought something damp touched my forehead. I screamed. A ghostly blue figure vanished through the window. *Ach!* Is this house haunted?"

Keith slipped past the countess, and darted to the window. A roof three feet below the window connected all the second-story windows of the lodge. He struck a match. Sure enough! A wet mark!

He returned to the hall. "Did you know," he asked the countess, "that there is a figure three on your forehead?"

Her mouth parted, and she put a startled hand on her forehead. The damp figure blurred. A frightened light entered her blue eyes.

"Phosphorescent or radium paint?" she asked.

Keith shook his head. "Not this time!"

"But—but," the frail woman faltered, "what does it mean? I heard someone say that—that there was a figure one on Justin Kindall's forehead. Now a figure three!"

"Perhaps," Keith said, striding over to Sarah, "Miss Kindall can explain."

"I?" she asked. "Just what do you mean, young man?"

Keith touched her hair. She drew away haughtily.

"Your hair," he said, "is damp."

She eyed him coldly. "Is it any of your business when I wash my hair?"

"When did you wash it?"

"An hour ago, perhaps. I read late. I'm a poor sleeper."

"So I observed. And a good swimmer?"

"Sarah's an excellent swimmer," Cobb said. "But what's the meaning of this inquisition, Keith?"

Keith turned. "Just this. I saw a yellow-haired woman swimming across the bay. I dashed out, but she slipped away in the bushes. Now the Countess Eritha is awakened by someone entering her room—awakened perhaps in time to avoid being killed. And there is a number three on her forehead. Where is the number two? Rex Kindall is unaccounted for!"

Cobb stared at Sarah incredulously. "Sarah," he said grimly. "If——"

She turned on him coldly. "It's a lie! I have been in my room since nine! If you don't order this impertinent young——"

"Sarah!" Cobb said curtly. "This is not a matter of form. Did you or did you not——"

An arctic coldness in her narrowed eyes, Sarah stared at her brother contemptuously. "I'm not in the habit of having my statements questioned."

"I have no authority here," Keith said, "except the authority of any citizen to restrain a law-breaker. But with your consent, Mr. Kindall, I suggest that your sister's windows be nailed, and her door locked—from the outside. I further suggest that someone stand guard at that door while you and I row over to your brother's cabin. The significance of a number three on the Countess Eritha's forehead worries me."

Sarah's body shook with anger. "Cobb, if you permit this insolent fool to lock me up like a common hoodlum——"

Cobb said icily: "Enough of that, Sarah! If you're innocent, you can surely have no objections. And I'm sure you are."

"Then why——" she began stormily, only to be interrupted by Cobb's demand that Robin awaken Curry and find a hammer and nails.

Sarah stalked into her room, her eyes wrathful. Nor did she speak while her window was being nailed. The door was locked from the outside and Robin placed on guard.

KEITH bent to the oars as soon as Cobb Kindall was seated in the stern of the boat. Cobb's face had lost some of its ruddiness; the scene with his sister had evidently unnerved him. His only sister, under the cloud of being a suspected murderess!

He said nothing as the oars clicked in their locks, only leaned forward with a strained expression in his eyes.

When the boat drew up alongside the narrow landing, he leapt out, and without waiting to moor the boat, strode swiftly toward the cabin. Keith tied up the boat, and followed at a run.

A dread had settled over his heart, and it twisted sharply as Cobb called shakily, "Rex! Oh, Rex!" He felt a surge of sympathy for the older man as the cries echoed across the lake, and died away.

The front door of the cabin was open. Keith's lean jaw hardened as he followed Cobb inside. By the flickering light of a match held in Cobb's shaking hand, the interior looked bare and unkempt.

Cobb hurried on, calling his brother's name. A small hall led back from the living-room. At the first door Cobb paused, and struck a match. Suddenly it fell from his nerveless fingers. He uttered a choked sound. He gripped the door-frame.

Keith hurried up, seizing Cobb's arm.

"I'm all right," he said dully.

On a bed lay a supine figure. By the faint starlight coming through the open window, he observed a knife rising from the man's chest like a lean tombstone. On a stand by the bed was a jar containing some gleaming substance—radium paint, perhaps.

And on the forehead of the dead man was a gleaming figure two!

KEITH lay in bed a short time later, his head throbbing with the problems confronting him. Curry guarded the door of Sarah's room, and silence had once more descended on the house.

His case against Sarah Kindall was fragile; it would not stand up in any court. Yellow hair—nothing more. Damp yellow hair! For a time after his return, he had worked on the lethal knife with a white powder—and found no prints. The jar containing the radium paint was similarly wiped to remove finger prints. Or, perhaps, the murderer or murderess had used gloves which had later been dropped into the lake.

Motives—he had plenty of those! Sarah Kindall was apparently at cross-

purposes with each of her brothers. She stood to gain tremendously by an increased income from the trust holding her father's watch company. Possible, too, that she felt them somehow to blame for not in some way helping her to find a marriage partner. Still, Keith wasn't satisfied.

Sarah was strong and sinewy. She could have swum to Rex Kindall's cabin and back easily, even carrying the small jar of radium paint and a knife. But by what means could she have made her body take on a luminous blue quality? He had not seen her except in a lighted room.

Then he remembered Robin's remark about the countess. *She wanted lights—many lights!* Why? For the reason Robin suggested, or another? She had screamed, and declared that a blue woman had entered her room. Was that attack merely a fabrication to throw attention from herself?

But her hair was red-gold. That was not so significant, however, as the fact that there was something peculiar-looking about her, a false note Keith couldn't place. Disguise always gave that effect, just as Sarah's yellow hair made her look odd. And the countess didn't like darkness!

Keith reviewed the facts about Mona Meusel which had been given him by her husband. And finally he fell asleep, promising himself that he would learn the countess' background on the morrow.

He was awakened by a soft hand on his face—awakened with nerves taut and quivering. In that brief instant of start before he could fully orient himself to his surroundings, Keith saw a glowing blue figure. The woman was dressed in a gossamer nightgown. It seemed to him that he could see through the gown, through the woman's body. He had the dazed impression that a blue skeleton glowed beside his bed; that the bones of the woman's body were shadows like the bones of a person's body under a fluoroscope.

That fleeting impression of a glowing skeleton beside his bed robbed Keith of power for immediate action. Too late, he heard something hissing downward. A club, a "billy"—he did not know what. But he tried to roll out from under that swiftly descending arc. Failed! The heavens seemed to explode before his eyes, and Keith felt himself falling—falling—falling, through a star-powdered sky. . . .

When his smarting eyes jerked open, he could see nothing for a few moments in that darkened room. His hands were bound, his legs bound, and when he tried to roll, he found that sheets held him to the bed, probably tied to the bed-posts. Tape across his lips made outcry impossible.

And then he caught a luminous brightness out of the corner of one eye, and jerked his head to the side. Leaning over the table by his bed was the blue woman! The room was dark, but in that glowing face he thought he could see haggard eyes below an aura of short, black hair. Mona Meusel?

"I'm sorry you must die," she said. "But you cannot interfere with my plans. There seems no other way."

The pulse in Keith's throat throbbed. The voice was mellow and deep. Not the accented voice of the countess! Not the dry, rustling voice of Sarah Kindall! A disguised voice? He did not think so; it seemed altogether natural to the speaker. A cultivated voice such as you might find among the better actors.

Actor! Mona Meusel was a chorus girl. Perhaps she had played small bits now and then.

He heard the tinkle of glass as the woman raised the glass stopper of a bottle. Nauseous fumes reached Keith's nostrils. A sickening chill swept over him. Chlorine gas! So that's what she was doing with the big bottle! Keith understood then what had kept her so long in the room. She had been stopping up door and window cracks. She would leave him with that deadly gas, to choke, gag, and finally die!

She slipped silently to the window—a livid blue streak of light. Then she stepped out on the roof, and silently closed the window.

Keith's head was already reeling. As the soft patter of her bare feet died away, he wrenched at the ropes the blue woman had made of his sheets. They held! He twisted his mouth, trying to break the adhesion of the tape over it, and although he felt as if the skin were being torn off his lips, he could not break its hold.

His body became drenched as the gas crept down into his lungs. Soft hands seemed to be choking off his breath. Desperately, Keith wrenched at the bonds holding his ankles and wrists.

He felt ill, frightfully weak. Balls of fire seemed to break before his pain-filled eyes. But he could feel the flesh being seared on one wrist. The strip of linen was giving!

Keith jerked his doubled fists back and forth, trying to bridge his body an inch or so by leaning his weight on his head and feet. Enough clearance to give freer play to his hands. The strips were slipping. But he was working blindly now. Waves of blackness swept over him. He jerked, wrenched and tore, like an animal caught in a trap. His wrists felt damp. Blood! And then the strips gave way!

Suddenly a shot shattered the silence. He heard a scream. Another shot! Then running steps; Curry's excited voice.

His senses were ebbing—and there was help not many feet away. But he could expect no assistance!

Keith reached out dazedly, put the stopper on the bottle, and hurled it toward the window. Glass crashed. Fresh air entered the room. For a moment, it intoxicated Keith, and his head reeled.

Then he broke the bonds holding him to the bed, and swung his legs over. For a moment, he put his head down to clear his senses, but the heavy, descending greenish-yellow gas was stronger near the floor.

Holding his breath to keep out the fiery fumes, Keith untied his ankles, and staggered to the window. He gulped in fresh air, but his lungs seemed to be afire. He threw up the other windows, then staggered drunkenly toward the door.

Unlocking it, he pulled it open.

THERE were voices in Sarah Kindall's room, and the door was open. The hall was flooded with lights. As Keith staggered across the hall, the Countess Eritha Koeler came running toward him, her negligee drawn close about her. Her blue eyes went wide.

"Mr. Keith, what's the matter?"

He forced a twisted smile, and stumbled toward the open door. Cobb Kindall came out, his face gray and drawn. Robin and Curry followed him, and even Robin's blithe spirits seemed to have been crushed.

"Dead!" Cobb said heavily.

"Your sister?" Keith asked incredulously.

Cobb nodded; then his eyes became bleak.

"Keith!" he said sternly. "You heard those shots! Why didn't you come sooner? Whoever shot my sister from the roof outside must have escaped by now."

"On the contrary," said Keith grimly.

"What do you mean?" Cobb asked.

"I'd like to ask a few questions. I have a theory. You make the See-at-Nite clocks in the Kindall factory, do you not, Mr. Kindall?"

"Certainly," said Cobb.

"The figures and hands of those clocks are painted with radium paint so that they can be seen at night, are they not?"

"Yes. We have a whole staff of girls doing that work. Recently we had some unfortunate results in the factory due to insufficient knowledge of radium."

"That's what I'm getting at," Keith said grimly. "Those unfortunate results, I take it, occurred to the girls painting the figures and hands of your See-at-Nite clocks?"

Cobb nodded his gray head. "The girls 'pointed' the brushes they used with their mouths."

"Thereby," Keith said, "getting radium poisoning."

"Yes," admitted Cobb Kindall. "Six cases were discovered less than four months ago. Since that time, there have been strict orders against putting the paint brush in the mouth, and all the girls must wear a special type of glove when working with radium paint."

"Now, as I understand it," Keith said, "radium poisoning kills in a very short time after it's discovered. Six months, perhaps?"

Cobb nodded. "It depends on how long and how often a girl has pointed her brush with her mouth before the poisoning shows itself."

"Did the Kindall Watch Company make restitution for the damage those six women suffered—say, to the extent of $30,000?"

"Exactly that," said Cobb.

"I see. Now I asked you once before if you remembered a certain Mona Meusel. You said you didn't. Think again, Mr. Kindall, and see if you can't recall the name. Among those six girls——"

Cobb's eyes shadowed. "Yes," he interrupted, "I believe that Mona Meusel was one of them, though that's not my end of the business. Robin, do you recall the name?"

"Mona Meusel was among the six," answered Robin.

"After receiving that money, Mona Meusel felt that she was not yet sufficiently revenged. She was determined to seek out every one of the Kindalls—and kill them. Perhaps in a company bulletin sent her she learned that the heads of the firm were holding a meeting up here at Lake Stevens. She left $25,000 of the money with her husband for the care of her children. The other $5,000 she was devoting to vengeance. She bought a number of trunks, and a wardrobe. And in the trunks were also other things. Radium paint—chlorine gas—certain weapons.

"She registered at one of the best hotels as the Countess Eritha Koeler. Ordinarily it would be hard to play such a part convincingly. Mona Meusel had certain natural advantages. She had doubtless learned from her husband, who had done wood carving for some of the nobility of Germany, their ways and manners and dress. She was also a specialist in make-up, and knew how to act a part convincingly."

The countess' face was deathly pale. In a heavily accented voice she cried: "Mr. Kindall, will you stand for these allegations?"

He looked from the countess to Keith, and back again.

Robin's voice was harsh with criticism: "Keith, this is ridiculous. I have seen Mona Meusel. While there's a certain resemblance, Mrs. Meusel had long, black hair."

"And a fair skin," said Keith. "Mr. Kindall, just how and where did you meet the countess?"

"At the Rochester House. The manager introduced her to us. Being fascinated by her charm, we invited her to be our guest, and she readily accepted."

"I dare say," Keith observed dryly. "It fitted her plans perfectly."

"But if Mona Meusel is the countess," Robin protested, "why was the countess attacked?"

"She was not attacked. The attack was faked!"

The countess drew herself up, her eyes flashing. Her lips curved in a contemptuous smile. "You are being very droll, Mr. Keith."

Her manner and her tones almost convinced Keith of a mistake. But he continued doggedly: "I'm not familiar with radium poisoning. But isn't it conceivable that it may make a person's body glow bluely at night? That was the way Meusel described the effects of the poisoning on his wife. He said there was a luminous blue quality about her, and that she first observed it herself after she had turned out the light, and saw her own reflection in the mirror."

"But he never——" The countess caught herself.

Cobb Kindall nodded. "That might be the effect."

"That *is* the effect," said Robin. "I talked to the doctor. Several of the poisoned women discovered their trouble in that way."

"If you knew that," Cobb snapped, "why in the world——"

"I never connected Haskall's blue woman with radium poisoning," said Robin. "How could I? It never occurred to me that one of the poisoned women——"

The countess started to slide away. Keith gripped her arm.

"A moment!" he said grimly. "We can settle this quite easily. Mr. Kindall, would you mind turning off the lights?"

"No!" the countess cried. "Don't—please don't! I'm afraid of darkness. Don't believe this man! He's insane!"

"Why are you afraid of darkness?" Keith asked. "Because your body can be seen glowing, then? . . . Another way of proving what I say is to remove that wig which somehow doesn't go with your face, Countess!"

Keith snatched off the wig. Beneath it was a shock of sheared black hair. The woman's eyes went wide with terror.

"Mrs. Meusel," Keith said, "you believed your husband for a while when he told you you were not going to die. But that night when you saw your body glowing in the darkness, you knew the truth. Brooding over your condition, you finally decided to make someone pay for your suffering. You killed Justin, Rex and Sarah Kindall. Am I right?"

"Yes," she quavered; then, turning brimming eyes on Cobb, she said in a choked voice: "Forgive me, Mr. Kindall!"

Suddenly her mood changed. She whirled on Keith—a small storm of fury. Her sharp nails raked his face, drawing blood. In the movement to protect his eyes, his grip on her arm loosened. She jerked away, flying down the hall.

"You'll never——" she cried.

Her words were lost as the door slammed. Moving like a winged thing, Keith's body struck the door just a split-second after the lock clicked.

He heard a drawer open, slam closed. Then the silence was punctuated by a staccato crack. Something thumped heavily on the floor.

Keith flung himself against the door.

It crashed inward. He was too late—and for that reason he felt a surge of relief.

On the floor in the darkness was a small, crumpled figure in a disarranged negligee. The figure gleamed with a faint bluish radiance. In one hand was still clutched a smoking gun. Below her left breast, the luminous blue was broken in one spot by a widening splotch of crimson.

Robin said softly, "She was too beautiful to die."

"And too dangerous to live," said Keith.

Night Song

By HUNG LONG TOM

What is the song
That the wind
Plays in the tall bamboo?

Oh, gentle lady,
In the azure night
It is playing
My love for you.

Do you not hear
The song
I breathe into the air
Bidding the moonbeams softly
To caress your hair?

Am I alone in your thoughts
Or are there others there?

Oh, lovely lady,
If you love me true
Let the wind
Whisper your answer
In the tall bamboo.

The Carnival of Death

By ARLTON EADIE

A thrilling mystery story of the present day—an eery adventure with a Golden Mummy, and strange death that walked at night

1. The Golden Mummy

LORD MOUNTHEAD, the millionaire newspaper magnate, lay back in his chair and stared fixedly at the sheet of paper on the desk before him. His portly figure was rigid and motionless. His clean-shaven lips were set in a grim, straight line, and in his narrowed eyes was a look akin to fear.

The room in which he sat, the library of Mounthead Chase, was a thing to gladden the heart and delight the eyes of any connoisseur of antiques. On every side were priceless tapestries, richly wrought armor, painted canvases in whose shadowy depths the fire of long-dead genius still seemed to glow. Yet at that moment the owner of all this luxury and magnificence was unheedful of the beauty around him. His every thought and emotion were centered on the letter that he had just opened:

> Return the golden mummy to the land of Khem, or you'll die quickly.

Below the printed words, by way of a signature, was a neatly drawn Ancient Egyptian hieroglyph representing a human figure with the head of a jackal.

A sudden frown creased Lord Mounthead's forehead, and a gleam of fury shone in his brooding eyes.

"It's blackmail!" he muttered thickly. "By heaven! this fellow, whoever he may be, will find he's taken on more than he can manage if he tries to put this melodramatic black-hand stuff across me!" He reached over and jabbed his forefinger savagely on the bell-push. "If he starts any killing business he will find it's a game that two can play at!"

In spite of the vehemence with which his lordship voiced this threat, the unexpected and almost noiseless entrance of his private secretary caused him to swing round with a nervous start.

Edwin Lorimer was a youngish man, slight and rather good-looking. His sleek, black hair was brushed straight back from his pale forehead; a tiny mustache, close-clipped until it resembled a thin, dark line, adorned his upper lip.

"Your lordship rang for me?"

"I did." Mounthead tossed the letter across the desk. "What do you make of this rigmarole?"

Lorimer's thin lips curved in a slight smile as he slowly read it through.

"I should say that it was nothing more than a practical joke," he declared with a shrug.

"I wish I could think the same," his employer returned grimly. "But I'm certain that the writer of that letter had something more in his head than a mere desire to be funny. And I'm equally certain that he has more than a smattering of knowledge about Ancient Egypt. Notice the expression, 'the Land of Khem'—that, of course, is the old name for the Valley of the Nile. Moreover, I think I can detect indications that the figure of Anubis, the jackal-headed god, which has been used as a kind of signature, has been drawn with a papyrus-reed pen, such as the ancients used. The draftsmanship is

"She felt an icy hand on her shoulder."

perfect. It has been very carefully traced from a genuine original, or else——"

"Yes, your lordship?"

"Or else the cult of the Death-god is not so extinct as most people imagine!"

Edwin Lorimer started and looked at the old man keenly. Then he dropped his eyes and abruptly changed the topic by asking an unimportant question about one of the other letters, shortly afterward quitting the room.

Left alone, Lord Mounthead quickly glanced through the rest of the morning mail, a preoccupied frown on his face. Tossing the last one aside, he again took up the cryptic message and stared at it.

As a public man it was no unusual thing for him to receive abusive and occasionally threatening letters from anonymous writers. Should he ring up the police and inform them of the threat? For an instant his hand hovered hesitating over the telephone. Then he turned away with a slight shrug and, after locking the letter and envelope carefully away in the wall safe, ordered the car to be

brought round, and a few minutes later was being rapidly driven to his city office.

Although the letter was out of sight, it was far from being out of mind. Try as he might he could not banish the memory of the mysterious warning. The vision of the hideous, jackal-headed God of Death would keep floating before the pages on which he sought to fix his attention. Time and again he found his thoughts wandering from the business in hand as he recalled the strange chain of circumstances which had resulted in the Golden Mummy coming into his possession.

THE man who goes excavating in Egypt nowadays must be an enthusiast indeed, for as matters now stand he has but a slender chance of obtaining any monetary return for his expenditure of capital and energy. The time is past when a lucky stroke of his pickax will render him rich for life. The Egyptian Government, at last alive to the value of the antiquities which were being carried off wholesale to enrich the galleries of every European capital, have forbidden their export except by official sanction.

When, a little over a year ago, Lord Mounthead began to explore the ancient tombs in the Valley of the Kings, he was obliged to give very substantial guarantees that all relics discovered would be delivered up to the authorities. At the end of every season he was to submit to the *Service des Antiquités* an exhaustive report on his work, enumerating every find, so that the Government could retain such antiquities as they might require for the Cairo Museum, letting the finder keep what they rejected.

It will be readily understood that the chances of a foreigner carrying away a valuable and unique antique were very small indeed under this system; therefore there was not a more surprized man in the world than Lord Mounthead himself when he realized that the hawk-eyed native officials had allowed such a prize to slip through their fingers as the Golden Mummy, now the gem of his collection.

The find had come after a long period of disheartening failure. Throughout the Egyptian winter they had toiled, sinking shaft after shaft in the sun-baked soil, exploring the chambers and galleries hewn, countless ages ago, in the depths of the Biban-el-Moluk, the towering mountain which forms one rampart of the valley which was the last sleeping-place of Egypt's illustrious dead.

It had been by the merest chance that Wilmer Denton, the young American Egyptologist whom Lord Mounthead had engaged to assist him in the work, had stumbled on the entrance to the huge underground temple. Unprovided with tools as he had been, he had enlarged the hole and peered through one of the shafts which had been constructed for the purpose of ventilation. For his find was no mere burial chamber, but a properly equipped temple intended to be used as a place of worship. The find was unique in the annals of Egyptian research, and as a reward the Government allowed Lord Mounthead to retain the smallest of the twelve mummy-cases which lay within the temple.

The case had been handed over to him with the seals unbroken. Imagine, then, his surprize and delight when he opened it and found it contained the mummy of a former high priest of Anubis, together with the full regalia of solid gold that had been used in the worship of the god.

That had been over a year ago, and now came this dread warning.

AFTER lunch Lord Mounthead gave up all pretense of working and rang up Wilmer Denton at his house at Lee.

"Are you open for another engage-

ment?" he asked as soon as he heard the young American's voice at the other end.

"Sure," came the ready answer. "Are you thinking of sending another expedition to Egypt?"

There was an appreciable pause.

"Well, not exactly," said Mounthead at length. "I was thinking of asking you to take up a line of inquiry in this country—a purely theoretical investigation, of course. I can't go into details over the line. Will you come to dinner at Mounthead Chase tonight? We can talk over the matter then. You'll be there? Good!"

He was about to hang up the receiver when a sudden thought seemed to strike him.

"Hullo! Hold on a moment, Denton. Do you happen to have such a thing as a revolver handy just now?"

The sound of a slight chuckle came over the 'phone.

"Well, I don't carry a gun around in this highly civilized city, but I guess I could lay my hand on one."

"Bring it along with you tonight," Mounthead ordered curtly.

"That sounds like business!" was Wilmer Denton's comment. "What's in the wind, anyway?"

"Kareef—unless I'm much mistaken."

He had time to hear the other's whistle of surprize before he rang off.

"I guess his lordship's something of an unconscious humorist," Wilmer Denton grinned as he began to overhaul the mechanism of a very serviceable automatic. "If you want a gun in the back of your pants in order to do a bit of theoretical investigation, I wonder what your outfit should be when you have a real job of work on hand? But it sounds like business, anyway," he mused as he plied the oil-can and cleaning-rod. "I wonder if I shall have the pleasure of renewing my acquaintance with the Honorable Celia? And I wonder if her adorable stepmammy has forgotten what happened in the conservatory?"

When he quitted the house that evening in his little coupé, Wilmer was looking forward to a somewhat exciting time, but the actual events of that night were destined to outdo his wildest dreams.

2. *Kareef Makes a Threat*

"I CANNOT help feeling a little anxious about your father, Celia. He has been looking terribly worried ever since this morning. Do you think he has received bad news about his speculations?"

The young girl to whom these questions were addressed shrugged slightly and a slight but rather bitter smile curved her full red lips.

Celia Mounthead could well understand the anxiety with which her stepmother asked the last question. Right from the moment of their first meeting, the young motherless girl had read the real character of her father's second wife. Well enough she had sensed that wealth and title had been the inducements that had led the beautiful and talented actress, Thelma Delorme, to marry an old man of nearly double her age.

Clever as she was, Thelma was apt to fall into the not uncommon error of estimating other people's actions by her own standards. Money and pleasure were the only things which she permitted to disturb her sheltered and artificial existence. Lord Mounthead was worried; therefore he must have been let down badly on one of his numerous investments. Such was her line of reasoning. That there might possibly be other, grimmer problems overshadowing her husband's life never for a moment entered her head.

She repeated her former question, adding: "I'm sure he must have had a big loss."

"Maybe," Celia laughed lightly. "Hadn't you better ask him, as you seem so anxious? I'm sure it doesn't worry me," she went on, turning and looking the other woman full in the face. "After all, we are not so poor that a few thousands one way or the other will make much difference. Why, I've heard that Daddy spent a small fortune on his Egyptian researches—far more than the actual value of the Golden Mummy, great as that is."

Thelma's finely arched brows drew down in a sudden frown as she turned away, biting her lips. There were not very many years' difference in the ages of Celia and her stepmother, and, owing to the artificial aids to beauty affected by the latter, such difference as did exist was by no means apparent in the softly shaded glow of the lights. A stranger might have taken them to be sisters.

That Thelma was beautiful Celia did not for a moment deny. Yet, strangely enough, the general effect of her appearance was far from pleasing. Why this should be is difficult to explain, for the most captious critic could not have found fault with any detail of her appearance. Paradoxical as it may seem, it was the very perfection of her face and form that marred her attractiveness. Although her features were flawless in their classical symmetry, her figure as delicately molded as that of a Grecian nymph, hers was the cold, dead beauty which appealed to the eye alone. Beautiful as a statue of some goddess of old, Thelma Mounthead was as soulless as the sculptured marble of which it was composed.

At the mention of her husband's hobby, Thelma's lips curved in a faint sneer.

"It passes my comprehension what your father can see in such things. Ugh! a lot of old dried-up bones! If I had my way I'd throw the whole lot out of doors."

Celia's white teeth showed in a hearty laugh.

"Better not let his lordship hear you say so!" she cried in mock dismay. "That mummy is covered from head to foot with plates of solid gold. And I heard Wilmer say once that there might be other jewels inside—sometimes there are, you know——"

"Indeed?" There was a curious hardening of the lines about Thelma's mouth as she said the word. A moment later she turned the matter off with a laughing shrug. "But there! I fear the subject of Egyptian mummies, jeweled or plain, is a little too musty for my taste."

Her stepdaughter was regarding her with mischievous eyes.

"That's because you don't know how romantic and thrilling they really are," Celia bantered. "I must ask Wilmer to tell you the story of what happened when he discovered the mummy."

Thelma Mounthead rose to her feet with an abrupt movement.

"If by 'Wilmer' you mean that vulgar American, Wilmer Denton, then I have no desire to be enlightened on the subject," she said with icy insolence.

A quick flush came into the cheeks of the younger girl and her usually serene eyes began to smolder with a light which boded danger.

"I don't know what right you have to say that Wilmer is vulgar," she said, speaking calmly with an effort. "His mode of expressing himself may be a little more snappy than ours at times, but not more so than you hear occasionally in good society."

Thelma raised her eyebrows.

"Really?" she cried with thinly veiled sarcasm. "Why, I declare, you are quite upset. Well, Mr. Denton may count himself lucky in having such an enthusiastic advocate as you. But I was not alluding to his illiteracies. You would do

well to remember, my dear Celia, that this Denton man is a mere paid employee of your father's, and as such is as far below Lord Mounthead's station of life as——"

"As *you* were when he married you!" Celia burst out, her eyes flashing, her voice trembling with anger. "If Wilmer was a paid employee when he discovered the Golden Mummy, were you not paid when you acted at the theater——"

"I decline to discuss the matter," said Thelma, crossing to the door. "When you are calmer I will give you my opinion of Wilmer Denton."

"Then you can tell me in front of him. He's coming here tonight."

Her stepmother stood like one turned to stone.

"Coming here?" she gasped. "I wonder that he has the audacity to enter this house after his disgraceful conduct on his last visit."

"What disgraceful conduct are you referring to?" Celia asked with exasperating coolness.

"You know perfectly well that I came upon him making love to you in the conservatory."

"Well, and what about it?" Celia's eyes met the other woman's in frank challenge as she asked the question. "As a matter of fact, my dear interfering stepmother, when you crept on the scene like a prowling pussy-cat, Wilmer was kissing me—and I was kissing him!" she added defiantly.

"Like they do on Hampstead Heath on a bank holiday!" sneered Lady Mounthead with a hard little laugh.

"Indeed?" said Celia sweetly. "Well, I am not in the habit of frequenting such places, so you have the advantage of me there!"

And before the other girl could think of a suitable reply, Celia cut short the conversation by quitting the room.

WILMER DENTON was conscious of a strained atmosphere hanging over the palatial dining-room of Mounthead Chase when he called that evening. Not only did his host seem preoccupied and ill at ease, but it was clear that Lady Thelma openly resented his presence. He felt a sense of relief when dinner came to an end, but it was then that he received his first surprize. Naturally he had expected that Lord Mounthead would wait until they were alone before broaching the subject that had been the reason of his visit. Imagine his astonishment when he heard his employer say:

"Please do not go away, Thelma. If you and Celia care to remain here you may hear something that will interest you. I received a somewhat disquieting communication by the morning mail, and I think you should know about it in case"—he hesitated and cleared his throat nervously—"in case of accidents. Here is the letter."

He took it from his pocket and passed it to each of the company in turn. Wilmer was the last to read it.

"What do you make of it, Mr. Denton?" Lord Mounthead asked as the young man laid it down.

"It sure sounds like our old friend Kareef all right," said the American. "It looks as though he's out to keep his promise."

"Kareef?"

"What promise?"

"Is it really serious?"

Lord Mounthead raised his hand to still the flood of excited questions.

"I think the best way of explaining the matter would be for Wilmer to tell you exactly what happened when he found the ancient Temple of Anubis, then you can form your own conclusions about the letter. Go ahead, Wilmer."

Thus enjoined, the young American plunged into his narrative. In a sketchy

fashion he outlined the difficulties which had beset the early stages of their work, only going into details when he arrived at the description of the actual find.

"I happened to be alone at the time, except for the native laborers; for his lordship had gone down to Cairo to see about some supplies. We had made a camp in the valley, partly so that I could keep an eye on things generally and prevent the pilfering which always goes on out there; partly to save the waste of time traveling from Luxor every day.

"I remember that night well. Although nothing out of the ordinary routine had happened, or seemed likely to happen, a curious feeling of unrest—of expectancy—came over me as I sat smoking before my tent and watching the silver rim of the full moon push itself up over the jagged edge of the Biban-al-Moluk.

"I suppose all of you have seen photographs of the Valley of the Kings, but no mere pictured representation can give the sense of aching desolation of the actual scene. It is, soberly and literally, a Valley of the Dead. No living thing—not a single blade of grass or withered bush—breaks the naked outlines of the tumbled boulders with which the defile is strewn.

"For a while I sat idly watching the fantastic shadows thrown amid the great blocks of sandstone by the rising moon, my mind dwelling on nothing more occult than a plan of work for the next day, when I intended to set the men to enlarging the hole I had discovered in one of the galleries in the rock, with a view to finding out what lay beyond.

"Suddenly, as I looked, I was aware of a white-clad figure clambering down the hillside toward the opening of the gallery. At first I thought it might be one of the watchmen employed by the Department of Antiquities to guard the numerous tombs situated in the Valley; but a moment's thought made me dismiss this idea. These men wear a sort of semi-uniform, whereas the stranger was clad in the flowing robes of an Arab. Moreover, there was a stealthiness about his movements which seemed to show that he was out for no good purpose. Hastily buckling on my revolver, I quitted the tent and, keeping in the shadow as much as possible, made my way cautiously toward the mouth of the gallery into which the stranger had now vanished.

"It was not long before I gained the mouth of the tunnel. At once it became clear that my suspicions had been well founded. The mysterious stranger had kindled a small lantern, and by its feeble light he was searching—not the narrow ventilation shaft that I had discovered—but another spot on the opposite side of the tunnel. Crouching low in the darkness, I watched his actions with growing amazement. The man appeared to be going through some intricate calculations; now pacing a certain distance along the narrow passage; now stopping to consult the scrap of paper he held in his hand; now retracing his steps; now going forward. At last he came to a halt not ten feet from where I lay. Then he began to pass his long, brown fingers over the ancient carvings with which the walls were covered.

"WHILE he was thus engaged I had a good opportunity of observing his appearance. I at once saw that he was no Arab, although he was dressed as one. His thin, hawk-like features were destitute of beard or mustache; which fact, in itself, was sufficient to show that he did not profess the Mohammedan faith. His age was as difficult to guess as his race. Judging by his movements, he might have been a man in the prime of life; judging by the wrinkled, parchment-like features, he might have been a hundred

years old. And there was something indefinably sinister about him, an intangible air of grim mystery which seemed to emanate from the man himself.

"For quite ten minutes he continued to run his claw-like fingers over the sculptured figures of the ancient gods, and, as nothing happened, I was beginning to grow somewhat tired of the business. I was just about to step forward and ask him to give an account of himself, when, without the slightest warning, the ground opened at his feet and he disappeared."

"In a cloud of sulfur?" laughed Celia.

"Upon my word," Wilmer echoed her laugh, "I could not have been more surprized if he had. But I quickly saw the explanation of the vanishing trick. You know how the figures of the wall-sculptures are deeply outlined by lines graven in the stone? Well, one of the figures had been completely separated from the body of the work, being pivoted in such a manner that, on being pressed, it would swing inward, releasing some hidden mechanism which in turn opened a trap-door in the floor of the tunnel. Even in the first moment of my surprize I realized that such a device must have been in pretty recent use to have worked so smoothly, and, as it turned out, I was right.

"His sudden disappearance left me in complete darkness. But I have a good sense of direction, and I found no difficulty in making my way to the movable panel. I hesitated a moment before pressing the spring, but my professional curiosity was by this time thoroughly roused. Nothing short of the knowledge that certain death awaited me on the other side would have kept me back just then. Taking a long breath, I planted my feet firmly on the stone and thrust my fist into the visage of the god on the wall. I felt it give beneath my touch; then the ground seemed to slither from beneath my feet and I was sliding down an inclined tunnel, gasping with the heat and half stifled by the clouds of fine dust raised by my joy-ride into the unknown.

Kareef

"I landed, breathless but unhurt, on my hands and knees. My first glance showed me that I was in a chamber very different from the usual tomb-chamber—an underground temple, nothing less. My second glance showed me the muzzle of a very modern-looking rifle held within a foot of my head. It was held by my mysterious visitor, and he seemed as pleased to see me as a starving cat is to make the acquaintance of a nice, plump mouse.

"For a moment his expression was so devilish that I didn't expect to live a moment longer. But as we continued to look at each other, his scowl relaxed until something like a smile twitched his leathery features.

" 'Denton *Effendi,*' he said, addressing me by name, and, to my amazement, speaking in cultured English, 'you do me too much honor. I am not worthy that you should prostrate yourself at my feet.'

"He ended up with a sardonic laugh, in which I thought it policy to join. After that the situation seemed to ease up a little.

" 'Get up,' said the unknown, 'and listen to what I am about to say.'

"He had quite a lot to say, but I had heard it all—or similar stuff—before. He was one of those fanatics who look upon all archeologists, excavating in Egypt, as a pack of ghouls who go about ransacking tombs in a mad search for loot—an absurd idea, of course, and one that I tried my best to dispel. But I

might as well have been talking to one of the stone idols for all the effect my words had on him.

" 'Fate has sent you across my path, Denton *Effendi,*' he said solemnly. 'Heed well my words. A few minutes ago I had you at my mercy; one touch on the trigger and it would have been for ever beyond your power to desecrate this sacred shrine. But I respected your life, O stranger, and in return I ask you to respect the dust of the holy priests of Anubis who are buried in this tomb. And rest assured that I do not warn in vain. Ill-fortune awaits those who despoil the holy dead!'

"Of course I did my best to explain that there was not the slightest chance of our carrying off his precious mummies. By the very concession under which we were working we were obliged to hand over everything to the Egyptian Government; so if there was any question of sacrilege and despoiling he would have to settle the matter with them. He cheered up wonderfully after I told him that; for, as far as I could make out, up to then his chief worry had been the fear that the mummies and relics were to be carried to England or the States to form the principal attraction of a dime museum.

"Mind you, at the time I was speaking in absolute good faith. It never occurred to me for a moment that the Egyptian Government would be crazy enough to hand over the pick of the whole collection of relics to Lord Mounthead. But that's exactly what they did, anyway. Naturally enough, his lordship did not refuse the gift. The mummy was carefully packed and placed on board a Nile steamer for transport to the coast.

"THE night before we sailed I received another visit from the mysterious Egyptian. This time I was ready for him, and he didn't get the chance to hold me up—which was perhaps lucky for me, as the man seemed almost beside himself with rage at what he was pleased to call my treachery and duplicity. According to him, the mummy which had fallen to our share was the most important of the whole lot. For some reason that was not very clear he wanted to get hold of that mummy. He went down on his knees to me, begging that I should make him a present of it. When I gently pointed out to him that such a thing was out of the question, he fairly went off the deep end. He spoke his piece for ten minutes on end, cursing the despoilers of the tomb by every saint and god in the Egyptian calendar, beginning with Amon-Ra and ending up with Zaza-Menkh. I guess he only stopped because he'd used up the whole bunch. At last he stepped up close to me and fixed me with his snaky eyes.

" 'You are fated to do this thing?' he said, speaking very slowly.

" 'Sure,' I answered.

"He raised up his skinny arms above his head, his whole body shaking with rage.

" 'Then beware the vengeance of the outraged gods of Khem!' he cried. 'Wo unto you, despoilers of tombs! Wo unto you, who fill your houses and museums with our sacred dead that they may be made a mockery and a show! Wo unto you, profaners of our ancient sanctuaries! Wo unto you, who meddle with the dreaded mysteries of the Past! For thy house shall become a place of mourning; tears and lamentations shall be thy portion; death shall be thine inheritance! I have spoken, I—Kareef, the descendant of the High Priests of Anubis, the God of Death and Destruction. On thy head be it! Farewell!' "

Wilmer Denton paused to light anoth-

er cigar, afterward glancing round the circle of his listeners.

"Cheerful old boy, this Kareef, eh?" he went on with a smile. "Of course I didn't take his curse-spilling stunt seriously. I could see that he was peeved pretty considerably at losing the Golden Mummy—I thought maybe he'd had his eye on the cache himself and we'd jumped his claim. I had forgotten all about him and his curses by the next morning, but they came back to me quick enough when things began to happen. The run of bad luck which followed our journey to the coast would have made Jonah's voyages seem like happy outings by comparison.

"First of all the native pilot put us on a sand-bank. Had the Nile been rising it would have been an easy matter to have set this right; but, with the water falling, we were four days before we got off. Before that happened we were boarded one night by a party of natives, and narrowly escaped being murdered in our sleep. No sooner had we got under way than the engineer—a European—began to find pieces of scrap-iron mixed up with his machinery. The chapter of accidents ended up with a spectacular mutiny of the whole crew, who flatly refused to go any farther unless the mummy was thrown overboard, and at the same time the native firemen struck work in the stokehold.

"Fortunately there was enough head of steam left in the boilers to carry the big stern-wheeler into the bank, where we moored. We flagged the first Government steamer that passed and asked them to send a military escort and transport convoy to protect the mummy and carry it to the nearest point whence it could be conveyed by rail to Suez. For by this time I was pretty certain that friend Kareef was willing to go to some considerable trouble to insure, by very materialistic means, that the curses of his old gods came to roost on the right doorstep. The arm of coincidence has a fairly long reach, I knew, but I did not think it would stretch so far as to cover our misfortunes up to date.

"Well, after that our progress became, by comparison, tame and uneventful. It is true that there was an outbreak of a mysterious disease among the escort, and a narrowly averted accident where a party of natives had removed a rail from the track; but we got the mummy safely aboard Lord Mounthead's private yacht, and a fortnight later it was deposited in this house."

He paused dramatically, then added: "The last incident was the very determined attempt on my own life tonight!"

A chorus of surprized exclamations broke from the group at this unexpected announcement. Above the rest Lord Mounthead's voice was heard:

"Tonight?" he jerked out the questions in rapid succession. "How?—where?"

"If you care to examine my car you will find a neat bullet-hole through the mica windscreen and another through the woodwork at the back. The shots were fired at me as I was on my way here this evening."

"Where?" asked his employer quickly.

"At a spot about a mile from here," answered the American. "The shots came from the direction of a little wood on the right-hand side of the road. Of course, there wasn't a soul to be seen, and pursuit was out of the question, to say nothing of being decidedly risky in the twilight."

Lord Mounthead frowned as he shifted uneasily in his chair.

"The shots might have been accidental—poachers, for instance?" he suggested.

Wilmer Denton shook his head.

"They don't shoot game with automatic pistols," he said dryly.

Mounthead rose to his feet with a jerk.

"By heaven, this is serious, Wilmer! It simply means——"

A scream from Lady Thelma cut into his words like the stroke of a knife.

"Look—at the window!" she gasped, pointing.

Every eye was turned in the direction in which her shaking finger was stretched. Framed in the lower pane of one of the tall French windows, dimly illuminated by the shaded lights within the room, was an apparition which looked more like the figment of a nightmare than the countenance of a human being.

The hawk-like features were so bloodless and emaciated that they might have passed for a mask of tightly stretched parchment, had it not been for the gleaming eyes which, jet-black and unspeakably evil, showed between the puckered lids. The thin lips were parted in a smile of sneering malignity.

For a moment the sinister figure stood calmly regarding the four faces turned to him. Then he vanished abruptly into the darkness.

Wilmer Denton was no coward—young, vigorous, sane-minded, and devoid of nerves. Yet he had found his blood running ice-cold in his veins as those malignant eyes had fixed themselves on his, seeming to search his very soul and paralyze his limbs into a leaden torpor. Not until the sinister form vanished did the spell snap, awakening him to sudden action.

"Kareef!" he shouted, and leapt to the window, pistol in hand.

3. *A Night Marauder*

THE dining-room windows opened on a narrow raised terrace of stone, beyond which the shrubbery stretched, its densely shadowed walks dark and somber in the feeble light of the moon.

On emerging from the room, Denton's first care was to place himself so that his figure was not outlined against the light coming from within; then he advanced to the edge of the terrace, and raising himself cautiously until he could peer over the stone balustrade, endeavored to locate the position of his lurking enemy.

He held his breath, listening. But there was no sound except the soft whispering of the wind-stirred trees, and, once, the mournful hoot of an owl in the distant woods down the hill. For a few minutes he stood baffled and undecided. Then he turned and made his way back to the room he had just quitted.

Lord Mounthead looked up as he entered the room. Wilmer Denton shook his head at the question in the old man's eyes.

"Vanished like a ghost," was his terse explanation.

Mounthead frowned meditatively. His face had become a shade paler and his eyes glittered with an expression such as Denton had never seen in them before.

"You think it really was Kareef?" he asked after a long pause.

"Dead sure of it. I'd recognize him in a thousand. He has a style of beauty which impresses itself on my mind!"

The grim humor of the American's remark drew a smile from all present except Lady Thelma. She had not moved or spoken since the moment when she had caught sight of the face at the window. She looked round angrily at the sound of the others' mirth.

"This is no jesting matter!" she cried impatiently. "I wonder that you have the heart to laugh, with such a creature hovering round the place." She gave a violent shudder. "Did you ever see such a

horrible face in the whole of your lives? I'm sure it was not human! It looked more like one of the mummies in your museum than anything else I can think of. He looked a thousand years old. And his eyes—ugh?" She ended with another shudder of loathing.

Lord Mounthead crossed to her side and poured out a glass of wine.

"Drink this, Thelma," he said gently. "It will do you good. Your nerves are all on edge——"

"No wonder!" she exclaimed harshly. "When a dead man stares at you——"

"Come, come, Thelma." He gave an impatient shrug as he pressed her to drink the wine. "You are talking like a foolish child. There certainly was a faint resemblance between his face and that of my Golden Mummy, but that is merely because both belong to the pure Egyptian type. The man you happened to see——"

"That was no mortal man—of that I am certain!" Thelma burst out hysterically. "It was a devil—a fiend in human form!"

"I guess we'd better catch him and put him in a cage," smiled Wilmer Denton.

Lady Thelma favored the young man with an acid glance and immediately turned to her husband.

"Don't you think it high time to put an end to these witticisms and do something practical to insure my safety?" she asked, in a tone of cold fury all the more bitter because convention demanded that it should be suppressed. "When are you going to ring up the police?"

Lord Mounthead gave a tolerant laugh.

"Upon my word, Thelma, you are not very logical tonight. If the intruder was a supernatural being—as you insisted a moment ago he was—then it is clearly useless to ask Scotland Yard to arrest him. If, on the other hand, he is a human being like ourselves, then I think that Wilmer and I will be quite capable of seeing that he does no harm. I've spent a fairly considerable amount of money having this place made burglar-proof, and once the doors and windows are shut and the connection switched on, it would take a very clever devil to get through without ringing the alarms. And it may be an additional comfort to you to know that I intend to amuse myself in the billiard-room until daylight appears."

"I'll remain up with you, sir," Wilmer volunteered at once. "I'm a keen student of practical spiritualism, and I've often wondered how a spook would stand up against a really well-aimed bullet."

THE arrangements for the night were quickly made. After the ladies had retired, Lord Mounthead rang for Mapes, the butler, and explained how matters stood, though he was careful not to disclose the identity of the stranger whom he had seen lurking on the terrace.

"I want to make sure that everything is fastened up all right," he concluded. "I'll make your rounds with you."

Having satisfied himself that everything was secure, Lord Mounthead intimated that the butler might go to bed.

At the door the old man hesitated. "Shall I let the dog run loose in the grounds, your lordship?"

His master considered the suggestion for a moment, then shook his head.

"I think not, Mapes. It might scare the man away."

Mapes was a servitor who prided himself on his serene and unruffled composure, but his master's unexpected answer scattered his professional decorum to the winds.

"Good 'eavens, sir!" he ejaculated in amazement. "Don't you *want* to scare the scoundrel away?"

Mounthead gave a grim smile.

"Not until I've had a little talk with

him—he might be able to tell me a whole lot of things I want to know. By the way, Mapes, did you plug the 'phone line through to the billiard room as I told you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then just you toddle off to bed and leave everything to me. Good-night."

After the old servant had taken his unwilling departure, Lord Mounthead switched off the lights and made his way to the room where Wilmer Denton was awaiting him.

The billiard room was on the upper floor. Its walls were destitute of windows, light being admitted by day through a large skylight in the roof. Now the only illumination was the row of adjustable electric globes over the table, which, being shaded to throw their rays downward, did not show a telltale glare through the glass overhead. It was the one room in the house in which lights might be kept burning without the fact being observed from outside, and it was for this reason that Lord Mounthead had selected it for his vigil.

Their interest in the game soon flagged. The play of both was erratic and half-hearted, their thoughts being far from the gently clicking balls. At last the American threw down his cue with a disgusted laugh.

"When I start missing nursery cannons it's time to give myself a rest!" he declared, after performing the feat in question for the third time in succession. "I'm getting as nervous as a cat tonight."

Mounthead jerked his head toward the cigar cabinet.

"Bite on one of those, and let's talk."

"That sounds good to me," acquiesced the American.

It was only natural that the talk should run on their mysterious visitor. Lord Mounthead had not been present at the discovery of the tomb in the Valley of the Kings, and he plied his assistant with questions about the man who so unwittingly revealed the secret entrance.

"I've been working up a theory about that," said Denton. "It's my firm belief that the worship of the ancient gods has been carried right down to recent times in that old temple—until we discovered it, in fact. I remember it struck me at the time that the temple didn't have the look of a place that had not been entered for two or three thousand years. For one thing, there wasn't that layer of fine dust that you always find in a sealed chamber. I can't describe it exactly, but the place seemed to have a kind of *inhabited* feeling. Of course, I'm quite well aware that every object in the temple was about three thousand or more years old—I'm not such a bonehead as to mistake a genuine antique when I see it. No, my point is that the different objects seemed to have been used recently. Why, the light, powdery ash of the incense was still lying in the bowls where it had been burnt during the last service, or celebration——"

"Or sacrifice!" suggested the other man with peculiar emphasis.

Wilmer Denton echoed the word in a tone of astonishment.

"Why do you use that word?" he asked after a pause.

Lord Mounthead uttered a curiously strained laugh.

"Have you forgotten the name of the god to which the hidden temple was dedicated?"

"No, I haven't forgotten that," returned Wilmer. "It was Anubis."

"Exactly." The voice of the elder man was jerky with excitement; a queer, brooding look had come into his eyes. "And Anubis, 'The Jackal-headed,' is the god of death and destruction—Kareef himself told you that at your first meeting. There is not the slightest doubt that sacrifices of some sort went on in

that temple—what if they were *human sacrifices?*"

The young American looked up sharply.

"Gee, I never thought of that!" he exclaimed. "Of course that would explain why the worship was conducted in secret. And, now I come to think of it, such a supposition would explain the ugly-looking dagger that was in the mummy-case. After all, there is nothing impossible in the theory that a sect of Ancient Egyptians has survived to the present day. The priests who served the gods were allowed to marry, you know, and what is likelier than that they should have passed on to their descendants the ancient traditions and rites of their worship? The very existence of the Jewish race today proves that such a thing is possible, even in the face of vigorous persecution; though, of course, I am not suggesting that there is any other parallel between the two cases except the mere fact of the traditions of each race being preserved intact. When you stop to consider that the cult of the ancient gods was in full swing when the Moslems overran Egypt, and that the only terms they offered the vanquished people were the well-known: 'Pay tribute, embrace the Koran, or die,' the secret worship of Anubis becomes not only feasible, but highly probable. And it explains a whole bunch of things that have been puzzling me. If this Kareef——"

Mounthead suddenly leaned forward and gripped his wrist.

"Hist! Did you hear that?" he breathed.

"What?"

"A tapping — somewhere downstairs. There it is again!"

In the dead silence of the night an eery knocking floated through the great house.

Tap-tap-tap . . . tap-tap-tap . . . tap-tap, it went; faint, elusive, yet sinister by reason of its very insistence.

Wilmer Denton

The eyes of the two listeners met in a questioning look. Then Mounthead rose to his feet and moved slowly toward the door. But Wilmer was by his side before he reached it.

"I guess we'll see this through together," he whispered.

SLOWLY, cautiously, testing every tread before putting their weight on it, in case its creaking should betray their presence, the two men crept down the wide staircase. A long, listening pause at the bottom told them that the noise was coming from the rear of the house. It grew steadily stronger as they advanced, resolving itself into an unmistakable contact of some metallic substance against one of the window-panes of the dining-room.

Wilmer gently turned the handle of the door, and, inch by inch, pushed it open. The curtains had been drawn over the high French windows, and on the center one, faintly illuminated by the struggling moonbeams, was thrown the shadow of a vague, blurred figure. Stepping softly across the carpeted floor, Wilmer unfastened the catch, flung open the window, and seized the muffled figure which crouched on the threshold.

A sharp yelp of terror burst from the man as he felt their grip close on him. He struggled and fought like a madman, shaking his captors to and fro in his wild efforts to free himself.

As they struggled, a sense of bewilderment began to steal over Wilmer Denton. Even in that dim light it was plain

to him that their prisoner was not Kareef. This man was twice the bulk of the emaciated Egyptian; moreover, instead of being clean-shaven and bald, he wore a full, bushy beard and hair which reached to his massive shoulders. His voice, too, was deeper and more guttural than Kareef's sibilant tones.

"What is it?" he demanded, with a strong foreign accent. "Why do you attack me thus? Who are you?"

"I am the owner of this house——" began Mounthead, only to be interrupted by a cry of surprize from his prisoner.

"You? Lord Mounthead?" he almost shouted. "And you do not know me—your old friend Boris Matrikoff?"

"Matrikoff!" repeated Lord Mounthead, amazed in his turn. "Why do you come like this—like a thief in the night?"

The man lowered his voice to an urgent whisper.

"Because I am surrounded by secret enemies—spies who dog me night and day. They put me in prison, but I escaped. They said I was mad——"

"Mad?" echoed Lord Mounthead. "Come inside!"

He drew the Russian within and locked the window. It was only when he heard Wilmer Denton's shout of laughter that he realized the unconscious humor of his last remark.

"Anyone would think you were running a private lunatic asylum," Wilmer grinned.

"I shall begin to think so myself, if this sort of thing continues to go on," Mounthead answered, passing his hand across his forehead with a bewildered gesture. "It's enough to make anybody doubt his sanity when he finds himself having a tussle with a man who died two years ago!"

Boris Matrikoff burst into a hearty laugh.

"Not so, not so, my good friend. The report of my death was greatly exaggerated, as you see. I am, I assure you, quite alive!"

He slapped his broad chest as he spoke, as though to assure his hearers of his solidity.

Seen in the light, the man's appearance was strange enough. His frame was that of a giant, broad and powerful; but his expression was so mild and benevolent as to appear almost saint-like. With his clear-cut, regular features, his long flaxen hair and forked beard, he might have been a figure which had stepped straight out of one of the devotional masterpieces that the old Italian artists loved to portray.

"The report of my death was spread by my enemies in order to explain my disappearance when they shut me up in the asylum," Matrikoff went on to explain. "Like a simpleton, I told them of my discovery of the hidden Temple of Anubis, and they wished to gain possession of the gold and treasure which it contained. They said I was mad——"

"Hold on," interrupted Mounthead quickly. "Are you referring to the buried temple in the Valley of the Kings?"

"Of course," returned the Russian in surprize. "What else?"

"Then you must be laboring under some delusion. That temple was unearthed by Mr. Wilmer Denton," Lord Mounthead pointed to the young American as he spoke. "He discovered the entrance to it while working on my behalf."

For a moment Boris Matrikoff stood speechless with amazement, a red flush of anger slowly mounting to his forehead.

"That I do not deny," he returned after a long pause. "I cannot deny—nor do I seek to—that the actual discovery was made thus. My only claim is that your find was directly due to the letter which I sent you, describing the position

of the temple so plainly that it could not be missed. When the royal collection at Petrograd was dispersed, I purchased for a few rubles a scroll of ancient papyrus, which, to my amazement, indicated the site of a hitherto unsuspected temple. Well knowing that I would not be allowed to leave Russia for some years, and knowing that you were exploring in the vicinity, I wrote a letter to you, giving sufficient data to enable you to find it."

Lord Mounthead shook his head slowly.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Matrikoff, but I received no such letter, either from you or anybody else. The discovery was made quite independent of information from an outside source."

Incredulity, suspicion and anger were stamped upon the features of the Russian as he listened to the explanation. At the conclusion he started to his feet; his high, broad forehead was creased by a heavy frown, his eyes glinted angrily beneath his ragged brows.

"It is a lie!" he muttered thickly. "It is a trick to rob me of——"

"You have no right to accuse me of such a thing!" cried Mounthead, growing angry in his turn. "Your letter must have been intercepted—if, indeed, the whole thing was not a figment of your imagination."

A spasm of rage shook the huge frame of the Russian.

"So? You, too, accuse me of being insane? But you will find that I am not to be put off so easily, my clever friend. Give me my share of the treasure you discovered with the Golden Mummy—the jewels——"

A SUDDEN shout from Wilmer Denton made him pause. The American was clutching Lord Mounthead's arm, a look of consternation on his features.

"The burglar alarm!" he gasped. "It should have rung the moment we opened the window downstairs. But it's been put out of action—there's a traitor inside this house!"

Abruptly on his words a terrified scream rang through the silence of the night. Dashing out of the room, the three men raced along the corridor in the direction of the ominous sound. The door of the bedroom occupied by Celia stood open. A single shaded globe hung from a bracket over the bed, and by its light they saw the girl lying back on the pillows, wild-eyed and trembling.

"What has happened?" her father cried.

Twice she tried to speak, but no sound came from her ashy lips. Then, in a broken whisper:

"I was reading," she managed to falter out. "I felt the touch of an icy hand on my shoulder. A tall figure was standing by my side. At first its face was in shadow, but when I screamed it turned, and I saw——"

She broke off and a violent shudder ran through her slender form.

"You saw him—clearly?" Mounthead cried eagerly. "Can you describe him?"

Another shudder shook her and her lips moved faintly.

"It was horrible—the face was exactly like that of the Golden Mummy!"

4. Blackmail

IMMEDIATELY after the night of mysterious happenings at Mounthead Chase, Lord Mounthead, fearing that they had not seen the last of the strange Egyptian, had pressed Wilmer Denton to stay there as his guest. It had not taken Wilmer many seconds to make up his mind to accept the invitation. The prospect of living under the same roof as the beautiful Celia; dining with her, rid-

ing with her, discussing the mysterious Golden Mummy in shuddering whispers, was a prospect very much like heaven on earth to him just then.

But there was one inmate of the house who watched the growing intimacy between them with a disapproving eye. Lady Thelma had always disliked the young American; she had done her best to bring about an open breach between him and her husband when they had first returned from Egypt. Her hatred knew no bounds when she saw him re-established in Lord Mounthead's friendship and on the way, apparently, to becoming his son-in-law. She was far too experienced an actress to allow her real motives to appear, as, subtly and by hints and vague innuendoes rather than direct accusations, she began to sow the seeds of suspicion and distrust in her husband's mind. So deliberately did she do her task that she never used the term "fortune-hunter" once when referring to Wilmer's attentions to Celia Mounthead.

Naturally it was not long before Wilmer sensed her antagonism, and he was puzzled to account for it.

"What's biting her?" he muttered to himself one evening after her ladyship had administered a very pointed snub. "If my company's good enough for a born aristocrat like Lord Mounthead, it's good enough to be tolerated by an ex-chorus girl like her!"

Had he been a witness of the scene that was being enacted in Lady Thelma's private room at that moment, he might have understood her strange aversion to his presence in the house.

Edwin Lorimer had made his way there, ostensibly to make a trivial inquiry respecting the sending out of invitations to a carnival dance which was to be held at Mounthead Chase in a few weeks' time. No sooner had Lady Thelma's maid quitted the room than Lorimer's suave, deferential manner dropped from him like a cloak.

"Well, did you make it plain to that dollar-hunting Yankee that his presence was not wanted?" he asked. His tone was one of aggressive insolence.

Lady Thelma, now very different from her usual proud and haughty self, seemed to wilt beneath the glare of the man's frowning eyes.

"I—I did my best," she returned timidly. "I gave him a broad enough hint——"

Lorimer cut her short with a sneering laugh.

"Hint?" he repeated mockingly. "What's the use of throwing hints to a man like that? You'll have to do more than hint, my lady"—he laid a sarcastic emphasis on her title—"if you want to satisfy me! If you've got any hints to drop, then drop 'em to your loving stepdaughter, the Honorable Celia. Tell her what a fine fellow I am. Remind her that I'm the younger son of a baronet, even though I am condescending to act as private secretary to Lord Mounthead. Tell her——"

The woman made a gesture of impatience. Much as she feared the man, his manner at times drove her almost to desperation.

"Why don't you tell her these things yourself?" There was a sneer in her voice that she could not wholly repress. "You are not usually so modest as to need a go-between in your love-making!"

He stepped close to her, a tigerish grin showing beneath the thin dark line of his mustache.

"Don't take that line of talk with me!" he snarled. "You know as well as I do that I might just as well save my breath as try to make love to Celia while that cursed Yank is around. That's why I want him out of the house—and it's up to you to see that he goes—at once!"

Lady Thelma uttered a low, mirthless laugh.

"You credit me with the ability to work miracles," she said. "I should not need any pressing from you to get rid of him if it were in my power to do so. I assure you that I haven't gone out of my way to make his stay here a pleasant one! What more can I do? You yourself know how highly Lord Mounthead thinks of him; in his estimation the wonderful Wilmer Denton is a most desirable son-in-law."

"Then you've got to prove to him that he's just mud!"

She lifted her gleaming white shoulders in a tiny shrug.

"A somewhat difficult task," she sneered.

He bent closer to her, grasping her wrist and speaking in an urgent whisper.

"Not too difficult to a pretty woman and an accomplished actress like yourself. Listen."

He sank his voice even lower and for a space spoke eagerly, outlining his scheme in all its naked treachery. A slow smile of understanding spread over Lady Thelma's features as she listened.

"It cannot fail," she declared at the conclusion.

"You'll have to handle the situation delicately——"

"Leave that to me," she interposed confidently. Then she turned and looked searchingly into his shifty eyes. "But before I go through with this, I want your assurance that this is the last service you will ask of me."

"Of course I give you that assurance," Lorimer answered glibly. "Once Wilmer Denton is disgraced, I will never again remind you of the fact that I hold a secret that would, if told in the right quarter, make your vaunted title a byword and a mockery. Wilmer Denton's ruin is the only service I ask for my silence."

A sardonic smile flitted over Lorimer's face as he gave the assurance. When once he gets a yielding victim firmly in his clutches, the blackmailer knows no such word as "enough."

DURING the days that followed, Wilmen Denton was conscious of an atmosphere about Mounthead Chase which left him puzzled and vaguely uneasy. Lady Thelma, who had hitherto made no effort to conceal her dislike for him, now allowed her behavior to veer round to the opposite extreme. In place of her former air of insolent superiority, she now greeted him with her most dazzling smiles. Instead of openly avoiding him, she now seemed to place herself in his way on the slightest excuse. A more conceited or more suspicious man than Denton might have guessed the plan which lay behind Thelma's abrupt desire to make amends for her former rudeness; but he did his best to meet her half-way in a reconciliation.

Less comprehensible to him was the changed attitude of Lord Mounthead. Although no spoken word had announced the fact, Wilmer was conscious of a growing coldness in his employer's manner; a distant reserve which seemed to denote suspicion. Hitherto he had admitted the young American fully into his future plans; now, it was only too plain that such was no longer the case. This fact was brought home to Wilmer with dramatic force one evening as he was strolling in the grounds enjoying an after-dinner cigar.

He was traversing one of the dark, yew-bordered walks, his thoughts far away from his immediate surroundings when, without the slightest sound, he felt a giant arm curl about him, while a hand equally huge presented the point of a long and very efficient-looking dagger at his throat.

"So, I have you at last, is it not so?" growled a guttural voice in his ear. "No more will you ignore the letters I send you—no more will you swindle me of my share in the discovery I helped you to make! Pray, Lord Mounthead, for you are very near to death!"

"Not by a jugful," said the American pleasantly, as he suddenly bent his body forward and, by a well-known Japanese trick, sent his adversary flying over his head, to meet the ground with a thud which knocked the breath from his body.

"You seem to have got things wrong, Mr. Matrikoff," Wilmer went on as he recognized the bearded face which looked dazedly up at him. "I guess I haven't been raised to the British peerage yet. And even if I had been the man you thought I was, it wouldn't have helped you any to try interviewing me with that piece of cutlery. What's the big idea, anyway?"

The Russian scrambled to his feet, shaking as much with rage as with the unexpected jolt he had received.

"I came here to kill Lord Mounthead!" he spluttered.

Wilmer nodded as he examined his cigar to ascertain if it was undamaged.

"So I gathered," he rejoined coolly. "Any particular reason for desiring his immediate demise?"

"Reason enough!" cried the Russian in a voice of fury. "Has he not taken to himself the sole credit for the discovery of the hidden Temple of Anubis? Has he not robbed me of my share of the priceless Golden Mummy?"

Wilmer Denton smiled patiently.

"I simply hate to rob you of a cherished illusion, my dear murderous Muscovite, but you're barking up the wrong gum-tree. I have already explained that I made the discovery quite independent of any information supplied by you. And I may add that when we unearthed the mummy, for all Lord Mounthead knew to the contrary, the only result of his labor and expenditure would be to add a few more exhibits to the Cairo Museum. If you have been robbed at all—which I deny—it is by the officials of the Egyptian Department of Antiquities, who handed the mummy over to him. I advise you to take your grievance to them, but I shouldn't advise you to try to ram home your arguments by the aid of a nine-inch bowie knife. They might not take it so calmly as I have done. Do you get me?"

Boris Matrikoff muttered some unintelligible words into his bushy beard.

"Why not have a quiet talk with Lord Mounthead one day—without your carving-knife, of course?" Wilmer suggested, laying his hand on the man's shoulder. "I'm sure a little heart-to-heart talk would straighten things out quite a lot."

Matrikoff flung off his grasp with a sudden movement and thrust his face close to Wilmer's. Rage so ungovernable as to amount almost to frenzy seemed to possess him. His eyes were staring wildly; the veins stood out in knotted cords on his flushed forehead.

"What is the use? I write to him suggesting an interview, and he mocks me with his silence! I beg, I implore him to see me—he makes no answer! I call here again and again—his servants turn me from the door like a beggar! What is there left for me but revenge?"

Denton had listened to this outburst with a growing wonder. The fact that Lord Mounthead had concealed the letters and calls showed, as could nothing else, the gulf which now stretched between them. This refusal to hear a claim, however mistaken and fantastic, was so unlike Mounthead's usual policy that for the first time a faint suspicion began to form in Wilmer's mind. What if Mounthead *had* received the Russian's letters

describing the site of the tomb and for reasons of his own now chose to deny it?

Although Wilmer dismissed the thought as soon as it came to him, he could not help admitting that it would explain some events which till then had puzzled him. He was well aware that the immediate clue to the whereabouts of the entrance of the hidden temple had come from Kareef. Yet the first idea of exploring that particular rock-gallery in the Valley of the Kings had emanated from Lord Mounthead. It was all very puzzling and problematical. Try as he would, he could not see what Matrikoff could have gained even if he had made the discovery himself, seeing that in all probability the relics would have been claimed by the Egyptian Government.

Turning to the Russian, he put the question to him bluntly. The answer made him gasp in amazement.

"Professor Artemus Figg has promised to pay me one thousand pounds on the day I deliver the Golden Mummy to him."

The calm, matter-of-fact tone in which Matrikoff made the statement left no doubt in the American's mind that he was stating the truth.

"But why—what interest has Professor Figg in the mummy?" he asked.

"He has discovered a method by which it may be restored to life," said the Russian simply.

5. *Celia's Fortune*

As THE soft, liquid chimes of the gilt Louis XIV clock on the boudoir mantelpiece slowly trickled out the hour of six, Lady Thelma tossed aside the book with which she had been amusing herself since tea-time, yawned, stretched herself elegantly, and entered an adjoining room that was nothing more nor less than a huge wardrobe.

Lady Thelma

Although she was quite alone, she still moved with the same studied grace that she would have displayed in a crowded social function. More than one critic had described Thelma Delorme as "a born actress" during her stage career, without realizing how literally true the description was. Applied to her, the fulsome, commonplace journalese became sober truth. She acted as naturally as she drew breath, and her acting had not ceased when she had quitted the stage. Indeed, her rôle as Lady Mounthead was, if anything, more carefully studied than any of her stage characters; but even she did not realize how tragic that rôle was destined to become.

With the expert eye of one who well appreciated the importance of correctly dressing the part she was now about to play, she passed down the rows of hanging dresses, scrutinizing, weighing the emotional effect of each. Her latest acquisition, of vivid wine-red and of rather daring cut, she passed without a glance, as she did an elaborate gown of golden tissue. This frock was too rich; this too sophisticated. She hesitated a long time over a delicate powder-blue cut with that deceptive seeming simplicity that it takes a master hand to achieve; but finally she rejected it in favor of an exquisite creation of delicate oyster-gray, whose very presence among her extensive wardrobe she had forgotten. She held it to her, and the testimony of her full-length mirror confirmed her judgment. She laid it aside with a little nod of satisfaction and rang for her maid.

She saw Annette's black eyebrows go

up when told of her choice; but the maid understood her mistress's temper too well to offer any comment.

"What jewelry will your ladyship wear?" she contented herself with asking.

"None," came the sharp reply, and Annette, who had been her dresser long before her marriage to Lord Mounthead, could only marvel in silence at this strange and unprecedented whim.

Lord Mounthead's study was on the ground floor. To the uninitiated it seemed an ordinary enough apartment, with its tall windows, walnut paneling and heavy, comfortable rather than ornate, furniture. It would have needed the eye of an expert to detect the fact that the ornamental transoms and mullions of the windows were of specially toughened steel; that the innocent-looking door leading to the private museum was but a veneer of wood masking an inner door of steel that would not be out of place if it guarded the strong-room of a bank; that the walls, ceiling and floor were meshed every six inches with fine wires, the snapping of which would set a dozen bells jangling their warning in different parts of the house. The green-painted safe in one corner did, it is true, appear to be quite a trumpery affair, such as would offer but slight resistance to a modern burglar. But it was merely a dummy, containing a few unimportant papers. The real safe was concealed so cunningly that a searcher might have wasted many hours before locating it, let alone prizing its many secrets from its drill-resisting walls.

LORD MOUNTHEAD was seated at the desk, glancing through some closely written sheets of manuscript which he had brought from the office. So absorbed was he that he failed to notice the first light tap on the door. Upon its being repeated he rose to his feet, crossed the room with quick, jerky strides, and pulled back the spring catch which operated the door.

"Thelma!" There was a note of surprize in his voice as he saw his wife standing outside. It was an unwritten law of the household that he should not be disturbed in his study unless he rang. "Come in, come in. Is anything the matter?"

"No, no—at least, nothing much."

The vibrating tremor which she infused into her voice seemed to belie her words. Mounthead closed the door carefully and crossed to her side.

"But there is something troubling you, dear," he said, anxiously. "I can read it in your face."

She sank on to a low seat near the fireplace, nervously twisting and untwisting a dainty lace handkerchief in her hands.

"I suppose I'm foolish—childish——" she paused artistically.

"Yes—yes? Tell me what the trouble is, and let me be the judge of that."

She laid her slender hands on the old man's shoulders, looking into his face with her great pleading eyes.

"You will not laugh at me—or scold me, John?"

"Of course not, you foolish darling," he hastened to assure her.

She uttered a long-drawn sigh and drooped her head to just the right angle to be most effective.

"It's . . . it's about . . . Celia," she began, making a hesitating pause now and again to give an air of spontaneity to what was in reality a carefully rehearsed speech. "Yes, John, I'm really worried about poor dear Celia. I really love that girl, and I'd do anything to make her happy—and I'd do more to save her from life-long misery."

"Celia? . . . misery?" He was looking at his young wife in undisguised amazement.

She made a pathetic gesture and dabbed her eyes with the filmy square of lace.

"You must know what I mean, John, dear. That American, Wilmer Denton—he has quite carried the poor child off her feet——"

A somewhat grim laugh from Lord Mounthead interrupted her.

"I'm rather inclined to think that it's the other way about, and that the 'poor child' has carried *him* 'off his feet,' as you term it."

Thelma's beautiful features took on an expression of horrified surprize.

"Surely you will not let this vulgar love affair go on?" she cried. "It would be a sin to allow your dear daughter's generous, unsuspecting heart to lead her into an absolutely disastrous marriage. What is this Denton man? A nobody! An upstart! A——"

She halted lamely as she became conscious that her husband was regarding her with a curious look in his eyes.

"Really, Thelma, you are talking like a character in one of the dramas of the last century," he protested with a smile. "Nowadays the world has outgrown the old shibboleth of judging a man by his ancestors rather than his actions. And I may remind you that there are many quite exalted people, moving in the best circles, who seem to see no necessity of setting up their family tree where its roots may be examined by all and sundry. You asked just now who Wilmer Denton is. I will tell you. He is a young man whom I have lived with, worked with, and, on one occasion, faced death with. Those are bonds not lightly to be disregarded. I know him to be a man of unusual intellectual powers, and of unimpeachable integrity. And, if Celia really has formed a liking for him, I can see no adequate reason for interfering in the matter."

He came across and laid his hand affectionately on his young wife's shoulder as he went on: "I'm very sorry indeed that you have taken such a dislike to him, Thelma, but"—a very meaning smile twitched his lips as he concluded—"I don't suppose you'll see much of either Celia or her husband after they are married."

For a moment her mind seemed to freeze as she realized all that his decision meant to her. Then she sprang to her feet and faced him, her lithe form trembling with baffled fury and with fear.

"You—you would allow your daughter to condemn herself to a life of beggary?" she demanded.

"Beggary?" Mounthead laughed aloud as he repeated the word. Then he took her hand in his, and without a word led her to the huge bookcase which filled the farther wall of the room.

Taking out a small bunch of keys, which was attached to his person by a fine steel chain, he inserted one in the glazed door of the bookcase and swung it open. Lady Thelma watched him closely, the breath coming quickly between her parted lips. Some subtle intuition seemed to tell her that the next few minutes would mark a crisis in her life.

Lord Mounthead ran his eyes over the closely packed rows of volumes, then turned to her with a tiny smile hovering about the corners of his mouth.

"Fond of reading, Thelma?" he inquired jocularly.

She shook her head, wondering. Glancing at the titles of the books, she had a vague recollection of having heard of some of them before, but the majority

were quite strange to her. Small wonder; for the fat, leather-bound tomes contained scientific treatises, ancient histories, volumes of legend and folk-lore, with a whole row devoted to works relating to Ancient Egypt.

"Scarcely my idea of light literature," she said with a shrug.

Mounthead laughed softly.

"Ah, you ought to go in for the classics, Thelma. They might reveal many surprizing things!" He passed his hand along the second row from the top, pausing at a heavy volume bound in calfskin. "Here is Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire,* a trifle heavy both literally and figuratively, but containing much good matter."

He removed the volume, laid it on the table, and again ran his hand along the shelf.

"And here we have Plutarch's *Lives*—one of the greatest books in the world. Although he wrote somewhere about the first century of the Christian era, his work shows an appreciation of picturesque detail, dramatic sense and knowledge of character-drawing that would not be out of place in a modern writer, besides containing powerful and vivid imagery and verbal richness surpassed only by the immortal Shakespeare."

Lady Thelma stifled an elaborate yawn.

"Is this going to be a lecture?" she asked resignedly.

"No, my dear Thelma. The lecture is over and the demonstration is about to begin."

AS HE spoke he thrust his two hands into the spaces left by the removal of the books. Lady Thelma's lassitude vanished in an instant, as a section of the shelves swung outward, disclosing a recess in which stood a huge steel safe of the latest pattern.

"Take a good look at it, my dear," said Mounthead, smiling at her start of surprize. "It's well worth looking at. It contains an idea in the way of combination-locks that refutes Solomon's assertion that there is nothing new under the sun. See here."

Her eyes followed the direction of his pointing finger. At first glance the little dials seemed in no way different from the usual run of such contrivances. Then she understood. Instead of the usual numbers and letters, the ciphers consisted of tiny, beautifully engraved Egyptian hieroglyphics.

Mounthead contemplated the dials with pride.

"I rather flatter myself that I struck a novel idea when I thought of employing the sacred characters of the old Egyptian priests to safeguard my treasures," he beamed. "It would have to be a very up-to-date crook indeed who included a working knowledge of Egyptology in his mental equipment."

She looked at the strange figures with thoughtful, narrowed eyes.

"Has it not struck you that some Egyptologist who was not a professional crook might use his knowledge to open it?" she asked slowly.

He dismissed the possibility with a shake of his head.

"The great advantage in employing hieroglyphics for such a purpose is that the key to the combination might be just a meaningless jumble of signs, or it might be an actual sentence from an inscription, or a prayer to the gods, or even an extract from the well-known papyrus, *The Book of the Dead.* You will notice that there are fifteen different signs. Now, how many different combinations do you think it is possible to make with them?"

"A hundred?" hazarded the girl.

"No. Your estimate is wofully short of the truth, Thelma, and it goes to show that you, in common with the great majority of people, are not acquainted with what is termed 'the permutations of numbers'. If you had studied algebra you would know that it is quite possible to determine the exact number of possible arrangements of any given number of signs (or actual objects, for the matter of that). The result is arrived at by multiplying consecutively the figures from one upward. Thus if there were only four symbols on the combination of that safe, you could tell how many times they could be varied by this simple sum":

He took a blank sheet of paper and hastily scribbled the following figures:—

1 x 2 x 3 x 4 = 24.

"Thus, without going to the trouble of actually experimenting, we know that the chances against a thief's hitting on the correct combination are twenty-four to one. If there were seven signs:"

He took up his pencil and wrote another sum:—

1 x 2 x 3 x 4 x 5 x 6 x 7 = 5,040.

"This, as you see, gives the poor crook the slender odds of five thousand and forty to one that he will not be successful. But, as I have already said, the actual number of signs in the combination is fifteen. So, if you care to work out the sum when you have a little spare time at your disposal, you will find that my fifteen signs can be varied in their order no less than 1,307,674,368 times! Hence anyone trying to hit on the correct combination of that safe would have more than a *billion to one* chances against him! You may pity the poor burglar when you realize that if it took him only one minute to try each possible arrangement, and he continued his work without intermission day and night, the unfortunate man would have to keep at his job for 1,800,000 years before he had exhausted all the possibilities of that safe!"

"The prospect is enough to make the most hardened crook mend his evil ways!" laughed Thelma. "But what is inside the safe that you have taken such pains to make it impregnable?"

Celia Mounthead

He did not reply for a minute as he deftly manipulated the tiny dials. Then:

"Look!" he cried, swinging the well-balanced door wide open.

Thelma looked and gasped in open-eyed amazement. The bottom of the capacious safe was filled with neatly stacked canvas bags, each packed tightly and secured with a large red seal. The shelves were piled with fat, oblong packages, sealed in the same manner.

The girl took one long look, then turned her wondering eyes on her husband.

"Is it . . . *money?*"

She breathed the word in the awed tone which people use in church. She was not acting now; Lady Mounthead was in the presence of the only god she acknowledged.

If Lord Mounthead had chanced to glance at his wife's face just then he might have seen a look which would have surprized him. But he merely gave a little smiling nod, his eyes on the wealth before him.

"Oh, yes, it's real money all right," he said lightly. "Some is in bullion, some in the form of banknotes; a few—very few—securities. But it's all good, and it's all waiting there for Celia."

A hard, steely glitter shone for an instant between the girl's drooping lashes.

"How much?" she asked, and he mentioned a sum which was like the whisper of a tempting devil in her ear.

"Isn't it rather risky keeping such a huge sum in ready money, even in such a wonderful safe as that?" The careless tone took all her art to maintain.

He nodded a frowning agreement.

"The risk is there, right enough," he admitted. "Unfortunately I'm bound to keep it in its original form, and in my personal charge, by the terms of the will by which it was bequeathed to Celia. My brother Henry was always eccentric where money matters were concerned. He never married, and Celia was a great favorite with him—his god-child, too. He emigrated to South Africa when still in his teens, and there he amassed a huge fortune. Exactly how he made his money I never learnt, but I know that he spent many years in Kimberley, so I presume that it came from a lucky deal on diamonds. Poor Henry! He was killed out there—by natives, it was said, though considerable mystery surrounded the affair. He had been transferring money to England for years, and when I learnt the actual amount that was to become Celia's, I was absolutely staggered. But the most extraordinary part was the fact that I was under no circumstances to allow the money out of my actual possession until I handed it over to Celia."

"When?"

"On her wedding day."

Thelma Mounthead glanced into the face of the man beside her, then quickly lowered her eyes. Such was the light that blazed in them that she feared her husband, fond and unsuspecting though he was, would read the sinister plan already shaping in her mind.

"A nice comfortable fortune to have dropped into one's lap!" she murmured as she waved the old man an affectionate adieu.

At the door she turned with a question: "Does my dear Celia know of the good fortune that's awaiting her?"

Lord Mounthead closed the secret door in the bookcase and looked round.

"No. You and I are the only living souls who know the contents of that safe. And I must ask you to keep the secret."

"You may rely on me, John dear," she called back to him with smiling lips. "I'll be as silent . . . as the grave."

But her eyes did not smile as she made her way slowly to her room.

The astonishing weird adventure with the Golden Mummy will be narrated in next month's installment. Reserve your copy now at your news dealer's

"It was an inferno of light, a soundless, rending explosion of it."

The Man Who Chained the Lightning

By PAUL ERNST

Another amazing tale of Doctor Satan, the world's weirdest criminal, whose startling exploits will hold you spellbound

1. Death on the Wall

THE wind played an eery chorus among the dank leaves of the trees lining the wealthy residential street. Far off, the flickering of lightning split the black September night.

From behind the high wall bordering the Weldman estate came a hoarse cry. It

was not a shout so much as an exclamation; but in it was packed a horror that could not have been more vividly expressed had the person yelled at the top of his voice.

With the low cry, the wind seemed to die down as if to listen. In the lull the slam of a small gate in the high wall rang out.

A man sped through that gate. His face was white in the light of the street lamp fifty yards away. His eyes were wide and staring. His mouth was half open and twisted as if for another cry.

He began to run down the street toward the town section. He pounded through puddles and mud, with his head straining forward and his breath tearing in sobs from his throat. He was slight, bald, middle-aged, and fear lent such speed to his feet that he ran as a youth might run. But only for an instant did he speed through the night.

The end of the Weldman wall was still a hundred feet in front of him, when suddenly he stopped. This time a piercing scream came from his lips instead of a suppressed exclamation. The scream echoed down the midnight quiet of the street like a banshee wail.

The man began to dance, as if grotesque, horrible music sounded from somewhere near. And as his feet beat clumsily on the muddy sidewalk, he struck himself with his clenched fists. Against his chest his fists beat, and then against his throat, as though he had gone mad and was attempting to punish himself for some recent transgression.

His screams ripped out in an almost unbroken flow of sound while he struck at his throat and chest. But only for a few moments did he dance there, and swing his arms. Abruptly his screaming stopped, as though cut across the middle with a knife-blade. His arms ceased to move.

He stood in the center of the sidewalk, staring up beyond the end of the Weldman wall. A patrolman was running toward him, drawn by the frightful screams. But the man did not seem to see him. He simply stood there, silent now and motionless, as if turned to rock. And then, with the policeman still a dozen yards away, he fell.

Full length to the sidewalk his body crashed, stiffly, like a thing of wood rather than of yielding flesh. And like a rigid thing of wood he lay in the water and mud of the walk.

The patrolman reached his side and bent over him.

Glaring, sightless eyes turned up into his face. The man's lips moved stiffly.

" . . . master . . . millions . . ."

"What?" said the policeman, raising the man's head. "What's that you said?"

The middle-aged man's voice sounded again, muffled and thick: " . . . master . . . shaving . . . "

The patrolman almost shook him in his anxiety to hear what was wrong.

"What is it?" he snapped. "Are you sick? Have you been hurt? What's happened?"

But the man said no more. His face was blackening and swelling. His lips were parting over bared teeth, while between them his breath rattled with ever more difficulty and agony.

Then the agonized breathing stopped. The man's eyeballs rolled up so that only the whites were visible. And the patrolman lowered him to the sidewalk and blew his whistle.

The man was dead.

Instinctively the policeman crossed himself as he stood looking down at the body. There was something hellish here, something diabolical beyond all his experience in a world of violence.

A SQUAD car screamed to a stop beside the dead man and the cop. A detective jumped out from beside the driver and ran forward. One look he took at the dead, blackened face; then he shook his head and whistled.

"Weldman's valet! He was on his way to the station house to tell us something. I was standing near when the desk sergeant took the call. Something terrible, and too important to be told over the phone, the guy said. Something about his employer, John Weldman. Some danger hanging over him, I gathered."

He stared at the agonized dead face.

"Well, whatever it was he was going to tell us will never be known now. But it must have been something big—for him to have been knocked off like this to keep him from spilling it!"

"Hey, he wasn't knocked off," said the policeman. "I saw him keel over. There wasn't anybody else in sight."

The detective stared somberly at him.

"It doesn't matter whether anyone was in sight or not. This guy was murdered!" He touched the curiously rigid body with the toe of his shoe. "If only he'd said something before he died——"

"He did," said the policeman.

"What?" The plain-clothes man's hand shot out and clutched the cop's shoulder. "What did he say?"

"Just three words. And they don't seem to make sense at all. He said 'master . . . millions . . . shaving . . . ' "

The detective relaxed his tense grip.

" 'Master. Millions. Shaving.' That doesn't mean anything to me. I guess the valet's secret died with him."

But the detective spoke too soon.

As far as the police force went, the dead man's secret might have died when he did. And the three words muttered by the dying lips might never be made clear to them.

But the night was alive with an intelligence far beyond theirs; an intelligence which was aware of things reaching back beyond this death of a servant, and which was already moving ahead of the death toward the apprehension of the cause.

Across the street from the two men who bent over a blackened corpse was an unusually large tree. In the branches of the tree a shapeless shadow clung.

The black figure slowly and silently descended while the plain-clothes man and the patrolman waited for the coroner and the ambulance. Under his arm was what appeared to be a small square box.

The figure got to the sidewalk, faced the men unseen for a moment, then moved silently off into the night.

FROM a square black box in a pitch-dark room came a beam of light, spreading from a half-inch opening to cover a six-foot-square silver screen. On the screen showed a high white wall—the wall of the Weldman estate.

In the blank white wall could be seen a dim oblong which was a small gate. The gate opened suddenly and a man leaped forth. Even in miniature, on the screen, his face could be read: an expression of stark terror was on it, twisting the partly opened mouth and glinting from the wide eyes.

Faithfully the movements of Weldman's valet were reproduced on the screen. Slight, bald, middle-aged, he ran through the night along the white wall. Then the picture showed him stopping and beginning his clumsy, inexplicable dance, and beating insanely at his own neck and chest.

But the picture revealed something more—something which made the halt and the self-punishment only too logical!

Just before the man stopped, something moved at the top of the high wall ahead of him. The something was a

hand. The hand curved out over the wall with fingers contracted as if to pluck something. But the hand did not gather anything in. Instead, it released an object—a tiny object which did not show in the rather dim moving-picture until it had hit the unfortunate valet. Then it showed on the whiteness of the valet's throat.

It was a tiny blur, too small to be described by the camera lens. But it moved.

In the picture it showed for just an instant on the running man's throat, and then disappeared under his collar. It was just after that that the man stopped and began beating himself.

"An insect," a deep, brooding voice split the blackness of the room. "A poison insect! Carried into the Weldman home, no doubt, for the death of the valet there. But the man had left the house on his way to the police station. He nearly escaped. . . ."

The picture went on, showing the valet's sudden immobility, showing him fall and lie like a log in the mud.

Then—it showed something else, at the top of the wall where the hand had appeared.

The hand was withdrawn now, and a face looked over. It was turned toward the dying man and it was a face to haunt the soul in nightmares.

There were no features to it. Only a blank expanse showed from forehead to chin, with black holes for eyes. A face masked as though for a masquerade; but there was in the masquerade no suggestion of humor.

Over the masked, terrible face was a low-brimmed black hat, and the top of the shoulders showing over the wall also showed black; some sort of cloak.

Evil emanated from the masked face as, like the covered face of a ghoul, it bent over the top of the wall toward where the valet lay dying. Calmly, terribly, it watched the man twitch and lie still. Then, leisurely, indifferently, it disappeared.

"Doctor Satan——" a girl's half-stifled cry sounded in the darkened room.

There was no reply to the exclamation. The picture continued, revealing the movement of the man's numbing lips.

A hand slowed the projector. The picture, running at a slower tempo, showed the formed words on the man's lips: " . . . master . . . millions . . . shaving. . . . "

Then the lips stopped moving and the figure of the patrolman edged into the film. The projector stopped. There was a click, and light flooded the room.

2. *Beneath the Metropolis*

IT WAS a huge room, a library, with books running from floor to ceiling of all four walls, crowding windows and the one door of the chamber. The books were all volumes of learning—a library such as few universities have, and containing some yellowed tomes dealing with the occult which no universities would have permitted on their shelves even had they the wealth with which to purchase them.

In the center of the library was a great ebony desk. Standing beside this was a girl, lovely, tall, lithe, with dark blue eyes and hair more red than brown. The sudden light revealed in her dark eyes, as they rested on a man next to her, a look of perplexity, vague horror, and something soft and glowing and shy, which faded the instant the man's gaze answered hers.

The man was one who had brought a glow to many a woman's eyes. For this was Ascott Keane, interesting to the mercenary for his large fortune, and to the unmercenary for his looks. His face, under coal-black hair, with steely gray eyes

shaded by black eyebrows, had been reproduced in many a rotogravure section. To readers of those society sections he was a wealthy young man who idled when he was not playing games, a fellow without a serious thought in his head. But the girl beside him, Beatrice Dale, his more-than-secretary, knew better.

She knew that Ascott Keane's playboy character was a cloak under which was a grim seriousness of purpose. She knew that he was one of the world's most learned men in all the sciences—and in those deep arts known, for want of a better name, as Black Magic. She knew that he had devoted his life to the running-down of such super-criminals as could laugh at the police and rise to the rather lofty altitude of his own attention.

And she knew that the masked, terrible face that had peered over the top of Weldman's wall for an instant belonged to a criminal who was perhaps more than worthy of his attention. A man known only as Doctor Satan, from the Luciferian costume he chose to wear when engaged in his fiend's work. A man of great wealth, who had turned to crime to stir his jaded pulses. A man whose name and identity were unknown, but whose erudition, particularly in forbidden fields of learning, matched Keane's own.

That was the veiled personality which occupied Keane day and night now, to his own great danger. That was the devil who had killed the valet with a poison insect—and who had done other things in the last few weeks at which Keane, till now, had been able only to guess.

The telephone on the ebony desk buzzed softly. Keane picked it up.

A harsh voice sounded, speaking in a flat monotone.

"Ascott Keane, you are meddling again!"

Beatrice Dale heard the voice as well as Keane. Her soft scream rang out: "Doctor Satan!"

Keane's eyes glittered. He dropped the instrument as if it had turned into a serpent in his fingers.

"I've told you death would strike if you interfered with my plans again," the harsh voice continued, sounding from the floor where the phone lay. "And I always keep my promises——"

The words ended, swiftly and dramatically. With their ending, the telephone on the floor jumped like a live thing, while from transmitter to receiver, in a thick blue arc, crackled a stream of electricity that would have killed a dozen men.

The crackling arc streamed just as far lightning flickered in the skies south of New York, and died as the lightning died.

Keane stared at Beatrice, who had gone white as death.

"He can harness the lightning!" he breathed. "That I cannot do myself! If I can't stop him soon, God knows what will happen to this city—to the whole country——"

He stared at the instrument. The metal was half melted. The hard rubber had been utterly consumed. Then he shrugged and turned toward the screen again, where, dimmed now by the lights in the room but still showing, was the picture of the dying valet, showing motionless with the stoppage of the projector.

"But I *will* stop him!" Keane's voice came bleakly. "Doctor Satan, hear that, wherever you are now."

He stepped across the melted telephone with a gesture that brushed into a past of forgotten dangers the fate he had just narrowly escaped, and stared at the lips of the pictured man.

"Shaving," he repeated, while Beatrice gazed at him with the fear in her dark

blue eyes almost buried by that soft glow which she never, never allowed him to see. "Shaving. I think in that word lies the key to the problem we've been working on for the last few weeks. The problem ending with the death of Weldman's valet."

SWIFTLY Keane reviewed the problem, one which he alone had become aware of; a string of events which singly had been noted by several people but which in their entirety had been remarked on by no one.

One by one over the past two weeks four wealthy men in New York had done odd things. Each had disappeared from his office without warning, in three cases breaking important business appointments. Each had then been seen neither at home nor in any accustomed haunt for many hours. Following that, on his return, each had seemed to avoid both his home and his office, appearing only now and then at either place and letting his business take care of itself.

Each, in those two weeks, had personally drawn large sums in cash from the United Continental Bank of New York —always that bank, never any of the others in which they kept money. Each of the four was living alone in his great home with only the servants, his family happening to be away at the time. And each, in the few times he was in home or office, did odd things which seemed to indicate a suddenly faulty memory.

These things Ascott Keane, alone in the city, had noted and pieced together into a pattern he felt sure had sinister meaning. More, it was a pattern behind which he thought he could sense the figure of Doctor Satan in his red robe, with red rubber gloves hiding his hands, and red mask and cap hiding face and hair.

John Weldman, copper magnate, had been the last to go through the queer antics. So to the wall outside Weldman's estate Ascott Keane had taken his special moving-picture camera, which recorded movement in dark night by means of an infra-red ray attachment he had invented.

And the camera had recorded the death of Weldman's valet—which Keane had been too far away to prevent—and the movement of his dying lips: " . . . master . . . millions . . . shaving. . . . "

Beatrice peered into Keane's steely gray eyes.

"What does it mean?" she whispered. "Do you know yet, Ascott?"

"I think I do," said Keane slowly. "I —think—I—do!"

THE flickering lightning to the south of New York lit with its rays a small graveyard in the heart of the downtown section of the city. It was a curious little cemetery, less than a hundred yards square. Long unused, it was dotted with crumbling tombstones over which long grass grew.

On two sides of it a great factory, built in an L-shape, made a pitch-dark, five-story wall. On the third side an old apartment reared its height. On the fourth side, the street side, a high, rusty iron fence closed it off.

A curious, forgotten place of death in the heart of New York, encroached on by the factory and the apartment building. But more curious yet was a figure which furtively approached the rusted gate in the fence and paused a moment to make sure no person was near.

The figure was tall and gaunt. A low-brimmed black hat hid its head and most of its face. The rest of the face showed masked—a blank expanse covered by red fabric. A long black cloak covered the figure from neck to ankles, making it blend into the darkness.

The gate creaked open and the figure glided in among the moldering tombstones.

Beside one which lay prone in the rank grass, the figure stopped. Then it stepped on the six-foot slab—and the slab sank under it. A yawning hole appeared where the slab had been; a dark pit into which the figure disappeared.

After an instant the slab rose and settled into place, apparently as it was before, looking as though it had lain there solid and undisturbed for a dozen years.

Under it the black-cloaked figure went down a passage that slanted yet lower into the earth. The passage was lined with broken rock, and through the cracks occasional bits of rotted wood projected. They were remnants of ancient coffins, and with them now and then could be seen bleached white fragments. Bones.

The figure opened a door at the end of the passage and stepped into a chamber as bizarre as it was secret.

It was a cavernous room twenty feet square, lined with the broken rock as was the passage. It was very dim, with a small red lamp in the corner near the door as its only illumination. Along the far wall were cages, small, about the size of large dog-houses. In these cages four white figures squatted like animals. In the dim light their species could not be determined. They were simply whitish, distorted-looking beasts which seemed too large for their small cages.

Leaning against the wall near the light were four figures that looked at first like sleeping men. But a glance told that they could not be that. Fully clad in expensive clothes, they leaned there like sticks, without flexibility or movement, more like dolls than men, perfectly fashioned in the image of Man but seeming to want motive power and direction.

In the center of the room, drawing themselves to attention as the black-cloaked figure entered the weird chamber, were two creatures that would bring a chill to the spine of any man.

One was an alert, agile little man with pale eyes shining cruelly through a mat of hair over his face. And this one, ape-like in movement and thought, was Girse, Doctor Satan's faithful servant. The other was a giant with no legs, who supported his hugely muscled torso on his hands, swinging it along on his knuckles as he moved. This was Bostiff, the second of Doctor Satan's henchmen.

The figure that had entered the room stood straight. Its shoulders moved, and the black cloak dropped. With a sweep of a hand, the black hat was removed, and the figure became a thing to haunt for ever the sleep of any who might chance to see it.

A red robe sheathed body and limbs. Red rubber gloves were over its hands. The face was masked in red, and the head was covered with a red skull-cap so that even its hair did not show. From the skull-cap, in mocking imitation of Satan's horns, two small red knobs projected. Lucifer! Someone going robed as Satan to a costume ball! But instinct whispered that this was no mere costume, that the man under the sinister make-up was as malevolent as his garb was mocking.

"Master!" breathed Girse. "Doctor Satan!"

Bostiff scraped his calloused knuckles along the floor uneasily and stared at Doctor Satan out of stupid, dull eyes.

DOCTOR SATAN glanced at the cages in which were dimly to be seen the curious, whitish animals. In his eyes, peering out of the eyeholes in the red mask, was a glint of velvet cruelty.

"Have they been fed?" he asked, his voice a harsh monotone.

"They have been fed," replied Girse.

"They have given no trouble?"

"None, Master," said Bostiff, grinning significantly.

A feeble groan sounded from one of the cages.

"One is ill?" snapped Doctor Satan.

"One is near death," retorted Bostiff. "The cold down here——"

"No matter. All have their duplicates, so that any may die without hurting my plans. Any save the last to come here. And I intend to remedy that now——"

The arrogant, harsh voice of Doctor Satan was drowned by a shriek from the cage in which the groan had sounded a moment before. The strange white animal in it suddenly reared up, or tried to, beating its head against the top of the cage. It rattled the bars for an instant, and then fell.

There was deathly silence in the chamber under the graveyard. Then Doctor Satan strode to the cage.

"Dead," he said, indifferently.

At the word, the other three animals in the adjoining cages set up a wailing and howling, chattering noises that sounded oddly like words.

"Silence!" commanded Doctor Satan. The chattering ceased. "Bostiff."

The legless giant hitched his torso toward the cage.

"Take this one into the next chamber." Doctor Satan's red-gloved hand went under his robe. It came out with an odd thing like a crystal tube an inch in diameter and nearly a foot long. "Place this against the body, with the free end slanting toward the south where the lightning still plays."

Bostiff visibly paled.

"But that draws the lightning in here, Master. The walls and roof will collapse——"

"Do as I bid you!" grated Doctor Satan. "The walls and roof are safe. But the fires of heaven will consume that carcass, and so we are rid of it."

Bostiff grunted and nodded his great head. He opened the cage in which the white beast had fallen, and dragged it out. But now as the carcass was drawn nearer the light, it could be seen that it was not a beast at all. It was a man, elderly, naked, hideously scarred and emaciated. And so the other three left alive in their cages were men, penned up like animals in spaces too small to allow them to lie or stand at full length, pitiful captives held here for Doctor Satan's purpose!

Dumbly, cowering behind their bars, they watched the red-robed, fiendish figure.

Doctor Satan went to a chest as Bostiff dragged the dead man through a door leading to another underground room like the first. He took from the chest a small object looking prosaic in this dimly lit chamber of horrors beneath a small, forgotten cemetery. It was a checkbook, on the United Continental Bank of New York City.

Doctor Satan walked with the checkbook to the end cage. He handed it, and a pen, to the shadowy white figure within.

"Make out five checks," he commanded. "Three for a hundred and fifty thousand dollars apiece, two for a hundred thousand."

The cowering figure in the cage straightened a little, and refused to take book and pen through the bars.

"Bostiff," called Doctor Satan. His voice was soft, but there was in it an essence of terror that made Girse, the little ape-man, shiver.

The legless giant came from the next chamber, leaving the door open. The doorway was suddenly flooded with light

that beat at the eyeballs like whips. Through the portal could be seen the dead man who had been taken out of the cage. But when the flash was over, only charred remnants of the corpse were left. That was all. The crystalline rod in their midst waited to bring the next lightning flicker from the south to consume even the remnants.

"Yes, Master?" said Bostiff, dragging his great body forward.

"This man does not want to do as he is ordered. You will 'persuade' him——"

"I'll write them!" screamed the man in the cage suddenly. "My God, don't let that legless fiend get me—I'll write them!"

Doctor Satan's red mask moved slightly, as though beneath it his lips shaped themselves to a smile. He handed pen and book through the bars to the miserable, naked creature in the cage.

3. *The Red Trail*

IN THE morning, which was flooded with calm sunlight after the night's storm, Ascott Keane paused a moment before the impressive stone façade of the United Continental Bank.

The bank building looked like a fortress, with thick walls and bronze doors that could have withstood an army. It spoke of comfortable, prosaic wealth, and the power to hold it indefinitely from marauders. It spoke of a world of skyscrapers and giant industrial plants and motor cars.

It seemed to give the lie to the possibility of the existence anywhere of a person capable of looting it—a person like Doctor Satan who could laugh ironically at bronze doors and stone walls.

Keane passed through the guarded entrance of the bank, and went to the rear of the great room within, past marble and glass counters, cages in which shelves of money changed hands, and desks at which transactions involving millions were being accomplished.

At the rear was a private elevator which went up to a big office on the fourth floor of the building. The office was marked, President.

Keane's name gave him instant entree to the president of the bank. For Keane was known to this man not only as a wealthy citizen whose business would be useful, but also in his more secret role of marvelously capable criminal investigator.

"Keane!" said Mercer, the president. "It's good to see you. What brings you here?" He glanced at the electric clock on his desk. "Only nine-thirty in the morning! That's practically dawn for you. At least that's what you like to let people think."

Keane did not smile in return. He studied the man.

Mercer was a small man, lean and leathery, with prim nose-glasses like a school teacher. One might be tempted to dismiss him as prim and fussy—till the jaw was noted. Mercer had a jaw like a steel trap, and blue eyes that were shrewd, capable, and honest-looking.

"I'm here to ask about a few of your customers," he said.

"I think I know which ones," said Mercer, the smile fading from his leathery face. "Sit down and tell me about it."

Keane took a chair at the end of Mercer's desk. It was an enormous desk. On it there was no welter of papers; it was bare save for a large onyx electric clock which was at the back and end of the desk between Mercer and whoever sat in the visitor's chair.

"The men I wanted to talk to you about," Keane said, "are Edward Dombey, Harold Kragness, Shepherd Case and lastly, John Weldman, all rich, and all depositors here."

Mercer leaned back in his chair, putting the tips of his fingers together and saying nothing, letting Keane talk before he told what he himself knew.

"I've learned," Keane went on, "that all four of these men have been making heavy withdrawals of cash here lately. For some reason each of them has found it necessary to have hundreds of thousands of dollars in bills with him. Yet here's an odd thing.

"Each of the four has deposits in other large New York banks. Between the four of them, indeed, they have large sums in no less than six of the biggest banks in the city. Yet they always have come here to draw their cash."

Mercer stirred.

"I didn't know that," he said thoughtfully.

"Well, it's true. So I came here to see if I could find out why. And I think I have." Keane glanced at the onyx electric clock. "That is, I believe I have—if the checks happened to be made out in this office."

Mercer nodded. "They were. All of them."

"All right, tell me about them," said Keane, leaning back to listen in his turn.

Mercer cleared his throat.

"Those are the four men, and that's the business, I expected you to ask about when the girl announced your name," he said. "Because there's something damned queer about it, although I haven't been able to puzzle out what it is.

"It started two weeks ago. Harold Kragness came up here. He talked pleasantly enough with me for a moment or two and then said he wanted to cash a rather large check. A hundred and seventy-five thousand dollars. He thought I'd better put my initials on it so the teller would pay the money without question.

"That was queer—both his desire to get the sum in cash, and his idea that I should countersign his check. I wouldn't have had to do that. He could get anything up to half a million downstairs without special arrangement. But I scribbled my initials on the check and——"

"Just a minute," said Keane. "Did he bring the check here already made out?"

Mercer shook his head.

"He wrote it out here on my desk, before my eyes. He waved it a minute or two to dry the ink, disregarding a blotter I passed him, and then handed it to me."

"It was his signature, all right?"

"Oh, yes! No doubting it!"

"Go on."

"Kragness went out with the check and cashed it downstairs. I thought about it a lot. Why should he want all that in cash? The obvious idea was that he might be blackmailed or something. But he didn't look like a man under a strain. He was cheerful, laughing. And I certainly couldn't question the genuineness of a check made out here in front of me.

"I THOUGHT no more about it, then—till two days later. Then Dombey came in and went through the same rigmarole, only with a check for two hundred thousand dollars. After that the flow started.

"Kragness came in again, and Dombey, and then Case, and finally Weldman. All well known to me. The four of them cashed check after check, all for big sums. Never did any of the four seem worried or terrified, as they would have been if they were buying their way clear from some sort of danger. Yet—all those checks!

"I was certain something was wrong. But I couldn't put my finger on it. In each case the check was written here in the office by the man himself. Each man

denied that anything was wrong, when I exceeded my rights and asked them bluntly.

"I went so far as to put a private detective on the trail of one of them, Dombey—though for heaven's sake don't ever let anybody know that. The detective reported that Dombey met no suspicious characters. He went home with his money, where he seemed cheerful and unalarmed. His wife and daughter are away in Europe, you know——"

"I know," said Keane grimly. He glanced at the clock again. "Each man made out each check here, before your eyes, so that you could testify that nothing could possibly be wrong——"

"Testify?" said Mercer quickly.

"Let it go," said Keane. "We'll put it this way: each check is beyond suspicion, and you, the president of the bank, could swear to it. Which is an important part of the game."

"Game? Come, Keane! Tell me what's wrong?"

"It's too soon, Mercer. Tell me one more thing. You say each of these four men is known to you personally. You couldn't possibly be fooled by somebody made up to represent them?"

"Not possibly!" said Mercer. "Besides, there were the checks, made out in their handwriting while I watched."

"The four seemed absolutely normal to you?" Keane persisted.

Mercer hesitated for a full minute before he answered that. Then his voice was a little strained, a little chilled.

"Normal? That's a hard word to define. Each of them was undoubtedly the man he said he was. The four who came in here, and between them have drawn several millions in the last two weeks, were certainly Dombey, Kragness, Case and Weldman. And each seemed cheerful and without worries. And yet——"

"Well?" prompted Keane as the man stopped.

"Well, in spite of all that they didn't seem what I would call 'normal'. It's hard to describe it. And I can't, as applied to them. I can only tell my own reactions."

He moistened his lips, and stared past Keane at the blank office wall.

"There was something the matter with those men, Keane! Something devilish! All the time I talked to each of them, I could feel it. A sort of chill along my spine—a feel of horror." He tried to laugh. "I used to feel that way when I was a boy and passed near a cemetery at night. That's all I can tell you, Keane. I'm afraid it isn't much."

"It's a lot," contradicted Keane. He got up, eyes icy with growing knowledge. "A lot! Thanks, Mercer."

He left the bank. Four men who seemed without worries—but who cashed large checks as though being bled by some criminal ring! Four who seemed normal at first glance—but who made the bank president feel as he had felt when near a graveyard as a boy!

Keane went to the presidents' offices of the five other big banks in which the four men had large deposits, but from which none had drawn money in the past two weeks. He found what he had thought he would find.

On the desks of none of the five executives was there anything corresponding to the onyx electric clock on that of Mercer. Their desks were bare of all but papers.

IN HIS big library, to which none gained admittance save after searching preliminaries, the frosted glass television screen on his ebony desk glowed softly. The face of Beatrice Dale was reflected.

He pressed a button and the door

swung open. Beatrice came in. He stared inquiringly at her. She was dressed in street clothes and had evidently just come in.

"I've just come from Mr. Weldman's home," she said. "I talked to a maid there. The servants are all terrified, of course, at the death of the valet."

Keane nodded impatiently. "They would be, naturally. But Weldman! How about him? How does he act?"

Beatrice caught her red lip between her teeth.

"He acts cheerful, absolutely normal. In fact, he seems almost too cheerful, after the murder of his man. Certainly he seems in no danger, nor does he act like a man who is being blackmailed."

"Did you see him?"

"Yes, I saw him for a moment from the servants' wing. I got just a glimpse. But, Ascott"—her voice sank—"I had the most uncanny sensation when I saw him! There's something about that man —something——" She stopped with a shudder.

"Go on," said Keane gently.

"It's impossible to put into words. He frightens me. I don't know why. And it isn't exactly fright—it's horror."

"Do the servants feel the same way about him?"

The girl touched her burnished, red-brown hair distractedly.

"Yes. They're a little afraid of him without knowing why. Several are leaving, because of the valet's death, they say. But I'm sure that vague feeling of horror is part of their going."

Keane's large, firm mouth tightened. His strong fingers clenched a little. But his voice was even as he said:

"The rest of the report, please. You saw the barbers I listed, and talked to the other valets?"

"Yes. I talked to the barbers in the four buildings where Dombey, Case, Kragness and Weldman have their suites of offices. And I talked to the valets of Kragness, Case and Dombey. None of them has shaved any of the four in the past two weeks."

Her face colored a little.

"It seemed a silly question to ask them, Ascott. But I know you must have had a good reason for telling me to inquire about it."

"I did," said Keane. "The best. The answer to that question clears up in my mind almost the last of the mystery of Doctor Satan's latest crime methods—precisely how he is draining the fortunes of these rich men."

Beatrice shook her head, bewildered. "Perhaps it's clear to you. I certainly can't understand it! And I can't understand what it is that takes place in Doctor Satan's mind! He is master of a hundred secrets of nature unknown to all others, save perhaps you. He could get all the money he wanted, if he chose, without these dreadful crime plots."

Keane looked at her with his gray eyes reflecting a knowledge of the motives of men that was far beyond the knowledge other mortals could glean from human contacts.

"You don't look at it from the right angle, Beatrice. Money? It isn't money alone Doctor Satan wants. He has more than enough of that without plotting for it. It's the game itself he is after. The grisly, stark game of plundering his fellow men of their fortunes and souls and lives—solely for the thrill of conquering them. Of course he must get the money too. One of the dark rules of his game is that his crimes must pay. But the fact that he is not purely a money-grabbing criminal is what makes him so infinitely dangerous. That, and his learning."

His voice lowered, and into it crept the

resolution that had tempered the steel of his nature since first he had heard of the ruthless, cold-blooded individual who chose to dress in the devil's masquerade and call himself all too appropriately, Doctor Satan.

"But I'm going to stop him, Beatrice! It may cost me my life, but the cost will come *after* the purchase—which is the destruction of Doctor Satan!"

He smiled, and his voice returned to normal.

"However, histrionics won't catch him, will they? It takes work and persistence to do that. Such work as the sifting of news items, for example. And I think I have one here that is to prove very, very important."

He took from a drawer a half-page cut from the society section. It pictured three people, a woman with a granite chin and gray hair like cast iron in a wave over her forehead; a girl who was a replica of her; and a foppishly handsome young man with a harassed look.

"Mrs. Corey Magnus, wife of the financier, is sailing at midnight tonight for England with her daughter, Princess Rimsky, and her son-in-law, the prince, last of the Borsakoffs. They will be received at court——"

Keane stared long at the pictures and the text.

"Another wealthy man living without his family for a time. Corey Magnus. And all the others were left alone by their families before beginning their cash withdrawals. . . ."

He put the clipping carefully away. And in his eyes was pity as well as stony resolve. For he knew that another man had been marked by Doctor Satan. Another victim for the strange and as yet unconquerable crime-routine contrived by the red-masked, red-robed demon who juggled with human beings as though they were pawns—to be thrown away when the game was over.

4. *The Fifth Victim*

IN THE home of Corey Magnus at nine next evening, Magnus's private secretary opened the library door and almost tiptoed in. He walked softly to the fireplace, in front of which was standing a tall, heavy-set, imposing-looking man with gray hair and slate-gray eyes who stared with a frown at the leaping flames.

The secretary's bearing expressed the deference due the man who was Chairman of the Board of the American Zinc Corporation, president of the New York & Northwestern Railway, president of the New York Consolidated Trust, and many other huge financial and industrial groups.

"Mr. Bowles, of the Gull Oil Corporation, is here to see you, Mr. Magnus," he said.

Magnus's slate-colored eyes turned on him.

"Ask Bowles to wait for a moment. I don't feel very well . . . a touch of dizziness. . . . But don't tell him that!"

The secretary nodded and went out, closing the doors of the library behind him. He was looking worried and perplexed. Asking a man like Bowles to wait! Even Corey Magnus might be sorry he had done that.

Behind him, his employer stared dully at the closed door, and then back at the flames in the fireplace. His eyes contracted as though he were in pain. He swayed a little, and caught at the mantelpiece for support.

The open French doors leading to his garden caught his gaze. He walked toward them, breathing deeply of the chill fall air. Small beads of perspiration studded his forehead, and his heavy face was pale.

He walked out of the doors.

His head was bent forward on his thick neck, and he looked intent, almost rapt, as though something called him from out there and he must find out what it was.

It was ten minutes later when his secretary came back into the library again, not daring to keep Bowles waiting longer. He saw that the room was empty, and went to the open French doors.

The garden was empty too. He rushed back to give an alarm—and saw something he had missed before. A note on the library table.

"Send Bowles away," the note read. "Tell him I'm ill and will see him in the morning at his office. You may go home, yourself. C. M."

The secretary bit his lip. No word in the note as to where his employer had gone so abruptly! No explanations of any sort!

But the brusk letter was indubitably in Magnus's handwriting. There was nothing for him to do but obey its commands.

UNDER the little cemetery, in the rock-lined chamber, Girse and Bostiff, servants of Doctor Satan, were busy.

More lamps had been lit. Now the room was brightly illuminated with garish red light. In the brighter illumination the cages along the end wall showed plainly: the one empty cage, the occupant of which had been consumed by the trapped lightning in the next chamber, and the three occupied cages.

The figures in these cages, seen in detail under the better light, would have astounded the city in the heart of which this chamber was buried. Naked, dishevelled, gaunt with hunger and mottled with cold, they were Edward Dombey, John Weldman and Shepherd Case, men among the two per cent who controlled four-fifths of the wealth of the country. The empty cage had belonged to Harold Kragness.

Girse, with ape-like movements, was clearing out the empty cage. Bostiff, with a look of stupid awe and fear on his bovine face, was stirring something in a large metal bowl.

It was curious stuff he stirred, faintly phosphorescent, like a colorless, opaque jelly. It clung to the pestle and, once, splashed sluggishly high enough to touch Bostiff's hand. When this happened, he exclaimed aloud and shook the stuff off his flesh, to land in the bowl and mingle with the rest.

Girse sneered at the exclamation.

"What are you afraid of, you ox?"

"This—this stuff in the bowl," Bostiff rumbled. "It's kind of alive!"

"Sure it's alive," chuckled Girse, keeping his distance from the bowl. "It's this here proto—protoplasm, Doctor Satan said. The junk you're made of, and me, and everybody else."

"I don't like it," said Bostiff, leaving off his stirring.

"I do! Anything that brings in the cash that stuff brings, I like a lot. God, Doctor Satan's smart!"

" 'Smart'?" Even to Bostiff's limited intelligence the word seemed feeble. But he could supply no other. "Smart enough to know everything we think or say. And to kill us if we don't think the right thing."

Girse nodded, his ape-like grin fading. He had seen his red-robed master read treachery in one man's thoughts, and kill him in a blue flame the only materials for which were mysterious powdered chemicals in a little heap.

The ape-like man started to say something, then stopped. The red lamp near the door was winking on and off, on and off. He opened the door and went down the passage revealed.

"Bostiff!" The voice came from a distance.

The legless giant hitched his way out of the chamber and down the tunnel to join Girse. Beside Girse, at the foot of the shaft down which the broad tombstone slid as an elevator, was a motionless figure. A heavy-set, important-looking man who was breathing stertorously but was obviously unconscious.

"Corey Magnus!" Bostiff rumbled. "I've seen him many a time in his private car when I worked on the New York & Northwestern Railroad! That's where I lost my legs. So he's the next! God, it'll be a pleasure to handle *him!*"

Even Girse paled a little at the dull ferocity in Bostiff's eyes.

The two of them dragged Magnus to the chamber and shut the door. There, working with the method of those who have performed the work before and know in advance every move, they began a strange series of tasks.

Girse hopped agilely to a box beside the metal mixing-bowl in which Bostiff had stirred the protoplasm, afraid of it, but having no conception of the marvel of it. From the box Girse took moistened, pulped papier-maché.

He pressed a thin blob of it over Magnus's unconscious face. It slowly hardened there. As it did so, Bostiff stripped the man, leaving his slightly paunchy body bare and white in the cold underground chamber.

Bostiff moved with the clothes to the row of figures leaning against the wall near the door like life-sized dolls. And now it could be seen that there were five figures leaning there instead of four.

One of the figures was naked; and its nudity revealed a fact about itself and the clad four beside it that was the most startling thing about the underground room.

These were not mechanical things—dolls the size of men and dressed in men's clothes. These were corpses; bodies; dead men, perfectly preserved but nevertheless as dead as last year's leaves!

Bostiff, handling the corpse as though it were a thing of wood, clothed it in the garments of Corey Magnus. And Girse, after feeling the papier-maché sheet over the unconscious man's face to make sure it had hardened properly, carefully lifted it off.

He held in his hands a perfect mask of the millionaire.

THE red light next to the door winked again. But it was a different signal this time. Instead of winking on and off at random, it blinked twice, hesitated, then blinked three times.

"Doctor Satan!" said Girse. "Is everything ready for him?"

"Everything is ready," said Bostiff, leaning the freshly clad corpse against the wall.

The door opened, slowly, as though no hand had touched it. A step sounded in the passage. Into the room came Doctor Satan, red-robed and gloved, with the crimson light reflecting dully from his red mask and the skull-cap with the mocking, Luciferian horns on it.

An instant Doctor Satan stood within the doorway, black eyes glaring at the two who served him so well. Then he swung the door shut behind him with an impatience of movement that made Bostiff and Girse glance apprehensively at each other.

Doctor Satan was in a rage. The icy brain under the cap and horns was glacially angry at something. They knew the signs.

"Has all gone well, Master?" said Girse, timidly.

The coal-black eyes behind the mask

narrowed as if their owner would ignore the question of an underling. Then the mask moved with words.

"You have the man, Magnus, whom I directed here in the little death of hypnotism. Doesn't that mean that all has gone well? And yet——"

Doctor Satan strode to the unconscious, stripped financier.

"All has not gone well," he grated at last. "Keane escaped the lightning. And he was not in his home awhile ago when I went there to deal personally the death he has avoided so far. Keane. . . . A man in my own position—wealthy, learned, making an avocation of crime prevention as I have made a pastime of crime."

The grating, arrogant voice softened with thought, almost with doubt.

"The ancient Greek theory had it that every force that reared in the world soon found an equal, opposing force rearing against it as an antidote. Can that be true? Has some high Providence observed my rise, and in the observing prepared for me an antagonist like Ascott Keane? But, no! There is no God, no higher Providence. Keane is an accident —an opponent more dangerous than most, but still one to be destroyed by me almost at will!"

The red-clad figure strode to the cages. Doctor Satan stood with folded arms, staring at the three men who cowered within them at his near approach.

"And you are three of the world's great," Doctor Satan's harsh, glacial tone lashed them. "Observe! Three who thought themselves all-powerful! Cringing here like animals in a cage! But I am more powerful than any other, though the world does not yet know that."

The three men cowered lower. Doctor Satan turned abruptly.

"The mask is prepared? The body matching Magnus's body in height and weight and build is prepared? But yes—I see it is so clad, and the garments fit it well. Bring me the mask, and the bowl."

He bent over Corey Magnus. Bostiff and Girse went to the corner and came back with the bowl of protoplasm, and the papier-maché mask.

Working with deft, gloved fingers, Doctor Satan began a process of scientific sculpture the methods and materials of which transcended anything yet known in science, art, or plastic surgery.

5. Chained Lightning

At a nod from Doctor Satan, Bostiff hitched his great body over to the newly clad corpse, dragged it down, and carried it to him with one huge hand under the dead man's belt.

He laid it beside the unconscious financier. Doctor Satan carefully placed the mask over the dead face, and thrust a small tube into the bowl of living substance. The other end of the tube was placed between the mask and the dead face.

No process of siphoning was begun as far as Girse or Bostiff could see. Yet the level of the protoplasm lowered steadily in the bowl as the jelly-like stuff flowed sluggishly up the tube and under the mask.

After a while the level ceased to sink in the bowl, and Doctor Satan stood up.

"It is done. Tomorrow another industrial giant shall go to the bank and draw out the first of many blocks of cash."

He removed the mask, and even Girse and Bostiff, who had seen such things before, gasped aloud.

The face of the dead man was the face of Corey Magnus!

Doctor Satan's coal-black eyes fixed themselves on the altered face of the

corpse. His gaze was electric, compelling, mystic.

"Magnus," he said, "for from now on you are Magnus—rise!"

The man, lying there nameless in oblivion, was dead. That was beyond questioning. His flesh was cold and stiff. For many hours the heart had not beat.

But—the body rose slowly, stiffly, at Doctor Satan's word!

Doctor Satan's eyes impaled the dead eyes of the moving, standing corpse.

"Smile," he said.

The dead lips, altered with the protoplasm, moved in a smile. It was the wolfish grin of Corey Magnus, pictured many a time in cartoons.

"Speak. What is your name?"

"My name," spoke the corpse, "is Corey Magnus."

"I shall tell you silently what you are to do tomorrow," said Doctor Satan. "Then you shall repeat my instructions."

For several minutes, the glittering, coal-black eyes probed the dead eyeballs of the animated body. Then the stiff lips moved.

"I shall go to the United Continental Bank tomorrow. With me I shall have a check written out by the man who lies behind you. I shall take this check to the president's office——"

But now a new voice spoke in that underground room, a voice not heard before. One that made Bostiff grunt in amazement, as though he had been struck. One that stiffened Doctor Satan's red-draped body as if an electric shock had coursed through it.

The voice came from behind Doctor Satan. And its message was as electrifying as its presence in that chamber.

"Let *me* tell you what the corpse was to have done for you tomorrow."

For the space of a heart-beat the silence that chained the room was more terrible than shrieking chaos. Then Satan whirled and stared at the man who had been lying behind him.

The man was sitting up now; and though body and features were those of Corey Magnus, there was something about the eyes . . . something. . . .

"Keane!" Doctor Satan whispered. *"Ascott Keane! Here!"*

The black eyes glared at the head of the man, so different from the lean, hawk face of Keane. Glared amazement—and rage.

"You have altered your face and body with protoplasm! You blundered onto my method of using and creating it. . . ."

Keane's voice came again, amazingly, from Magnus's throat.

"That's only one of the many things I've discovered, Doctor Satan. I know all you've done and planned to do.

"Tomorrow that revivified corpse would take a check, made out in advance by Corey Magnus, to the office of the president of the United Continental Bank. Why to that one bank? Because only on that one presidential desk is there an object—such as an electric clock—behind which your puppet could write with a dry pen over the words and figures already made out by Magnus, and thus seem to write the check fresh 'under the very eyes' of the president."

The coal-black eyes glaring at him from the red mask were like living jet, burning with hate. But, relentlessly, Keane went on, slowly getting to his feet as he spoke.

"A clever, if somewhat complicated, scheme, Doctor Satan. But like all complicated plans, it provided its own drawbacks as it went along.

"For one thing, your dead men roused an inexplicable feeling of horror and dread in the minds of observers. They seemed all right, and acted all right—

but something chilled those they came in contact with, and that fact was remembered.

"For another thing, there was the matter of their queer actions at home and in their offices. Clever as you are, you couldn't know all the details of their private and business lives, so your masquerading corpses made mistakes sometimes.

"Again, there was the matter of shaving. Hair does not grow on the dead, contrary to superstition. And your mask of living protoplasm, of synthetic flesh, covered the facial hair of the dead who did your bidding. So there was no shaving to be done—to the bewilderment of barbers and valets. It was this that started Weldman's valet to spying around, as a result of which he started for the police, and his death.

"Finally, you had to pick rich victims who were not living with their families at the moment: No matter how marvelous the disguise, immediate relatives of course could not have been fooled. It was that fact which informed me, when Corey Magnus's family went abroad, that he would probably be next on your list. So I persuaded him to go away secretly while I took his place. An easy way to find you, wasn't it, Doctor Satan?"

WITH the fires of hell glittering in his jet-black eyes, Doctor Satan had heard Keane out. They flamed like fire opals as he finally spoke.

"An easy way to get here, Ascott Keane. Very easy! But you may find it more difficult to leave."

"I'll take my chance on that," said Keane.

Doctor Satan's red-clad body quivered.

"Seize him!"

Girse and Bostiff clutched Keane's arms and held him in apparent helplessness.

"Bind him!"

Rope was wound around Keane's arms and body and pulled so taut that it cut deep into the synthetic flesh with which Keane had built out his hard, firm body to resemble Magnus's pudgier one.

Keane stared at Doctor Satan—and smiled.

Doctor Satan's hand brought from under his red tunic the deadly, crystalline tube.

"The lightning tube!" muttered Bostiff, mouth open stupidly. "But, Master, there is no storm tonight. The sky is clear——"

"Fool," said Doctor Satan, "there is always lightning, and storm, somewhere in the world. And distance makes no difference to *this*."

He thrust the crystalline tube between Keane's bound arm and his side, jet-black eyes flaming with triumph.

"When the next lightning bolt splits the sky, somewhere on earth," he said, almost softly, "you die, Keane. That may be in five seconds—it may be in ten minutes. But whenever it comes, death comes with it."

And still Keane smiled.

"You're so sure, Doctor Satan? Under this synthetic flesh on my body there might be something that would astonish you——"

The sentence was never finished.

In some far distant place, lightning flared.

And suddenly the underground chamber was ablaze with blue-white light that dazzled the eyes even through closed lids. It was an inferno of light, a soundless, rending explosion of it.

In a blinding sheet it played over the body of Ascott Keane. Played over it—and as suddenly shot away from it at a crackling right angle!

Girse screamed and Bostiff roared like

a lanced bull as a little of the tremendous current rayed into them. But Doctor Satan made no outcry.

The main stream of blue-white death was streaming from Keane's body—straight into the red-clad figure!

Doctor Satan's body convulsed at the touch. A smell of burning fabric filled the room, to mingle with the acrid odor of burned ozone.

And then Doctor Satan was down, with sheet after sheet of lightning bathing Keane in harmless radiance and streaming from him to plunge into the writhing red figure on the floor.

KEANE'S bonds were burned away by the force he had redirected. Some of the synthetic flesh over his abdomen was charred from him, revealing part of a crystalline plate, like armor over his body.

He dropped Doctor Satan's tube, which smashed on the floor, and leaped over the moaning figures of Girse and Bostiff toward the cages in which three men screamed pleas for help.

From walls and roof of the low room bits of rock and earth were falling, loosened by the lightning bolts. The very floor seemed to sway under his feet.

He opened the cages.

"Run!" he shouted. "Run!"

The three staggered to the door and into the passage, with Keane behind them. At his touch on a concealed projection, the tombstone from the cemetery above sank down to get them. . . .

With a soft roar the earth behind them caved in, burying many feet deep the passage between them and the room in which they had left Doctor Satan, Girse and Bostiff, and the five dead men who had served Satan's turn.

The passage shuddered and quivered. Air from the cave-in screamed about their ears. The four clung to one another for support.

Then, in the racking silence succeeding the pandemonium, they stared at each other in the faint light of the stars coming down the black pit.

"The end of Doctor Satan," breathed John Weldman at last. "Thank God for that!"

But Ascott Keane said nothing. He was remembering that in the burned patches of Doctor Satan's red robe he had seen some crystalline stuff. And he knew that was armor such as he himself had devised against the lightning's bolt. Not as impervious as his own, perhaps—letting some of the current through to convulse the man's body—but still saving him from death.

The cave-in? That could not have harmed Doctor Satan. He must have constructed the chamber to resist the lightning shocks, because he drew them there himself. Only the passage between the room and the end of the tunnel could have collapsed.

So Keane said nothing to Weldman. But he knew the truth: neither lightning nor cave-in had killed Doctor Satan. He was alive—to continue his grim forays against all the laws of decency and humanity.

Another thrilling story about Doctor Satan, "Hollywood Horror," will appear next month

Vulthoom

By CLARK ASHTON SMITH

A weird-scientific story of two Earthmen on Mars—a tale of frightful tortures and eery horrors in the subterranean caverns of the red planet, and a doom that menaced Earth

TO A cursory observer, it might have seemed that Bob Haines and Paul Septimus Chanler had little enough in common, other than the predicament of being stranded without funds on an alien world.

Haines, the third assistant pilot of an ether-liner, had been charged with insubordination by his superiors, and had been left behind in Ignarh, the commercial metropolis of Mars, and the port of all space-traffic. The charge against him was wholly a matter of personal spite; but so far, Haines had not succeeded in finding a new berth; and the month's salary paid to him at parting had been devoured with appalling swiftness by the pirate rates of the *Tellurian Hotel*.

Chanler, a professional writer of interplanetary fiction, had made a voyage to Mars to fortify his imaginative talent by a solid groundwork of observation and experience. His money had given out after a few weeks; and fresh supplies, expected from his publisher, had not yet arrived.

The two men, apart from their misfortunes, shared an illimitable curiosity concerning all things Martian. Their thirst for the exotic, their proclivity for wandering into places usually avoided by terrestrials, had drawn them together in spite of obvious differences of temperament, and had made them fast friends.

Trying to forget their worries, they had spent the past day in the queerly piled and huddled maze of old Ignarh, called by the Martians Ignar-Vath, on the eastern side of the great Yahan Canal. Returning at the sunset hour, and following the estrade of purple marble beside the water, they had nearly reached the mile-long bridge that would take them back to the modern city, Ignar-Luth, in which were the terrestrial consulates and shipping-offices and hotels.

It was the Martian hour of worship, when the Aihais gather in their roofless temples to implore the return of the passing sun. Like the throbbing of feverish metal pulses, a sound of ceaseless and innumerable gongs punctured the thin air. The incredibly crooked streets were almost empty; and only a few barges, with immense rhomboidal sails of mauve and scarlet, crawled to and fro on the somber green waters.

The light waned with visible swiftness behind the top-heavy towers and pagoda-angled pyramids of Ignar-Luth. The chill of the coming night began to pervade the shadows of the huge solar gnomons that lined the canal at frequent intervals. The querulous clangors of the gongs died suddenly in Ignar-Vath, and left a weirdly whispering silence. The buildings of the immemorial city bulked enormous upon a sky of blackish emerald that was already thronged with icy stars.

A medley of untraceable exotic odors was wafted through the twilight. The perfume was redolent of alien mystery, and it thrilled and troubled the Earthmen, who became silent as they approached the bridge, feeling the oppression of eery strangeness that gathered from all sides

"He fell slowly downward among prodigious masses of unnamable machines."

in the thickening gloom. More deeply than in daylight, they apprehended the muffled breathings and hidden, tortuous movements of a life for ever inscrutable to the children of other planets. The void between Earth and Mars had been traversed; but who could cross the evolutionary gulf between Earthman and Martian?

The people were friendly enough in their taciturn way: they had tolerated the intrusion of terrestrials, had permitted commerce between the worlds. Their languages had been mastered, their history studied, by terrene savants. But it seemed that there could be no real interchange of ideas. Their civilization had grown old in diverse complexity before the foundering of Lemuria; its sciences, arts, religions, were hoary with inconceivable age; and even the simplest customs were the fruit of alien forces and conditions.

At that moment, faced with the precariousness of their situation, Haines and

Chanler felt an actual terror of the unknown world that surrounded them with its measureless antiquity.

They quickened their paces. The wide pavement that bordered the canal was seemingly deserted; and the light, railless bridge itself was guarded only by the ten colossal statues of Martian heroes that loomed in war-like attitudes before the beginning of the first aerial span.

The Earthmen were somewhat startled when a living figure, little less gigantic than the carven images, detached itself from their deepening shadows and came forward with mighty strides.

The figure, nearly ten feet in height, was taller by a full yard than the average Aihai, but presented the familiar conformation of massively bulging chest and bony, many-angled limbs. The head was featured with high-flaring ears and pit-like nostrils that narrowed and expanded visibly in the twilight. The eyes were sunken in profound orbits, and were wholly invisible, save for tiny reddish sparks that appeared to burn suspended in the sockets of a skull. According to native custom, this bizarre personage was altogether nude; but a kind of circlet around the neck—a flat wire of curiously beaten silver—indicated that he was the servant of some noble lord.

HAINES and Chanler were astounded, for they had never before seen a Martian of such prodigious stature. The apparition, it was plain, desired to intercept them. He paused before them on the pavement of blockless marble. They were even more amazed by the weirdly booming voice, reverberant as that of some enormous frog, with which he began to address them. In spite of the interminably guttural tones, the heavy slurring of certain vowels and consonants, they realized that the words were those of human language.

"My master summons you," bellowed the colossus. "Your plight is known to him. He will help you liberally, in return for a certain assistance which you can render him. Come with me."

"This sounds peremptory," murmured Haines. "Shall we go? Probably it's some charitable Aihai prince, who has gotten wind of our reduced circumstances. Wonder what the game is?"

"I suggest that we follow the guide," said Chanler, eagerly. "His proposition sounds like the first chapter of a thriller."

"All right," said Haines, to the towering giant. "Lead us to your master."

With strides that were moderated to match those of the Earthmen, the colossus led them away from the hero-guarded bridge and into the greenish-purple gloom that had inundated Ignar-Vath. Beyond the pavement, an alley yawned like a high-mounted cavern between lightless mansions and warehouses whose broad balconies and jutting roofs were almost conterminous in midair. The alley was deserted; and the Aihai moved like an overgrown shadow through the dusk and paused shadow-like in a deep and lofty doorway. Halting at his heels, Chanler and Haines were aware of a shrill metallic stridor, made by the opening of the door, which, like all Martian doors, was drawn upward in the manner of a mediæval portcullis. Their guide was silhouetted on the saffron light that poured from bosses of radio-active mineral set in the walls and roof of a circular antechamber. He preceded them, according to custom; and following, they saw that the room was unoccupied. The door descended behind them without apparent agency or manipulation.

To Chanler, gazing about the windowless chamber, there came the indefinable alarm that is sometimes felt in a closed space. Under the circumstances, there seemed to be no reason to apprehend dan-

ger or treachery; but all at once he was filled with a wild longing to escape.

Haines, on his part, was wondering rather perplexedly why the inner door was closed and why the master of the house had not already appeared to receive them. Somehow, the house impressed him as being uninhabited: there was something empty and desolate in the silence that surrounded them.

The Aihai, standing in the center of the bare, unfurnished room, had faced about as if to address the Earthmen. His eyes glowered inscrutably from their deep orbits; his mouth opened, showing double rows of snaggy teeth. But no sound appeared to issue from his moving lips; and the notes that he emitted must have belonged to that scale of overtones, beyond human audition, of which the Martian voice is capable. No doubt the mechanism of the door had been actuated by similar overtones; and now, as if in response, the entire floor of the chamber, wrought of dark, seamless metal, began to descend slowly, as if dropping into a great pit. Haines and Chanler, startled, saw the saffron lights receding above them. They, together with the giant, were going down into shadow and darkness, in a broad circular shaft. There was a ceaseless grating and shrieking of metal, setting their teeth on edge with its insupportable pitch.

Like a narrowing cluster of yellow stars, the lights grew dim and small above them. Still their descent continued; and they could no longer discern each other's faces, or the face of the Aihai, in the ebon blackness through which they fell. Haines and Chanler were beset with a thousand doubts and suspicions, and they began to wonder if they had been somewhat rash in accepting the Aihai's invitation.

"Where are you taking us?" said Haines bluntly. "Does your master live underground?"

"We go to my master," replied the Martian with cryptic finality. "He awaits you."

The cluster of lights had become a single star, had dwindled and faded as if in the night of infinity. There was a sense of irredeemable depth, as if they had gone down to the very core of that alien world. The strangeness of their situation filled the Earthmen with increasing disquiet. They had committed themselves to a clueless mystery that began to savor of menace and peril. Nothing was to be learned from their conductor. No retreat was possible—and they were both weaponless.

THE strident shrieking of metal slowed and sank to a sullen whine. The Earthmen were dazzled by the ruddy brilliance that broke upon them through a circle of slender pillars that had replaced the walls of the shaft. An instant more, while they went down through the flooding light, and then the floor beneath them became stationary. They saw that it was now part of the floor of a great cavern lit by crimson hemispheres embedded in the roof. The cavern was circular, with passages that ramified from it in every direction, like the spokes of a wheel from the hub. Many Martians, no less gigantic than the guide, were passing swiftly to and fro, as if intent on enigmatic errands. The strange, muted clangors and thunder-like rumblings of hidden machinery throbbed in the air, vibrated in the shaken floor.

"What do you suppose we've gotten into?" murmured Chanler. "We must be many miles below the surface. I've never heard of anything like this, except in some of the old Aihai myths. This place might be Ravormos, the Martian underworld, where Vulthoom, the evil god, is supposed to lie asleep for a thousand years amid his worshippers."

The guide had overheard him. "You

have come to Ravormos," he boomed portentously. "Vulthoom is awake, and will not sleep again for another thousand years. It is he that has summoned you; and I take you now to the chamber of audience."

Haines and Chanler, dumfounded beyond measure, followed the Martian from the strange elevator toward one of the ramifying passages.

"There must be some sort of foolery on foot," muttered Haines. "I've heard of Vulthoom, too, but he's a mere superstition, like Satan. The up-to-date Martians don't believe in him nowadays; though I have heard that there is still a sort of devil-cult among the pariahs and low-castes. I'll wager that some noble is trying to stage a revolution against the reigning emperor, Cykor, and has established his quarters underground."

"That sounds reasonable," Chanler agreed. "A revolutionist might call himself Vulthoom: the trick would be true to the Aihai psychology. They have a taste for high-sounding metaphors and fantastic titles."

Both became silent, feeling a sort of awe before the vastness of the cavern-world whose litten corridors reached away on every hand. The surmises they had voiced began to appear inadequate: the improbable was verified, the fabulous had become the factual, and was engulfing them more and more. The far, mysterious clangors, it seemed, were of preternormal origin; the hurrying giants who passed athwart the chamber with unknown burdens conveyed a sense of supernatural activity and enterprise. Haines and Chanler were both tall and stalwart, but the Martians about them were all nine or ten feet in height. Some were closer to eleven feet, and all were muscled in proportion. Their faces bore a look of immense, mummy-like age, incongruous with their agility and vigor.

Haines and Chanler were led along a corridor from whose arched roof the red hemispheres, doubtless formed of artificially radio-active metal, glared down at intervals like imprisoned suns. Leaping from step to step, they descended a flight of giant stairs, with the Martian striding easily before them. He paused at the open portals of a chamber hewn in the dark and basic adamantine stone.

"Enter," he said, and withdrew his bulk to let them pass.

The chamber was small but lofty, its roof rising like the interior of a spire. Its floor and walls were stained by the bloody violet beams of a single hemisphere far up in the narrowing dome. The place was vacant, and furnished only with a curious tripod of black metal, fixed in the center of the floor. The tripod bore an oval block of crystal, and from this block, as if from a frozen pool, a frozen flower lifted, opening petals of smooth, heavy ivory that received a rosy tinge from the strange light. Block, flower, tripod, it seemed, were the parts of a piece of sculpture.

CROSSING the threshold, the Earthmen became instantly aware that the throbbing thunders and cave-reverberant clangors had ebbed away in profound silence. It was as if they had entered a sanctuary from which all sound was excluded by a mystic barrier. The portals remained open behind them. Their guide, apparently, had withdrawn. But, somehow, they felt that they were not alone, and it seemed that hidden eyes were peering upon them from the blank walls.

Perturbed and puzzled, they stared at the pale flower, noting the seven tongue-like petals that curled softly outward from a perforated heart like a small censer. Chanler began to wonder if it were really a carving, or an actual flower that had been mineralized through Martian chem-

istry. Then, startlingly, a voice appeared to issue from the blossom: a voice incredibly sweet, clear and sonorous, whose tones, perfectly articulate, were neither those of Aihai nor Earthman.

"I, who speak, am the entity known as Vulthoom," said the voice. "Be not surprized or frightened: it is my desire to befriend you in return for a consideration which, I hope, you will not find impossible. First of all, however, I must explain certain matters that perplex you.

"No doubt you have heard the popular legends concerning me, and have dismissed them as mere superstitions. Like all myths, they are partly true and partly false. I am neither god nor demon, but a being who came to Mars from another universe in former cycles. Though I am not immortal, my span of life is far longer than that of any creature evolved by the worlds of your solar system. I am governed by alien biologic laws, with periods of alternate slumber and wakefulness that involve centuries. It is virtually true, as the Aihais believe, that I sleep for a thousand years and remain conscious continually for another thousand.

"At a time when your ancestors were still the blood-brothers of the ape, I fled from my own world to this intercosmic exile, banished by implacable foes. The Martians say that I fell from heaven like a fiery meteor; and the myth interprets the descent of my ether-ship. I found a matured civilization, immensely inferior, however, to that from which I came.

"The kings and hierarchs of the planet would have driven me away; but I gathered a few adherents, arming them with weapons superior to those of Martian science; and after a great war, I established myself firmly and gained other followers. I did not care to conquer Mars, but withdrew to this cavern-world in which I have dwelt ever since with my adherents. On these, for their faithfulness, I conferred a longevity that is almost equal to my own. To ensure this longevity, I have also given them the gift of a slumber corresponding to mine. They sleep and wake with me.

"We have maintained this order of existence for many ages. Seldom have I meddled in the doings of the surface-dwellers. They, however, have converted me into an evil god or spirit; though evil, to me, is a word without meaning.

"I am the possessor of many senses and faculties unknown to you or to the Martians. My perceptions, at will, can be extended over large areas of space, or even time. Thus I learned your predicament; and I have called you here with the hope of obtaining your consent to a certain plan. To be brief, I have grown weary of Mars, a senile world that draws near to death; and I wish to establish myself in a younger planet. The Earth would serve my purpose well. Even now, my followers are building the new ether-ship in which I propose to make the voyage.

"I do not wish to repeat the experience of my arrival in Mars by landing among a people ignorant of me and perhaps universally hostile. You, being Earthmen, could prepare many of your fellows for my coming, could gather proselytes to serve me. Your reward—and theirs—would be the elixir of longevity. And I have many other gifts . . the precious gems and metals that you prize so highly. Also, there are the flowers, whose perfume is more seductive and persuasive than all else. Inhaling that perfume, you will deem that even gold is worthless in comparison . . . and having breathed it, you, and all others of your kind, will serve me gladly."

THE voice ended, leaving a vibration that thrilled the nerves of the listeners for some moments. It was like the

cessation of a sweet, bewitching music with overtones of evil scarcely to be detected above the subtle melody. It bemused the senses of Haines and Chanler, lulling their astonishment into a sort of dreamy acceptance of the voice and its declarations.

Chanler made an effort to throw off the enchantment.

"Where are you?" he said. "And how are we to know that you have told us the truth?"

"I am near you," said the voice, "but I do not choose, at this time, to reveal myself. The proof of all that I have stated, however, will be revealed to you in due course. Before you is one of the flowers of which I have spoken. It is not, as you have perhaps surmised, a work of sculpture, but is an antholite, or fossil blossom, brought, with others of the same kind, from the world to which I am native. Though scentless at ordinary temperatures, it yields a perfume under the application of heat. As to the perfume . . . you must judge for yourselves."

The air of the chamber had been neither warm nor cold. Now, the Earthmen were conscious of a change, as if hidden fires had been ignited. The warmth seemed to issue from the metal tripod and the block of crystal, beating upon Haines and Chanler like the radiation of some invisible tropic sun. It became ardent but not insupportable. At the same time, insidiously, the terrestrials began to perceive the perfume, which was like nothing they had ever inhaled. An elusive thread of other-world sweetness, it curled about their nostrils, deepening slowly but acceleratively to a spicy flood, and seeming to mix a pleasant coolness as of foliage-shaded air with the fervent heat.

Chanler was more vividly affected than Haines by the curious hallucinations that followed; though, apart from this differing degree of verisimilitude, their impressions were oddly alike. It seemed to Chanler, all at once, that the perfume was no longer wholly alien to him, but was something that he had remembered from other times and places. He tried to recall the circumstances of this prior familiarity, and his recollections, drawn up as if from the sealed reservoirs of an old existence, took the form of an actual scene that replaced the cavern-chamber about him. Haines was no part of this scene, but had disappeared from his ken, and the roof and walls had vanished, giving place to an open forest of fern-like trees. Their slim, pearly boles and tender frondage swam in a luminous glory, like an Eden filled with the primal daybreak. The trees were tall, but taller still than they were the flowers that poured down from waving censers of carnal white an overwhelming and voluptuous perfume.

Chanler felt an indescribable ecstasy. It seemed that he had gone back to the fountains of time in the first world, and had drawn into himself inexhaustible life, youth and vigor from the glorious light and fragrance that had steeped his senses to their last nerve.

The ecstasy heightened, and he heard a singing that appeared to emanate from the mouths of the blossoms: a singing as of houris, that turned his blood to a golden philtre-brew. In the delirium of his faculties, the sound was identified with the blossoms' odor. It rose in giddying rapture insuppressible; and he thought that the very flowers soared like flames, and the trees aspired toward them, and he himself was a blown fire that towered with the singing to attain some ultimate pinnacle of delight. The whole world swept upward in a tide of exaltation, and it seemed that the singing turned to articulate sound, and Chanler heard the words, "I am Vulthoom, and thou art mine from the beginning of worlds, and shalt be mine until the end. . . ."

He awoke under circumstances that might almost have been a continuation of the visionary imagery he had beheld under the influence of the perfume. He lay on a bed of short, curling grass the color of verd-antique, with enormous tiger-hued blossoms leaning about him, and a soft brilliance as of amber sunset filling his eyes between the trailing boughs of strange, crimson-fruited trees. Tardily, as he grew cognizant of his surroundings, he realized that the voice of Haines had awakened him, and saw that Haines was sitting near at hand on the curious sward.

"Say, aren't you ever coming out of it?" Chanler heard the crisp query as if through a film of dreams. His thoughts were bewildered, and his memories were oddly mixed with the pseudo-recollections, drawn as if from other lives, that had risen before him in his delirium. It was hard to disentangle the false from the real; but sanity returned to him by degrees; and with it came a feeling of profound exhaustion and nerve-weariness, which warned him that he had sojourned in the spurious paradise of a potent drug.

"Where are we now? and how did we get here?" he asked.

"As far as I can tell," returned Haines, "we're in a sort of underground garden. Some of those big Aihais must have brought us here after we succumbed to the perfume. I resisted the influence longer than you did; and I remember hearing the voice of Vulthoom as I went under. The voice said that he would give us forty-eight hours, terrestrial time, in which to think over his proposition. If we accept, he'll send us back to Ignarh with a fabulous sum of money—and a supply of those narcotic flowers."

Chanler was now fully awake. He and Haines proceeded to discuss their situation, but were unable to arrive at any definite conclusion. The whole affair was no less baffling than extraordinary. An unknown entity, naming himself after the Martian Devil, had invited them to become his terrestrial agents or emissaries. Apart from the spreading of a propaganda designed to facilitate his advent on Earth, they were to introduce an alien drug that was no less powerful than morphine, cocain, or marihuana—and, in all likelihood, no less pernicious.

"What if we refuse?" said Chanler.

"Vulthoom said that it would be impossible to let us return, in that case. But he didn't specify our fate—merely hinted that it would be unpleasant."

"Well, Haines, we've got to think our way out of this, if we can."

"I'm afraid that thinking won't help us much. We must be many miles below the surface of Mars—and the mechanism of the elevators, in all probability, is something that no Earthman could ever learn."

Before Chanler could offer any comment, one of the giant Aihais appeared among the trees, carrying two of the curious Martian utensils known as *kulpai.* These were large platters of semi-metallic earthenware, fitted with removable cups and rotatory carafes, in which an entire meal of liquids and solids could be served. The Aihai set the platters on the ground before Haines and Chanler, and then waited, immobile and inscrutable. The Earthmen, conscious of a ravening hunger, addressed themselves to the foodstuffs, which had been molded or cut into various geometric forms. Though possibly of synthetic origin, the foods were delicious, and the Earthmen consumed them to the last cone and lozenge, and washed them down with a vinous garnet-colored liquor from the carafes.

When they had finished, their attendant spoke for the first time.

"It is the will of Vulthoom that you should wander throughout Ravormos and

behold the wonders of the caverns. You are at liberty to roam alone and unattended; or, if you prefer, I shall serve you as a guide. My name is Ta-Vho-Shai, and I am ready to answer any questions that you ask. Also, you may dismiss me at will."

Haines and Chanler, after a brief discussion, decided to accept this offer of ciceronage. They followed the Aihai through the garden, whose extent was hard to determine because of the misty amber luminance that filled it as if with radiant atoms, giving the impression of unbounded space. The light, they learned from Ta-Vho-Shai, was emitted by the lofty roof and walls beneath the action of an electro-magnetic force of wave-length shorter even than the cosmic rays; and it possessed all the essential qualities of sunlight.

The garden was composed of weird plants and blossoms, many of which were exotic to Mars, and had perhaps been imported from the alien solar system to which Vulthoom was native. Some of the flowers were enormous mats of petals, like a hundred orchids joined into one. There were cruciform trees, hung with fantastically long and variegated leaves that resembled heraldic pennons or scrolls of cryptic writing; and others were branched and fruited in outlandish ways.

BEYOND the garden, they entered a world of open passages and chambered caverns, some of which were filled with machinery or with storage-vats and urns. In others, immense ingots of precious and semi-precious metals were piled, and gigantic coffers spilled their flashing gems as if to tempt the Earthmen.

Most of the machines were in action, though untended, and Haines and Chanler were told that they could run in this manner for centuries or millenaries. Their operation was inexplicable even to Haines with his expert knowledge of mechanics. Vulthoom and his people had gone beyond the spectrum, and beyond the audible vibrations of sound, and had compelled the hidden forces of the universe to appear and obey them.

Everywhere there was a loud beating as of metal pulses, a mutter as of prisoned Afrits and servile iron titans. Valves opened and shut with a harsh clangor. There were rooms pillared with strident dynamos; and others where groups of mysteriously levitated spheres were spinning silently, like suns and planets in the void of space.

They climbed a flight of stairs, colossal as the steps of the pyramid of Cheops, to a higher level. Haines, in a dream-like fashion, seemed to remember descending these stairs, and thought they were now nearing the chamber in which he and Chanler had been interviewed by the hidden entity, Vulthoom. He was not sure, however; and Ta-Vho-Shai led them through a series of vast rooms that appeared to serve the purpose of laboratories. In most of these, there were age-old colossi, bending like alchemists over furnaces that burned with cold fire, and retorts that fumed with queer threads and ropes of vapor. One room was untenanted, and was furnished with no apparatus, other than three great bottles of clear, uncolored glass, taller than a tall man, and having somewhat the form of Roman amphoras. To all appearances the bottles were empty; but they were closed with double-handed stoppers that a human being could scarcely have lifted.

"What are these bottles?" Chanler asked the guide.

"They are the Bottles of Sleep," said the Aihai, with the solemn and sententious air of a lecturer. "Each of them is filled with a rare, invisible gas. When the time comes for the thousand-year slumber of Vulthoom, the gases are re-

leased; and, mingling, they pervade the atmosphere of Ravormos, even to the lowest cavern, inducing sleep for a similar period in us who serve Vulthoom. Time no longer exists; and eons are no more than instants for the sleepers; and they awaken only at the hour of Vulthoom's awakening."

Haines and Chanler, filled with curiosity, were prompted to ask many questions, but most of these were answered vaguely and ambiguously by Ta-Vho-Shai, who seemed eager to continue his ciceronage through other and ulterior parts of Ravormos. He could tell them nothing about the chemical nature of the gases; and Vulthoom himself, if the veracity of Ta-Vho-Shai could be trusted, was a mystery even to his own followers, most of whom had never beheld him in person.

Ta-Vho-Shai conducted the Earthmen from the room of bottles, and down a long straight cavern, wholly deserted, where a rumbling and pounding as of innumerable engines came to meet them. The sound broke upon them like a Niagara of evil thunders when they emerged finally in a sort of pillared gallery that surrounded a mile-wide gulf illumined by the terrible flaring of tongued fires that rose incessantly from its depths.

It was as if they looked down into some infernal circle of angry light and tortured shadow. Far beneath, they saw a colossal structure of curved and glittering girders, like the strangely articulated bones of a metal behemoth outstretched along the bottom of the pit. Around it, furnaces belched like the flaming mouths of dragons; tremendous cranes went up and down perpetually with a motion as of long-necked plesiosaurs; and the figures of giants, red as laboring demons, moved through the sinister glare.

"They build the ether-ship in which Vulthoom will voyage to the Earth," said Ta-Vho-Shai. "When all is ready, the ship will blast its way to the surface by means of atomic disintegrators. The very stone will melt before it like vapor. Ignar-Luth, which lies directly above, will be consumed as if the central fires of the planet had broken loose."

Haines and Chanler, appalled, could offer no rejoinder. More and more they were stunned by the mystery and magnitude, the terror and menace, of this unsuspected cavern-world. Here, they felt, a malign Power, armed with untold arcana of science, was plotting some baleful conquest; a doom that might involve the peopled worlds of the system was being incubated in secrecy and darkness. They, it seemed, were helpless to escape and give warning; and their own fate was shadowed by insoluble gloom.

A gust of hot, metallic vapor, mounting from the abyss, burned corrosively in their nostrils as they peered from the gallery's verge. Ill and giddy, they drew back.

"What lies beyond this gulf?" Chanler inquired, when his sickness had passed.

"The gallery leads to outer caverns, little used, which conduct on the dry bed of an ancient underground river. This river-bed, running for many miles, emerges in a sunken desert far below sea-level, and lying to the west of Ignarh."

The Earthmen started at this information, which seemed to offer them a possible avenue of escape. Both, however, thought it well to dissemble their interest. Pretending fatigue, they asked the Aihai to lead them to some chamber in which they could rest awhile and discuss Vulthoom's proposition at leisure.

Ta-Vho-Shai, professing himself at their service in all ways, took them to a small room beyond the laboratories. It was a sort of bedchamber, with two tiers of couches along the walls. These couches, from their length, were evidently de-

signed to accommodate the giant Martians. Here Haines and Chanler were left alone by Ta-Vho-Shai, who had tacitly inferred that his presence was no longer needed.

"Well," said Chanler, "it looks as if there were a chance of escape if we can only reach that river-bed. I took careful note of the corridors we followed on our return from the gallery. It should be easy enough—unless we are being watched without our knowledge."

"The only trouble is, it's too easy. . . . But anyway, we can try. Anything would be better than waiting around like this. After what we've seen and heard, I'm beginning to believe that Vulthoom really is the Devil—even though he doesn't claim to be."

"Those ten-foot Aihais give me the creeps," said Chanler. "I can readily believe they are a million years old, or thereabouts. Enormous longevity would account for their size and stature. Most animals that survive beyond the normal term of years become gigantic; and it stands to reason that these Martian men would develop in a similar fashion."

IT WAS a simple matter to retrace their route to the pillared gallery that encircled the great abyss. For most of the distance, they had only to follow a main corridor; and the sound of the rumbling engineries alone would have guided them. They met no one in the passages; and the Aihais that they saw through open portals in laboratory rooms were deeply intent on enigmatic chemistries.

"I don't like this," muttered Haines. "It's too good to be true."

"I'm not so sure of that. Perhaps it simply hasn't occurred to Vulthoom and his followers that we might try to escape. After all, we know nothing about their psychology."

Keeping close to the inner wall, behind the thick pillars, they followed the long, slowly winding gallery on the right hand. It was lit only by the shuddering reflection of the tall flames in the pit below. Moving thus, they were hidden from the view of the laboring giants, if any of these had happened to look upward. Poisonous vapors were blown toward them at intervals, and they felt the hellish heat of the furnaces; and the clangors of welding, the thunder of obscure machineries, beat upon them as they went with reverberations that were like hammer-blows.

By degrees they rounded the gulf, and came at last to its further side, where the gallery curved backward in its return toward the entrance corridor. Here, in the shadows, they discerned the unlit mouth of a large cavern that radiated from the gallery.

This cavern, they surmised, would lead them toward the sunken river-bed of which Ta-Vho-Shai had spoken. Haines, luckily, carried a small pocket-flash, and he turned its ray into the cavern, revealing a straight corridor with numerous minor intersections. Night and silence seemed to swallow them at a gulp, and the clangors of the toiling Titans were quickly and mysteriously muted as they hurried along the empty hall.

The roof of the corridor was fitted with metal hemispheres, now dark and rayless, that had formerly served to illuminate it in the same fashion as the other halls of Ravormos. A fine dust was stirred by the feet of the Earthmen as they fled; and soon the air grew chill and thin, losing the mild and somewhat humid warmth of the central caverns. It was plain, as Ta-Vho-Shai had told them, that these outer passages were seldom used or visited.

It seemed that they went on for a mile or more in that Tartarean corridor. Then the walls began to straiten, the floor

roughened and fell steeply. There were no more cross-passages, and hope quickened in the Earthmen as they saw plainly that they had gone beyond the artificial caverns into a natural tunnel. The tunnel soon widened, and its floor became a series of shelf-formations. By means of these, they descended into a profound abyss that was obviously the river-channel of which Ta-Vho-Shai had told them.

The small flashlight barely sufficed to reveal the full extent of this underground waterway, in which there was no longer even a trickle of its prehistoric flood. The bottom, deeply eroded, and riffled with sharp boulders, was more than a hundred yards wide; and the roof arched into gloom irresoluble. Exploring the bottom tentatively for a little distance, Haines and Chanler determined by its gradual falling the direction in which the stream had flowed. Following this downward course, they set out resolutely, praying that they would find no impassable barriers, no precipices of former cataracts to impede or prevent their egress in the desert. Apart from the danger of pursuit, they apprehended no other difficulties than these.

The obscure windings of the bottom brought them first to one side and then to the other as they groped along. In places the cavern widened, and they came to far-recessive beaches, terraced, and marked by the ebbing waters. High up on some of the beaches, there were singular formations resembling a type of mammoth fungi grown in caverns beneath the modern canals. These formations, in the shape of Herculean clubs, arose often to a height of three feet or more. Haines, impressed by their metallic sparkling beneath the light as he flashed it upon them, conceived a curious idea. Though Chanler protested against the delay, he climbed the shelving to examine a group of them more closely, and found, as he had suspected, that they were not living growths, but were petrified and heavily impregnated with minerals. He tried to break one of them loose, but it resisted all his tuggings. However, by hammering it with a loose fragment of stone, he succeeded in fracturing the base of the club, and it toppled over with an iron tinkling. The thing was very heavy, with a mace-like swelling at the upper end, and would make a substantial weapon in case of need. He broke off a second club for Chanler; and thus armed, they resumed their flight.

IT WAS impossible to calculate the distance that they covered. The channel turned and twisted, it pitched abruptly in places, and was often broken into ledges that glittered with alien ores or were stained with weirdly brilliant oxides of azure, vermilion and yellow. The men floundered ankle-deep in pits of sable sand, or climbed laboriously over dam-like barricades of rusty boulders, huge as piled menhirs. Ever and anon, they found themselves listening feverishly for any sound that would betoken pursuit. But silence brimmed the Cimmerian channel, troubled only by the clatter and crunch of their own footsteps.

At last, with incredulous eyes, they saw before them the dawning of a pale light in the further depths. Arch by dismal arch, like the throat of Avernus lit by nether fires, the enormous cavern became visible. For one exultant moment, they thought that they were nearing the channel mouth; but the light grew with an eery and startling brilliance, like the flaming of furnaces rather than sunshine falling into a cave. Implacable, it crept along the walls and bottom and dimmed the ineffectual beam of Haines' torch as it fell on the dazzled Earthmen.

Ominous, incomprehensible, the light seemed to watch and threaten. They stood

amazed and hesitant, not knowing whether to go on or retreat. Then, from the flaming air, a voice spoke as if in gentle reproof: the sweet, sonorous voice of Vulthoom.

"Go back as you came, O Earthlings. None may leave Ravormos without my knowledge or against my will. Behold! I have sent my Guardians to escort you."

The lit air had been empty to all seeming, and the river-bed was peopled only by the grotesque masses and squat shadows of boulders. Now, with the ceasing of the voice, Haines and Chanler saw before them, at a distance of ten feet, the instant apparition of two creatures that were comparable to nothing in the whole known zoology of Mars or Earth.

They rose from the rocky bottom to the height of giraffes, with shortish legs that were vaguely similar to those of Chinese dragons, and elongated spiral necks like the middle coils of great anacondas. Their heads were triple-faced, and they might have been the trimurti of some infernal world. It seemed that each face was eyeless, with tongue-shapen flames issuing voluminously from deep orbits beneath the slanted brows. Flames also poured in a ceaseless vomit from the gaping gargoyle mouths. From the head of each monster a triple comb of vermilion flared aloft in sharp serrations, glowing terribly; and both of them were bearded with crimson scrolls. Their necks and arching spines were fringed with sword-long blades that diminished into rows of daggers on the tapering tails; and their whole bodies, as well as this fearsome armament, appeared to burn as if they had just issued from a fiery furnace.

A palpable heat emanated from these hellish chimeras, and the Earthmen retreated hastily before the flying splotches, like the blown tatters of a conflagration, that broke loose from their ever-jetting eye-flames and mouth-flames.

"My God! These monsters are supernatural!" cried Chanler, shaken and appalled.

Haines, though palpably startled, was inclined to a more orthodox explanation. "There must be some sort of television behind this," he maintained, "though I can't imagine how it's possible to project three-dimensional images, and also create the sensation of heat. . . . I had an idea, somehow, that our escape was being watched."

He picked up a heavy fragment of metallic stone and heaved it at one of the glowing chimeras. Aimed unerringly, the fragment struck the frontal brow of the monster, and seemed to explode in a shower of sparks at the moment of impact. The creature flared and swelled prodigiously, and a fiery hissing became audible. Haines and Chanler were driven back by a wave of scorching heat; and their wardens followed them pace by pace on the rough bottom. Abandoning all hope of escape, they returned toward Ravormos, dogged by the monsters as they toiled through yielding sand and over the ledges and riffles.

Reaching the point where they had descended into the river-channel, they found its upper stretches guarded by two more of these terrific dragons. There was no other recourse than to climb the lofty shelves into the acclivitous tunnel. Weary with their long flight, and enervated by a dull despair, they found themselves again in the outer hall, with two of their guardians now preceding them like an escort of infernal honor. Both were stunned by a realization of the awful and mysterious powers of Vulthoom; and even Haines had become silent, though his brain was still busy with a futile and desperate probing. Chanler, more sensitive, suffered all the chills and terrors that his literary imagination could inflict upon him under the circumstances.

THEY came at length to the columned gallery that circled the vast abyss. Midway in this gallery, the chimeras who preceded the Earthmen turned upon them suddenly with a fearsome belching of flames; and, as they paused in their intimidation, the two behind continued to advance toward them with a hissing as of Satanic salamanders. In that narrowing space, the heat was like a furnace-blast, and the columns afforded no shelter. From the gulf below, where the Martian titans toiled perpetually, a stupefying thunder rose to assail them at the same time; and noxious fumes were blown toward them in writhing coils.

"Looks as if they are going to drive us into the gulf," Haines panted, as he sought to draw breath in the fiery air. He and Chanler reeled before the looming monsters, and even as he spoke, two more of these hellish apparitions flamed into being at the gallery's verge, as if they had risen from the gulf to render impossible that fatal plunge which alone could have offered an escape from the others.

Half swooning, the Earthmen were dimly aware of a change in the menacing chimeras. The flaming bodies dulled and shrank and darkened, the heat lessened, the fires died down in the mouths and eye-pits. At the same time, the creatures drew closer, fawning loathsomely, and revealing whitish tongues and eyeballs of jet.

The tongues seemed to divide . . . they grew paler . . . they were like flower-petals that Haines and Chanler had seen somewhere. The breath of the chimeras, like a soft gale, was upon the faces of the Earthmen . . . and the breath was a cool and spicy perfume that they had known before . . . the narcotic perfume that had overcome them following their audience with the hidden master of Ravormos. . . . Moment by moment, the monsters turned to prodigious blossoms; the pillars of the gallery became gigantic trees in a glamor of primal dawn; the thunders of the pit were lulled to a far-off sighing as of gentle seas on Edenic shores. The teeming terrors of Ravormos, the threat of a shadowy doom, were as things that had never been. Haines and Chanler, oblivious, were lost in the paradise of the unknown drug. . . .

HAINES, awakening darkly, found that he lay on the stone floor in the circling colonnade. He was alone, and the fiery chimeras had vanished. The shadows of his opiate swoon were roughly dissipated by the clangors that still mounted from the neighboring gulf. With growing consternation and horror, he recalled everything that had happened.

He arose giddily to his feet, peering about in the semi-twilight of the gallery for some trace of his companion. The petrified fungus-club that Chanler had carried, as well as his own weapon, were lying where they had fallen from the fingers of the overpowered men. But Chanler was gone; and Haines shouted aloud with no other response than the eerily prolonged echoes of the deep arcade.

Impelled by an urgent feeling that he must find Chanler without delay, he recovered his heavy mace and started along the gallery. It seemed that the weapon could be of little use against the preternatural servants of Vulthoom; but somehow, the metallic weight of the bludgeon reassured him.

Nearing the great corridor that ran to the core of Ravormos, Haines was overjoyed when he saw Chanler coming to meet him. Before he could call out a cheery greeting, he heard Chanler's voice:

"Hello, Bob, this is my first televisual appearance in tridimensional form. Pretty good, isn't it? I'm in the private laboratory of Vulthoom, and Vulthoom has

persuaded me to accept his proposition. As soon as you've made up your mind to do likewise, we'll return to Ignarh with full instructions regarding our terrestrial mission, and funds amounting to a million dollars each. Think it over, and you'll see that there's nothing else to do. When you've decided to join us, follow the main corridor through Ravormos, and Ta-Vho-Shai will meet you and bring you into the laboratory."

At the conclusion of this astounding speech, the figure of Chanler, without seeming to wait for any reply from Haines, stepped lightly to the gallery's verge and floated out among the wreathing vapors. There, smiling upon Haines, it vanished like a phantom.

To say that Haines was thunderstruck would be putting it feebly indeed. In all verisimilitude, the figure and voice had been those of the flesh-and-blood Chanler. He felt an eery chill before the thaumaturgy of Vulthoom, which could bring about a projection so veridical as to deceive him in this manner. He was shocked and horrified beyond measure by Chanler's capitulation; but somehow, it did not occur to him that any imposture had been practised.

"That devil has gotten him," thought Haines. "But I'd never have believed it. I didn't think he was that kind of a fellow at all."

Sorrow, anger, bafflement and amazement filled him alternately as he strode along the gallery; nor, as he entered the inner hall, was he able to decide on any clearly effective course of action. To yield, as Chanler had avowedly done, was unthinkably repugnant to him. If he could see Chanler again, perhaps he could persuade him to change his mind and resume an unflinching opposition to the alien entity. It was a degradation, and a treason to humankind, for any Earthman to lend himself to the more than doubtful schemes of Vulthoom. Apart from the projected invasion of Earth, and the spread of the strange, subtle narcotic, there was the ruthless destruction of Ignar-Luth that would occur when Vulthoom's ether-vessel should blast its way to the planet's surface. It was his duty, and Chanler's, to prevent all this if prevention were humanly possible. Somehow, they—or he alone if necessary—must stem the cavern-incubated menace. Bluntly honest himself, there was no thought of temporizing even for an instant.

Still carrying the mineraloid club, he strode on for several minutes, his brain pre-occupied with the dire problem but powerless to arrive at any solution. Through a habit of observation more or less automatic with the veteran space-pilot, he peered through the doorways of the various rooms that he passed, where the cupels and retorts of a foreign chemistry were tended by age-old colossi. Then, without premeditation, he came to the deserted room in which were the three mighty receptacles that Ta-Vho-Shai had called the Bottles of Sleep. He remembered what the Aihai had said concerning their contents.

In a flash of desperate inspiration, Haines boldly entered the room, hoping that he was not under the surveillance of Vulthoom at the moment. There was no time for reflection or other delay, if he were to execute the audacious plan that had occurred to him.

TALLER than his head, with the swelling contours of great amphoras, and seemingly empty, the Bottles glimmered in the still light. Like the phantom of a bulbous giant, he saw his own distorted image in the upward-curving glass as he neared the foremost one.

There was but one thought, one resolution, in his mind. Whatever the cost, he

must smash the Bottles, whose released gases would pervade Ravormos and plunge the followers of Vulthoom—if not Vulthoom himself—into a thousand-year term of slumber. He and Chanler, no doubt, would be doomed to share the slumber; and for them, unfortified by the secret elixir of immortality, there would be in all likelihood no awakening. But under the circumstances it was better so; and, by the sacrifice, a thousand years of grace would be accorded to the two planets. Now was his opportunity, and it seemed improbable that there would ever be another one.

He lifted the petrified fungus-mace, he swung it back in a swift arc, and struck with all his strength at the bellying glass. There was a gong-like clangor, sonorous and prolonged, and radiating cracks appeared from top to bottom of the huge receptacle. At the second blow, it broke inward with a shrill, appalling sound that was almost an articulate shriek, and Haines' face was fanned for an instant by a cool breath, gentle as a woman's sigh.

Holding his breath to avoid the inhalation of the gas, he turned to the next Bottle. It shattered at the first stroke, and again he felt a soft sighing, that followed upon the cleavage.

A voice of thunder seemed to fill the room as he raised his weapon to assail the third Bottle: "Fool! you have doomed yourself and your fellow Earthman by this deed." The last words mingled with the crash of Haines' final stroke. A tomb-like silence followed, and the far-off, muted rumble of engineries seemed to ebb and recede before it. The Earthman stared for a moment at the riven Bottles, and then, dropping the useless remnant of his mace, which had been shattered into several fragments, he fled from the chamber.

Drawn by the noise of breakage, a number of Aihais had appeared in the hall. They were running about in an aimless, unconcerted manner, like mummies impelled by a failing galvanism. None of them tried to intercept the Earthman.

Whether the slumber induced by the gases would be slow or swift in its coming, Haines could not surmise. The air of the caverns was unchanged as far as he could tell: there was no odor, no perceptible effect on his breathing. But already, as he ran, he felt a slight drowsiness, and a thin veil appeared to weave itself on all his senses. It seemed that faint vapors were forming in the corridor, and there was a touch of insubstantiality in the very walls.

His flight was without definite goal or purpose. Like a dreamer in a dream, he felt little surprize when he found himself lifted from the floor and borne along through midair in an inexplicable levitation. It was as if he were caught in a rushing stream, or were carried on invisible clouds. The doors of a hundred secret rooms, the mouths of a hundred mysterious halls, flew swiftly past him, and he saw in brief glimpses the colossi that lurched and nodded with the ever-spreading slumber as they went to and fro on strange errands. Then, dimly, he saw that he had entered the high-vaulted room that enshrined the fossil flower on its tripod of crystal and black metal. A door opened in the seamless stone of the further wall as he hurtled toward it. An instant more, while he seemed to fall downward through a nether chamber beyond, among prodigious masses of unnamable machines, upon a revolving disk that droned infernally; then he was deposited on his feet, with the whole chamber righting itself about him, and the disk towering before him. The disk had now ceased to revolve, but the air still throbbed with its hellish vibration. The place was

like a mechanical nightmare, but amid its confusion of glittering coils and dynamos, Haines beheld the form of Chanler, lashed upright with metal cords to a rack-like frame. Near him, in a still and standing posture, was the giant Ta-Vho-Shai; and immediately in front of him, there reclined an incredible thing whose further portions and members wound away to an indefinite distance amid the machinery.

Somehow, the thing was like a gigantic plant, with innumerable roots, pale and swollen, that ramified from a bulbular bole. This bole, half hidden from view, was topped with a vermilion cup like a monstrous blossom; and from the cup there grew an elfin figure, pearly-hued, and formed with exquisite beauty and symmetry; a figure that turned its Lilliputian face toward Haines and spoke in the sounding voice of Vulthoom:

"You have conquered for the time, but I bear no rancor toward you. I blame my own carelessness."

TO HAINES, the voice was like a far-off thunder heard by one who is half asleep. With halting effort, lurching as if he were about to fall, he made his way toward Chanler. Wan and haggard, with a look that puzzled Haines dimly, Chanler gazed upon him from the metal frame without speaking.

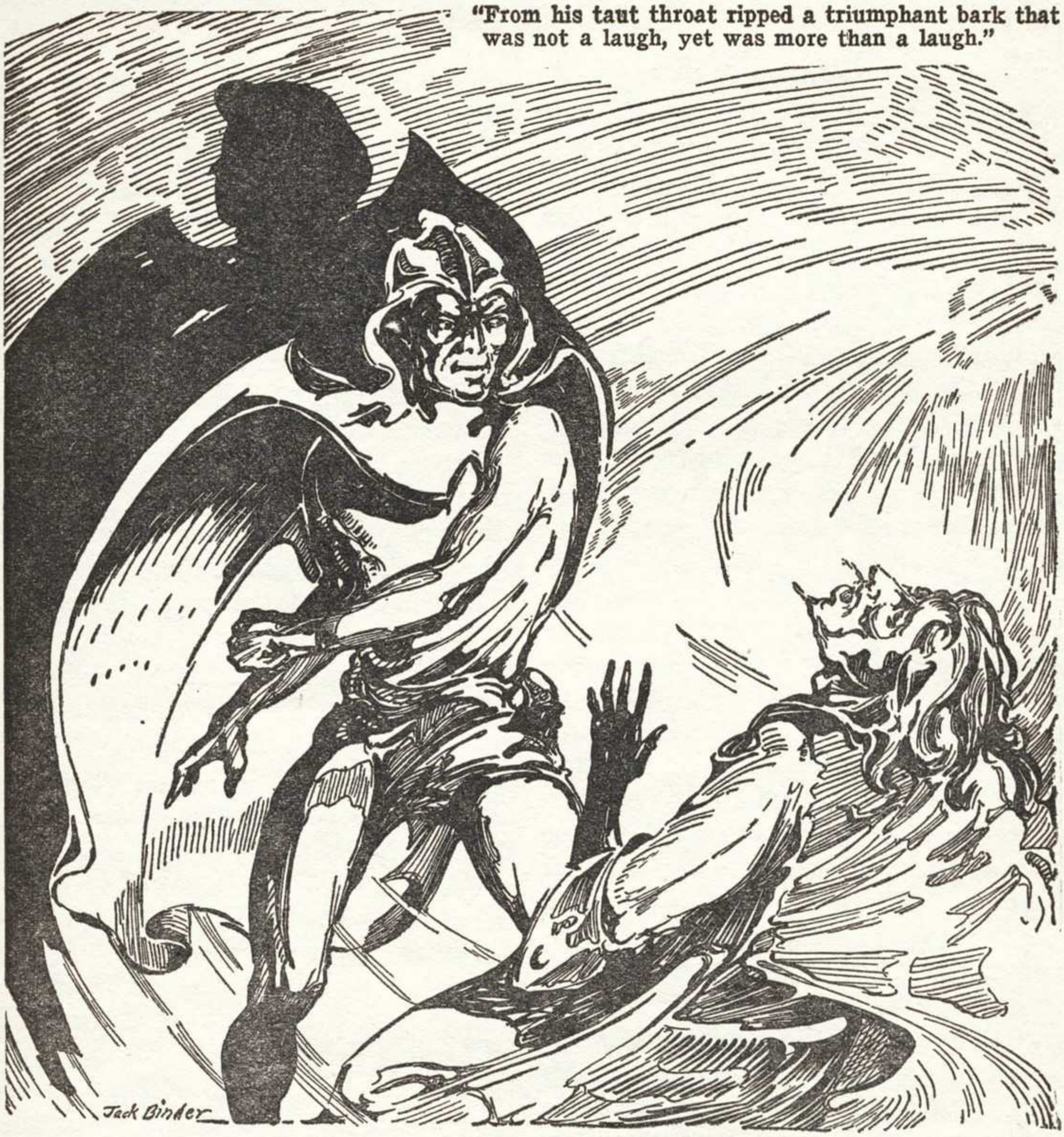
"I . . . smashed the Bottles," Haines heard his own voice with a feeling of drowsy unreality. "It seemed the only thing to do . . . since you had gone over to Vulthoom."

"But I hadn't consented," Chanler replied slowly. "It was all a deception . . . to trick you into consenting. . . . And they were torturing me because I wouldn't give in." Chanler's voice trailed away, and it seemed that he could say no more. Subtly, the pain and haggardness began to fade from his features, as if erased by the gradual oncoming of slumber.

Haines, laboriously trying to comprehend through his own drowsiness, perceived an evil-looking instrument, like a many-pointed metal goad, which drooped from the fingers of Ta-Vho-Shai. From the arc of needle-like tips, there fell a ceaseless torrent of electric sparks. The bosom of Chanler's shirt had been torn open, and his skin was stippled with tiny blue-black marks from chin to diaphragm . . . marks that formed a diabolic pattern. Haines felt a vague, unreal horror.

Through the Lethe that closed upon his senses more and more, he became aware that Vulthoom had spoken; and after an interval, it seemed that he understood the meaning of the words. "All my methods of persuasion have failed; but it matters little. I shall yield myself to slumber, though I could remain awake if I wished, defying the gases through my superior science and vital power. We shall all sleep soundly . . . and a thousand years are no more than a single night to my followers and me. For you, whose life-term is so brief, they will become—eternity. Soon I shall awaken and resume my plans of conquest . . . and you, who dared to interfere, will lie beside me then as a little dust . . . and the dust will be swept away."

The voice ended, and it seemed that the elfin being began to nod in the monstrous vermilion cup. Haines and Chanler saw each other with growing, wavering dimness, as if through a gray mist that had risen between them. There was silence everywhere, as if the Tartarean engineries had fallen still, and the titans had ceased their labor. Chanler relaxed on the torture-frame, and his eyelids drooped. Haines tottered, fell, and lay motionless. Ta-Vho-Shai, still clutching his sinister instrument, reposed like a mummied giant. Slumber, like a silent sea, had filled the caverns of Ravormos.



"From his taut throat ripped a triumphant bark that was not a laugh, yet was more than a laugh."

Satan in Exile

By ARTHUR WILLIAM BERNAL

A stupendous weird novel of a space bandit whose exploits among the planets of our solar system made him a veritable Robin Hood of the airways

The Story Thus Far

PARR KERIO receives a strange midnight visitor, Prince Satan, the man with the metal arm. Satan, the most-wanted space pirate in the universe, reveals his identity as that of a young nobleman of Earth, Price Torgeny, long considered dead. Kerio hears his amazing tale.

Back of it all is ruthless High Prince

 This story began in WEIRD TALES for June

Fane, Overlord of Earth, who is directly responsible for the banishment of young Torgeny and blind Feloth, an aged scientist, to the prison planet, Triton.

On the way to Triton, a Neptunian satellite, Torgeny and Feloth secure control of the prison-ship and escape, killing the ship's officers. The stolen ship is manned by a horde of giant Martian peasants who look to the Earthmen as their leaders. In the course of battle, Torgeny is crippled for life by having his left arm charred with a ray-gun. His once handsome face is split diagonally by a hideous whip-scar.

After many hazardous adventures, during which the exiled prince turns genuine pirate, Torgeny finds himself possessed of a tiny underground kingdom somewhere beneath the crust of the Jovian satellite, Ganymede. By this time the nobleman is known only by the fantastic title, Prince Satan, Lord of the Great Blackness. He is enemy number one on the lists of the baffled space-police.

Through Feloth's genius, Satan is equipped with the fleetest cruiser in the void, the *Space Waif*. Satan is also furnished by Feloth with a miracle of metal —a steel forearm and hand to replace his lost natural limb. Science again proves the supremacy of machinery over flesh, and Satan becomes a superman. With his fast ship he is practically invincible.

Prince Satan has not forgotten his vow of vengeance against High Prince Fane, and at last he decides the time has come when the Overlord must pay for his treacheries.

At present, Fane and Lavorkis, a criminally-minded scientist, have abducted Thorg Lua, a Venusian inventor, to force from him the secret of a terrible lethal weapon. With this weapon Fane hopes to conquer the planet Mars. Satan, aware of the situation, tracks the conspirators to their lair, a sunken tower in the depths of the Atlantic Ocean. The corsair, in turn, has been trailed by his greatest professional enemy, Inspector Nderso Drexx, of the space-police.

At present, Drexx lies trussed helplessly in the top of the tower, while Satan is peering into a hidden sub-chamber where the conspirators are torturing Thorg Lua. Under the stress of torture, the inventor has divulged his terrible secret and now only Satan can stave off a war which will plunge two worlds into bloody holocaust. Fane's lustful triumph turns to fear as he suddenly gazes up into the muzzle of the deadliest ray-gun in the universe, and Prince Satan holds the conspirators at bay.

The story continues:

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11. Satan Settles Accounts

IN A TRICE Satan was down the ladder and on the green-slime floor of the hidden chamber. He knew he was still working against time, it being only a matter of minutes before some one of Drexx's crew got restless and disembarked to seek his commander.

His dark eyes swept the small room curiously. He saw in a flash that this room was a secret water-lock in the tower's bottom, containing a tiny submarine. No wonder Lavorkis had managed to carry on so much uncaught villainy, with this hidden undersea entrance and an illicit ship to smuggle in his captives with, the space pirate remarked to himself as he signaled the gaunt scientist to drop his glittering scalpel.

"Get over there against the wall—both of you," Satan snapped, his low voice chill as a gust from Pluto's ice-wastes.

Lavorkis, whimpering like a beaten thing, stumbled back against the little submarine, hands held high above his head. Fane sullenly followed, with as much dig-

nity as he could muster. Both knew the deadliness of that menacing ray-gun in the hand of metal. Without taking his steady gaze from his prisoners, Satan unstrapped the moaning Thorg Lua with his free hand, although he felt that it was already too late.

"Where are your men, Lavorkis?" demanded the exile.

"He—sent them away," supplied the dying Venusian as Lavorkis hesitated. "Only two—on guard somewhere——"

The tortured man collapsed. One swift glance at the seared breast told Satan that Thorg Lua would suffer no more. His acid-eaten heart was stilled.

"I disposed of your men on the way down, Lavorkis, so don't expect aid from them," Satan said in his taut half-whisper.

He shifted his gaze from the fever-flushed one of the scientist to that of Fane.

"And now, Overlord, you cold-blooded murderer, do you know who I am? Be quick—I'm in a hurry!"

"You're Prince Satan, the notorious space pirate," stated the high prince, having regained a little of his habitual composure. "But why——"

"Enough!" Satan could feel the precious seconds slipping past—racing seconds which might mean the difference between life and death for him. "I'm Torgeny," he blurted without further preamble, his eyes narrowed to slits behind which dark flames blazed, "and I've come from the depths of space to kill you, as I promised."

"Torgeny!" Fane's composure was completely swept away. *"Torgeny!"* The rocky sub-chamber swirled in black chaos. His knees buckled beneath him and he clutched at the slimy wall for support, his face white as the snow-heaped plains of Triton.

"Kill us? Kill us?" Lavorkis rasped insanely, his yellow fangs clicking like ice in a bowl. But Satan completely ignored this conspirator; he had forgotten that he even existed.

Fane

"But first, Fane," said Satan in gentle tones soft as the caress of death itself, "I have a few things to settle with you. I don't want to burn you just yet. I——"

While he spoke, the grim-visaged exile, prompted by his strange conceit and knowing that his enemies were fully aware of his reputation for uncanny speed, had laid his ray-gun on the table beside him. But Lavorkis, delirious with fear, thought he saw a chance for escape.

With one great bound, the owner of the tower was atop the flat platform by the tiny submarine's open entrance-port, one skinny hand clutching at a lever in the side of the wall. That was as far as he got.

"Stop where you are or I'll burn you through!" The heavy pistol was in the gleaming metal hand and aiming at Lavorkis' traitorous heart in the flicker of an instant. Fane shrank, terror-stricken, against the rocky wall.

"Don't let him pull that lever!" cried the Overlord to Satan, terror clipping off his syllables. "It opens the gates to the sea, and we'll be drowned like rats in here! *Stop him!*"

Something in the brain of Lavorkis had certainly snapped. With one hand still on the lever handle, he swung upon the two men below and cackled triumphantly. "In a minute more you'll both be dead! Ha, ha, ha! Did you think, Fane, that Lavorkis would be for ever content to lick your boots? Oh, no!

Lavorkis is clever. Lavorkis can escape from here—escape with the secret that will make him an emperor of two worlds—but you, you two, will die in a foaming ocean torrent and none will ever find your bodies. Ha, ha, ha, ha!"

Sudden movement. The ray-gun in Satan's hand bucked, and its beam of dull red death leapt toward the madman swaying on the rocky shelf. Fane screamed in wild fear and made a dash for the ladder leading to the rooms above. Lavorkis, flecks of foam upon his parted lips, was yanking hard upon the handle in the chamber wall.

Simultaneously with the plunging home of the flood-lever, a tiny round hole sprang into smoking existence between Lavorkis' narrow eyes. There was a harsh grating as giant cogs meshed inside the green-grown wall, and at the same instant that the lifeless body of Lavorkis tumbled headlong into the gaping hatchway of his little submarine, that Fane's scrambling boots disappeared from the ladder into the tower above, and that Satan flung himself desperately after the fleeing Overlord, the massive wall at one end of the undersea chamber split into pivoted halves, and swung outward into the cold green depths of the mighty Atlantic. . . .

FAR above the level of that secret chamber where Satan had tracked his quarry, Inspector Drexx opened bewildered eyes to discover himself bound and gagged, in a strange and lightless tower-top room. Recollection came quickly, however, in spite of a throbbing head, and in a short time the trussed officer was thrashing about the floor, straining at his bonds. Cursing his delay, the blond captive rolled wildly in the dark. He did not see that he was, with each lurch of his giant frame, inching dangerously close to the brink of a gaping ladder-well.

And outside, the anxious crew of a stationary space-ship fidgeted with their weapons, as they restlessly paced the floor of their engine-room in growing concern over their master's fate. . . .

With an angry roar, a white-foamed deluge surged into the water-lock. The first leaping gush of green sea-flood dashed the stout table whereon sprawled the dead body of Thorg Lua against the far wall, with a crash that shattered the heavy piece of furniture into kindling-wood. The swiftly climbing Satan himself would have been torn from the ladder and plunged to a watery death by the force of that swirling torrent had not the little submarine borne the initial brunt of the onrushing wave of destruction. As it was, the submarine of the dead Lavorkis rocked and tilted in its cradle; but it saved the flying human from being engulfed by cascading doom.

Satan, breathless from a crushing slap of sea-water, managed to drag his dripping body out of danger in the nick of time, and staggered forward in gasping pursuit of his mortal enemy. He realized that he had dropped his only useful ray-gun in his mad climb up the ladder.

Fane would easily have made his escape had he not tripped and fallen to his knees at the very entrance to the waiting elevator. Now, before the machinery of the lift could jerk it upward under Fane's jabbing finger, his fearful adversary tumbled upon him; and the next second, as a dark green cataract bubbled and swirled out of the open water-lock and spouted over the bottom of the submerged tower, both pirate and prey rushed roofward.

Inside the lift there was hardly a scuffle. Fane quickly wrenched himself from the water-soaked pirate's iron grasp, and whining for mercy, crawled off into a corner of the cage. Satan laughed grimly and pulled himself erect.

"Fane," he remarked coldly, "when you ask me for mercy, you're just wasting your time. When I get you out of this tower, nothing in the universe can cut me off from vengeance."

Fane's only response was a terrified whimper. It did not occur to Satan that his prisoner might be shamming

Then, ignoring his captive completely, Satan stoically folded his arms and waited for the rising cage to stop. He wondered if the crew of the *Falling Leaf* were investigating the absence of their commander yet, and if so, what he would do to evade them. When he had lost the weapon he borrowed from Drexx, he had lost his only means of defense, for the two guns in his holsters were uncharged, and thus useless. He shrugged with characteristic nonchalance. The proper time to worry about problems was when they actually confronted him, he told himself.

The Overlord was slumped dejectedly in his corner as though in a semi-stupor. But actually, the cringing figure was not so cowed as Satan believed; and the crafty brain of the evil high prince was whirling at lightning speed, seeking some avenue of escape. Hate-blurred eyes stole repeated glances first at the various dark levels as they sped past, then at the butt of the ray-gun stuck so loosely in his captor's belt. There were but a few floors to go now, and Fane snatched a short, desperate look at the black-shrouded form of the disfigured exile standing beside him, still apparently rapt in somber reflection. Fane had formulated his plan. He tensed himself for action.

THE elevator was just passing the third floor from the tower-top, when the Overlord woke to life. His rash plan was executed in a flash. Before the musing Satan was half aware that anything was amiss, his heretofore docile prisoner flicked the corsair's ray-gun from its worn holster and flung himself at the black square that indicated a passing floor.

His ruse depended entirely upon correct timing. If he missed his goal, Fane knew he would be hurling himself against a solid wall; and even though he should dive truly at the dark blotch that was the tenth landing, if his catapulting body struck the low safety-gate, it would also mean his being crushed to death between wall and elevator.

But with sure death awaiting him should he remain inside the lift, Fane preferred to take his chances in the mad leap. Like a bundle of rage, his torn black cape streaming out behind, he shot from the lighted cage into all-enveloping darkness. He jounced heavily but safely upon the cold metal floor, rolled over, and sat up. He heard the elevator jerk to a scraping stop at the eleventh level, and commence to descend.

Hastily, the Overlord threw himself behind an instrument-littered table, and leveled his captured ray-gun at the elevator shaft. An instant later the cage ground to a stop and presented the bizarre silhouette of Satan's form against a square of light. Fane squeezed the trigger.

"Too bad, Fane. You're unlucky tonight. Had you asked me, I could have told you the gun was uncharged." Satan, bounding from the cage, caught the faint click of the pistol's release catch above the growing murmur of the mounting flood below. While the baffled high prince huddled, cursing, in the darkness, wondering what he should do next, his relentless persecutor fumbled about the black wall for the light-switch.

During the brief moment of grace allowed him before his enemy could locate the neon button, Fane eased himself down the aisle toward the invisible ladder well.

He was not quick enough.

The lights flashed on, and the Overlord was once more exposed to the baleful glare of the terrible space-black eyes. So fearful was the hate asmolder in those two dark pits beneath the shaggy bangs, that Fane shrieked aloud.

"Great Dzchan—spare me!"

"Go on and scream," purred Satan icily, his long steel forefinger pointing at his victim's ashen face. "Scream now, and get it over with. Because when I get through with you, you'll be silent for a long, long time. This mad scheme of interplanetary war is too much, Fane, too much! Oh, don't think you can escape me. I promised long ago I'd kill you—and I always keep my promises."

Two stories above, Inspector Drexx, wriggling about in the black topmost room of the tower, suddenly felt his head and shoulders drop into nothingness. By a violent wrench he managed to fling himself back from the brink to safety.

Abruptly a light blinked on somewhere below, and the officer twisted his blond head until he could peer down the hole into which he had so nearly toppled. Two levels beneath him, the steel-gray eyes glimpsed a slowly advancing figure robed in black. The shrouded form extended a hand in the gesture of pointing, and it sparkled in the clear neon glow. Drexx knew the hand was made of steel.

The police officer redoubled his efforts to free himself. In his haste, Satan had not tied the strips of cloth as well as he might have, and Drexx joyfully found his bonds to be gradually loosening.

From the lighted floor beneath came a sudden stifled scream. Panting from his exertion, Drexx strained his ears and listened attentively. Wafted up the ladder-well came an indistinct murmuring. The trussed giant hung his head over the pit's edge, until he faintly caught a few words.

". . . can't escape . . . promised I'd kill you . . . keep my promises." The voice was that of Prince Satan, and it was vibrant with hate. A second voice, so distorted that it could belong to anyone, choked, "Don't—don't kill me!"

Inspector Drexx logically assumed that the words issued from the throat of Lavorkis. Satan was going to commit cold-blooded murder under his very nose, while *he* lay helplessly bound only a few yards away!

DREXX wasted no more time in listening. He strained at his bindings with the power of a Martian plainsman. Under the sudden surge of energy, he felt the knots of the bands about his chest slip a little further. He gritted his strong teeth and strained mightily. The clumsily tied bonds gave a little bit more. If only Satan's exaggerated sense of the theatrical would make him delay that murder half a minute longer!

After his desperate plan had failed so miserably, Fane's courage melted with the swiftness of snow on the sun-baked surface of Mercury. Now, with all fight taken out of him, he trembled as he watched the advance of his macabre adversary, shuddered at the twitching of the dread white scar, seethed with horror at the invincible talons of glittering steel which remorselessly reached out for him.

Held powerless in the grip of hypnotic eyes, the Overlord staggered backward. For several slow steps he was unable to summon the will to turn and flee, but finally the swelling mutter of the angry flood spurred him to action. If he was to save himself, he must act quickly.

Fane leapt around the corner of a long apparatus table standing conveniently near, and was about to make another great leap for the ladder-steps. Satan continued his relentless advance without haste. He was secure in the belief that

any attempt at escape could be but a temporary staving off of the vengeance to come.

Abruptly the anxiety in Fane's dark eyes vanished, to be replaced by a gleam of incredulous joy. Hanging on the back of a close-at-hand chair, beside a chemical-stained work apron, was the forgotten weapon belt of one of Lavorkis' laborers. From one of its holsters, the black shiny butt of a ray-gun protruded invitingly.

Satan saw his danger too late. As he abandoned his melodramatics and rushed toward his opponent, Fane triumphantly jerked up the forgotten pistol with eager fingers and pointed it at the pirate's head.

"Stop!" cried the Overlord, his sharp white teeth bared in a fierce grin. "One step forward and I'll burn a hole right between those hellish eyes of yours!"

Satan stopped. Space-black eyes measuring the distance between the two men told him it was useless to go on. The pirate cursed himself for having let his personal desire for revenge prevent his dispatching this enemy of the universe at first sight. Now the tables were turned.

"Well, Prince Torgeny, alias Prince Satan, which one of us will leave this tower alive tonight? You thought you had me trapped, didn't you? But I'll show you how High Prince Fane, Overlord of Earth, deals with those who threaten his life. If you know any prayers, I'd advise you to start saying them now, you ghastly devil!"

Satan glared stonily at the slender rod of death in the hand of his arch-enemy and wondered if his time had come. Out of that tiny round hole could spurt a thin beam of destruction to sear its way through his brain. Prince Satan was standing face to face with the black-shrouded form of the man he had sworn to kill, and that man was tightening his finger on the trigger of a ray-gun. How long would it be before that trigger's slack would be taken up?

Fane's ebon locks shook as he tilted his head in evil laughter. "You waited years for the moment when you and I would stand face to face, didn't you, Torgeny? All right, now enjoy it!

"Enjoy your last minute in this world, Torgeny; and then go to your death knowing that High Prince Fane will proceed with his original plans, unmolested. You know that I alone have the key to Thorg Lua's documents now, and there is another copy of his experiments on file at my palace. No sooner will the newscasters have their fling at telling of your sudden demise, than they'll start flashing reports of interplanetary war. War, Torgeny, war between worlds, war that will make me the first Overlord to rule two planets. Think of it, Torgeny! I, Fane, emperor over Earth and Mars *combined!*

"Oh, no you don't!" the power-mad monarch snapped, stepping backward a pace. And Satan realized it would be impossible to inch forward until he could get within arm's reach of his taunting enemy. "No you don't, Prince. I'm the one who's going to spill blood this night. And I'm the one who's going to spill the blood of Mars too, soon enough! Is it not ironic that I shall be accounted a hero for both deeds, Torgeny?"

The long-cloaked Overlord bellowed with mirth. The exile licked his dry lips, and waited woodenly for his tormenter to tire of making speeches and send forth the needle of fire that would release Prince Satan from this life.

From close beneath came the gurgle of mounting waters. Fane's blazing eyes narrowed in crafty thought as he heard it.

"I'm not going to burn you dead, Torgeny," he smiled darkly. "I have a much better plan. Listen. I shall merely drill you in both thighs until your legs buckle

beneath you in paralysis. Then I shall take the elevator to the top floor and simply watch. What a spectacle! Imagine, Torgeny, the amusement that will be mine as I watch you struggle vainly to drag your body up the ladder hand over hand, racked with pain and handicapped by the weight of useless legs, while below you the whole ocean creeps up to engulf you! Magnificent, eh? Listen to that torrent roar into the room below us! Oh, how I'll rock with merriment when I see that dark flood close over your sweating face, as you try to scale the ladder to safety! And, Prince, just to make sure you will not cheat the ocean, I shall be waiting with this gun, just over you a few yards above sea level, so if you seem to be winning your race with the rising waters, I shall carefully pepper your right hand with little burning holes! Ha, ha!"

Fane was now slowly backing toward the elevator, widening the margin of safety between him and the helpless exile before daring to cut the latter's legs from beneath him with a sword of flame. Satan steeled himself against the expected charge.

"I hope I have made this moment worth your long wait," Fane shouted above the now deafening roar of rushing water. Then the Overlord felt the guard-rail of the ladder-well pressing against his back, and knew it was time to shoot down his enemy. The polished barrel of his weapon glinted as he lowered it slightly to cover Satan's thighs.

But Fane never lived to press the trigger his eager finger tightened on. For at that moment, the excited voice of Inspector Drexx yelled from two levels above.

"Drop that gun, Satan! I've got you covered!" he bluffed.

STARTLED half out of his wits, the black-cloaked Overlord shot a hasty glance upward, and by that one instant's delay sealed his doom. For if Fane's nerves were jarred by the unexpected outburst, Satan's were not. The tensed exile knew only that the moment of his deliverance was at hand, and he did not hesitate. With the swiftness of a beam of light, he struck.

All the unbearable torture of all those long years of exile and shame surged in a fever-flood through Satan's tingling fibers. For one short instant, while his ebon eyes, ablaze with all the savagery of man's age-old killer lust, probed like a searing heat-pencil into the numbed brain of his long-sought enemy, Satan's every nerve quivered with pulsations of raw madness.

Then, ere the fright-staggered Overlord could force his dead fingers even to twitch upon the trigger of his dangling weapon—even before the globes of frigid sweat could spring up on a brow parchment-pale with the agony of impending annihilation—with a strength more than human concentrated in this great effort, the exile of space flung himself in one swift motion across intervening distance, like a giant metal spring released, and swung the clenched fist of his steel left arm through the air in a murderous, flashing arc, squarely at the center of Fane's terror-twisted countenance.

The savage crunch of snapping bone which followed the shock of the piston-rod blow rocked Satan's brain with unholy delight, and from his taut throat ripped a triumphant bark that was not a laugh, yet was more than a laugh. For one eternal instant Satan's whole heritage of civilization was stripped from him and he felt the same joy thrilling through his frame that his ancient, less than human ancestors must have felt when they glared

Prince Satan

with red dripping fangs at the torn jugular of a fallen foe.

Then the primeval feeling abruptly ebbed away, and Satan saw his gleaming metal forearm splashed with warm crimson to the elbow, saw the pale blob of flesh that had been a human face vanish in a gush of scarlet as it seemed to leap away from him, saw Fane's sprawling corpse plunge limply against the guard-rail around the ladder-shaft, slip inertly between its bars, and topple into the frothing flood below.

He saw all this and became aware, as the fever of madness melted swiftly from his being, that his ancient enemy, High Prince Fane, Overlord of Earth, was no more. And with the realization that at last Fane was indeed dead partly clearing his brain like a dash of icy water, the exile returned to the present, became cognizant of the facts that somewhere beneath, Fane's lifeless body was sinking slowly through the foaming maelstrom to join the bodies of the insane Lavorkis and the unfortunate Thorg Lua, that all danger of a war between two worlds had been averted, and that an arch-enemy of the universe was cold in death and with him had gone the last brain that held the secret of a terrible weapon.

He also became aware that murky seawater was lapping noisily at his frayed boots, that the metal ladder which connected the various tower floors was vibrating from the touch of rapidly descending feet, and that the man who would trade his soul to see him taken had inadvertently spared his life.

The next second Inspector Drexx was upon him, and Satan found himself engaged in one of the wildest, most ferocious hand-to-hand combats ever participated in by civilized mortals.

"You knew I didn't have a weapon, you beast," snarled Drexx as he plunged from the ladder full upon Satan's shoulders.

WITH his brain fighting its way foggily back to complete clearness, Satan shook off his flailing opponent and dragged himself to his feet.

"Wait, Drexx!" he protested, trying to ward off his savage attacker. "That man —you thought to be me—was . . . that was—Fane! I had to kill him—interplanetary w——"

"Fane!" bellowed Drexx, slugging with greater frenzy than ever. "You murdered Overlord Fane, right in front of me—you filthy ghoul?"

Satan was beginning to realize that the officer would not listen to reason, and reluctantly broke off his unheeded explanations to save his breath for battle. Drexx was a herculean madman of righteous ire, and Satan was groveling in the knee-deep swirl of sea-water before he could save himself from the other's pounding fists.

But once under the surface of the cold green tide, the exile's senses cleared, and he soon had the scarlet-uniformed police officer gasping and sputtering helplessly at arm's length.

In vain did the space pirate plead with his wriggling foe to pay attention to his explanations, but the half-drowned blond giant could not long be stayed even by the vise-grip of Satan's

Inspector Drexx

steel fingers. He wrenched free and foolishly flung himself at the perplexed exile, strong hands again seeking the pirate's throat.

But now Satan knew his only recourse was to down his wrathful adversary and flee, leaving his explanations unuttered, unless he wanted another useless murder on his hands. Accordingly, he ducked beneath the wild onslaught of his irrational assailant, and sent the other rocking back on his heels with a carefully controlled swing of his metal fist. A second short jab sent the officer stumbling to his knees, with a line of red creeping from his mouth until it was wiped away by lapping tongues of frothy green.

A single, splashing stride carried the panting corsair to the shaft's submerged safety-rail. In another moment he was dragging his dripping body up the steel ladder, leaving his insane attacker to shift for himself.

But Drexx was not to be defeated so easily. His vision was a hazy fog of red as he staggered upright and struck off through the rising cataract around him.

Satan's amazement was unbounded when long fingers sank into his legs from below. With a kick, he jerked away and sped up a few more rungs. He was above the eleventh level now, and half-way toward the topmost story—Drexx would have to be more than human to stop him this time.

But it seemed that Drexx was superhuman on this occasion, for half a second later grasping hands again tugged savagely upon Satan's climbing boots. That his wild enemy could still be after him, Satan could not comprehend. Indeed, so entirely unexpected was this last attack from below that Satan's scaling hands slipped from their polished holds, and the desperately battling couple plunged down toward the foaming whirlpool that pursued them.

Once again that night Satan's hand of steel stood him in good stead, and its clutching fingers wrapped themselves securely about one of the uprushing ladder rungs, even as he dropped. With a terrific jolt that almost pulled the arm from its socket, the pirate stayed his fall. However, even that tremendous jerk was not too much for the furious Inspector Drexx. Tenaciously he hung on to the booted legs as the pair, like a human pendulum, swung precariously to and fro above the leaping surge of oncoming waves.

For the life of him, Satan could neither raise his other hand high enough to pull himself upward, nor dislodge his frenzied opponent, to free his weighted legs. Wild-eyed, powerless to move an inch from the spot whence he dangled helplessly from a ladder rung, Satan cast a hopeless look around him. As he feared, he hung at least three yards below sea level, the point of safety. For the pirate knew that the uprushing waters would cease only when they had reached the same level within the tower as they were without.

At the same time when Satan's left shoulder seemed ready to rend itself from his body under the torturing strain, the clinging officer spluttered angrily. During the minutes they had been crazily suspended above the flood, neither had spoken a word. Now, however, at Drexx's gurgle of wrath, Satan's hopes rose again, for he knew the green torrent was closing over his foe's blond head. He summoned all his strength to hang on for just a moment more, until he should feel the paralyzing fingers on his legs release their powerful hold.

When that moment came, Satan swung his weary body ladderward and slowly resumed his painful climb, too tired even

to worry about his enemy. With a grateful gasp, the exile drew himself to safety above sea level and dropped soddenly to the floor of the tower.

By the time the roar of the inflowing water died away below as the flood approached sea level, Satan's strength had somewhat returned. The ebon-eyed exile dragged himself unsteadily to his feet. He wanted to get to his ship and change clothes before he caught pneumonia from the cold night air. But as he reeled awkwardly erect, Satan saw something that widened his eyes in utter astonishment. It was with great effort he kept himself from collapsing again.

For there, peering above the floor-edge, with cold fire flashing from the narrowed gray eyes like the sparks cast off by clashing steel, streaming with salty rivulets, cut and bruised in half a dozen places, teeth gritted in a painful attempt to rise further, blue with cold, was the weaving blond head of Inspector Drexx!

"You monster!" the sickly apparition panted weakly, still vainly striving to writhe itself upward. "You cursed fiend! I'm not afraid of you. . . . And I'm not licked yet, either. Wait ten seconds—till I climb up where you are, and I'll tear you apart—with my bare hands!"

IF SATAN had doubted his eyes, he disbelieved his ears still more. Here was a man who had suffered enough punishment in the last few minutes to kill even a rubber-hided Martian, and now—in such awful condition that his strengthless hands could not even raise his body out of the ladder-shaft—this incredible superman was muttering curses and challenges!

"I'll get you tonight, Satan—if it's the last thing I ever do! You——"

Breathless, complete exhaustion sapping the energy from every cell in his punished body, the pale, heroic countenance shut its bleary eyes in a grimace of superhuman effort, but to no avail. Gradually, fighting each inch of the way with the courageous will of a man who *would* not die, the blond head began to sink weakly below the floor-edge, down toward hungry waves.

Frozen to the spot, his mind the battleground for a wild tumult of emotions, Satan gaped unbelievingly at the slowly vanishing head of his dauntless foe. If what his eyes saw was true, he was watching the last struggles for life of a being who was more than human—a veritable god of courage was sinking to horrible watery doom.

But that was nonsense! Satan shook his head sharply to clear it. God of courage or not, this man was called Nderso Drexx, and he was an officer of the space-police. And this avenging demon of the Code was powerless, offering an excellent chance for Prince Satan to rid himself of one more enemy.

Yet—he *was* a fighter, and a fearless one, too. . . . But that also was nonsense! Besides, Satan had already too foolishly spared this fellow's life on a previous occasion, and this was the thanks he had received, the thanks he would always receive from Nderso Drexx.

Satan glared at the half-fainting man whose quivering head was descending a trifle faster now. This was an opportunity the like of which might never present itself again. The exile grunted in grim satisfaction—Dzchan was surely with him on this night of nights!

As the crimson-doubleted corsair of the void approached Drexx's head, the steel-gray eyes fastened on him a basilisk glare of unabated fury. From the agonized face came a checked groan of feeble anguish. Nderso Drexx was about to tumble from the ladder into the hungry

torrent underneath . . . and a well-aimed kick would greatly speed that water-soaked blond head on its journey.

"Lu'ul sholem, Inspector," Satan murmured softly, drawing back a heavy, square-toed boot.

Epilog: Into the Great Blackness

PRINCE SATAN, with less than even a bruise to indicate that he had that night battled in brutal combat for his very life, leaned back in his chair.

"But—what happened to Inspector Drexx?" I demanded, aghast. "You mean to say you—killed him . . . in spite of all his heroism?"

There was a brief silence, during which the exile of space was immobile except for the slight twitching of his scarred cheek. Then Prince Satan's thin lips twisted in his sardonic half-smile.

"Kerio, I am an idiot," he murmured in that voice like a soft caress. "No, I didn't kill Inspector Drexx. I couldn't do it, I like the infernal fool too much. You can't deliberately murder a comrade you admire, you know. And Nderso Drexx *is* my comrade, even though he calls me his enemy.

"He's a great fellow, Kerio, and deserves to live if ever a man did. Anyway, men like Drexx just aren't born to die in lonely towers, after superhumanly heroic battles. I may be lawless and depraved, but I realized that fact, and my resolution failed me at the crucial moment."

I sighed in relief. "Well, how did you save him, and how did you get out of the tower yourself?" I persisted.

A hand that had steel fingers carefully smoothed the buccaneer's shaggy bangs of silky black. "Oh, it was very simple," he said. "To save Drexx, I merely pulled him up to safety, where he glared at me with deadly hate for the one instant he remained conscious.

"But my real problem was to get first aid for him. He was in no immediate danger—that fellow Drexx is tougher than Martian leather—but he did need attention. Also, I had to decoy the inspector's men away from my life-shell, because I knew that should that tiny defenseless boat attempt to shove off it would be blasted right out of existence. A two-man life-shell isn't much of a cruiser, is it, Kerio?"

"Go on," I urged. "How did you get out, then?"

"Why, I solved both problems at once. Being as careful as I could, I lowered the unconscious Drexx down the ladder until the water just barely reached his chin; and tied him there. Then I scrambled up to the top story again, and did some investigating.

"After I discovered a hiding-place, I went over to where I had previously dumped Drexx's weapon belt and radio-whistle, and blew upon the latter the Interplanetary Code signal for help. Then I again put out the lights and scurried for cover. Just over the doorway I had spied a stout water-pipe, and it took me but half a second to pull myself up to it out of sight.

"When Drexx's men got to the tower door—and I knew that it is in the Code regulations for *all* officers within hearing distance to rally round whoever sounds that S. O. S.—they found the top floor in total darkness, but a light shining from the eleventh.

"As I had intended, the first thing they saw—it was the whole crew—was their insensible commander bound securely up to his chin in water, with the rising tide bringing its level each moment closer to his mouth and nostrils."

"But," I expostulated, "at this hour of the night the tide is not rising—it's ebbing!"

"Yes, I was aware of that," remarked Satan dryly, "but you see, the police were not quite sure! Anyway, in their quite natural haste to rescue poor Drexx from a possible death by drowning, they left but one man stationed on the top floor. That was their mistake.

"This one fellow who was left behind —a husky-looking brute—posted himself just inside the doorway where he could keep an eye on what went on inside as well as on the outside tower roof. It would have gone hard with anyone who showed his nose to that sentry, too, I'll tell the universe, for he had a ready ray-gun in each hand and he was pretty nervous. But, as I said, he stationed himself just inside the doorway, directly beneath where I crouched. That was his mistake.

"As silently as I could, I leaned carefully down from my perch and suddenly crooked this," his silvery forearm flashed in a sparkling gesture, "about his thick neck. He must have been considerably surprized, and he wriggled quite a bit, but he never said a word.

"For a short while we clung there in the darkness, with his feet about a foot from the floor, and except for the little clatter his guns made as they slipped from his grasp, neither he nor I felt inclined to break the stillness. It was very considerate of him.

"After a couple of minutes, I loosened my hold and my unknown friend slumped in a heap. Still he spoke not a word, unless you can call a soft groan a word. I relinquished my hold on the pipe after lowering myself till my feet touched the threshold. In the next second I was rubbing the tired fingers of my right hand—it was quite a strain on them, you know—and scampering into the welcoming arms of grinning Waugh.

"And then, by the time Drexx's body was carefully packed up the ladder and the man in the doorway had rolled over and groaned again, I was rocketing out of sight in a sheet of white flame."

THE dark head bent over a timepiece. It uttered an exclamation of intense surprize.

"I've got to go at once. It's nearly dawn. If I don't hurry, the space-police will be coming back to Earth looking for me. Then I *would* be caught."

"I see you believe in the old principle that people never look for their enemies in their own camp," I smiled admiringly, as the cosmic buccaneer rose and drew his ebon cape about him. "But listen, Your Highness," I continued hastily, "why not let me hide you here until I explain to the authorities who the notorious Prince Satan really is, and why he——"

The saturnine face grew hard in an instant. A steel forefinger reached out and prodded me meaningly in the chest. "That would be the rashest thing you ever did, Kerio, if you told anyone who I really am. Prince Torgeny is dead—and he has to stay that way."

"But, Prince, you are really a great hero. A savior of civilization. A cosmic war at this——"

"You repeat a word of what I have told you while I am yet alive, and your life won't be worth a Venuzian *xeelez,*" iced the soft voice grimly. "You said earlier tonight that the Code does not forgive murder. You promised me silence as long as I live—and I'll see that you keep it if I have to——" A steel hand tapped significantly against the butt of a holstered ray-gun.

"I always keep my word," I choked hurriedly.

"Good. I knew you wouldn't make an exception in my case. But, *lu'ul sholem* —it is sunrise, and the *Space Waif* awaits me!"

"Oh, yes. The *Space Waif*—where has she been all night?"

"I told Tina to take her out into space and creep along in Earth's shadow, till it was dawn in Nyork. She's probably on your own roof-level by this time, for that's where I told Tina to poise her. Where Earth's shadow falls in space there's always a great area of complete lightlessness, and in there the *Space Waif's* black hull makes her invisible. So she has been as safe as though she were in her own cradle at Home. But I must go!"

"Wait, Prince!"

"No time to wait any longer, my brother. Each minute's delay now means increased danger of discovery. Besides, if I don't shove off right away I won't be in time to meet the *Lady of Asia* in a deserted stretch of space. And Feloth would be terribly disappointed if I didn't bring Home her new solar-furnace, as I promised him I would."

The somber-faced pirate dropped his levity like a cloak. "One thing more," he said gravely, tenderly. "Lady Myryam —she is still unwed?"

"Yes," I replied hesitantly. "Still faithful to the memory of her prince."

For the flicker of an instant the scarred visage brightened again. He said no word, but I am sure that even then Prince Satan was conceiving his audacious plan of abduction that was so soon to astound three worlds. When Satan desired a thing, there was no power under the sun that could prevent his getting it. Now, though, he spoke nothing of this, relapsing instead into a fit of morbid revery as he peered unseeingly out the window at the deserted, gray levels below.

"I *have* made them pay, haven't I, Kerio?" he asked softly, in a manner indicating that he expected no response. "Yes, they've all paid—those who were foolish enough to oppose me. All of them—first Stully, then Threepa, and now Fane. There have been other foolhardy ones too, of whom I have not spoken.

"Yet still there are some whose existence upon our planets is a curse. I have a few more debts to pay—a few more wrongs to avenge before I am done.

"One by one these people must stand face to face with Prince Satan and look upon his hideousness. And always, after each one has drunk his fill of my—my beauty, there will be one less score to settle, unless——"

This strange personage interrupted himself, struck by a new thought. For a moment eery lights glowed in the ebon eyes.

"But no!" he said abruptly, and his tones told me he was still speaking his thoughts aloud. "I shall not die until I have balanced my last account and have no more quarrels with anyone . . . except, of course, the space-police, for I shall always have a quarrel with them. Yes, and I shall always have a quarrel with the Interplanetary Code.

"The Code is one law; but I am Satan —and Satan lives by another law.

"But after I have canceled my last debt? What then will become of Satan —Satan, whom no one loves and most men fear? What then will he have to live for? I know not. But after all, is not death but a sleep—a long period of forgetfulness, through which all men rest soundly without fear of being waked? And is there any reason for Satan to be afraid of death? On the contrary, sometimes death offers a release from great suffering. And life can sometimes be very empty, very bitter, very terrible. Especially when one has been caught and crushed by the wheels of circumstance, as Satan has been caught and crushed.

"But all that lies in the future, and Satan concerns himself only with the present. And at present not all debts are paid, and not all wrongs are righted. So there is much work yet to be done, eh, Kerio? Much work—and I must be off to attend to it.

"Farewell, comrade—and may life bring you joy in half the measure that it has brought sorrow to me. *Lu'ul sholem!*"

Then, almost before I was aware of it, he was gone, like the whisper of a fleeting memory.

I SPRANG to my balcony and looked out, but I could distinguish naught in the uncertain light of dawn. Shivering, not alone from the early morning chill, I returned to the warmth of my rooms. Presently, hearing the roar of thrumming space-motors, I glanced quickly out at the dreary sky, to glimpse the slender black shape of the *Space Waif* just before she vanished spaceward in a tiny puff of light.

Wearily I sought my couch, but could not sleep. As I lay, wide awake in the stillness, there was constantly pictured in my mind the sad, grim face of Prince Satan, lonely exile of the void. And my heart, brimming with pity, went out to that heroic, melancholy mortal with the gleaming metal arm and the horribly mutilated face, as he nosed his phantom ship through the all-enveloping Great Blackness that is infinity. . . .

[THE END]

Vampires

By DOROTHY QUICK

The old books tell of how the werewolf came
With white fangs gleaming redly in the night,
Of evil things that haven't any name,
That cannot bear the searching rays of light.
They tell of unknown horrors, deadly deeds;
Of vampires, who can leave their coffin bed
And fly abroad to satisfy their needs
With human blood. So age-old books have said.

There still are vampires walking on our ways,
Not creatures from the grave, but men who live
On someone else's heart's blood all their days,
Men who take all they can but never give;
Strange men who ever striving for their goals
Achieve their way by crushing human souls.

The Shambler From the Stars*

By ROBERT BLOCH

The story of a blood-freezing horror, evoked by the magic of Ludvig Prinn's terrible "Mysteries of the Worm"

I HAVE nobody but myself to blame for the whole affair. It was my own blundering that precipitated that unforeseen horror upon us both; my own stupidity that caused our downfall. The acknowledgment of my fault does not help us now; my friend is dead, and in order to escape an impinging doom worse than death I must follow him into the darkness. So far I have relied upon the ever-diminishing potency of alcohol and drugs to dull the pangs of memory, but I shall find true peace only in the grave.

Before I go I shall inscribe my story as a warning, lest others make the same mistake and suffer a similar fate.

I am what I profess to be—a writer of weird fiction. Since earliest childhood I have been enthralled by the cryptic fascination of the unknown and the unguessable. The nameless fears, the grotesque dreams, the queer, half-intuitive fancies that haunt our minds have always exercised for me a potent and inexplicable delight.

In literature I have walked the midnight paths with Poe or crept amidst the shadows with Machen; combed the realms of horrific stars with Baudelaire, or steeped myself with earth's inner madness amidst the tales of ancient lore. A meager talent for sketching and crayon work led me to attempt crude picturizations involving the outlandish denizens of my nighted thoughts. The same somber trend of intellect which drew me in my art interested me in obscure realms of musical composition; the symphonic strains of the *Danse Macabre* and the like became my favorites. My inner life soon became a ghoulish feast of eldritch, tantalizing horrors.

My outer existence was comparatively dull. Days of grammar school and adolescent high school soon passed. As time went on I found myself drifting more and more into the life of a penurious recluse; a tranquil, philosophical existence amidst a world of books and dreams.

A man must live. By nature constitutionally and spiritually unfitted for manual labor, I was at first puzzled about the choice of a suitable vocation. The depression complicated matters to an almost intolerable degree, and for a time I was close to utter economic disaster. It was then that I decided to write.

I procured a battered typewriter, a ream of cheap paper, and a few carbons. My subject matter did not bother me. What better field than the boundless realms of a colorful imagination? I would write of horror, fear, and the riddle that is Death. At least, in the callowness of my unsophistication, this was my intention.

My first attempts soon convinced me how utterly I had failed. Sadly, miserably, I fell short of my aspired goal. My vivid dreams became on paper merely meaningless jumbles of ponderous adjectives, and I found no ordinary words to express the wondrous terror of the

* This story is dedicated to H. P. Lovecraft.

"It was not a sight for sane eyes to see."

unknown. My first manuscripts were miserable and futile documents; the few magazines using such material being unanimous in their rejections.

I had to live. Slowly but surely I began to adjust my style to my ideas. Laboriously I experimented with words, phrases, sentence-structure. It was work, and hard work at that. I soon learned to sweat. At last, however, one of my stories met with favor; then a second, a third, a fourth. Soon I had begun to master the more obvious tricks of the trade, and the future looked brighter at last. It was with an easier mind that I returned to my dream-life and my beloved books. My stories afforded me a somewhat meager livelihood, and for a time this sufficed. But not for long. Ambition, ever an illusion, was the cause of my undoing.

I wanted to write a real story; not the stereotyped, ephemeral sort of tale I turned out for the magazines, but a real work of art. The creation of such a masterpiece became my ideal. I was not a good writer, but that was not entirely due to my errors in mechanical style. It was, I felt, the fault of my subject matter. Vampires, werewolves, ghouls, mytho-

logical monsters—these things constituted material of little merit. Commonplace imagery, ordinary adjectival treatment, and a prosaically anthropocentric point of view were the chief detriments to the production of a really good weird tale.

I must have new subject matter, truly unusual plot material. If only I could conceive of something utterly ultra-mundane, something truly macrocosmic, something that was teratologically incredible!

I longed to learn the songs the demons sing as they swoop between the stars, or hear the voices of the olden gods as they whisper their secrets to the echoing void. I yearned to know the terrors of the grave; the kiss of maggots on my tongue, the cold caress of a rotting shroud upon my body. I thirsted for the knowledge that lies in the pits of mummied eyes, and burned for wisdom known only to the worm. Then I could really write, and my hopes be truly realized.

I SOUGHT a way. Quietly I began a correspondence with isolated thinkers and dreamers all over the country. There was a hermit in the western hills, a savant in the northern wilds, a mystic dreamer in New England. It was from the latter that I learned of the ancient books that hold strange lore. He quoted guardedly from the legendary *Necronomicon,* and spoke timidly of a certain *Book of Eibon* that was reputed to surpass it in the utter wildness of its blasphemy. He himself had been a student of these volumes of primal dread, but he did not want me to search too far. He had heard many strange things as a boy in witch-haunted Arkham, where the old shadows still leer and creep, and since then he had wisely shunned the blacker knowledge of the forbidden.

At length, after much pressing on my part, he reluctantly consented to furnish me with the names of certain persons he deemed able to aid me in my quest. He was a writer of notable brilliance and wide reputation among the discriminating few, and I knew he was keenly interested in the outcome of the whole affair.

As soon as his precious list came into my possession, I began a widespread postal campaign in order to obtain access to the desired volumes. My letters went out to universities, private libraries, reputed seers, and the leaders of carefully hidden and obscurely designated cults. But I was foredoomed to disappointment.

The replies I received were definitely unfriendly, almost hostile. Evidently the rumored possessors of such lore were angered that their secret should be thus unveiled by a prying stranger. I was subsequently the recipient of several anonymous threats through the mails, and I had one very alarming phone-call. This did not bother me nearly so much as the disappointing realization that my endeavors had failed. Denials, evasions, refusals, threats—these would not aid me. I must look elsewhere.

The book stores! Perhaps on some musty and forgotten shelf I might discover what I sought.

Then began an interminable crusade. I learned to bear my numerous disappointments with unflinching calm. Nobody in the common run of shops seemed ever to have heard of the frightful *Necronomicon,* the evil *Book of Eibon,* or the disquieting *Cultes des Goules.*

Milwaukee was barren ground. Chicago became my next hunting-place. I made the trip, planning to spend a week there. Instead, I was forced to remain in that city for well over a month. Never have I seen so many book stores!

Persistence brings results. In a little old shop on South Dearborn Street, amidst dusty shelves seemingly forgotten by time, I came to the end of my search.

There, securely wedged between two century-old editions of Shakespeare, stood a great black volume with iron facings. Upon it, in hand-engraved lettering, was the inscription *De Vermis Mysteriis*, or "Mysteries of the Worm."

The proprietor could not tell how it had come into his possession. Years before, perhaps, it had been included in some second-hand job-lot. He was obviously unaware of its nature, for I purchased it with a dollar bill. He wrapped the ponderous thing for me, well pleased at this unexpected sale, and bade me a very satisfied good-day.

I left hurriedly, the precious prize under my arm. What a find! I had heard of this book before. Ludvig Prinn was its author; he who had perished at the inquisitorial stake in Brussels when the witchcraft trials were at their height. A strange character—alchemist, necromancer, reputed mage—he boasted of having attained a miraculous age when he at last suffered a fiery immolation at the hands of the secular arm. He was said to have proclaimed himself the sole survivor of the ill-fated ninth crusade, exhibiting as proof certain musty documents of attestation. It is true that a certain Ludvig Prinn was numbered among the gentlemen retainers of Montserrat in the olden chronicles, but the incredulous branded Ludvig as a crack-brained impostor, though perchance a lineal descendant of the original warrior.

Ludvig attributed his sorcerous learning to the years he had spent as a captive among the wizards and wonder-workers of Syria, and glibly he spoke of encounters with the djinns and efreets of elder Eastern myth. He is known to have spent some time in Egypt, and there are legends among the Libyan dervishes concerning the old seer's deeds in Alexandria.

At any rate, his declining days were spent in the Flemish lowland country of his birth, where he resided, appropriately enough, in the ruins of a pre-Roman tomb that stood in the forest near Brussels. Ludvig was reputed to have dwelt there amidst a swarm of familiars and fearsomely invoked conjurations. Manuscripts still extant speak of him guardedly as being attended by "invisible companions" and "star-sent servants". Peasants shunned the forest by night, for they did not like certain noises that resounded to the moon, and they most certainly were not anxious to see what worshipped at the old pagan altars that stood crumbling in certain of the darker glens.

For years the old thaumaturgist was infamously notorious throughout the countryside, and many a pilgrim came to him for prophecies, horoscopes, and the dubious service of his potions, philtres, and talismans. There are a few surviving accounts which speak cautiously of his sepulchral dwelling-place, the Saracenic relics, and the invisible servitors he had summoned from afar. There is a curiously uniform reticence on the part of these chroniclers when it comes to describing these servitors in detail, but all agree that the terrible old man was gifted with baleful and unholy powers.

Be that as it may, these creatures that he commanded were never seen after Prinn's capture by the inquisitorial minions. Searching soldiers found the tomb entirely deserted, though it was thoroughly ransacked before its destruction. The supernatural entities, the unusual instruments, the obscure herds and compounds—all had most curiously vanished. A search of the forbidding woods and a timorous examination of the strange altars did not add to the information. There were fresh blood-stains on the altars, and fresh blood-stains on the rack,

too, before the questioning of Prinn was finished. A series of particularly atrocious tortures failed to elicit any further disclosures from the silent wizard, and at length the weary interrogators ceased, and cast the aged sorcerer into a dungeon.

It was in prison, while awaiting trial, that he penned the morbid, horror-hinting lines of *De Vermis Mysteriis*, known today as *Mysteries of the Worm*. How it was ever smuggled through the alert guards is a mystery in itself, but a year after his death it saw print in Cologne. It was immediately suppressed, but a few copies had already been privately distributed. These in turn were transcribed, and although there was a later censored and deleted printing, only the Latin original is accepted as genuine. Throughout the centuries a few of the elect have read and pondered on its secret. The secrets of the old archimage are known today only to the initiated, and they discourage all attempts to spread their fame, for certain very definite reasons.

This, in brief, was what I knew of the volume's history at the time it came into my possession. As a collector's item alone the book was a phenomenal find, but on its contents I could pass no judgment. It was in Latin. Since I can speak or translate only a few words of that learned tongue, I was confronted by a barrier as soon as I opened the musty pages. It was maddening to have such a treasure-trove of dark knowledge at my command and yet lack the key to its unearthing.

For a moment I despaired, since I was unwilling to approach any local classical or Latin scholar in connection with so hideous and blasphemous a text. Then came an inspiration. Why not take it east and seek the aid of my friend? He was a student of the classics, and would be less likely to be shocked by the horrors of Prinn's baleful revelations. Accordingly I addressed a hasty letter to him, and shortly thereafter received my reply. He would be glad to assist me—I must by all means come at once.

2

PROVIDENCE is a lovely town. My friend's house was ancient, and quaintly Georgian. The first floor was a gem of Colonial atmosphere. The second, beneath antique gables that shadowed the enormous window, served as a workroom for my host.

It was here that we pondered that grim, eventful night last April; here beside the open window that overlooked the azure sea. It was a moonless night; haggard and wan with a fog that filled the darkness with bat-like shadows. In my mind's eye I can see it still—the tiny, lamplit room with the big table and the high-backed chairs; the book-cases bordering the walls; the manuscripts stacked in special files.

My friend and I sat at the table, the volume of mystery before us. His lean profile threw a disturbing shadow on the wall, and his waxen face was furtive in the pale light. There was an inexplicable air of portentous revelation quite disturbing in its potency; I sensed the presence of secrets waiting to be revealed.

My companion detected it too. Long years of occult experience had sharpened his intuition to an uncanny degree. It was not cold that made him tremble as he sat there in his chair; it was not fever that caused his eyes to flame like jewel-incarned fires. He knew, even before he opened that accursed tome, that it was evil. The musty scent that rose from those antique pages carried with it the reek of the tomb. The faded leaves were maggoty at the edges, and rats had gnawed the leather; rats which perchance had a ghastlier food for common fare.

I had told my friend the volume's history that afternoon, and had unwrapped it in his presence. Then he had seemed willing and eager to begin an immediate translation. Now he demurred.

It was not wise, he insisted. This was evil knowledge—who could say what demon-dreaded lore these pages might contain, or what ills befall the ignorant one who sought to tamper with their contents? It is not good to learn too much, and men had died for exercising the rotted wisdom that these leaves contained. He begged me to abandon the quest while the book was still unopened and to seek my inspiration in saner things.

I was a fool. Hastily I overruled his objections with vain and empty words. I was not afraid. Let us at least gaze into the contents of our prize. I began to turn the pages.

The result was disappointing. It was an ordinary-looking volume after all—yellow, crumbling leaves set with heavy black-lettered Latin texts. That was all; no illustrations, no alarming designs.

My friend could no longer resist the allurement of such a rare bibliophilic treat. In a moment he was peering intently over my shoulder, occasionally muttering snatches of Latin phrasing. Enthusiasm mastered him at last. Seizing the precious tome in both hands, he seated himself near the window and began reading paragraphs at random, occasionally translating them into English.

His eyes gleamed with a feral light; his cadaverous profile grew intent as he pored over the moldering runes. Sentences thundered in fearsome litany, then faded into tones below a whisper as his voice became as soft as a viper's hiss. I caught only a few phrases now, for in his introspection he seemed to have forgotten me. He was reading of spells and enchantments. I recall allusions to such gods of divination as Father Yig, dark Han, and serpent-bearded Byatis. I shuddered, for I knew these names of old, but I would have shuddered more had I known what was yet to come.

It came quickly. Suddenly he turned to me in great agitation, and his excited voice was shrill. He asked me if I remembered the legends of Prinn's sorcery, and the tales of the invisible servants he commanded from the stars. I assented, little understanding the cause of his sudden frenzy.

Then he told me the reason. Here, under a chapter on familiars, he had found an orison or spell, perhaps the very one Prinn had used to call upon his unseen servitors from beyond the stars! Let me listen, while he read.

I SAT there dully, like a stupid, uncomprehending fool. Why did I not scream, try to escape, or tear that monstrous manuscript from his hands? Instead I sat there—sat there while my friend, in a voice cracked with unnatural excitement, read in Latin a long and sonorously sinister invocation.

"*Tibi, Magnum Innominandum, signa stellarum nigrarum et bufaniformis Sadoquæ sigillum . . .*"

The croaking ritual proceeded, then rose on wings of nighted, hideous horror. It stabbed my soul with exquisite pain, even though I did not understand. The words seemed to writhe like flames in the air, burning into my brain. The thundering tones seemed to echo into infinity, beyond the farthermost star. They seemed to pass into primal and undimensioned gates, to seek out a listener there, and summon him to earth. Was it all an illusion? I did not pause to ponder.

For that unwitting summons was answered. Scarcely had my companion's

voice died away in that little room before the terror came. The room turned cold. A sudden wind shrieked in through the open window; a wind that was not of earth. It bore an evil bleating from afar, and at the sound my friend's face became a pale white mask of newly awakened fear. Then there was a crunching at the walls, and the window-ledge buckled before my staring eyes. From out of the nothingness beyond that opening came a sudden burst of lubricious laughter—a hysterical cackling born of utter madness. It rose to the grinning quintessence of all horror, without mouth to give it birth.

The rest happened with startling swiftness. All at once my friend began to scream as he stood by the window; scream and claw wildly at empty air. In the lamplight I saw his features contort into a grimace of insane agony. A moment later, his body rose unsupported from the floor, and began to bend outward to a back-breaking degree. A second later came the sickening grind of broken bones. His form now hung in midair, the eyes glazed and the hands clutching convulsively as if at something unseen. Once again there came the sound of maniacal tittering, but this time it came from *within the room!*

The stars rocked in red anguish; the cold wind gibbered in my ears. I crouched in my chair, my eyes riveted on that astounding scene in the corner.

My friend was shrieking now; his screams blended with that gleeful, atrocious laughter from the empty air. His sagging body, dangling in space, bent backward once again as blood spurted from the torn neck, spraying like a ruby fountain.

That blood never reached the floor. It stopped in midair as the laughter ceased, and a loathsome sucking noise took its place. With a new and accelerated horror, I realized that that blood was being drained to feed the invisible entity from beyond! What creature of space had been so suddenly and unwittingly invoked? What was that vampiric monstrosity I could not see?

Even now a hideous metamorphosis was taking place. The body of my companion became shrunken, wizened, lifeless. At length it dropped to the floor and lay nauseatingly still. But in midair another and a ghastlier change was taking place.

A reddish glow filled the corner by the window — a *bloody* glow. Slowly but surely the dim outlines of a Presence came into view; the blood-filled outlines of that unseen shambler from the stars. It was red and dripping; an immensity of pulsing, moving jelly; a scarlet blob with myriad tentacular trunks that waved and waved. There were suckers on the tips of the appendages, and these were opening and closing with ghoulish lust. . . . The thing was bloated and obscene; a headless, faceless, eyeless bulk with the ravenous maw and titanic talons of a star-born monster. The human blood on which it had fed revealed the hitherto invisible outlines of the feaster. It was not a sight for sane eyes to see.

Fortunately for my reason, the creature did not linger. Spurning the dead and flabby corpse-like thing on the floor, it purposely seized the dreadful volume with one slimy, sinuous feeler and shambled swiftly to the window; then squeezed its rubbery, viscous body through the opening. There it disappeared, and I heard its far-off, derisive laughter floating on the wings of the wind as it receded into the gulfs from whence it had come.

THAT was all. I was left alone in the room with the limp and lifeless body at my feet. The book was gone; but

there were bloody prints upon the wall, bloody swaths upon the floor, and the face of my poor friend was a bloody death's-head, leering up at the stars.

For a long time I sat alone in silence before I set on fire that room and all it contained. After that I went away, laughing, for I knew that the blaze would eradicate all trace of what remained. I had arrived only that afternoon, and there were none who knew, and none to see me go, for I departed ere the glowing flames were detected. I stumbled for hours through the twisted streets, and quaked with renewed and idiotic laughter as I looked up at the burning, ever-gloating stars that eyed me furtively through wreaths of haunted fog.

After a long while I became calm enough to board a train. I have been calm throughout the long journey home, and calm throughout the penning of this screed. I was even calm when I read of my friend's curious accidental death in the fire that destroyed his dwelling.

It is only at nights, when the stars gleam, that dreams return to drive me into a gigantic maze of frantic fears. Then I take to drugs, in a vain attempt to ban those leering memories from my sleep. But I really do not care, for I shall not be here long.

I have a curious suspicion that I shall again see that shambler from the stars. I think it will return soon without being resummoned, and I know that when it comes it will seek me out and carry me down into the darkness that holds my friend. Sometimes I almost yearn for the advent of that day, for then I too shall learn once and for all, the *Mysteries of the Worm.*

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One Chance

By ETHEL HELENE COEN

A brief tale of horror and the plague in New Orleans

IT WAS the terrible summer of 1720. The plague hung darkly over shuddering New Orleans. Its black wings beat at every door, and there were few that had not opened to its dread presence. Paul had seen his mother, father, sisters and friends swept down by its mowing sickle. Only Marie remained for him—beautiful Marie with her love for him that he knew was stronger than any plague—the one thing in all the world that was left to sustain him.

"Let us fly from this accursed place," he pleaded. "Let us try to find happiness elsewhere. Neither of us has a tie to bind us here—is not your sister to be buried this very day? Ah, Saint Louis has seen many such scenes in this last month—we will fly to Canada and begin all over."

"But, my darling," she protested, "you forget the quarantine: no one is allowed to enter or leave the city; your plan is hopeless."

"No—no—I have a plan—such a terrible one that I shudder to think of it. Here it is——"

While he rapidly sketched their one desperate chance Marie's face blanched, but when he finished, she agreed.

The daughter of the mayor had died that morning. A special dispensation had been secured to ship her body to Charleston for burial. The body rested in its casket in Saint Louis Cathedral and was to be shipped by boat that night.

At six o'clock that evening the cathedral was empty save for its silent occupants awaiting burial. The tall wax tapers glimmered fitfully over the scene of desolation. Paul and Marie crept in and went to the casket of the mayor's daughter. Paul rapidly unscrewed the wooden top, removed the slight body, put it into a large sack; and Marie, nearly swooning from terror, got into the coffin.

"Here is a flask of water," Paul whispered, "and remember—not a sound, no matter what happens. I shall sneak aboard the boat before it sails at nine. After we are out for half an hour I will let you out of this. It is our only chance."

"Yes, I know," Marie whispered chokingly. "I shall make no sound . . . now go . . . the priests will soon be back, so one last kiss, until we are on the boat."

He kissed her passionately, then loosely screwed the top on the casket.

Stealing with his awful burden to the yard in the back of the cathedral he remembered a deep, dried-up well in one corner of the yard. Just the place to dispose of the body.

"God rest the poor girl's soul," he thought; "she, wherever she is, will understand that I meant no sacrilege to her remains, but this is my one chance of happiness . . . my only chance."

His task ended, he climbed the iron wall and walked rapidly up Pirates Alley and wandered over the Vieux Carré until eight-thirty. Thank God—it was time to try the success of their daring venture. His head whirled and his heart beat like a trip-hammer as he slipped onto the boat unobserved by any but the dock hands, who probably considered him one of

their number. He secreted himself in a dark corner and waited. After centuries had passed, or so it seemed to him, the boat started moving. It would not be long now. He did not stop to think what would happen when they were caught—that would take care of itself.

Ah—voices, coming nearer and nearer. From his corner Paul could distinctly see the silhouettes of the two men who were approaching.

"Yes," said one, "it is sad. The mayor is broken-hearted—we were going to take her body to Charleston—but the mayor had her buried from Saint Louis just after the sun went down."

The Toad Idol

By KIRK MASHBURN

A ten-minute story about a horrible stone toad that came from an Aztec temple

THE thing—the toad—comes from a small, ruined Aztec temple in Central Mexico. My standing as an archeologist has not come unearned, and I know that none of the Aztec gods was represented by a toad; nor does evidence exist that the reptile had any other sacred significance in their religious symbolism. Yet this one occupied the place of honor in the temple; and except for it, there was no image in the ruins.

The thing struck me with an odd loathing, a sense of dread and oppression, almost at sight. As for my Indian workmen, they were persuaded to enter the temple only with difficulty. No explanation was obtainable, but their terror of the place was manifest.

When I removed the toad from its pedestal overlooking a small altar, they groveled on the ground in abject misery, frantically beseeching me to leave the image undisturbed. It was nothing but a small, curved piece of obsidian stone (though I have already admitted the malignant impression I received from it); yet I strongly suspect that, had I not been formidably armed, the Indians would have forcibly compelled me to leave it untouched. I would to God they had done so!

Overcome by a perverse fascination for the thing, notwithstanding my dislike of toads and reptiles in any form, to say nothing of my steadily mounting (if then unreasoning) repugnance for the thing, I smuggled out the amphibian idol upon my return to this country, circumventing the Mexican laws which prohibit exportation of archeological objects.

Who has not experienced similar attraction for some very thing that repels and disgusts, even while it fascinates? So, in my case with this toad. Instead of turning it over to the museum, I placed it upon the writing-desk in my study. Each passing day has added to my repugnance; but now, finally, something of the horror and terror of those Indians has succeeded my former mere loathing.

For the toad has come *alive!* It deserts my desk, by night, to sit upon the floor, looking at the windows, waiting—for God alone knows what.

As I write, I feel the beady eyes of the accursed reptile, the loathsome, mottled toad, burning into my back from where it squats behind me in a corner of this room. It is but a common, ordinary toad, to all appearances; and that is what lends it the significance of a small but horrific monster out of hell—for it should be a thing of carved volcanic obsidian, lifeless upon my desk. I have not even the power to touch it, cast it with loathing through the open window. I have tried, once, and failed. . . .

WHETHER I am mad, or the victim of hallucinations induced by some tropic fever hitherto dormant in my blood—whether I have, in violating the Temple of the Toad, brought upon my head some dread, nameless curse, I do not know. I am aware, only, that the figurine monster upon the floor has become an obsession of torment and dread. More than anything else, it is the thing's attitude of *waiting*. . . .

I have lived and worked alone in this house for years; the one servant who attends my scant wants stays only through the day. Thus, as usual, I was alone in my study, resting wearily at my desk, upon the evening when the toad first moved. It was dusk; but there was yet enough light for shadowy visibility. Something intruded upon my tired thoughts; some indistinct prompting impelled me to raise my head and look down to the floor in the nearest corner of the room.

It was then that I saw the toad, removed from its place upon my desk—and alive. What I saw was not of itself alarming, to other eyes than mine. But I knew the toad, huddled in the corner with its beady eyes meeting my own, for the idol that should have rested upon my desk—the idol come alive.

I am naturally neurotic, and the apparition stabbed at every taut nerve in my body. I determined to evict the thing; to throw it out and have done with it, once and for all. I rose and, taking a section of newspaper in order to avoid contact of my bare hand with the reptile's loathsome hide (I was convinced the thing was clammily alive), I stooped to take it from the floor and cast it out the window.

The toad made no effort to escape as the paper descended, and I gathered it up. I could not feel my captive beneath the several thicknesses of paper; but I had no doubt of its being wrapped in the wad of newsprint I tossed through the window. I turned with a feeling of relief and satisfaction—and there in the corner the toad squatted as before.

With an exclamation of annoyance, I again moved to enfold the reptile in paper, using a small, thin piece. Again it appeared that I had secured the thing; but this time I turned my hand over, to make certain. Expecting to see the bloated belly of the creature exposed, I beheld, instead, nothing but the wadded newspaper! The toad blinked balefully up, from the floor at my feet!

Stupidly, I stared from the paper in my hand to the toad upon the floor. A third time I essayed to seize the elusive monstrosity, in the same manner as before—and with the same result. I moved then to turn on the lights, as dusk had deepened into night. My hand trembled so violently that I pressed the switch with difficulty.

I decided to dispense with the paper and, overcoming my natural repugnance, grasp the toad with my naked hand. Determinedly, I bent down; my fingers swooped to snatch the thing. With a gasp I straightened, stepped back uncertainly. I had thought to scoop up the toad, but

my hand had clutched nothing more than empty air!

I laughed. Even in my own ears, the sound possessed a startling quality. The thing had been a carven stone toad upon my desk, and had become alive. And now, to my touch, there was *no* toad!

"Hallucination," I muttered; "I am seeing things that do not exist."

The implications of that conclusion were far from comforting, however. And whatever I might think—or whatever else than a stone idol it might be—there it sat upon the floor, its sardonic eyes unswerving from my face, blinking . . . *waiting*. . . .

I SAT down at the desk, stared back, baffled—and afraid—into those cold, glittering eyes. Gradually, sullen rage possessed me. I sprang up, furiously, and stamped upon the small monster. I fell upon my knees, sought to seize it with my hands, to tear and rend it into nothingness. Each time I lifted my grinding heel, each time I drew back my clawing fingers, the thing was there: gloating up at me with its cold, demon's eyes.

Finally, I staggered again to my chair, and fell forward across the desk, burying my head in my arms. I awoke in that position, in the chill, gray dawn that succeeded. My first coherent thought moved me to rouse, groaning with misery, and look toward that corner where the accursed toad had huddled the night before. Even in abjection, I found heart to rejoice, for the living creature that had been upon the floor was gone with the night; and the small idol rested in its accustomed place atop my desk—clearly, a carved, lifeless piece of obsidian.

But chill dread awoke with the sudden thought that life might return with another night. All through that day, the apprehension lay like a somber shadow upon my mind. I left the house, returning after nightfall. When I came to the door of my workroom, I hesitated for long minutes before entering.

Groping through the darkness, I switched on the lights. After one fearful, revealing glance, I sank into my chair, utterly abject with terror and despair. For, settled in the same corner it had occupied the night before, the toad regarded me with bright, malevolent eyes.

If I am mad, I have every reason to be. Night after night, for so many nights that it wearies me to number them, I have been stared out of countenance by a fiend in the shape of a malformed toad. Hoping that its manifestations were confined to this room, I have fled the house more than once at night. But wherever I seek to hide, my familiar demon appears with darkness. Seemingly, it has been ages since I have known sleep that was not induced either by drunkenness or soporific drugs; more often than not, neither of these suffices to bring merciful oblivion.

Tomorrow, I shall leave this country for ever; I have already completed my arrangements. Perhaps if, as I intend, the end of my flight places half the world between us, I shall elude my tormenter.

That I am not mad, I have established to my satisfaction, by writing this account. Obviously, the effort and orderly thought required for a coherent narrative of this length is outside the scope of a deranged mind. And in the course of this exercise, there remains but one further item to be set down.

This has to do with the pebbles that have accompanied the idol's latter nightly transformations. I noticed the first of them, a little longer than a fortnight ago. Upon each succeeding night, there has been one more pebble, each about the size of a small walnut, added to the growing pile beside the creature. These appear only at night, like the living reptile that squats beside them; they are not on the

desk with the lifeless, obsidian toad in the daytime.

What this addition to the toad's nocturnal animation may portend, I have sought to fathom, with growing unease. I have lately recalled that there was a pile of just such pebbles, heaped at the foot of the altar in the ancient temple, from which—may God forgive the stupid act! —I took the vile toad. . . .

SOMETHING very dreadful has occurred since I wrote the preceding words. I am impelled to write the few remaining lines that will be necessary—or possible —by some power, some gleeful and *triumphantly* malignant force outside of me:

While I was writing, I felt a blow upon the back of my head. It was more as if I had been hit forcibly, *inside,* upon my uncovered brain, by an object thrown from behind my back. For a moment, I was unable to move, so great was the pain. Partly recovering, I turned to discover the source of the missile with which I had been struck. Then my blood chilled, seemed truly to freeze in my veins. . . .

The toad has moved out of its usual squatting position. About it there is an unfathomable impression of unholy joyousness; I know without understanding, that the thing no longer is waiting—its hour has struck!

I wrote that the toad has moved. It stands erect, upon its deformed and twisted rear members. Grotesque and unnatural as that is, the circumstance that constricts my heart is that, raised above its head in the act of casting as I turned—the frightful little monster gripped a pebble in its tiny, hand-like forefeet! Even as I saw and gasped, the missile hurtled through the air, struck *inside* my forehead with stunning impact.

The pile of pebbles—those pebbles, the purpose of which I *now* know!—probably is diminished by more than half. At intervals, one of them crashes into the back of my brain. I am paralyzed now, all except, oddly, this arm with which I write. I can not move aside, seek to evade the battering pebble hail. But I feel that I should not escape, though the power to move, to cry out, still remained to me.

All about this room, there are intangible rustlings and scurryings. There are things around me, unseen but present, that have come to watch with grim, unhallowed satisfaction as the toad hurls pebbles into my brain.

My death, beyond doubt, will be attributed to cerebral hemorrhage. My head, to all outward appearances, will be whole and unmutilated; for the toad's missiles pass unscathing through my skull, by some unholy means, and batter only upon my brain.

I shall die—very soon, now—beneath the barrage of pebbles cast by the paws of that thing in the corner behind me. I shall die as, in all likelihood, no man ever met death before: stoned to death by a foul, loathsome *toad!* . . .

The Monster-God of Mamurth*

By EDMOND HAMILTON

OUT of the desert night he came to us, stumbling into our little circle of firelight and collapsing at once. Mitchell and I sprang to our feet with startled exclamations, for men who travel alone and on foot are a strange sight in the deserts of North Africa.

For the first few minutes that we worked over him, I thought he would die at once, but gradually we brought him back to consciousness. While Mitchell held a cup of water to his cracked lips, I looked him over and saw that he was too far gone to live much longer. His clothes were in rags, and his hands and knees literally flayed, from crawling over the sands, I judged. So when he motioned feebly for more water, I gave it to him, knowing that in any case his time was short. Soon he could talk, in a dead, croaking voice.

"I'm alone," he told us, in answer to our first question; "no more out there to look for. What are you two—traders? I thought so. No, I'm an archeologist. A digger-up of the past." His voice broke for a moment. "It's not always good to dig up dead secrets. There are some things the past should be allowed to hide."

He caught the look that passed between Mitchell and me.

"No, I'm not mad," he said. "You will hear, I'll tell you the whole thing. But listen to me, you two," and in his earnestness he raised himself to a sitting position, "keep out of Igidi Desert. Remember that I told you that. I had a warning, too, but I disregarded it. And I went into hell—into hell! But there, I will tell you from the beginning.

"My name—that doesn't matter now. I left Mogador more than a year ago, and came through the foot-hills of the Atlas ranges, striking out into the desert in hopes of finding some of the Carthaginian ruins the North African deserts are known to hold.

"I spent months in the search, traveling among the squalid Arab villages, now near an oasis and now far into the black, untracked desert. And as I went farther into that savage country, I found more and more of the ruins I sought,

* From WEIRD TALES for August, 1926.

crumbled remnants of temples and fortresses, relics, almost destroyed, of the age when Carthage meant empire and ruled all of North Africa from her walled city. And then, on the side of a massive block of stone, I found that which turned me toward Igidi.

"It was an inscription in the garbled Phenician of the traders of Carthage, short enough so that I remembered it and can repeat it word for word. It read, literally, as follows:

"Merchants, go not into the city of Mamurth, which lies beyond the mountain pass. For I, San-Drabat of Carthage, entering the city with four companions in the month of Eschmoun, to trade, on the third night of our stay came priests and seized my fellows, I escaping by hiding. My companions they sacrificed to the evil god of the city, who has dwelt there from the beginning of time, and for whom the wise men of Mamurth have built a great temple the like of which is not on earth elsewhere, where the people of Mamurth worship their god. I escaped from the city and set this warning here that others may not turn their steps to Mamurth and to death.

"Perhaps you can imagine the effect that inscription had on me. It was the last trace of a city unknown to the memory of men, a last floating spar of a civilization sunken in the sea of time. That there could have been such a city at all seemed to me quite probable. What do we know of Carthage even, but a few names? No city, no civilization was ever so completely blotted off the earth as Carthage, when Roman Scipio ground its temples and palaces into the very dust, and plowed up the ground with salt, and the eagles of conquering Rome flew across a desert where a metropolis had been.

"It was on the outskirts of one of those wretched little Arab villages that I had found the block and its inscription, and I tried to find someone in the village to accompany me, but none would do so. I could plainly see the mountain pass, a mere crack between towering blue cliffs. In reality it was miles and miles away, but the deceptive optical qualities of the desert light made it seem very near. My maps placed that mountain range all right, as a lower branch of the Atlas, and the expanse behind the mountains was marked as 'Igidi Desert', but that was all I got from them. All that I could reckon on as certain was that it was desert that lay on the other side of the pass, and I must carry enough supplies to meet it.

"But the Arabs knew more! Though I offered what must have been fabulous riches to those poor devils, not one would come with me when I let them know what place I was heading for. None had ever been there, they would not even ride far into the desert in that direction; but all had very definite ideas of the place beyond the mountains as a nest of devils, a haunt of evil Jinns.

"Knowing how firmly superstition is implanted in their kind, I tried no longer to persuade them, and started alone, with two scrawny camels carrying my water and supplies. So for three days I forged across the desert under a broiling sun, and on the morning of the fourth I reached the pass.

"IT WAS only a narrow crevice to begin with, and great boulders were strewn so thickly on its floor that it was a long, hard job getting through. And the cliffs on each side towered to such a height that the space between was a place of shadows and whispers and semi-darkness. It was late in the afternoon when I finally came through, and for a moment I stood motionless; for from that side of the pass the desert sloped down into a vast basin, and at the basin's center, perhaps two miles from where I stood, gleamed the white ruins of Mamurth.

"I remember that I was very calm as I covered the two miles between myself and the ruins. I had taken the existence of the city as a fact, so much so that if the

ruins had not been there I should have been vastly more surprized than at finding them.

"From the pass I had seen only a tangled mass of white fragments, but as I drew nearer, some of these began to take outline as crumbling blocks, and walls, and columns. The sand had drifted, too, and the ruins were completely buried in some sections, while nearly all were half covered.

"And then it was that I made a curious discovery. I had stopped to examine the material of the ruins, a smooth, veinless stone, much like an artificial marble or a superfine concrete. And while I looked about me, intent on this, I noticed that on almost every shaft and block, on broken cornice and column, was carved the same symbol—if it was a symbol. It was a rough picture of a queer, outlandish creature, much like an octopus, with a round, almost shapeless body, and several long tentacles or arms branching out from the body, not supple and boneless, like those of an octopus, but seemingly stiff and jointed, like a spider's legs. In fact, the thing might have been intended to represent a spider, I thought, though some of the details were wrong. I speculated for a moment on the profusion of these creatures carved on the ruins all around me, then gave it up as an enigma that was unsolvable.

"And the riddle of the city about me seemed unsolvable also. What could I find in this half-buried mass of stone fragments to throw light on the past? I could not even superficially explore the place, for the scantiness of my supplies and water would not permit a long stay. It was with a discouraged heart that I went back to the camels and, leading them to an open spot in the ruins, made my camp for the night. And when night had fallen, and I sat beside my little fire, the vast, brooding silence of this place of death was awful. There were no laughing human voices, or cries of animals, or even cries of birds or insects. There was nothing but the darkness and silence that crowded around me, flowed down upon me, beat sullenly against the glowing spears of light my little fire threw out.

"As I sat there musing, I was startled by a slight sound behind me. I turned to see its cause, and then stiffened. As I have mentioned, the space directly around my camp was clear sand, smoothed level by the winds. Well, as I stared at that flat expanse of sand, a hole several inches across suddenly appeared in its surface, yards from where I stood, but clearly visible in the firelight.

"There was nothing whatever to be seen there, not even a shadow, but there it was, one moment the level surface of the sand, the next moment a hole appearing in it, accompanied by a soft, crunching sound. As I stood gazing at it in wonder, that sound was repeated, and simultaneously another hole appeared in the sand's surface, five or six feet nearer to me than the other.

"When I saw that, ice-tipped arrows of fear seemed to shoot through me, and then, yielding to a mad impulse, I snatched a blazing piece of fuel from the fire and hurled it, a comet of red flame, at the place where the holes had appeared. There was a slight sound of scurrying and shuffling, and I felt that whatever thing had made those marks had retreated, if a living thing had made them at all. What it had been, I could not imagine, for there had been absolutely nothing in sight, one track and then another appearing magically in the clear sand, if indeed they were really tracks at all.

"The mystery of the thing haunted me. Even in sleep I found no rest, for evil dreams seemed to flow into my brain from the dead city around me. All the

dusty sins of ages past, in the forgotten place, seemed to be focused on me in the dreams I had. Strange shapes walked through them, unearthly as the spawn of a distant star, half seen and vanishing again.

"It was little enough sleep I got that night, but when the sun finally came, with its first golden rays my fears and oppressions dropped from me like a cloak. No wonder the early peoples were sun-worshippers!

"And with my renewed strength and courage, a new thought struck me. In the inscription I have quoted to you, that long-dead merchant-adventurer had mentioned the great temple of the city and dwelt on its grandeur. Where, then, were its ruins? I wondered. I decided that what time I had would be better spent in investigating the ruins of this temple, which should be prominent, if that ancient Carthaginian had been correct as to its size.

"I ASCENDED a near-by hillock and looked about me in all directions, and though I could not perceive any vast pile of ruins that might have been the temple's, I did see for the first time, far away, two great figures of stone that stood out black against the rosy flame of the sunrise. It was a discovery that filled me with excitement, and I broke camp at once, starting in the direction of those two shapes.

"They were on the very edge of the farther side of the city, and it was noon before I finally stood before them. And now I saw clearly their nature: two great, sitting figures, carved of black stone, all of fifty feet in height, and almost that far apart, facing both toward the city and toward me. They were of human shape and dressed in a queer, scaled armor, but the faces I can not describe, for they were unhuman. The features were human, well-proportioned, even, but the face, the expression, suggested no kinship whatever with humanity as we know it. Were they carved from life? I wondered. If so, it must have been a strange sort of people who had lived in this city and set up these two statues.

"And now I tore my gaze away from them, and looked around. On each side of those shapes, the remains of what must once have been a mighty wall branched out, a long pile of crumbling ruins. But there had been no wall between the statues, that being evidently the gateway through the barrier. I wondered why the two guardians of the gate had survived, apparently entirely unharmed, while the wall and the city behind me had fallen into ruins. They were of a different material, I could see; but what was that material?

"And now I noticed for the first time the long avenue that began on the other side of the statues and stretched away into the desert for a half-mile or more. The sides of this avenue were two rows of smaller stone figures that ran in parallel lines away from the two colossi. So I started down that avenue, passing between the two great shapes that stood at its head. And as I went between them, I noticed for the first time the inscription graven on the inner side of each.

"On the pedestal of each figure, four or five feet from the ground, was a raised tablet of the same material, perhaps a yard square, and covered with strange symbols—characters, no doubt, of a lost language, undecipherable, at least to me. One symbol, though, that was especially prominent in the inscription, was not new to me. It was the carven picture of the spider, or octopus, which I have mentioned that I had found everywhere on the ruins of the city. And here it was scattered thickly among the symbols that made up the inscription. The tablet on

the other statue was a replica of the first, and I could learn no more from it. So I started down the avenue, turning over in my mind the riddle of that omnipresent symbol, and then forgetting it, as I observed the things about me.

"That long street was like the avenue of sphinxes at Karnak, down which Pharaoh swung in his litter, borne to his temple on the necks of men. But the statues that made up its sides were not sphinx-shaped. They were carved in strange forms, shapes of animals unknown to us, as far removed from anything we can imagine as the beasts of another world. I can not describe them, any more than you could describe a dragon to a man who had been blind all his life. Yet they were of evil, reptilian shapes; they tore at my nerves as I looked at them.

"Down between the two rows of them I went, until I came to the end of the avenue. Standing there between the last two figures, I could see nothing before me but the yellow sands of the desert, as far as the eye could reach. I was puzzled. What had been the object of all the pains that had been taken, the wall, the two great statues, and this long avenue, if it but led into the desert?

"Gradually I began to see that there was something queer about the part of the desert that lay directly before me. It was *flat*. For an area, seemingly round in shape, that must have covered several acres, the surface of the desert seemed absolutely level. It was as though the sands within that great circle had been packed down with tremendous force, leaving not even the littlest ridge of dune on its surface. Beyond this flat area, and all around it, the desert was broken up by small hills and valleys, and traversed by whirling sand-clouds, but nothing stirred on the flat surface of the circle.

"Interested at once, I strode forward

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to the edge of the circle, only a few yards away. I had just reached that edge when an invisible hand seemed to strike me a great blow on the face and chest, knocking me backward in the sand.

"It was minutes before I advanced again, but I did advance, for all my curiosity was now aroused. I crawled toward the circle's edge, holding my pistol before me, pushing slowly forward.

"When the automatic in my outstretched hand reached the line of the circle, it struck against something hard, and I could push it no farther. It was exactly as if it had struck against the side of a wall, but no wall or anything else was to be seen. Reaching out my hand, I touched the same hard barrier, and in a moment I was on my feet.

"For I knew now that it was solid matter I had run into, not force. When I thrust out my hands, the edge of the circle was as far as they would go, for there they met a smooth wall, totally invisible, yet at the same time quite material. And the phenomenon was one which even I could partly understand. Somehow, in the dead past, the scientists of the city behind me, the 'wise men' mentioned in the inscription, had discovered the secret of making solid matter invisible, and had applied it to the work that I was now examining. Such a thing was far from impossible. Even our own scientists can make matter partly invisible, with the X-ray. Evidently these people had known the whole process, a secret that had been lost in the succeeding ages, like the secret of hard gold, and malleable glass, and others that we find mentioned in ancient writings. Yet I wondered how they had done this, so that, ages after those who had built the thing were wind-driven dust, it remained as invisible as ever.

"I STOOD back and threw pebbles into the air, toward the circle. No matter how high I threw them, when they reached the line of the circle's edge they rebounded with a clicking sound; so I knew that the wall must tower to a great height above me. I was on fire to get inside the wall, and examine the place from the inside, but how to do it? There must be an entrance, but where? And I suddenly remembered the two guardian statues at the head of the great avenue, with their carven tablets, and wondered what connection they had with this place.

"Suddenly the strangeness of the whole thing struck me like a blow. The great, unseen wall before me, the circle of sand, flat and unchanging, and myself, standing there and wondering, wondering. A voice from out the dead city behind me seemed to sound in my heart, bidding me to turn and flee, to get away. I remembered the warning of the inscription, 'Go not to Mamurth.' And as I thought of the inscription, I had no doubt that this was the great temple described by San-Drabat. Surely he was right: the like of it was not on earth elsewhere.

"But I would not go, I could not go, until I had examined the wall from the inside. Calmly reasoning the matter, I decided that the logical place for the gateway through the wall would be at the end of the avenue, so that those who came down the street could pass directly through the wall. And my reasoning was good, for it was at that spot that I found the entrance: an opening in the barrier, several yards wide, and running higher than I could reach, how high I had no means of telling.

"I FELT my way through the gate, and stepped at once upon a floor of hard material, not as smooth as the wall's sur-

(Please turn to page 388)

COMING NEXT MONTH

THE woman swerved when she saw him. Northwest Smith watched her subtly swaying approach without a flicker of expression on his face. But when she laid a milky-white hand upon his arm he gave a queer little start, involuntarily, like a shiver quickly suppressed. A ripple of annoyance crossed his face briefly and was gone, as if the muscular start had embarrassed him. He turned upon her an absolutely expressionless stare and waited.

"Who are you?" cooed a throatily velvet voice from the depths of the hood.

"Northwest Smith." He said it crisply, and his lips snapped shut again. He moved a little away from her, for her hand still lay upon his right arm, and his right hand was still hidden in the coat pocket. He moved far enough to free his arm, and stood waiting.

"Will you come with me?" Her voice throbbed like a pigeon's from the shadow of her hood.

For a quick instant his pale eyes appraised her, as caution and curiosity warred within him. Smith was a wary man, very wise in the dangers of the spaceways life. Not for a moment did he mistake her meaning. Here was no ordinary woman of the streets. A woman robed in snow-cat furs had no need to accost casual strangers along the Lakklan.

"What do you want?" he demanded. His voice was deep and harsh, and the words fairly clicked with a biting brevity.

"Come," she cooed, moving nearer again and slipping one hand inside his arm. "I will tell you that in my own house. It is so cold here." . . .

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(Continued from page 386)

face, but equally invisible. Inside the entrance lay a corridor of equal width, leading into the center of the circle, and I felt my way forward.

"I must have made a strange picture, had there been any there to observe it. For while I knew that all around me were the towering, invisible walls, and I knew not what else, yet all my eyes could see was the great flat circle of sand beneath me, carpeted with the afternoon sunshine. Only, I seemed to be walking a foot above the ground, in thin air. That was the thickness of the floor beneath me, and it was the weight of this great floor, I knew, that held the circle of sand under it for ever flat and unchanging.

"I walked slowly down the passageway, with hands outstretched before me, and had gone but a short distance when I brought up against another smooth wall that lay directly across the corridor, seemingly making it a blind alley. But I was not discouraged now, for I knew that there must be a door somewhere, and began to feel around me in search of it.

"I FOUND the door. In groping about the sides of the corridor my hands encountered a smoothly rounded knob set in the wall, and as I laid my hand on this, the door opened. There was a sighing, as of a little wind, and when I again felt my way forward, the wall that had lain across the passageway was gone, and I was free to go forward. But I dared not go through at once. I went back to the knob on the wall, and found that no amount of pressing or twisting of it would close the door that had opened. Some subtle mechanism within the knob had operated, that needed only a touch of the hand to work it, and the whole end of the corridor had moved out of the way, sliding up in grooves, I think, like a portcullis, though of this I am not sure.

"But the door was safely opened, and I passed through it. Moving about, like a blind man in a strange place, I found that I was in a vast inner court, the walls of which sloped away in a great curve. When I discovered this, I came back to the spot where the corridor opened into the court, and then walked straight out into the court itself.

"It was steps that I encountered: the first broad steps of what was evidently a staircase of titanic proportions. And I went up, slowly, carefully, feeling before me every foot of the way. It was only the feel of the staircase under me that gave reality to it, for as far as I could see, I was simply climbing up into empty space. It was weird beyond telling.

"Up and up I went, until I was all of a hundred feet above the ground, and then the staircase narrowed, the sides drew together. A few more steps, and I came out on a flat floor again, which, after some groping about, I found to be a broad landing, with high, railed edges. I crawled across this landing on hands and knees, and then struck against another wall, and in it, another door. I went through this too, still crawling, and though everything about me was still invisible, I sensed that I was no longer in the open air, but in a great room.

"I stopped short, and then, as I crouched on the floor, I felt a sudden prescience of evil, of some malignant, menacing entity that was native here. Nothing I could see, or hear, but strong upon my brain beat the thought of something infinitely ancient, infinitely evil, that was a part of this place. Was it a consciousness, I wonder, of the horror that had filled the place in ages long dead? Whatever caused it, I could go no farther in the face of the terror that possessed me; so I drew back and walked to the edge of the landing, lean-

ing over its high, invisible railing and surveying the scene below.

"The setting sun hung like a great ball of red-hot iron in the western sky, and in its lurid rays the two great statues cast long shadows on the yellow sands. Not far away, my two camels, hobbled, moved restlessly about. To all appearances I was standing on thin air, a hundred feet or more above the ground, but in my mind's eye I had a picture of the great courts and corridors below me, through which I had felt my way.

"As I mused there in the red light, it was clear to me that this was the great temple of the city. What a sight it must have been, in the time of the city's life! I could imagine the long procession of priests and people, in somber and gorgeous robes, coming out from the city, between the great statues and down the long avenue, dragging with them, perhaps, an unhappy prisoner to sacrifice to their god in this, his temple.

"THE sun was now dipping beneath the horizon, and I turned to go, but before ever I moved, I became rigid and my heart seemed to stand still. For on the farther edge of the clear stretch of sand that lay beneath the temple and the city, a hole suddenly appeared in the sand, springing into being on the desert's face exactly like the one I had seen at my campfire the night before. I watched, as fascinated as by the eyes of a snake. And before my eyes, another and another appeared, not in a straight line, but in a zigzag fashion. Two such holes would be punched down on one side, then two more on the other side, then one in the middle, making a series of tracks, perhaps two yards in width from side to side, and advancing straight toward the temple and myself. And I could see nothing!

"It was like—the comparison suddenly

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struck me—like the tracks a many-legged insect might make in the sand, only magnified to unheard-of proportions. And with that thought, the truth rushed on me, for I remembered the spider carved on the ruins and on the statues, and I knew now what it had signified to the dwellers in the city. What was it the inscription had said? 'The evil god of the city, who has been there from the beginning of time.' And as I saw those tracks advancing toward me, I knew that the city's ancient evil god still dwelt here, and that I was in his temple, alone and unarmed.

"What strange creatures might there not have been in the dawn of time? And this one, this gigantic monster in a spider's form—had not those who built the city found it here when they came, and, in awe, taken it as the city's god, and built for it the mighty temple in which I now stood? And they, who had the wisdom and art to make this vast fane invisible, not to be seen by human eyes, had they done the same to their god, and made of him almost a true god, invisible, powerful, undying? Undying! Almost it must have been, to survive the ages as it had done. Yet I knew that even some kinds of parrots live for centuries, and what could I know of this monstrous relic of dead ages? And when the city died and crumbled, and the victims were no longer brought to its lair in the temple, did it not live, as I thought, by ranging the desert? No wonder the Arabs had feared the country in this direction! It would be death for anything that came even within view of such a horror, that could clutch and spring and chase, and yet remain always unseen. And was it death for me?

"Such were some of the thoughts that pounded through my brain, as I watched death approach, with those steadily advancing tracks in the sand. And now the paralysis of terror that had gripped me was broken, and I ran down the great staircase, and into the court. I could think of no place in that great hall where I might hide. Imagine hiding in a place where all is invisible! But I must go some place, and finally I dashed past the foot of the great staircase until I reached a wall directly under the landing on which I had stood, and against this I crouched, praying that the deepening shadows of dusk might hide me from the gaze of the creature whose lair this was.

"I KNEW instantly when the thing entered the gate through which I too had come. Pad, pad, pad—that was the soft, cushioned sound of its passage. I heard the feet stop for a moment by the opened door at the end of the corridor. Perhaps it was in surprize that the door was open, I thought, for how could I know how great or little intelligence lay in that unseen creature's brain? Then pad, pad—across the court it came, and I heard the soft sound of its passing as it ascended the staircase. Had I not been afraid to breathe, I would have almost screamed with relief.

"Yet still fear held me, and I remained crouched against the wall while the thing went up the great stairs. Imagine that scene! All around me was absolutely nothing visible, nothing but the great flat circle of sand that lay a foot below me; yet I saw the place with my mind's eye, and knew of the walls and courts that lay about me, and the thing above me, in fear of which I was crouching there in the gathering darkness.

"The sound of feet above me had ceased, and I judged that the thing had gone into the great room above, which I had feared to enter. Now, if ever, was the time to make my escape in the dark-

ness; so I rose, with infinite carefulness, and softly walked across the court to the door that led into the corridor. But when I had walked only half of the distance, as I thought, I crashed squarely into another invisible wall across my path, and fell backward, the metal handle of the sheath-knife at my belt striking the flooring with a loud clang. God help me, I had misjudged the position of the door, and had walked straight into the wall, instead!

"I lay there, motionless, with cold fear flooding every part of my being. Then, pad, pad—the soft steps of the thing across the landing, and then silence for a moment. Could it see me from the landing? I wondered. Could it? For a moment, hope warmed me, as no sound came, but the next instant I knew that death had me by the throat, for pad, pad —down the stairs it came.

"With that sound my last vestige of self-control fled and I scrambled to my feet and made another mad dash in the direction of the door. Crash! — into another wall I went, and rose to my feet trembling. There was no sound of footsteps now, and as quietly as I could, I walked into the great court still farther, as I thought, for all my ideas of direction were hopelessly confused. God, what a weird game it was we played there on that darkened circle of sand!

"No sound whatever came from the thing that hunted me, and my hope flickered up again. And with a dreadful irony, it was at that exact moment that I walked straight into the thing. My outstretched hand touched and grasped what must have been one of its limbs, thick and cold and hairy, which was instantly torn from my grasp and then seized me again, while another and another clutched me also. The thing had stood quite still, leaving me to walk directly into its grasp —the drama of the spider and the fly!

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"A moment only it held me, for that cold grasp filled me with such deep, shuddering abhorrence that I wrenched myself loose and fled madly across the court, stumbling again on the first step of the great staircase. I raced up the stairs, and even as I ran I heard the thing in pursuit.

"Up I went, and across the landing, and grasped the edge of the railing, for I meant to throw myself down from there, to a clean death on the floor below. But under my hands, the top of the railing moved, one of the great blocks that evidently made up its top was loosened and rocked toward me. In a flash I grasped the great block and staggered across the landing with it in my arms, to the head of the staircase. Two men could hardly have lifted it, I think, yet I did more, in a sudden access of mad strength; for as I heard that monster coming swiftly up the great stairs, I raised the block, invisible as ever, above my head, and sent it crashing down the staircase upon the place where I thought the thing was at that moment.

"For an instant after the crash there was silence, and then a low humming sound began, that waxed into a loud droning. And at the same time, at a spot half-way down the staircase where the block had crashed, a thin, purple liquid seemed to well out of the empty air, giving form to a few of the invisible steps as it flowed over them, and outlining, too, the block I had thrown, and a great hairy limb that lay crushed beneath it, and from which the fluid that was the monster's blood was oozing. I had not killed the thing, but had chained it down with the block that held it prisoner.

"There was a thrashing sound on the staircase, and the purple stream ran more freely, and by the outline of its splashes, I saw, dimly, the monstrous god that had been known in Mamurth in ages past. It was like a giant spider, with angled limbs that were yards long, and a hairy, repellent body. Even as I stood there, I wondered that the thing, invisible as it was, was yet visible by the life-blood in it, when that blood was spilled. Yet so it was, nor can I even suggest a reason. But one glimpse I got of its half-visible, purple-splashed outline, and then, hugging the farther side of the stairs, I descended. When I passed the thing, the intolerable odor of a crushed insect almost smothered me, and the monster itself made frantic efforts to loosen itself and spring at me. But it could not, and I got safely down, shuddering and hardly able to walk.

"Straight across the great court I went, and ran shakily through the corridor, and down the long avenue, and out between the two great statues. The moonlight shone on them, and the tablets of inscriptions stood out clearly on the sides of the statues, with their strange symbols and carved spider forms. But I knew now what their message was!

"It was well that my camels had wandered into the ruins, for such was the fear that struck through me that I would never have returned for them had they lingered by the invisible wall. All that night I rode to the north, and when morning came I did not stop, but still pushed north. And as I went through the mountain pass, one camel stumbled and fell, and in falling burst open all my water supplies that were lashed on its back.

"No water at all was left, but I still held north, killing the other camel by my constant speed, and then staggered on, afoot. On hands and knees I crawled forward, when my legs gave out, always north, away from that temple of evil and its evil god. And tonight, I had been crawling, how many miles I do not know, and I saw your fire. And that is all."

HE LAY back exhausted, and Mitchell and I looked at each other's faces in the firelight. Then, rising, Mitchell strode to the edge of our camp and looked for a long time at the moonlit desert, which lay toward the south. What his thoughts were, I do not know. I was nursing my own, as I watched the man who lay beside our fire.

It was early the next morning that he died, muttering about great walls around him. We wrapped his body securely, and bearing it with us held our way across the desert.

In Algiers we cabled to the friends whose address we found in his money-belt, and arranged to ship the body to them, for such had been his only request. Later they wrote that he had been buried in the little churchyard of the New England village that had been his childhood home. I do not think that his sleep there will be troubled by dreams of that place of evil from which he fled. I pray that it will not.

Often and often have Mitchell and I discussed the thing, over lonely campfires and in the inns of the seaport towns. Did he kill the invisible monster he spoke of, and is it lying now, a withered remnant, under the block on the great staircase? Or did it gnaw its way loose; does it still roam the desert and make its lair in the vast, ancient temple, as unseen as itself?

Or, different still, was the man simply crazed by the heat and thirst of the desert, and his tale but the product of a maddened mind? I do not think that this is so. I think that he told truth, yet I do not know. Nor shall I ever know, for never, Mitchell and I have decided, shall we be the ones to venture into the place of hell on earth where that ancient god of evil may still be living, amid the invisible courts and towers, beyond the unseen wall.

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Return of Orrin Mannering

By KENNETH P. WOOD

A brief story of a jail-break and its ghostly sequel

JUST how Orrin Mannering, murderer and fugitive from justice, was returned to the security of his cell is a ghostly legend down in Dunham County, Tennessee, although it occurred many years ago, and the ancient jail has long since been demolished.

In the fall of the year, Mannering was confined in the county jail to await trial for the brutal slaying of his brother-in-law. Mannering was a desperate man, a cold-blooded killer, and no coward. He had escaped prison by knocking down John Duff the jailer with an iron bar, then robbing him of his keys; after which he opened the outer door and stole out into the night. The jailer being unarmed, Mannering got no weapon with which to defend his recovered liberty. As soon as he was out of the town, he had the folly to enter a forest; this was, of course, when that region was wilder than it is now.

The slowly rising moon aided Mannering's flight, but as he had never dwelt in the immediate locality, he knew nothing of the lay of the land. He was not long in losing himself, for he had doubled several times. But he could not determine if he were getting farther away from the town or getting back to it—a most important matter to Orrin Mannering. He knew that in either case the sheriff, with a posse of armed citizens and a pack of bloodhounds, would soon be on his trail and his chance of escape was very slender. But he did not wish to assist in his own pursuit. Even an added hour of freedom was worth having.

Suddenly he emerged from the woods into an old road, and there before him saw indistinctly the figure of a man with a rifle slung over one arm, standing motionless in the gloom, evidently posted there to intercept him. It was too late to retreat. The fugitive felt that at the first movement back toward the thicket he would be instantly shot down. So the two stood there like trees, Mannering nearly choking to death as his heart mounted into his throat; the emotions of the other are not of record.

A moment later—it may have been an hour—the moon entered a patch of unclouded sky and the hunted man saw that visible embodiment of Law raise his free arm without a word and point significantly toward and beyond him. Mannering understood. Turning his back to his captor, he walked submissively away in the direction indicated, looking neither to the right nor the left; hardly daring to breathe, for he felt a burning sensation between the shoulder-blades just where the rifle must be pointing. And his spine actually ached with the prophecy of leaden bullets.

Mannering was as courageous a criminal as ever lived to be hanged. That was shown by the conditions of awful personal peril under which he had coolly murdered his brother-in-law. It is needless to relate them here. They came out at his trial, and his calmness in confronting them came near to saving his neck. Nevertheless he was now doggedly plodding his way toward the town, a brave man beaten and submitting to the inevitable.

So the two men pursued their journey jailward in silence along the old road through the woods. Only once did Mannering venture a turn of his head; just once, when he was in the deep shadow of a big overhanging elm tree and he knew that the other was in the full light of the moon, he looked backward. His captor was John Duff, the jailer, as white as death and bearing upon his brow the livid mark of the iron bar. Orrin Mannering had no further curiosity.

EVENTUALLY they entered the town, which was all alight, but deserted. Not a soul appeared to be abroad. Straight up the main street the criminal held his way; straight up to the entrance of the jail he walked and laid his hand upon the knob, opening without command the big iron-bound door. Passing through the dimly lighted corridor, Mannering opened a second door and found himself in the presence of half a dozen armed men who were crowding round a table. But the street door had not opened and closed behind him to admit his captor, so he turned round. Nobody else had entered.

The armed men walked quickly toward Mannering to catch him as he collapsed, for he saw on the table the dead body of John Duff.

FROM time to time we receive letters from you, the readers of this magazine, commenting on the fact that some of our finest stories are what are known as "filler" stories, or "short shorts;" that is, stories of less than five pages in length, printed in the back pages of the magazine, usually without illustrations. Some of these short shorts continue to receive votes from you for months, and even years, after they are printed. Prime example of this last year was Mary Elizabeth Counselman's intriguing short yarn, *The Three Marked Pennies;* and this year Walker G. Everett's bizarre fantasy entitled *The Woman in Gray* bids fair to equal the popularity of Miss Counselman's little masterpiece. One reader points out that E. Hoffmann Price's tale of devil worship, *The Stranger from Kurdistan,* "one of the most powerful and perfect stories ever printed anywhere," took up only four pages in WEIRD TALES. Two other "filler" stories for which votes and letters are still coming in are *The Cats of Ulthar* by H. P. Lovecraft and *The Night Wire* by H. F. Arnold, which were printed several years ago. And there are others. Mere length does not make a story great; and although we will continue to put our main efforts into seeking out and publishing the best weird novelettes and feature-length stories written today, we also take pride in our very short fiction. We rec-

ommend our short tales to you. Despite the fact that they are merely "filler" stories in length, they are chosen for publication just as carefully as the longer stories.

Really Great Stuff

T. O. Mabbott, of New York City, in casting his vote for Fitz-James O'Brien's *The Wondersmith*, our Weird Story Reprint for the July issue, writes: "O'Brien's tale is very fine, though not his best; but voting should be for the new ones, I think. Keep them weird. *They Called Him Ghost* is your best story in ages. . . . Your readers who say things are better than Poe and Verne amuse me, since the old standards remain, but the new perfections are soon forgotten. But some of your short things are really great stuff, which is higher praise than comparison."

For Her Grandchildren

Mrs. Virginia Parker, of Merigold, Mississippi, writes: "I have been reading WEIRD TALES for years and am an avid science-fiction fan, but this is my first letter to the Eyrie. I wish to congratulate you on the fine publication you have. If you don't want my grandchildren to curse you, please continue to publish WT." [We will continue to publish WEIRD TALES as long as we have the support of you who like to read good weird fiction. You have loyally supported this magazine through the lean years of the Great Depression, and we will strive mightily to keep the magazine worthy of your continued support in the future.—THE EDITOR.]

For Nuder Nudes

A. V. Pershing, of Bloomington, Indiana, writes: "Clothing is a disgrace to the former nudes of the rare artistry of M. Brundage. I had just begun saving the nude covers when she began to put veils about their lovely nakedness—and thereby ruined the splendid covers. How can people be so vulgar as to always see evil and wantonness in such sublime masterpieces of artistry as M. Brundage gives her nudes? Won't you please return them to your covers so I may continue my collection? Take the new July issue. M. Brundage failed to produce complete weirdness because of the green dress draped about the girl. I do hope you change your policy and restore our nudes. We do not want *sexy* nudes. We want *Brundage* nudes."

The Very Short Stories

Dwight A. Boyce, of Ludlow, Massachusetts, writes: "Always, without exception, I enjoy the short stories in WEIRD TALES much in preference to the feature-length stories and serials. The longer fiction is too often obviously written around a formula, too deliberately *written to sell*. Every author wants to sell his output, of course; but, it seems to me, the shorter tales are more often ingenious and interesting, displaying great inventiveness and a clever faculty for telling a lot in a small space—the most difficult detail of good story-telling."

A Reprint Suggestion

D. M. Roberts, of Syracuse, New York, writes: "Why don't you reprint some of the older weird tales from your own magazine that have been requested several times, instead of using the 1776 reprints? Nobody cares for the dry, colorless chromos of a century ago. You must realize that there are several thousand unfortunates who have never read your earlier issues, and probably never will be able to do so, as they are out of print. Why not give these people a taste of what WEIRD TALES used to be? You could even reprint the longer stories and serials, seeing that you reprinted *Frankenstein* and *The Wolf-Leader*, both of them eight-part serials. I would suggest that you start in with Volume 1, Number 1, and reprint one story each month until you reach the stories still in print. Anent the cover controversy: Personally I don't care whether you have a naked lady or a Filipino delegate on the cover, as I buy the magazine for the reading matter it contains."

Some Ghosts, Please

John L. Robson, of Charleston, West Virginia, writes: "Donald Wandrei is my favorite science-fiction author and Seabury Quinn my favorite writer of mysteries. . . . But I was thinking the other day that I'd like to read a ghost story. You remember what a ghost was, don't you, one of those white-sheeted things? I should appreciate a resurrection of a few stories in the reprint department, containing some of these rare specimens. In the June and July issues M. Brundage's covers had just the correct el-

ement of the supernatural. I would suggest that you keep the nudes off of your covers and send them to some spicy periodical, where they would seem more at home. After all, the thrill of viewing a nude isn't exactly a weird one. The best stories in your June number were *The Woman in Gray* by W. G. Everett and *Together* by Ida M. Kier. They are two of the most original and well-done weird stories that I have read in months—and I've read plenty. In the July number, Paul Ernst's *Waiter Number 34* was swell. I'm eagerly awaiting his Doctor Satan series."

Quick, Major, the Gong!

Jack Darrow, of Chicago, writes: "Brundage did a nice cover this time. The only fault I could find is that the tangle of figures is a little too messy. Jack Binder did some nice art work for July. I enjoyed *The Avenger from Atlantis* by Edmond Hamilton very much. . . . Did you notice that Aalla Zaata's story, *A Grave Is Five Feet Deep,* is called *A Grave Must Be Deep* on the contents page?" [Thanks, Jack, for calling this egregious blunder to our attention. We are overwhelmed with chagrin, and shall certainly ask Major Bowes to give us the gong. We must have had Theodore Roscoe's story, *A Grave Must Be Deep,* in our subconscious mind when we prepared the table of contents. Aalla Zaata's original title for the tale was *Nothing but the Truth.* This was changed to *Black Earth of India,* but the title *A Grave Is Five Feet Deep* was the name under which it was finally printed.—THE EDITOR.]

Best Brundage Cover

Lewis F. Torrance, of Winfield, Kansas, writes: "The July issue, having been in my hands some four hours, is perused. It is an improvement over any this year. WT prints only the best, has always done so, and probably always will. The month-to-month alternation of artists is not too advisable. Such conduct put the July issue behind the June artistically. The cover, however, was Brundage's best to date, being mysterious, and at the same time containing the much-quarreled-over female, sparsely draped, with the vile gleam in her eyes. . . . You will probably receive much 'weeping, wailing and gnashing of teeth' because she is not clad in less satin. Be that as it may, WT should be the

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proudest pulp on the ladder of magazine fame. The greatest surprize was to learn of the coming of Montgomery to WEIRD TALES. Literarily, *Anne of Green Gables* was a success—if only her weird fiction is as good. The two translated German narratives added literary spice to *the* magazine of weird fiction. . . . Give us more from Robert Bloch, and his colleagues of horror, C. L. Moore and Frank B. Long, Jr."

The Avenger from Atlantis

G. H. January, of Memphis, writes: "That grand July issue that I've just finished has inspired me to write another letter. If the remainder of the pages had been blank, that marvelous story, *The Avenger from Atlantis,* would have filled the need capably. I have never read a story by Mr. Hamilton that I enjoyed half as much as I did his latest. You may be certain that it will go down on my 'preferred' list with such other masterpieces as *The Woman of the Wood, The Phantom Farmhouse,* and the King Kull fantasies. Incidentally, don't let Conan (enjoyable as he is) replace the colorful heroes of the Shadow Kingdom. *The Death Cry* I found a very well-written and entertaining *detective* story but sadly lacking in eery qualities. Again I sound the age-old chant—Keep WEIRD TALES weird. As to the nudes on the cover, I have found many of them that added to the idea of the magazine and were really splendid, while others with their excessive voluptuousness made the magazine appear a cheaper type. Let's keep our nudes but keep them in reason. Here's hoping for another issue like the July."

Science Fiction

Clifford Shine, of Denver, writes: "I want to enter into the discussions in the Eyrie. I am for nudes and against *The Death Cry.* And I wish to say that I think weird-scientific stories should remain in WT. The argument against them is that there are several magazines devoted to them already; however, I don't think they do as good a job as WT. Perhaps the readers remember *Corsairs of the Cosmos* in WT. If you do, I think you will agree that no story ever printed in the science-fiction magazines was anything like it. Neither did I ever see in those magazines a story like *Rulers of the Future* or *The Man Who Was Two Men.* These stories take up science fiction where

other magazines leave off. . . . For reprints I would like, first, *The Slithering Shadow* by Robert E. Howard, and second, *Penelope* by Vincent Starrett. Both these tales are from old issues of WT. My favorite stories in the July issue are *Jirel Meets Magic* by C. L. Moore, and *The Avenger from Atlantis* by Edmond Hamilton. My two favorite authors are Robert E. Howard and C. L. Moore."

July Issue Nearly Perfect

B. M. Reynolds, of North Adams, Massachusetts, writes: "The July issue of WEIRD TALES was so near perfect that I had to break a two-months' silence to compliment you on it. All of the stories were good, and three were outstanding. *The Avenger from Atlantis* by Edmond Hamilton was absolutely the best he has ever written; not only in novelty of plot, but in the excellent way in which he handled the theme. C. L. Moore, with a long line of successes already to her credit, certainly gave us the best to date in *Jirel Meets Magic*. Moore's stories are following, more and more, a trend toward sheer fantasy, of which there is a pitiful lack in present-day fiction. Parts of this story were strongly reminiscent of A. Merritt's imaginative descriptions, and I hardly believe a better compliment could be given a writer than to compare one with the incomparable. Gustav Meyrink's strange little tale, *The Violet Death*, might have taken first place if it had not been so brief. An extraordinary plot like that could have been enlarged into a superb novelette. But, at any rate, it was excellent. . . . Regarding reprints: How about *Bimini* and *The Girl from Samarcand?*"

C. L. Moore's Stories

Carleton C. Ames, of Minneapolis, writes: "I first started reading WEIRD TALES in 1925, and have scarcely missed an issue since. You have published some very poor stories, but on the whole, you stand alone in your field. The stories which I do not like are those which, after building up an atmosphere of weirdness, proceed to explain the whole affair as a dream, or as having a perfectly rational explanation. To me, this vitiates the whole story. . . . I have just finished the July 1935 issue. The leading story therein, in my opinion, is C. L. Moore's *Jirel Meets Magic*. As far as that goes, Moore's stories are the best that you have published.

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Shambleau, which was the first one that I encountered, is, in my opinion, the masterpiece of weird fiction. While I have enjoyed Moore's stories since, that author has never come up to the sheer horror of *Shambleau.*"

The Unique Magazine

William J. Smith, of New Brunswick, New Jersey, writes: "I have no fault to find whatever with WEIRD TALES. It is still the Unique Magazine. Other publications specializing in horror have been put out, but their basis is practically always one of beautiful women and fiends. The story nearly always turns out as a hoax. Therefore, WEIRD TALES is still the only magazine which gives us weird *literature.* I hope it continues in business a good long time."

Brief Paragraphs

Parker Dehn, of New York City, writes: "*The Horror in the Studio* by Dorothy Quick in your June issue is one of the most vivid tales I have ever read. It had all the power of a real thriller."

David W. Sallume, of Yellow Springs, Ohio, writes: "I wish to offer you my congratulations on your publication of Paul Ernst's story, *Waiter Number 34.* It is not often that one encounters in pulp fiction a story which has any appreciable social vision, so that the discovery is the more pleasing when it does come."

Richard H. Hart writes from New Orleans: "My congratulations on the July number: there isn't a weak story in it. My choice for *best* wavers between *The Avenger from Atlantis* and *A Grave Is Five Feet Deep.* You've made quite a find in Aalla Zaata."

C. B. H. writes from New York City: "*Jirel Meets Magic* was the best Jirel story, in my estimation, that I have ever read. Jirel is my favorite character."

Herbert Zettler, of New York City, writes: "*The Avenger from Atlantis* is a swell story. It puts a new light on historical people. But couldn't Etain teach someone to put her brain in a new body?"

Miss Mildred L. Doctor, of Minneapolis, writes: "I have all your magazines since 1930, and have read all the stories and verses. I think your magazine is the best on the market. The more gruesome they are, the better I like them."

Favorite Story

Readers, what is your favorite story in this issue? Write us a letter, or fill out the vote coupon on this page and send it to the Eyrie, WEIRD TALES. And if there are any stories you do not like, we want to know which ones, and why you do not like them. Your favorite story in the July issue, as shown by your votes and letters, was *The Avenger from Atlantis,* by Edmond Hamilton. This was closely pressed for first place by *Waiter Number 34,* by Paul Ernst, and *Jirel Meets Magic,* by C. L. Moore.

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Story	Remarks
(1) ----------	----------
(2) ----------	----------
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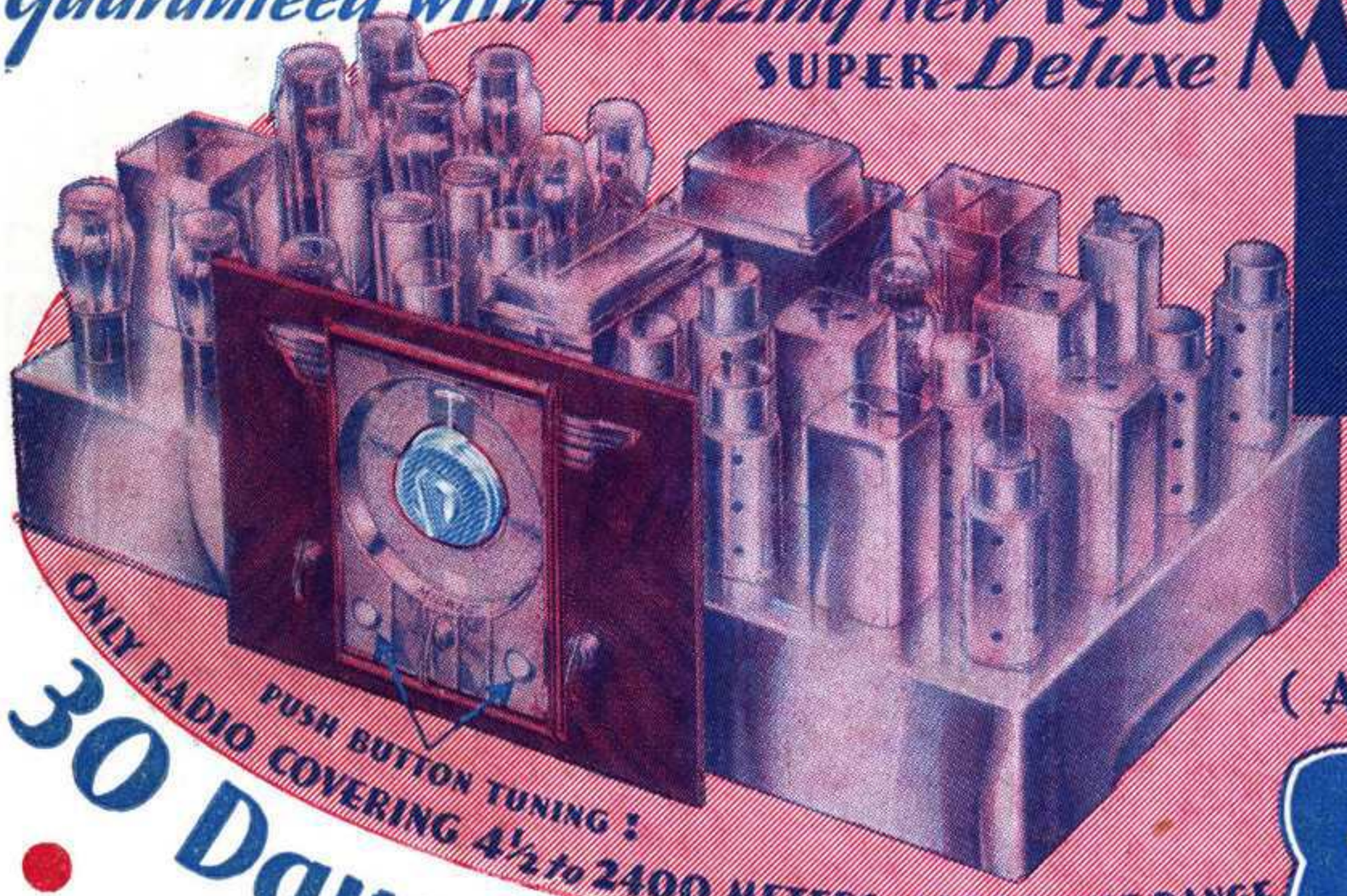

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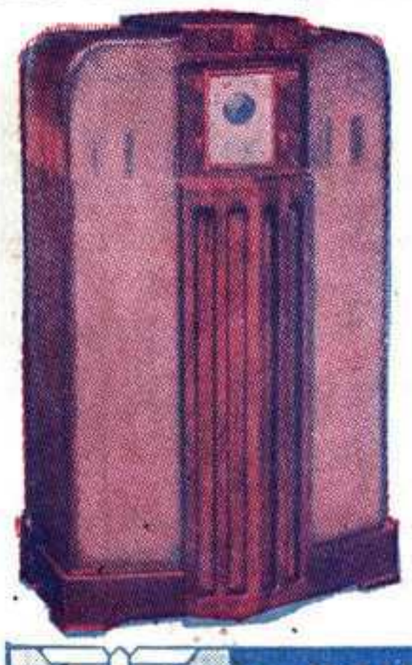

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