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By DOROTHY QUICK

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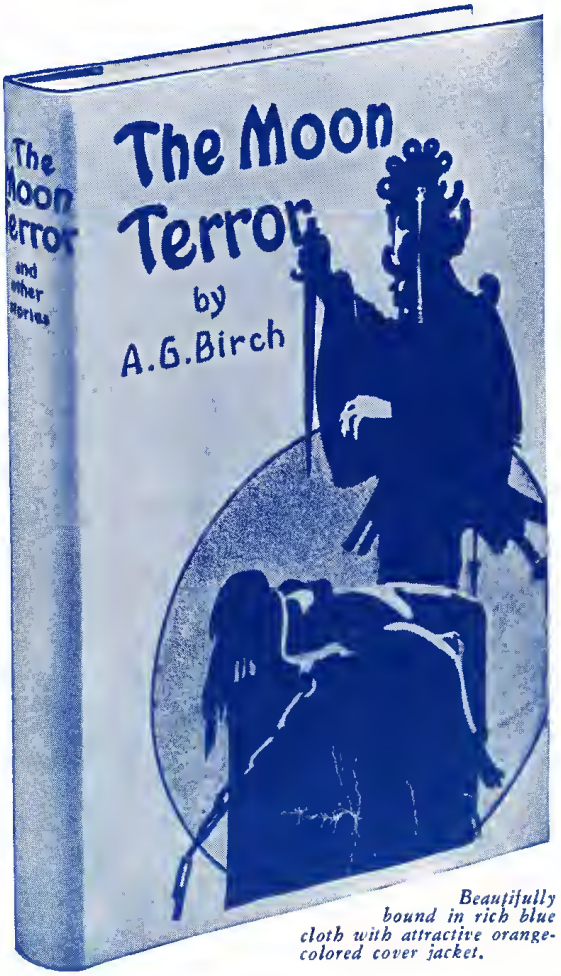

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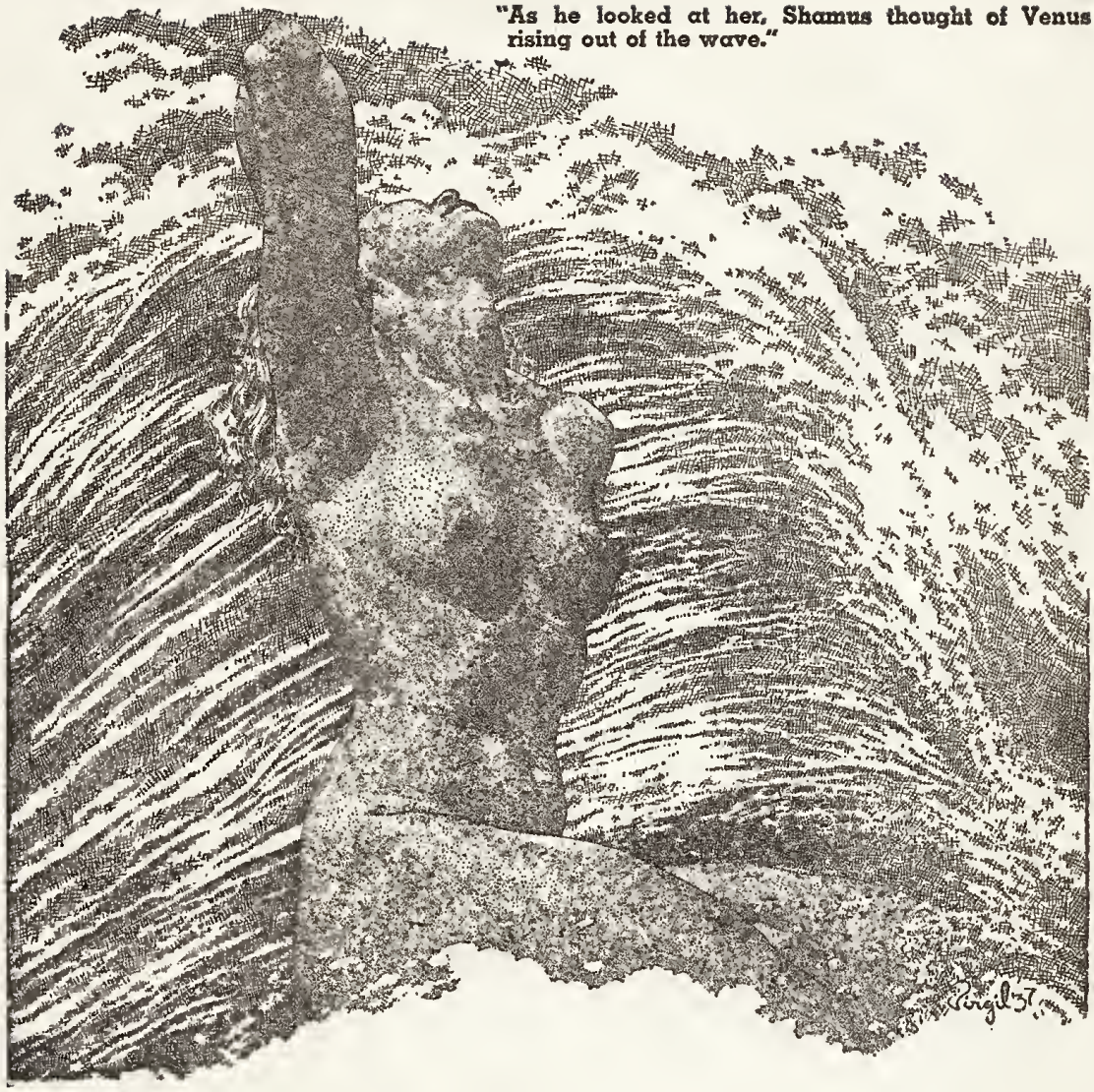


"As he looked at her, Shamus thought of Venus rising out of the wave."

The Witch's Mark

By DOROTHY QUICK

Shamus O'Brien risked his very soul for the red, red lips of Cecily Maltby—a strange and curious story about a beautiful, evil woman with red-gold hair

THE first time Shamus saw Cecily Maltby he thought her easily the most fascinating woman he had ever seen. He weighed her charm against her beauty and found they balanced each other perfectly.

The second time he thought of Isolde—Isolde of the red-gold hair and the snow-white skin. Cecily Maltby's skin was so white that a camellia seemed yellow against it. She had a slim figure from which her breasts curved lushly, and

she moved with the unconscious grace Isolde must have had.

The third time he saw her he was conscious that her lips were much too red, that they looked as though blood had been smeared across them. Quite suddenly he forgot her beauty and charm and felt an odd repugnance toward her, all the more odd because her great eyes were looking at him with the expression a woman wears when she loves a man and is willing to let him see that she does.

Shamus O'Brien was an author of sorts. That is, he lived on an income left him by his father and played at writing because he had nothing better to do and was always in hopes of striking literary gold. He had an attractive apartment in the East Sixties and was popular enough to have his engagement book filled far ahead.

He had a sense of humor. His father was Irish and his mother French. He was six feet tall, broad-shouldered, with regular features and brown hair that would wave no matter how he struggled to make it lie flat. All in all, he was quite an ordinary young man of twenty-seven and there was no apparent reason why he should have been thrown into such a maelstrom of curious events.

They began on the Friday morning when Jim Blaketon came breezing into his living-room.

"Hi, old Stick-in-the-Mud, I've come to dig you out," he shouted, his words reverberating among the Italian antiques.

"I've just settled in for the week-end. I've got a swell idea for a new story." Shamus waved a box of newly sharpened pencils at his friend.

"Rats! You're too good-looking to deprive the debutantes of for anything so inconsequential as a story. Come on, my lad, Trudy's giving a house-party. She's a man short, so she sent me an S. O. S. to get you."

Shamus liked Trudy Rose. She was a swell girl and they'd always been friends.

"Why didn't she call me herself?" Shamus asked.

Jim laughed. "I just happened to be talking to her. Long-distance calls cost money these days." Then his face sobered. "If you must have the truth, I think Trudy's a bit shy of you. Unrequited love turns sour after a point."

Unrequited love! Trudy in love with him? Shamus had never dreamed of such a thing. Trudy and he had been pals, playmates, for years. He couldn't picture his life without her, and yet often he didn't see her for weeks. He conjured up a vision of her piquant rounded face with its turned-up nose, friendly smile and clear blue eyes. She was like Diana, slender and unawakened. It had never occurred to him to light the spark that would change her from the cold moon-maiden into a warm, passionate woman. If it hadn't been for Jim, he would have gone on playing big brother to Trudy indefinitely. But now he suddenly realized how lost he would be without her, and his heart beat faster at the idea of Trudy —and love!

He looked at Jim with perhaps a little of the elation he felt showing on his face.

"Shamus O'Brien," Jim said sternly, "if you ever so much as hint to Trudy that I've let the cat out of the bag, I'll tar and feather you! I just couldn't keep my mouth shut and let a fine romance go to waste for want of proper direction."

"I never dreamed——"

"You wouldn't. You're kind of dumb where women are concerned. That's why I spoke up. I knew you had a soft spot for Trudy and that you'd never find it unless it was pointed out to you."

With the perfect understanding there sometimes is between men who have done college and night-life together, they read each other's thoughts. Then Jim slapped

Shamus on the back and pulled him toward the bedroom, talking as they went.

"Come on, pack the bag. I'll guarantee you a moon tomorrow night so you can propose."

THERE was a moon, and Trudy was beside Shamus, her arm linked in his —but he did not propose. In the meantime he had met Cecily Maltby.

Jim and he motored up to Ridgefield, where the Roses had a large country estate outside the little Connecticut town. They used it only for spring and fall and occasional winter housewarmings, but it was always lovely. Now, in the beginning of June, it was particularly so. When Shamus and Jim drove up under the rambler-covered porte-cochère, Trudy followed the butler to the door. She had on a soft yellow sports dress that brought out the deep brown of her hair and eyes. She was lovely to look at as she stood in the doorway with the wind ruffling her curls and whipping her skirt back against her slender legs.

"Shamus! I'm so glad Jim actually got you." There was real joy in her eyes that he would not have noticed ordinarily.

He caught her two hands and raised them one after the other to his lips. It was the first gesture of sentiment there had ever been between them and he made it as a tribute to the girl he had decided to make his wife.

A swift color flooded Trudy's cheeks and she looked as though she had been suddenly given a passport to the Seventh Heaven. Then Jim swept down upon them and presently they were all inside, the center of a laughing, welcoming group.

It was several minutes before Shamus saw Cecily. When he did, she was standing over against the mantelpiece. The gray stone threw her red hair into startling relief as it silhouetted her figure.

She wore some kind of clinging green material tied around her waist with a gold cord. Shamus couldn't tell what type of dress it was—sport or afternoon, morning or evening—he only knew that she looked like Undine standing there and that when she spoke her voice was like the rippling of deep waters over silver stones. Sweet and mellow it vibrated against his heart-strings as she acknowledged Trudy's introduction.

She didn't move from her place by the mantel, nor did she make the slightest effort to call Shamus to her. Nevertheless, when he had acquired a highball, he found himself beside her.

"Can I get you something?" he asked, matter-of-factly.

"Not now," she said in that deep melodious voice, "but perhaps some day——" She looked at Shamus, and there were smoldering fires behind her eyes.

It was an odd thing to say, "Not now —later perhaps" would have been the expected thing — "but perhaps some day——" with the blank spaces left unfilled! Shamus didn't understand it; he didn't want to—he only wanted to hear her speak again.

She gratified his unspoken wish.

"You are Irish, are you not? There's a touch of the Gaelic about you."

"My name could have told you that." Shamus wondered if one could tease a goddess.

"Your name?" she repeated, puzzled, "I did not even hear it. Last names mean so little. What is your given name?"

"Shamus—Shamus O'Brien. That confirms the Irish, doesn't it?"

"There have been many men in Ireland who bore that name. One Shamus, who was very like you, wooed the King's daughter, Deidre; wooed her away from all the King's sons who sought her hand. Though he was but a farmer's lad, the

Princess Deidre loved him and came down from her golden throne to take him in her arms. Do you remember that?"

All at once the room in the Connecticut mansion was gone. Shamus seemed to be out in the open spaces with the music of Cecily Maltby's voice singing in his ears. The sky was blue and there was green grass all around him and somewhere in the distance the sound of waves. And in his arms was a slender loveliness with a cloud of red-gold hair that sent a wave of fragrant scent through his nostrils, a strange unearthly perfume that he knew even in that moment was unforgettable. There was a beating in his ears, a thumping of his heart. The loveliness in his arms raised her head, the cloud of red-gold hair fell back revealing the white face—of Cecily Maltby. The past and the present surged about Shamus in a mad spinning whirl. Presently out of it he heard Cecily's voice saying triumphantly, "You do remember!"

He was back in the room at Ridgefield once more, looking at Cecily, who regarded him with strange languorous eyes. From somewhere behind, Trudy's voice called, "Shay!"

He started to turn. As he did so, Cecily put her hand on his arm.

"Some day you will remember even more, and I will tell you the rest of the story."

He bent over, and as his head came level with hers, he caught a whiff of that unforgettable perfume. Then her hand left his arm, and in some curious way he knew he was free to answer Trudy's call.

That was the first time he saw Cecily Maltby.

WHAT happened between then and the time they went to dress for dinner, Shamus didn't know. He was in a kind of daze. Nobody else noticed it, apparently, for he mixed highballs for several people and added his share to the banter that was going on. But that was with only part of his mind, another part —a tiny part that he had never known existed—was listening to the music of Cecily Maltby's voice, was remembering the loveliness he had held in his arms. Only a second more and he would have kissed the full red lips.

An overwhelming longing swept over him. Shamus shook himself as a terrier whose coat is overburdened with water might do. This was foolish. He'd had a long ride, and listening to an old Irish legend had made him dream day-dreams. It could be nothing else. Only why had the girl in the vision had the face of Cecily instead of Trudy? Trudy was the girl he loved. He had definitely decided that on the way up. And then—oh, it was all too silly! Just because Cecily Maltby was easily the most beautiful, charming woman he had ever seen, he mustn't take her too seriously. Incongruously he wondered how old she was.

Jim and he shared a room; so while they struggled into their tuxedos, Shamus asked him who Cecily Maltby was and how she happened to be there, in a tone it was an effort to make casual.

"Just one of Trudy's friends," Jim replied. "Nobody knows much about her. She has a house not far from here—took possession of it several months ago and kept to herself. Trudy met her one day while she was walking through the woods, felt sorry for her lonesome state and invited her for tea or something. She's had her here quite often. You know Trudy's soft heart."

Shamus didn't say anything. Fortunately for his curiosity, Jim went on.

"I don't like her much. There's something about her that gives me cold shivers up and down the spine and makes me remember that lady vampires are supposed to have red hair."

Shamus laughed. The idea of Cecily Maltby being even remotely associated with a vampire struck him as excessively funny.

Jim joined in a good hearty guffaw, then suddenly turned serious.

"I don't think the lady's up to any good. She lives alone except for a gaunt foreign maid she brought with her when she came."

"Sounds odd," Shamus said, as he put the finishing touches to his tie. But he was thinking more of the strange, unforgettable perfume and the day-dream it had evoked than of what Jim was saying.

"She's a 'mystery woman' all right," Jim went on, "and I wish Trudy had never met her. Trudy's like a beautiful rose blooming in the sunshine, and that Maltby wench is one of those orchids that hang from trees in South America, exotic, gorgeous, but they draw living things into their mouths for food, attract them by the strange perfume they send forth."

Shamus started. How strange that Jim should compare Cecily Maltby to a flower emitting strange perfume—almost his very words, remembering the day-dream and the loveliness he had held in his arms! He shrugged his shoulders, annoyed with himself. This was utter foolishness!

"You must have been delving into weird literature," he told Jim, "what with red-haired vampires and orchids that——"

Jim eyed his friend shrewdly. "I saw you talking to her. Don't, my boy—don't! Tell Trudy you love her, and stay out in the sunshine—it's better than the jungle depths."

"You talk as though you were my grandfather," Shamus scoffed, although Jim's words had rung a warning bell in that corner of his brain that he had only discovered this afternoon. "I told you on the way up I was going to propose to Trudy. Did you ever see anyone look sweeter than she did standing in the doorway when we arrived?"

"Never!" There was something in Jim's tone that made Shamus wonder.

"Jim, do you, by any chance——"

"I did, but it was no go. That's how I knew you were the one she cared for—she told me. Trudy's a swell girl! You needn't get steamed up over me, though. I'm going to marry Margery Standish. It will be announced next week. I love Margery and we'll be happy—but I'm still fond of Trudy, fond enough not to want you to fall for either orchids or vampires."

For a long minute they looked into each other's eyes. Then Shamus said blithely, in the way men have of covering real emotion, "You needn't worry—I love Trudy." Their hands met in a strong, solid clasp, as he added, "Congratulations about Margery. She's a grand girl. I'm glad she and Trudy are such good friends."

"We'll make a swell quartette," Jim remarked, and Shamus agreed heartily. He had completely forgotten Cecily, the strange perfume and the vision he had had.

TRUDY was waiting for them when they came downstairs.

"You're going to sit on my right, Shay," she announced, slipping her arm through his. Her eyes looked up at him clearly, with no evasions.

"It's more than I deserve. Trudy, I've got something to tell you—a question to ask——" He leaned toward her, so close that he could have touched her brown curls with his lips.

"Shay!" Her eyes were glowing now and a kind of inner light illuminated her face. "Tell me now!"

"Can't you guess?"

"I might," she sighed happily, "but I'd rather hear."

Just at that moment someone moved out of the little group of people that were clustered around the cocktails and came toward them.

It was Cecily Maltby.

Cecily was in misty green chiffon that clung to her revealingly. The dress couldn't be described. It was like the sea as it rippled about her feet. Shamus thought of Venus rising out of the wave as he looked at her neck and arms emerging from the green material. Her face had the beauty that poets sing of yet can never wholly describe because of its intangible loveliness. Her red hair was bound about her head in two thick braids, like a coronet. Her gray-green eyes looked at Shamus with a strange, compelling glance, but she spoke to Trudy, and her voice had changed again. Now it was like the bubbling waters of a brook dancing down a mountainside.

"You must come and make your guests behave. Someone wants to put a bottle of absinthe into the cocktails. Perhaps you can exercise restraint, Trudy."

Was there a challenge in her words? There was none in her tone, only the gay bubbling mountain brook sweeping downward. But Shamus thought of a stream he had once seen rushing down the mountain, full, torrential, carrying great trees in its wake, creating havoc as it went.

He felt a sudden cold and caught Trudy's hand in his. It was warm, reassuring, just as her voice was, and comfortingly natural.

"Come along then, we'll see what we can do." Trudy kept her arm linked through Shamus' and stretched out her free hand to Cecily.

Cecily gave Shamus a wise sidelong glance and started over toward the group, ignoring Trudy's gesture. Without knowing why, Shamus was grateful that Cecily's long tapering fingers hadn't touched Trudy's.

As they walked along, Trudy squeezed the hand which was still holding hers.

"You'll have to tell me later," she whispered.

"I certainly will," he whispered back.

Just at that moment Cecily turned and waited for them. There was an inscrutable expression on her face, but Shamus knew just as though she had spoken aloud that he would never tell Trudy what was in his mind, if Cecily could prevent it.

He knew, and all at once he felt afraid.

It was just then, as Trudy made a dive to rescue the cocktail shaker, that he smelt the strange unforgettable perfume once more. It was as though someone had sprayed a powerful atomizer over him so that he was enveloped in a cloud of nascent sweetness that was almost intoxicating in its effect.

Through the mist that surrounded him he saw Cecily Maltby's red lips curving in a triumphant smile.

Something stirred in that corner of his brain that he had never known he possessed until today. In some vague way he knew a memory was there struggling to come forth—a memory that belonged to the vision he had had—that vision of the green meadow and the blue, blue sky with the sound of the waves and the loveliness in his arms—a memory that went beyond that—which was tremendously important—he couldn't seem to grasp it. He could only see Cecily Maltby's face with its triumphant smile, and his fear deepened until he wanted to cry out, "Save me!" to Jim, to Trudy, to anyone. And just as he felt his throat muscles constrict to give the cry, he heard the butler say, "Dinner is served, Miss Trudy," and the scent of the perfume died away. He

laughed at himself for an utter fool as he walked unmolested toward Trudy.

That was the second time he saw Cecily.

DINNER was very gay. There were just ten: nine house guests and Cecily Maltby. Mr. and Mrs. Rose had gone out to dine, so the young people had the place to themselves, and mirth ran high.

There wasn't any chance for individual conversation. Cecily saw to that. She dominated the conversation, did it with a chance word here and there, unobtrusively, as though she were a juggler keeping nine balls bouncing in the air with no effort at all. Her balls were people and she juggled them around as she pleased.

While this was going on, Shamus reached under the table and held Trudy's hand. A kind of contentment flowed from her fingers to his. He felt a sense of security and almost forgot Cecily's eyes resting on him from the other end of the table.

Cecily looked like a queen as she sat in the high-backed chair, her head crowned with braids. Like a queen she looked over her subjects, insolently, except when her glance touched Shamus. Then there was something in her eyes under their straight brows and heavy lashes that he could not read, nor did he want to. He was content to sit with Trudy's hand in his. He forgot to wonder about Cecily. He even forgot to pay attention to the conversation. He only held Trudy's hand tighter, as though he were welding their fingers together for ever and ever.

When the dessert was finished, Trudy started to rise, but before she could do so Cecily said quickly, "Can we not all have coffee together? In my country we do not separate the men and women as we do sheep and goats."

Trudy acquiesced gracefully. Someone asked Cecily where her country was and she said, "I thought you knew, I am Hungarian."

Was it fancy, Shamus wondered, or had he heard that certain parts of Hungary were noted for vampires? It was at that moment he decided Cecily's lips were too red. But he brushed the thought away. What *was* the matter with him? He wondered. He was acting as though this were the Middle Ages instead of 1937. Seeing visions, smelling strange perfumes, associating vampires with Cecily Maltby! There definitely must be something wrong with him—a touch of liver probably. He'd see a doctor when he got back to town.

Cecily was speaking, and now her voice was as it had been when he first heard it, like the rippling of deep waters over silver stones, and her gray-green eyes had glints of the sea in them.

"It's my turn to tell a story," she said to the crowd—but she looked at Shamus.

"Once there was a Princess of Ireland," she began, and he wondered why she was telling that story to the others, wondered for a minute, then forgot everything but the magic of her voice and the tale she was telling. "Her name was Deidre, and many were the kings' sons who sought her hand. Among her suitors was a farmer's lad, and because he was tall and handsome with arms that were strong for holding a woman and lips that were eager to kiss, the Princess Deidre loved him and came down from her golden throne to take him in her swan-like arms."

It was the same story she had told him before, almost the same words, and already Shamus could hear the singing in his ears and the faint, distant sound of the waves.

Her voice went on, water dripping slowly on the silver stones, dripping into that far corner of his brain, awakening it.

"Then all the king's sons who had

sought her hand were angry and they went to the King who was Deidre's father and they said, 'This is an ill thing your daughter has done. She has scorned us for a farmer's lad. It will mean war.'

"The King was sore beset, for he loved his daughter and he loved his kingdom, but in the end he loved his kingdom more; for he called Deidre to him and she came with her red-gold hair in two long braids about her head, for she was no longer a maid and could not let its flaming glory loose. And with her was the farmer's lad, straight and strong, with his arms to hold and his lips to kiss that had won the Princess."

GRADUALLY as Cecily talked, Shamus let go his hold of Trudy's hand. Little by little his fingers unclasped until finally his arms rested on the table and his eyes met the curious gray-green ones of Cecily Maltby. It seemed to him as though in the whole room there were only he and Cecily, that the others were not there at all, though he could see their tense faces as they listened to the magic of Cecily's voice continuing her tale.

"The King looked at them standing together and he said, 'Give up this farmer's lad, my daughter.'

"Deidre shook her head. 'We have gone beyond that, my father,' she said proudly. 'He is mine for now and all time to come.' "

Through the singing in his eyes and the dripping of Cecily's words, Shamus heard Trudy say, "Love is like that." He knew she meant it for him with one part of him, but the other part was growing stronger every minute and was so avid to know the end of Cecily's story that he ignored the girl beside him.

Cecily went on. "The King said, 'There is no use sending more arrows into the air to be lost. I have spoken. Go, my daughter, take with you your farmer's lad, but only on pain of worse than death will anyone give you food or drink or help of any kind. Go now, before my heart breaks in two.'

"And the Princess Deidre took the hand of her farmer's lad and walked out into the world with him."

"Did they live happily ever after?" It was Jim who asked the question—or was it someone else? Shamus didn't know. His mind was confused. He couldn't see the faces at the table, but only Cecily's gray-green eyes holding his.

"Yes," she said slowly, "they lived happily ever after."

"But how could they when the King forbade anyone to help them?" It was Trudy who questioned now.

"The Princess Deidre made a bargain with the Little Folk, and the fairies let them come to the Land of Heart's Desire, where they lived happily ever after," Cecily answered.

All at once the memory that had eluded Shamus all evening came back. He leaned on the table, toward Cecily, and cried excitedly, "No, no! There's more than that! It wasn't the Princess who made the bargain—it was Shamus who bargained for the Land of Heart's Desire. He even gained it for a little while; but soon he found that he hadn't bargained with a fairy, he'd bargained with a witch woman, and the price he had to pay—was the—the——"

Like a shutter dropping, something closed between that far corner of his mind and the rest of it—a door that sealed away the end of the story. The singing died out of his ears and he leaned back in his chair feeling very foolish.

"Shamus?" Trudy was puzzled. "Did you say the farmer's lad was named Shamus?" she asked Cecily directly.

"Of course I did," Cecily laughed—a laugh that sounded like the vibrations of a crystal glass when it is struck suddenly

—a beautiful laugh, but entirely without mirth. "Of course I did. That's why I told the story, because of the coincidence of the names."

Shamus knew she lied. Not once had she mentioned a name—she had always said "the farmer's lad."

"It wasn't nice of you, Mr. O'Brien," she said lightly, "to spoil my happy ending. It was such a nice story. You must have heard a different version of the legend." Shamus felt her words as piercing as thin slivers of ice.

"Yes, Shay, tell us how yours went." Did he imagine it, or did Jim look toward him curiously?

"I don't seem to remember much more than I said," he managed to stammer. "I'm very sorry, Miss Maltby."

Cecily smiled. "It's no matter. To show that I forgive you, I'll let you take me home tonight." She smiled again and then rose from the table, her green skirts swirling around her like rippling waves. As she passed by Shamus, she brushed against his hand, and it seemed to him as though his fingers had been touched by a cold ocean spray. He caught a whiff of the strange unforgettable perfume, and as he did so he thought he heard her say, "What else do you remember, Shamus?" but he was not sure whether she had spoken or not; and before he could find out, she had gone.

LATER, other people came in for dancing. The rugs were rolled up and two colored men appeared to play. Shamus wondered if Cecily would dance. He could picture her swaying like a woodnymph while Pan piped his tunes, but somehow couldn't associate her with the modern type of dancing.

She did not dance. She stood by the fireplace surrounded by men. But though she talked with them, Shamus felt her eyes upon him, searching, probing; and the far corner of his mind stirred under her glance.

He danced with Trudy. Several times the words, "I love you," trembled on his lips, but he did not say them. He knew in some vague way that it was Cecily Maltby's sea-green eyes that kept the words back, and he resented this, yet couldn't defy her by telling Trudy what he wanted to. It was almost as though Cecily had put a spell on him, binding his tongue where Trudy was concerned—a witch-woman's spell. Shamus caught his thoughts up sharply. This was all nonsense! For the rest of the evening he would forget Cecily, and above all things he would not take Cecily home. He was quite determined about that.

Nevertheless at midnight he found himself walking through the woods with Cecily.

"We'll just take this short cut," she had said. "It's only a step this way," brushing aside his suggestion of running over in the car.

He had submitted gracefully, for he had realized he couldn't get out of escorting her without a scene; so there was nothing to do but make the best of it.

THERE was a deep stillness in the woods, which consisted mainly of white birch trees. They walked along quietly. Shamus was annoyed that despite his resolve she had made him bring her, and she was quite silent. Wrapped in chiffons, she looked like a wraith silhouetted against the white trunks of the trees as she glided along. Shamus thought of Rider Haggard's *She,* and decided Cecily had the same deathless indescribable beauty that Ayesha had had.

"I am glad you find me beautiful," Cecily said, and her voice was like golden temple bells rung by a flower-scented breeze.

Shamus stopped short. "Can you read thoughts?" he exclaimed.

She stood facing him. "I can read yours, Shamus, because in the old days we were one."

The strange, unforgettable perfume was filling his nostrils, seeping into his senses. He tried to think of Trudy, to remember what Jim had said of an orchid luring living creatures into its mouth by its scent, but he couldn't. Everything was swept away from him by the wonder of Cecily Maltby.

She had thrown her draperies aside and stood there against the white birches with the moonlight streaming down upon her through an opening in the trees, almost as though it were a spotlight. Shamus knew she had on the green dress she had worn at dinner—he could see it rippling like the waves of the sea about her feet—but it had suddenly become transparent. Through it gleamed the white lines of her body. It was as though someone had thrown a thin chiffon over a marble statue.

Desire such as he had never known before swept over Shamus. He stretched out his hands to her.

"Not yet," she whispered, her voice changed again. It was like deep waters falling over silver stones. "I am Deidre—you are Shamus. Once before we loved and lived, but we were parted, Shamus—parted because you tired of my beauty—and I have gone down through the ages seeking you—seeking you——"

"But you said we lived happily ever after in the Land of Heart's Desire."

"Do you think I could tell them that you left me because my beauty was a well-known tale to you—that you went away from the Land of Heart's Desire out into the world, and a curse was put upon me to find you again, though it took age after age, century upon century?"

The far corner of his brain was struggling to come to life, struggling to tell him something, fighting against the desire for her that was mastering him, but he shut his mind against it. Nothing mattered of that dim past, nothing. He did not care which was right—the long-dead memories that were striving to revive themselves, or Cecily Maltby's story of a curse, a seeking. They were in the past and he was in the present, and he wanted her—Cecily or Deidre—as he had wanted no other woman.

"Give me your lips!" he begged.

She caught his hands in hers and pressed them against her. His head swam with the scent of her perfume. He forgot everything, his doubts, his fears. In all the world there was only this woman and his longing for her.

"Give me your lips!" he cried again.

She swayed nearer, yielded herself to his arms. But still he could not reach her lips. Red, inviting they were there, but he knew he could not touch them until she gave him leave, and he knew he should die of desire for her unless she gave that leave.

She spoke again, and now her voice was like the soft petals of roses falling on emerald grass.

"Shamus, Shamus, you shall have my lips if you desire them. You shall have myself if you desire me. But this time there must be no turning back, no running away. I will roam the earth no more under a curse. You must be mine utterly, now and for ever. Tell me if you will give me yourself in return for me!"

She brushed her lips against his cheek. It was as though every fiber of his being leapt to life at her touch. It was beyond explaining, beyond knowing. It was wonderfully glorious, and yet hideously obscene. It gave him a glimpse into an

unknown world, but when she took her lips away he felt as though he were losing all that made life worth while, and the desire for her that possessed him was intensified, until there was no longer anything within him but that desire.

SHE stood a little away from him and Shamus could no longer see the swirling chiffon of her dress; he could only see her lush nudity, which was no longer that of a statue but of a vibrantly living woman. She shook her head, and her hair fell about her in a red-gold flame. Eve! She was Eve, the mother of all living, and Lilith, the serpent woman —both in one.

"Do you want me, Shamus," she asked, "enough to pay the price you must pay?"

"I want you," he heard himself say. "I will pay the price."

She stretched out her arms, those wonderful swan-like arms. She threw back her red-gold hair.

"Then come to me, Shamus, and seal the bargain with a kiss!" In her voice was the music of the ages. It sang in his ears, filling them just as the unforgettable perfume filled his nostrils, and desire for her filled his soul.

He caught her in his arms. Her skin was soft and lovely to touch. She took a long lock of her hair and bound it about his throat, drawing his face nearer and nearer to hers with the red-gold rope.

"At last, my Shamus!" he heard her whisper through the mad beating of his heart.

Their lips had almost touched when he heard a voice—a far-off voice—calling. He couldn't make out what it was saying, but he knew that the voice was calling him.

He hesitated. Cecily pressed closer, wound her white arms about him, tightening the coils of her hair around his throat.

"Shamus, Shamus, I will be yours if you kiss me—kiss me——"

He bent closer; then he heard the far-off voice distinctly. It was Jim's voice calling, "Shay! Shay! Where are you?" and at the same time the far-off corner of his mind broke loose the bonds he had put upon it, and an almost forgotten memory cried its warning, "If you kiss her this time, you are hers for ever—you will have lost your soul!" just as he suddenly realized that her hair was bound so tight around his neck that he could hardly breathe.

"Shay! Shay!" Jim sounded nearer.

"Shamus—kiss me!" It was the voice of the loveliness he held in his arms—water dripping over silver stones, silver stones with sharp jagged edges.

Shamus looked at her, and underneath her beauty there was an avid rapacious look. His throat began to throb agonizingly.

The desire died. Slowly, as dew drops from a flower, it fell away.

"Shay! Shay!" Jim's voice again.

"Here, Jim, here!" Shamus called back, the words tearing through his tortured throat.

"Coming!" The normality of Jim's voice recalled Shamus entirely to his senses.

"You'd better put something around you," he said, letting go his hold of Cecily Maltby, stepping back away from her, putting up his hands to loosen the tightness of her hair about his throat.

Then he gasped with amazement, for she stood in the moonlight with the green chiffon dress swirling about her feet like the rippling waves of the sea, no longer transparent, but exactly as it had been at dinner—and the hair which he had just

loosened from his throat was bound securely and sedately about her head.

His throat still ached from the constriction, and yet there were the braids coroneting her head. The red-gold hair that he had seen loose, enveloping her, that he had felt round his throat a second ago, was now braided neatly. It didn't seem possible, and yet looking at her Shamus saw a frustrated fury stamped on her face that filled him with terror and made him doubly glad to see Jim's six-feet-two emerge from behind one of the birch trees.

"My scarf is very warm," Cecily said, touching the green wrap, the anger gone from her face. She turned to Jim, saying casually, "Mr. O'Brien was worried for fear the night air would be too cool for me."

Shamus had seen her throw that wrap on the ground, and yet now it was about her shoulders.

"I must be going mad," he thought, "unless—witch-woman, vampire—what has happened to me tonight?"

"You're wanted on the phone, old chap—long distance. Your publisher. I rushed after you—he's holding the wire." Jim's sentences were disjointed. "You run back. I'll take Miss Maltby home."

"Thanks!" Shamus squeezed Jim's arm hard in appreciation. Then he turned to Cecily, "I'm sorry," he said.

She looked at him quizzically; then her lip curled a little.

"Are you?" she whispered, too low for Jim to hear, and for a second Shamus caught a whiff of the perfume again and felt a touch of that mad desire. "I shall see you soon, Shamus," she said louder, more confidently.

Then she turned and took Jim's arm. They walked off, and Shamus went stumbling back to the house in a kind of a daze, wondering if he ever wanted to see Cecily Maltby again.

THE party was still going on. Shamus' mind was in such a turmoil that he could not face the idea of seeing people, especially Trudy. With the memory of Cecily still in his mind, that glorious obscenity that made his pulses leap, he couldn't look into Trudy's clear eyes.

He went in by a little side door and made his way upstairs quietly, unseen. When he reached the room he shared with Jim, he threw himself down on the bed. His head ached, his throat throbbed; he couldn't see, he couldn't think; he could only remember Cecily's white body gleaming in the moonlight, her cloud of red-gold hair, her outstretched arms.

Presently he heard the door open and shut—and there was Jim standing over him.

"God, man, what's happened to your neck?"

Shamus staggered up and went across the room toward the mirror. With his dinner jacket he had worn a low turned-down collar; above it was a fiery red line that ran, so far as he could see in the mirror, completely around his neck. He put his hand up to it. The skin was smooth and cool to the touch, but the red line was there, about an inch wide, flaming against the tan of his throat, just where Cecily Maltby's hair had been wound about his neck.

Suddenly the far corner of his mind clicked again. "It's the Witch's Mark!" he screamed, and tumbled over on the floor at Jim's feet.

WHEN Shamus came to, Jim was bathing his head with a towel wrung out in cold water.

"Is it still there?" he asked.

"It doesn't rub off, if that's what you mean. I tried," Jim answered grimly. Then he helped Shamus into a big armchair. "If I'd known what I was letting

you in for, I'd have left you in New York."

"It might have been better," Shamus admitted. "You came just in time tonight."

"I had a hunch. Of course, you know I made up that story of the phone call, but anyway it worked. Now, suppose you tell me all about it." He pointed to the mark on his friend's neck.

Shamus was feeling more normal now, more Shay O'Brien and less Shamus the farmer's lad. He told Jim everything, every small detail that he could remember, and when he'd finished he could see that Jim was perfectly bewildered. Shamus didn't wonder—he was all mixed up himself.

"What do you make of it?" Jim asked.

"I suppose it might be a case of mental suggestion, that I saw what she wanted me to see. It must have been that—she wouldn't have had time to braid her hair between the time you called and——"

"I always thought she was a witch," Jim remarked truculently.

"There aren't any witches now——"

"There were. Anything that was, still can be. You said yourself it was a witch's mark." He pointed to the mark again.

"I didn't say that—Shamus, the farmer's lad, said it. He knows all about it." Shamus spoke slowly as though he was searching for words. "See here, Jim, I believe I was the Shamus in the legend. In fact, I *know* I was. Reincarnation—or if you won't have that, perhaps it was ancestral memories. There's a man who has a theory that our ancestral memories are buried deep in the unused parts of our brains. It may be the farmer's lad was an ancestor whose memories were born with me; or it may be I am Shamus himself come again, reborn just as she is reborn. Or perhaps she never died—witch-women don't die!"

"You seem to know a lot about this." Jim watched Shamus closely.

"I don't really. I'm only groping in the dark, but I must talk while I can. This is the first time I've been really normal since I saw her. I'm afraid it won't last. See here, Jim, we've got to fight her, otherwise I'll lose my soul. The far-off corner of my brain told me that. Wasn't there something, somewhere, about witches—succubæ—eating up spirits to make them strong?"

"My God! Like the orchid luring in the flies for food!"

"Like that. I may be crazy, but I believe that if I had kissed her to seal the bargain, as she put it, my spirit would have been drawn into hers, my body would have died. Probably that's the reason for this." Shamus touched the mark on his throat.

"It makes sense, if you're goofy to start with!" Jim paced up and down. Suddenly he stopped short. "What did you mean at dinner when you busted up her story of the legend, with the talk about a bargain with a witch-woman?"

"I don't know. That's one of the memories, ancestral or actual. It didn't finish. There's something wrong with the legend as she tells it. She's twisted it for her own reasons. I know that much. Despite the red-gold hair and the swan-like arms, Cecily wasn't Deidre — Deidre — Deidre——" Shamus' voice died away as that far corner of his memory began to wake again, to try to tell him——

THE door opened. "Did you call me, Shay?" Trudy was standing on the threshold, Trudy with her gallant head held high, her sweet lips curving in a smile, and love shining from her eyes. "I thought I heard you call me as I came along the hall."

Shamus sprang up, drew her into the room, held her two hands close.

"Trudy," he said slowly, "Trudy, you are Deidre."

She looked amazed; then her eyes widened in horror as she saw the mark on his neck. Behind Shamus, Jim motioned to her to be quiet.

"Trudy," Shamus went on, "you saved me once before. Will you save me again?"

"Of course, Shay, of course." She spoke soothingly, as one might speak to a sick child.

Now Shamus knew the truth of the legend. He knew why Cecily had twisted it, and he knew the depth of his danger. But about his neck was the witch's mark and in his ears the faint singing he had heard in his vision of the meadow; a faint scent of strange unforgettable perfume was drifting through his nostrils—soon it would permeate his being again. He knew that, and he knew, too, that there was little time—so little time!

"Trudy," he cried, "Trudy—take me in your arms—hold me fast!"

Beside Trudy he could see Cecily Maltby standing, her body gleaming whitely through the transparent green chiffon, her red-gold hair floating about her like a cloud, her milk-white arms extended toward him.

"Trudy, if you love me, take me—save me! Trudy, for God's sake——" Shamus heard his own voice almost as though it were not a part of him.

The perfume was stronger now; it was deadening the part of his brain that could think, shutting the door of the far corner that was striving to save him.

Cecily's voice, like deep waters falling on silver stones, like golden temple bells, ruffled by perfumed breezes, like soft rose petals falling on emerald grass, came to him.

"Shamus, Shamus — just one kiss to seal the bargain—just one! You remember——"

He did remember, and he knew that while there was still life and death and the world continued to revolve he would always remember. He took a step toward Cecily. He couldn't see Trudy any more; he could only see the loveliness that waited, arms outstretched, bidding him come to her with honeyed magic in her tones. He touched her, as he had touched her before, felt her white arms twine themselves about his neck. In another minute he would touch her lips — she would be all his. Once again desire swept over him—desire that must be satisfied before it destroyed him utterly.

He forgot everything but that consuming desire. He wanted more than even life itself to kiss those red, red lips.

All at once he felt himself being pulled back from those milk-white arms, away from the red, red lips. He heard another voice — Trudy's voice — saying, "Shay, Shay, my darling! Shay, I love you—I love you!"

He struggled to release himself from this new hold. He wanted to lose himself entirely in Cecily's arms.

"Come to me, Shamus," Cecily was whispering. "I can open the door to unspeakable delights, unbearable joys. I will give you myself, myself, Shamus—Shamus——"

Other arms were around his neck, strong, sun-tanned arms, and a lithe muscular figure was between him and the evil loveliness. It was Trudy holding Shamus fast, Trudy pressing herself against him, kissing his eyes so he could no longer see Cecily, and Trudy's voice, warmly normal, crying, "Shay, Shay, my darling, I love you — I love you — kiss me — kiss *me*——" so that he could no longer hear the melodious voice, though the last notes of the music still vibrated through his brain.

The loveliness grew less distinct as Trudy became more tangible. Still he

fought against Trudy, for the desire for the loveliness was driving him mad.

"Come to me, Shamus—Shamus!" He could still hear the magic voice, but it was very faint, more like the echo of golden bells than the actual chiming, and the loveliness was far away, a vision dimly seen through mist.

A command came to him from Cecily; clear and sharp it rang in his brain, her thoughts speaking to his. "Kill that woman, then you can come to me—then I can be yours." And his hands went to Trudy's throat because the desire that was ravaging him must be appeased — the loveliness must be his no matter what the cost.

As he pressed his hands about Trudy's neck, he could see the loveliness more plainly, smiling triumphantly. And then Trudy with a last desperate effort pulled his face to hers and set her lips on his, her fresh young lips, although already the pressure of his hands on her throat was cruel.

Trudy's lips held his, and through them her spirit reached out to the spirit of Shamus.

He forgot the loveliness of Cecily Maltby; his hands loosened, fell away from Trudy's throat. He held Trudy in his arms drinking of her sweetness, her love allaying the desire that Cecily's evil loveliness had aroused.

Suddenly Shamus realized it was Trudy he loved—Trudy who loved him—that they belonged to each other. There was no longer desire, or perfume, no longer the singing music. He looked up: the evil loveliness was gone. Cecily Maltby, the witch-woman, had been conquered by love.

TRUDY went limp. As she did so, Shamus was aware that Jim was beside them. Jim took Trudy and laid her on the bed.

"Is she——" Shamus couldn't say the word "dead" — he could hardly move. He was weak and trembling with the emotion he had lived through. "Have I killed her?" he cried.

Jim looked down at the bed. "Trudy's all right, she's only fainted. She'll come to in a minute."

Shamus began to speak, words rushing from his mouth like newly freed waters that had been dammed up for a long time. "Trudy was Deidre. When her father put us out with the ban upon us, we roamed the kingdom looking for food and drink and a place to live." He had to tell Jim the things that the far corner of his mind had revealed to him, tell them before they were lost again, for the door was shutting now into that corner of his mind and Shamus knew intuitively it would never open again.

"Everyone shunned us, afraid to help; so we went to the forest to live. But we could not find food. Even animals were against us—the King's curse had been a wide one. I could only defend Deidre from their onslaughts, give her water from a brook and some berries that grew near by.

"Deidre weakened, she grew ill. I begged her to return to her father, to leave me, but she would not. Then one day while Deidre was asleep, came a woman with red-gold hair and lush rounded breasts who said she was of the fairy folk and that she would take us to the Land of Heart's Desire, and the only price I had to pay was to kiss her now, and once again when she asked me to. It seemed simple enough. I kissed her lips, and she took Deidre and me to a wonderful land where everything was truly as our hearts desired. We saw no one, but all our needs were satisfied and we wanted nothing but each other.

"Deidre grew strong again and we were happy; only all the time I remem-

bered the magic of the fairy woman's kiss and knew I would be glad when she came to claim the rest of the bargain—the second kiss I had promised.

"Deidre knew there was something on my mind, and being a woman as well as a Princess she made me tell her. When I did, she shrank back in horror, for she said that the woman was not of the fairies who were good and kind, and would ask no payment—the woman was a witch-woman and if I kissed her the second time I would lose my soul; that we must leave this pleasant land before she came again.

"I laughed at her fears, but when she wept I said that we would go. Just at that moment the woman with the red-gold hair and lush rounded breasts appeared beside us. 'You made a bargain, Shamus the farmer's lad, and I have come to claim my kiss,' she said.

"I remembered the first kiss, and desire for her ran high in my heart. 'I am ready to pay.' I moved toward her outstretched arms.

" 'No, No!' cried Deidre. 'You shall not!' — and she ran between us and pressed her lips against the woman's, and fell down dead from the force that was in them, the force that was ready to take my soul.

"Deidre's soul it did not take, for she had only been kissed once; but she was dead, the beautiful Princess who had left her throne for the farmer's lad, and my heart was dead with her.

"I looked at the woman, and the desire for her was gone. I saw behind the loveliness that was hers, and I knew her for a witch. So standing there, with Deidre's body at my feet, I cursed the witch-woman, cursed her with the curse of the undying—that she could never find food, that she would grow hungry through the ages longing for my soul, unable to attain it.

"She looked at me with a glowering hate. 'Well is it for you that the second kiss must be given, not taken,' she said, 'or your soul would feel mine this moment. But if I must wait until you come again to feed my hunger, then you must go quickly so you can return quickly. I do not like to wait.'

"And she stretched out her hand and whispered a name—and I, Shamus the farmer's lad, fell across the dead body of the Princess Deidre, my love!"

SHAMUS stopped talking. The room was very still. Then Jim asked, "You remembered all that?"

"Yes, in that second before I asked Trudy's help. What happened in between I don't know; my memory didn't go beyond this, but evidently the witch-woman, Cecily, has lost some of her power with the years—she didn't blast me to annihilation this time." Shamus sighed thankfully. Life still looked good to him. "She didn't tell the truth of the legend, either. Obviously she wanted me to think her Deidre, to give her the second kiss freely."

"I caught one glimpse of her as she stood beside Trudy. I don't wonder you wanted to kiss her. Do you think she'll come back?" Jim's voice was strained.

"I don't think so. I think at least for now she's vanquished by my love for Trudy, but——"

"We'll take no chances," said Trudy from the bed, sitting up. "Come on, Jim, you're going to be best man at a wedding."

"Now?" he exclaimed.

"Right now. We'll motor over to that place where you can be married at any time. I heard everything you two said, and I believe it. I'm not going to risk losing Shay, now that I've got him."

"She's right, Jim. Let's go." Shamus

took Trudy's hand and helped her to her feet.

Jim caught a scarf from the bureau. "Better put this around your neck—the mark's still there."

"The witch's mark!" Shamus shuddered; all the more need for haste.

They went down the back way, although the house was dark and everyone was already sound asleep.

As they drove up before the minister's door, the clock on the dashboard said four o'clock. They woke up a kindly old man who agreed to officiate if they'd get a license from the Justice of the Peace who lived next door.

As the minister said, "Those whom God hath joined together let no man put asunder," Shamus thought he heard a faint sigh like the rustle of leaves in a dying wind. Trudy must have heard it too, for she clasped his hand tighter.

They were quiet as they drove away. Shamus felt an utter peace pervading him—all the strange madness of the last two days was over. Trudy was his. At last Shamus, the farmer's lad, had regained his Princess.

As they turned into Ridgefield, Trudy said to Jim, who was driving, "Go past Cecily's house."

"But why?" Jim remonstrated. "Haven't you had enough for one night?"

"I have a feeling that I *must*," Trudy answered.

"If you're going to get feelings too and be psychic——" Jim groaned.

"Go ahead," Shamus told him; "I'm not afraid—not now." He looked into Trudy's upturned eyes that reflected the love in his.

"I wish Margery were here. All this romance is hard on me," Jim grumbled as he speeded up the car.

Neither Trudy nor Shamus bothered to answer. They were very busy with each other.

After a while Jim announced as he slowed up, "There's the house." Then his voice became puzzled, "Why, look, the front door's swinging open!"

He was right. Through the iron gates set in the wall, they could see the front door swinging back and forth.

"I'm going in," Trudy said.

Jim stopped the car near the path that led up to the house, which stood quite a way back from the road.

"Now, see here, this has been a hard night. Twice we've snatched Shay back from something—witch-woman or—what—I don't know. The whole thing may be as Shay doped it out, or it could be suggestion. Miss Cecily Maltby may have fallen for Shay in a big way, and be a hypnotist de luxe. But whichever it is, why jump into the lion's den?" There was anxiety in Jim's voice.

Trudy smiled. "The mark has gone from Shay's throat."

"It has!" both men exclaimed together.

"It faded while we were being married. I was watching it. There's no danger now, Jim. I know there isn't—and I must go in."

Shamus got out and held the car door open.

"Come on Jim, Trudy's right. We may as well get this settled now."

As they walked up the path toward that swinging door, Shamus was afraid of what the blackness behind it might reveal, and although he knew he was free of the witch's mark, he dreaded seeing Cecily Maltby again.

On the porch Jim threw the beam from a pocket flashlight into the dark hallway. It was empty. There was not a stick of furniture in the place. The

house was barren, stripped of any sign of life.

"I don't understand. I suppose people can move in the middle of the night, but the place was furnished when I brought her home—lovely old antique furniture in the hall," there was awe in Jim's voice. "Now there's nothing—it's as though it had never been lived in."

"Perhaps it never was," Shamus said slowly.

"But I've been here! It was like any house, and we all saw Cecily!" Trudy clung to me.

"We won't see her again, darling," Shamus whispered. "Between us we've driven her away, back to Witch Land, wherever it may be."

Across the air floated just the vaguest reminder of the unforgettable perfume, as though it was a farewell from Cecily Maltby to Shamus. He knew it as such. The witch's mark had gone from his throat, but would the mark she had made across his soul ever vanish? he wondered. Would the remembrance of her haunt him until in some future life they met again and fought the batle over—and if they did, how would it end?

He felt Trudy tremble against him. "Come, dear," he said gently. "We must go now—and we must forget Cecily Maltby."

Shamus said that, and he meant it, but as he guided Trudy out of the door toward the new life that was to be theirs, he wondered if he could ever quite forget Cecily Maltby, the witch-woman, with her red-gold hair and her lush rounded breasts.

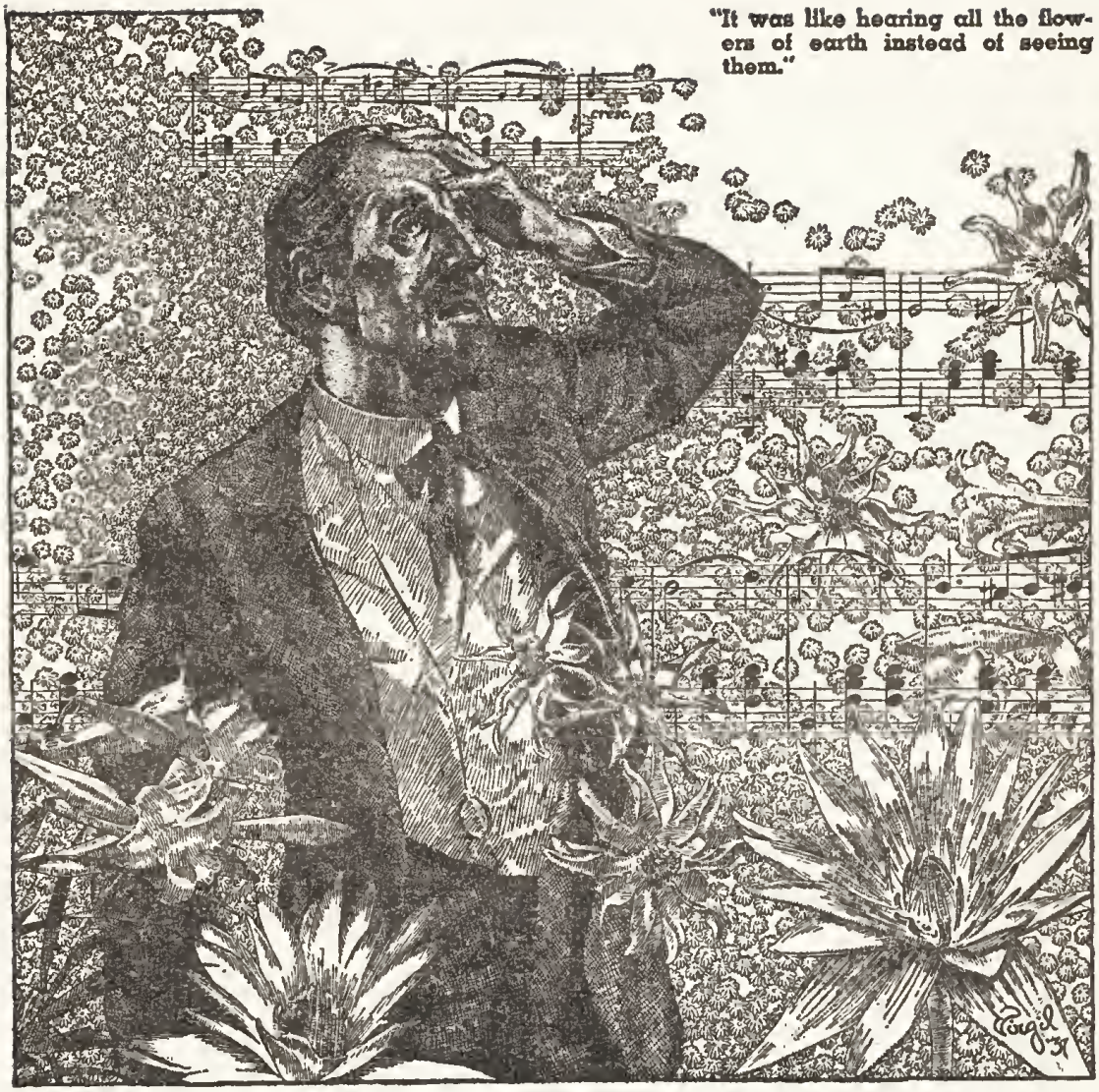
Despite the happiness he has found with Trudy, it is a question that has never been answered.

The Canal

By H. P. LOVECRAFT

Somewhere in dream there is an evil place
Where tall deserted buildings crowd along
A deep, black, narrow channel, reeking strong
Of frightful things, whence oily currents race.
Lanes with old walls half meeting overhead
Wind off to streets one may or may not know,
And feeble moonlight sheds a spectral glow
Over long rows of windows, dark and dead.

There are no footfalls, and the one soft sound
Is of the oily water as it glides
Under stone bridges, and along the sides
Of its deep flume, to some vague ocean bound.
None lives to tell when that stream washed away
Its dream-lost region from the world of day.



"It was like hearing all the flowers of earth instead of seeing them."

The House of Living Music

By EDMOND HAMILTON

A strange weird-scientific story with a tragic denouement—about a great composer who could re-create all living things in sound

IF I HAD only killed Harriman on that first night! Yes, I know it would have been murder, but the diabolical thing that Harriman did was worse than any murder. He was a great composer —the world will never know just how great. He was also a devil from hell.

But at that time I, a young newspaper music critic, had only admiration for Harriman. He was considered one of the greatest living composers. His Mechanical Symphony, with its mad blend of street noises and riveters, had started a whole new school of music. Then he had

upset the academies again with what he called "mathematical" music. He always seemed striving to achieve some impossible musical ideal that haunted his brain.

That night I met him in the lobby of Carnegie Hall. Inside, the Philharmonic had just launched into the last movement of Beethoven's Ninth, and I was hurrying toward that exultant shout of strings when I bumped into Harriman, going out.

I muttered a hasty excuse, and then I suddenly recognized him and stopped. It was Harriman, all right, his tall, thin figure clad as usual in rusty black, his unruly, thick gray hair falling over his brilliant gray eyes and taut face. He *looked* like a genius, Harriman did.

I exclaimed, "You're not leaving now, surely? Don't you want to hear the finale?"

Harriman said, "Hello, Raymer." Then he made an impatient, disgusted movement with his hand, toward the distant music. "No, I don't want to hear it. It's a confession—Beethoven's confession of his ultimate failure as a composer."

His gray eyes were bitter and scornful now as we stood there, listening to the chorus' great song that blended with the tumultuous instruments in the conclusion of Beethoven's stupendous work.

"Human voices," said Harriman bitterly. "That's what Beethoven came down to in the end—his attempts to create pure, perfect music an admitted failure."

"What do you mean by perfect music?" I demanded.

Unconsciously, in my interest, I had fallen into step with Harriman and we had strolled together out into the warm spring night.

Harriman's thin hand gesticulated as he explained. "I mean music that perfectly expresses things in sound. Take a flower, for instance. A painter can reproduce that flower exactly for your eyes by his colors. A scientist can reproduce it exactly for your mind, by his exact classifications and measurements. Why shouldn't a musician be able to reproduce the flower exactly for your ear in sound, in music?"

"It's an odd theory," I commented. "Sounds like a sort of sublimated program music."

"Program music, hell!" snarled Harriman angrily. "You wait until I——"

He shut up suddenly, and I could not get another word out of him that evening. I left him at his apartment building, but I found pretexts to call on him during the next few days, and endeavored to draw him out further about his oddly interesting theory.

It was no use, for Harriman was not often there and when he was, he refused to be pumped. Yet my time wasn't wasted, for in my first visit I'd discovered his daughter. Lina Harriman became a greater attraction for me there than her father's radical musical ideas.

SHE was a small girl, with bright yellow hair, a tip-tilted nose and blue eyes dancing with love of fun. I think I fell in love with laughing, gay little Lina from the first. Harriman was too preoccupied to notice, though what so absorbed him I did not know, at first.

Lina told me, a few weeks after I'd first met her. "I can't understand it, Harold," she said perplexedly. "Father is going in for scientific research."

I was amazed. "A first-class composer like Harriman dabbling in science? Why in the world should he?"

She shook her bright head, puzzled. "I can't guess—he will tell me nothing. But you know that he was a brilliant stu-

dent of physics before he took up music, and for the last months he has spent all his time down at the laboratories of Manhattan University, experimenting. He says that it's only a hobby of his."

"Strange hobby for a man whose whole life-interest seemed to be music," I commented. And I resolved to ask Harriman about it the next time I called.

Well, I didn't ask him, for the next time I visited the apartment, Harriman was gone. So was Lina. The apartment was empty and I learned from the building superintendent that the two had moved out only two days before.

He didn't know where they had gone. Neither could I find any forwarding address through the post office. Harriman's music publishers were similarly ignorant —they didn't know the composer had left town until I told them.

I was surprized, and a little hurt, for I had thought that Lina and I were coming to an understanding, and couldn't comprehend why she would leave like that without a word. I thought, though, that she'd soon write from wherever they had gone, but the weeks went by and she didn't.

She and her father had simply disappeared as though the earth had swallowed them. I scoured around New York musical circles a good bit, without ever finding a clue to their whereabouts.

As a final resort I tried Manhattan University, in whose physical laboratories Harriman had been dabbling with research. The professor of physics there, a spectacled, white-haired Teuton, remembered Harriman quite well.

"He was my pupil years ago—I expected him to become a brilliant physicist," he told me. "Then he disappointed me—he turned to music. A fine scientist wasted, just like that." He added, "He came back here a few months ago and asked to use my laboratories for some private research. Of course I let him."

"You don't know what kind of research?" I asked, a little curiously.

The scientist shook his head. "No, he was quite secretive. It seemed that he was conducting some experiments in acoustics, but I could not gather their nature."

"And you've no idea where he and his daughter could have gone?"

He hadn't. I thanked him and left, disappointed and wondering if Harriman had not become a little queer mentally.

It certainly looked like it, for a composer of his reputation, a man of his devotion to music, to fling himself suddenly into abstruse scientific research for weeks, and then abruptly disappear. I told myself, too, that if Lina had wanted me to know where she was, she would have written me. She hadn't, so I might as well forget her.

But it wasn't so easy for me to forget laughing little Lina. Only now that she was gone did I discover how much I had come to care for her. The withdrawal of her lilting, sunny being from my life left it flat and tasteless, and I followed my routine around the concert halls and operas of New York without much enthusiasm, in the following months.

DURING all those months I had not one word from Lina or her father, and never heard from anyone in musical circles any news of Harriman's whereabouts. He and Lina might just have dropped out of existence. Then, a full year after their disappearance, I was astounded to receive a telegram from Harriman.

It had been sent from a village in

western Massachusetts, and I read and re-read it.

"Raymer, I'm not dead as you may have thought. I've been working up here, and I have achieved my ideal of perfect music. If you will come up here, you shall hear it."

Lina! That was all I thought of when I read Harriman's queer message. I didn't care at that moment what Harriman had been doing in music. I was only overjoyed to discover at last where he and Lina were living.

Early the next morning, I was in my roadster on the highway north. And as I drove through the spring-green Berkshires that afternoon, I could hardly wait to reach Lina. I still couldn't understand why she had not written me, but told myself that doubtless her father had forbidden it, in his desire for seclusion.

The village from which his wire had come was a neat little community of white frame houses, tucked in the big hills west of Greenfield. There I learned without trouble where Harriman was living—a hilltop house a few miles out of the village. It was late afternoon by the time I steered my car around a winding dirt road into sight of the place.

Harriman's house stood brooding black against the red embers of sunset, up on the low, domed hill. It was an old stone Colonial farmhouse, whose grounds looked shabby and ill cared for. I stopped my car in its drive, wondering whether gay, fun-loving Lina had liked this isolated place.

My heart pounded with eager anticipation as I stood in the dusk on the veranda, ringing the bell. But when the door opened, my spirits were a little dashed, for it wasn't Lina who stood inside, but Harriman himself.

He had changed, in this year. His white face was thinner, looking more taut and strained than it had been, and his gray eyes, always brilliant, were burning now with some continuous inward excitement.

He smiled at me a little oddly and said, "I hoped you'd come, Raymer. I was almost sure you would."

"Where's Lina?" I demanded eagerly. "Does she know I'm coming?"

Harriman made a brusk gesture. "Oh, Lina—she's not here."

"Not here?" I echoed, dismayed.

He shook his head. "No, she couldn't stand the loneliness out here. A month after we came, she left me and went down to live with an aunt of hers in North Carolina." He added, "Come on in, Raymer. Let me have your bag."

I was numb with disappointment as I followed him inside. Only now was I aware how eagerly I had looked forward to seeing Lina again. Harriman, however, appeared not to notice my dejection, as he conducted me into the living-room of the old house.

The room was in an unforgivably slovenly state from complete lack of care, dust lying thick on the floor and old-fashioned black furniture. It was quite evident that Harriman was living here alone.

He was rigid with repressed excitement as he told me now, "Raymer, you'll thank heaven you came here. For you, first of all men, are going to hear the greatest music ever produced on this earth—*my* music."

I said hesitatingly, "Yes, but Lina—I can't understand why she never wrote me from Carolina."

He exclaimed impatiently, "Oh, forget about Lina—haven't you any curiosity at all about my music?"

I tried to summon up an appearance of interest.

"Of course I'm curious, Harriman.

What have you been composing up here, anyway? Another symphony?"

He nodded slowly, his brilliant gray eyes fixed with an odd expression on mine. "You might call it that. You remember, Raymer, that I once told you my dream was to create music that would perfectly express anything, any object, in sound? Well, I've succeeded, and you're going to hear that music. Come along to my laboratory."

"Your laboratory?" I repeated, surprized.

He chuckled. "Yes, Raymer, this music isn't composed with pen and ruled paper. It is created by—but come on, and see for yourself."

I followed him along a dark corridor that led into the rear portion of the rambling old house. He led into a dark room, and when he had snapped on the lights, I saw that it really did look like a scientific laboratory.

There were various electrical generators and machines around the room, which meant nothing to a music critic like myself. There was also a sound-recording machine and a large phonograph, but the central object in the room was a big cubical metal chamber six feet high. This weird apparatus was open in front, and fastened outside one of its sides was a bank of big vacuum tubes connected to a resonator like a flat loud-speaker.

I said, "This is a queer kind of study for a composer."

Harriman laughed triumphantly. "Wait until you hear the music that has been created in this room."

He opened a big steel filing-case. I saw that it was full of black disks, phonograph records of the long-playing kind. They were not ordinary commercial records, though, for the only label on each one was a white sticker with a scrawled word in Harriman's writing.

HARRIMAN took out one of the records and placed it on the turntable of the large phonograph near me. Then he turned to me.

"This is one of the first pieces of music I created here, Raymer. It is a series of flowers, in music."

I said doubtfully, "You mean a descriptive suite something like Hadley's——"

"Hadley be damned!" he muttered. "This isn't a musical description of flowers—it's the flowers themselves, in music! Listen."

He started the phonograph. Out from the turning black disk welled music, strange music such as I had never heard before. Its notes did not seem to have been produced by any musical instrument known to man. They were purer, sweeter, clearer, than any sounds that man-made instruments could create. And they wove a weird, magic pattern of changing sound in the lamplit laboratory, music that brought with it to my ears and brain, inevitable sound-pictures of the blossoming plants of earth. Each separate drifting melodic phrase seemed to conjure up for me a different impression of flowers blooming from the soil.

There were shy, sweet, fluted melodies, fugitive and brief, that brought to my mind the wild, nodding violets and daisies. There were thrilling, full-voiced harmonies of gorgeous roses, cool, low songs of drooping orchids, flaring music of vivid poppy and hibiscus, sighing whisper of white lilies beside forest pools, and gay, climbing, clarinet-like notes that irresistibly suggested the waving cat-tails.

I listened enthralled, almost forgetting my disappointment over Lina's absence. It was like *hearing* all the flowers of earth instead of seeing them. As he played record after record, the cool drifting music brought before my eyes everything

that has root and seed and flower, all the life that climbs upward from the soil into the sunlight.

"Harriman, it's wonderful!" I cried. "It *is* music like no other ever composed before. But I can't understand on what instruments you produced it——"

"You will soon learn that," Harriman answered, his thin face smiling strangely. "There is more that I want you to hear first."

One record after another he brought from the cabinet and played. Enchanted, I listened, hearing music such as surely no one had ever listened to before, music perfectly expressive of the life of earth.

Strong, vibrating harmonies as of hushed reed-instruments that voiced the trees of the forest, the sturdy young elms and gnarled oaks and slender, graceful birches. Deep, solemn chords like the muttering of ancient bassoons, expressing in sound the rocks of earth itself, the eternal quartz and granite. Ringing, crystal bell-notes of shining forest spring and stream.

And the wild, moving life of earth welled out in the room in music, too. Swift, thrilling harmonies of the winged birds that dart in the sky; nervous, quick-tumbling music of the squirrels running in the branches, little orderly rhythms of tiny pattering brasses in complex counterpoint, that voiced the intricate life of hive and ant-hill; long, suave harmonies that brought before the eyes the silver fish poised in his dim, curving world. All the inanimate earth, and also its animate plant and animal life, poured forth in torrents of weird music.

Harriman finally stopped the phonograph, his eyes brilliant with triumph. "*Now* do you know what perfect music is, Raymer?"

I cried, "How in the world did you do it? How could you create music like that? It's as though you translated the rocks and birds and flowers themselves into music."

"That," said Harriman, "is just what I do."

I stared at him. "What do you mean?"

"Just what I said," he replied calmly. "Watch, Raymer."

He went to the big, cube-shaped apparatus, and touched certain switches on its control panel. The electrical mechanisms around the room broke into whining life. A flood of white radiance cascaded down from the top of the cube's interior, filling the hollow chamber with shining force. The great vacuum on the side began to sputter.

HARRIMAN took a red carnation from a vase of flowers, and tossed the blossom into the force-filled chamber. Then my eyes beheld an uncanny thing. The carnation began to *fade,* to disappear slowly. As though under that terrific flood of white force, its very substance was melting away.

And from the resonator outside the cubical chamber, at the same time, began to issue sounds. Music! Hushed, velvety, slow-climbing tones in languid rhythm, a smooth, slow harmony that perfectly expressed in sound the fading flower inside the cube!

The flower faded further, became almost invisible in its increasing tenuity. The velvety music from the resonator swelled louder. Then, as I watched frozenly, the carnation in the cube vanished altogether and the music ended.

I gasped, "Good Lord, it isn't possible that I've seen——"

Harriman nodded quietly. "Yes, Raymer. You have just seen solid matter transmuted into sound, a flower translated into music. I can do the same with any living or non-living matter."

And, to show me, he took a living rabbit from a cage in the corner, and tossed it also into the force-filled chamber.

I saw the furry little animal freeze motionless inside, as though petrified by the white force. It too began slowly to fade. And again from the resonator came music —different music.

Darting, quick little runs of jovial silvery notes in broken rhythm, a complex harmony that was a perfect sound-picture of the furred, furtive little thing inside the tube. The rabbit faded further, the music swelled quicker and louder. Then the little beast too had vanished, and with a last flutter of silver notes, the music ended.

I said hoarsely, "A flower—an animal—converted into pure sound!"

Harriman nodded again. "Just so was created all the music which you have heard, and which I have recorded as it issued from that apparatus. Everything I put into that cube beneath the changing force, flower or rock or bird or beast, has been transmuted into pure music which I have preserved on these records."

"But how?" I cried, stupefied. "The thing's not possible——"

Harriman's eyes glistened. "Yet I achieved it, Raymer—achieved my life ambition of creating music that does not *describe* a thing, but *is* that thing, turned into sound.

"It's simple enough, in principle. What is music, sound? A vibration in the air, is it not? And what is matter? A vibration in the ether, nothing more. Well, find a way to transfer that vibration from the ether to the air, and you have transmuted matter into sound, into music.

"That process does not offer great difficulties. After all, any ordinary radio can transfer etheric vibrations, the Hertzian waves which flash through the ether, into sound-vibrations. It is very little harder to convert the different etheric vibrations which are matter into sound-waves. This apparatus of mine does it easily. The more complex the matter, the more complex will be the sound, the music."

Harriman's face was gleaming with rapt devotion as he continued, "By this method, I am going to create the greatest symphony that will ever be heard. An Earth Symphony, containing the pure music of earth itself, its rocks and streams and flowers and birds and beasts. Out of the pure music preserved in these records, I shall assemble that Earth Symphony, the greatest musical work that will ever be heard in this world."

Stunned, I said, "But somehow this whole business seems unholy, uncanny——"

I asked with a sudden thought, "Is that why Lina left here? Because of this weird work of creation of yours?"

Harriman nodded impatiently. "Yes, Lina too thought that it was uncanny and didn't want to stay. I've been living here quite alone, and that's why I wired you to come, Raymer—I wanted someone to know what I have achieved."

The brooding brilliance in his eyes deepened. "But my great work here is nearly completed now. Soon I shall have arranged and assembled the pure music of these records into my Earth Symphony. When the world hears the records of that symphony, it will hear pure, perfect music for the first time."

He broke off, turning to me. "You look pretty dazed, Raymer, and tired too. We'll have some supper, and after a good night's sleep you'll be better able to appreciate what I'm doing."

I made no objection, but I ate little of the sketchy supper which Harriman prepared in the ill-kept kitchen. I was still extremely disappointed by Lina's ab-

sence, yet I could well understand now why she had left. There was something so strange about Harriman's fantastically created music that it repelled me in spite of its perfect beauty.

Later, as I lay in bed in the dark, musty chamber Harriman had assigned me, I found myself shivering a little when I heard faint, drifting music from his library. He was there, I knew, even this late, going over his records, listening to the music into which he had converted life itself.

THROUGH the dark house the weird music whispered to me where I lay in darkness. I heard again those cool, sweet harmonies of forest flowers, those mighty chords of the eternal rocks, the swift, rippling rhythms of winged birds and jovial, broken music of furtive forest beasts. The music stopped, and then it began again. But this time it was not any music that Harriman had played for me in the laboratory, but was new, different music that brought me bolt upright in bed, trembling as I listened.

A gay, dancing melody it was now, clearer and sweeter and more tender than any he had let me hear. It rose and fell like love and laughter themselves translated into silver sound.

Sweeter, stronger, swelled that silver melody, while I listened with a strange feeling clutching my heart. That exquisite, lilting music, it was like the laughing tenderness of a loving heart, like a bright-haired girl dancing in the sunlight, like——

Like Lina!

That hideous thought crashed into my brain like a dissonance of horror across the lilting notes.

I leaped wildly out of bed, snatched on my clothes and crept down the corridor toward the laboratory door. I was trembling like a harp-string as I paused outside that door.

From within, the gay, sweet music welled to a sheer climax of unearthly melody. A last phrase of exquisitely tender notes whispered to me. Then silence.

I crashed madly through the door. Harriman whirled from the big phonograph, his face a stiff white mask of alarm, and came toward me.

I thrust him reeling aside and ran to the phonograph, peered with wild eyes at the black record that lay on it. The label on the disk bore a single written word: *"Lina."*

"Lina!" I screamed it aloud like a maniac at Harriman as he stumbled to his feet. "You did the thing to her, too—translated her too into music!"

"Yes, I did." Harriman's stiff white face was strange, and in his voice there was a ghastly note of unhuman pride. He had drawn a pistol from his pocket and was covering me with it.

His voice swelled, his eyes blazed. "Yes, I put Lina into the cube and transmuted her also into music—music that will live for ever. I loved her, do you hear? Yet I did not hesitate to do that, for as a mere human being of flesh and blood she would have died within a few score of years. But as music, imprisoned eternally in that record, she is undying in beauty!

"She will live on always as part of my immortal Earth Symphony. And you too will be part of that great symphony, Raymer! That is the reason why I had you come here. For my Earth Symphony, to be really complete, must have in it not only the rocks and streams, the birds and flowers and beasts, it must also have in it human life, human love, man and woman who love each other. The music that was Lina is already recorded and preserved. And you, Raymer, shall now

become music likewise and take your place with her in my symphony."

And Harriman, keeping his pistol aimed at my heart, strode toward the control panel of his diabolical apparatus. The switches clicked, the white forces streamed down into the interior of the tube.

He rasped, "You will step into the cube, Raymer. Otherwise——"

He stopped. For by now the wild grief that had frozen me suddenly dissolved into mad rage as I stared at the black record in which was prisoned the music that had been the girl I loved.

Gone, transmuted into silver melody, lost to me for ever! Lina——

I shrieked, "By heaven, your devil's symphony will never be heard by the world! I'll destroy it—it and you——"

And in my crazy rage I leaped at the filing-case and tore out the neat stacks of black records, sent them crashing to the floor in showers of broken black bits.

Harriman shrieked and shot. I felt the bullets tear into my shoulder but in my mad wrath I did not even experience any pain. And as I tore out the last records and smashed them, Harriman leaped at me.

His eyes blazed awful agony and his hands clutched my throat to choke me. He too had gone mad at sight of the destruction of his work. We wrestled there, two crazily struggling men in the lamplit laboratory.

"Lina!" I kept shouting as I struggled, that strangling horror still utterly possessing my soul.

I tore his hands from my throat, forced him back across the room, toward the devilish cube inside which the white transmuting forces flamed. I thrust him with a wild push inside the cube!

Harriman's thin body froze rigid in there beneath the terrific forces. Pain, awful pain, leaped into his stricken eyes. His petrified body began to waver, to fade. And as he faded, sound, music, swelled out from the resonator at the side of the cube. Music into which Harriman's mind and body were being translated! Thunderous, crashing chords of vaulting and collapsing superhuman aspirations. Mad bellowing as of brasses trumpeting soaring ambitions that had failed. Wild music such as no man had ever heard before, thundering on my ears as Harriman's frozen body faded and faded, until at last his misty form was gone, and with a last, long wail of bitter agony, the music had ended.

I was only dimly conscious. But I reeled forward and with great blows smashed the tubes and apparatus of the cube, then staggered to the phonograph and snatched from it the black record with Lina's name upon it, the only one that had escaped destruction. And with it clutched to my breast, I stumbled blindly and drunkenly out of that house accursed.

THE world never knew what became of Harriman and Lina. When I drove unsteadily into the village in the gray dawn after that hideous night, I told only that I had found them missing from the old house. The signs of destruction in the house led local authorities to believe that intruders bent on robbery had killed Harriman and his daughter and disposed of their bodies. I let them think so, for I knew that if I told the truth they would deem me mad.

I am no longer a music critic, for I can no longer bear to hear music of any sort. But there is one exception. That is the record that I took with me

from Harriman's house, the black disk that imprisons for ever the tender, wonderful melody into which was transmuted the girl I loved.

That music I hear each night. I start that record playing, and as the dancing melody swells out, gay and clear and sweet, Lina is again beside me in the dark room—little Lina, laughing beside me in the lilting, exquisite music that was her being. She will be with me thus while I live.

Roads

By SEABURY QUINN

A mystic story of the yuletide and a barbarian from the North in the Roman army—a reverent tale of the Crucifixion, and Pontius Pilate, and a hetaera from the house of Mary the Magdalene

1. The Road to Bethlehem

FIRES of thornbush crackled in the courtyard of the sari, camels sighed and grunted in their kneeling-places, horses munched dry grass. Around the empty stew-pots met licked the crumbs of rice and grease from fingers and brushed them from their beards, then drew their sheepskin cloaks about them and lay down on the kidney stones to sleep; all but the little group of three who huddled round a charcoal brazier in a corner by the horse-lines. They were talking treason:

"Wah, these be evil days for Jacob's children; they are as the tribes in Egypt were, only they have neither Moses nor a Joshua! . . . The tax of a denarius on every household, and each one forced to journey to his birthplace. . . . Now they slay our children in their swaddling-bands. . . . This Romans' puppet that sits on the throne, this unbelieving Greek!"

"But Judas will avenge our wrongs; men say that he is that Messiah we have waited for so long. He will rouse his mighty men of valor out of Galilee and sweep the Roman tyrant in the sea——"

"*Sh-s-sh,* Joachim, hold thy babble; that one yonder is belike a spy!"

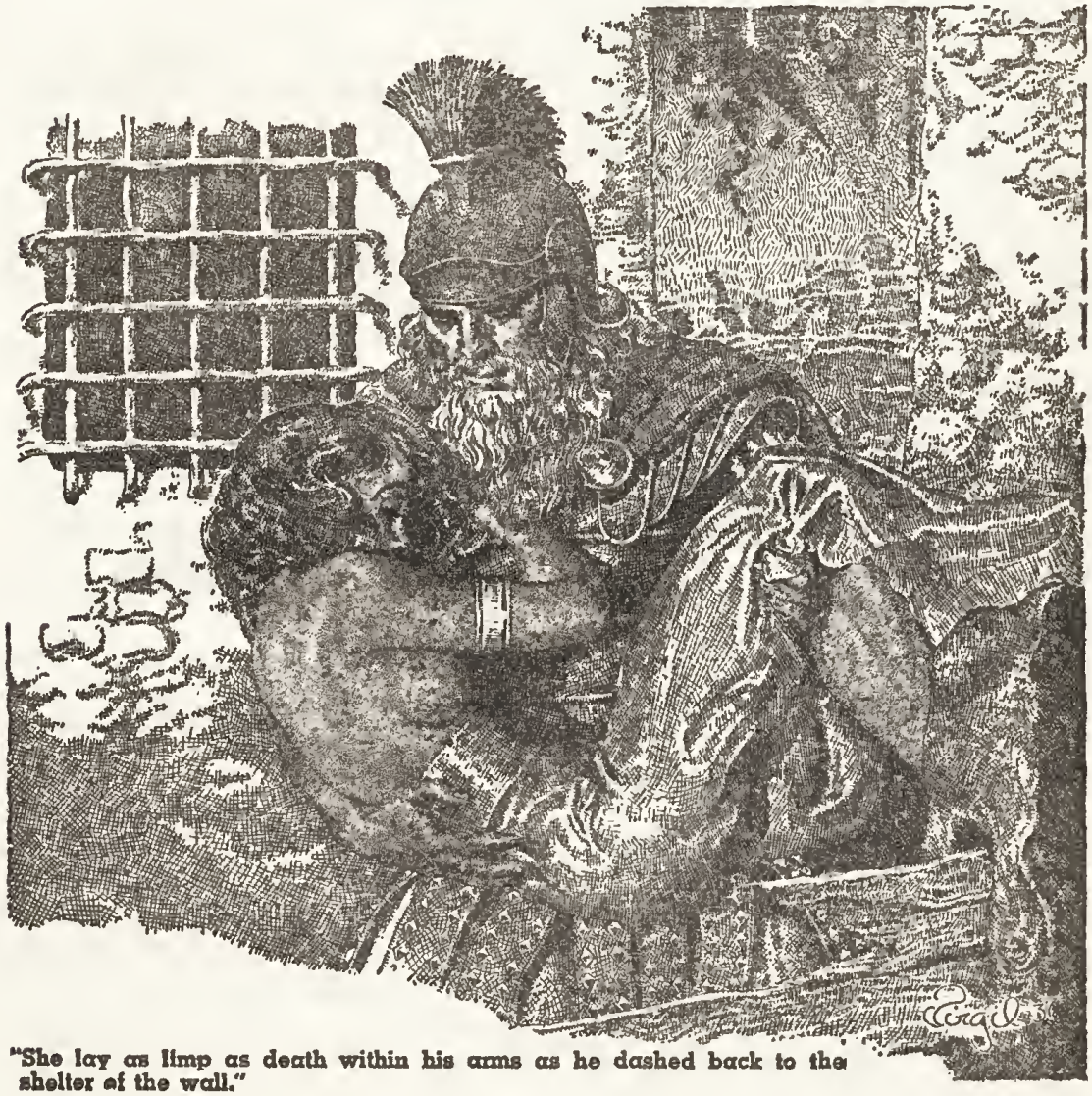
With one accord the men turned toward the figure hunched in sleep before a dying fire of thornbush. Flaxen-haired, fair-skinned, he drooped above the whitening embers, his cloak of ruddy woolen cloth draped loosely round his shoulders, the sinking firelight picking out soft highlights on the iron cap that crowned his flowing, braided hair. A man of mighty stature, one of the gladiators kept by Herod in his school for athletes that was constantly replenished with recruits from German provinces or the Slavic tribes beyond the Danube.

"What does the godless dog so far from Herod's kennels?"

"The Lord of Zion knows, but if he go back to the Holy City and tell the tale of what he has heard here, three crosses

will crown Golgotha before another sun has set," Joachim interrupted softly, and dropping to his knees unloosed the dagger at his girdle as he began to worm his way across the courtyard flints. In all the country round about Jerusalem there was no hand more skilful with the knife than that of Joachim the cut-purse. Softly as the cat that stalks a mouse he crept across the stones, paused and bore his weight on one hand while he drew the other back . . . a single quick thrust underneath the shoulder-blade, slanting downward to the heart, then the gurgling, blood-choked cry, the helpless thrashing of the limbs, the fight for breath, and—perhaps the sleeping gladiator had a wallet stuffed with gold, or even copper. They were well paid, these fighting dogs from Herod's kennels. The firelight glinted on the plunging knife, and——

On the golden bracelet on the Northman's arm. "Ho, little brother of a rat, would you bite a sleeping man," the giant's bell-like voice boomed, "and one who never did thee any harm? For shame!" White lines sprang into prominence against his sun-gilt skin; his mighty muscles tightened, and a yelp of pain came from Joachim as the knife dropped



"She lay as limp as death within his arms as he dashed back to the shelter of the wall."

from his unnerved fingers and a crackling like the breaking of a willow twig told where his wrist-bones snapped beneath the other's sudden grip.

"Have mercy, mighty one," he begged. "I thought——"

"Aye, that thou didst, thou niddering craven," came the answer. "Thou thought me sleeping, and like the thief thou art, were minded to have had my purse and life at once. Now get thee gone from out my sight, thou and those hangdog friends of thine, before I crush that puny neck between these hands of mine."

He spread his hands, great, well-shaped, white-skinned hands trained in the wrestler's art and in the wielding of the sword, and his strong, white fingers twitched as though already they felt yielding flesh between them. With a frightened skirking, as though they were in truth the rats the stranger named them, the three conspirators slunk out, Joachim the cut-purse nursing his broken right wrist in the crook of his left arm, his two companions crowding close beside him as they sought to gain the exit of the courtyard before the giant Northling reconsidered and repented of his mercy.

The blond-haired stranger watched them go, then swung his cloak back from his shoulders. Beneath the cape he wore from neck to knee a tunic of fine woolen stuff dyed brilliant red and edged about the bottom with embroidery of gold. A corselet of tanned bullhide set with iron studs was buckled round his torso; his feet were shod with buskins of soft leather laced about his legs with rawhide thongs; from the girdle at his waist on one side hung a double-bladed ax, on the other a soft-leather pouch which clinked with a metallic sound each time he moved. Between his shoulders swung a long two-handed sword with a wide, well-tempered blade, pointed and double-edged. He was brawny and broad-shouldered, his hair was braided in two long, fair plaits which fell on either side his face beneath his iron skullcap. Like his hair, his beard was golden as the ripening wheat, and hung well down upon his breastplate. Yet he was not old; the flaxen beard was still too young to have felt shears, his lightly sun-tanned skin was smooth and fair, his sea-blue eyes were clear and youthful. He glanced up at the star-flecked heavens, then drew his cloak about him.

"The dragon marches low upon the skies," he muttered; "'tis time I set forth on my journey if I would reach the homeland ere the winter tempests howl again."

THE road was thick with travelers, mostly peasants on their way to market, for the day began with sunrise, and the bartering would start within an hour. Hucksters of every sort of article, fanciful as well as necessary, pressed along the way, tugging at halters, now entreating, now berating their pack-animals to greater speed. A patrol of soldiers passed him, and their decurion raised his hand in greeting.

"*Salve,* Claudius! Art thou truly going back to that cold land of thine? By Pluto, I am sorry that thou leavest us; many is the silver penny I have won by betting on those fists of thine, or on thy skill at swordplay!"

The Northman smiled amusedly. Though he had been among the Romans since before his beard was sprouted, their rendering of his simple Nordic name of Klaus to Claudius had never failed to rouse his laughter.

"Yea, Marcus, I am soothly gone, this time. Five years and more have I served Herod's whim, and in that time I've learnt the art of war as few can know it. With sword and ax and mace, or with bare hands or cestus have I fought until methinks I've had my fill of fighting.

Now I go back to till my fathers' acres, perchance to go a-viking, if the spirit moves me, but hereafter I will fight for my own gain or pleasure, not to the humor of another."

"The gods go with the, then, Barbarian," the Roman bade. "'Twill be a long time ere we see thy match upon the sands of the arena."

A RAMBLING, single-streeted village fringed the highway, and at the trickling fountain where the women came to fill their jars the wanderer rested to scoop up a sup of tepid water in his hand. The sun was up six hours and the little square around the spring should have been alive with magpie-chattering women and their riotously noisy children; but the place was like a city of the dead. Silence thick as dust lay on the white, sun-bitten road; utter quiet sealed the houses with the silence of a row of tombs. Then, as he looked about in wonderment, Klaus heard a thin-drawn, piping wail: *"Ai-ai-ai-ai!"* the universal cry of mourning in the East. *"Ai-ai-ai-ai!"*

He kicked aside the curtain at the doorway and looked into the darkness of the little house. A woman crouched cross-legged on the earthen floor, her hair unbound, her gown ripped open to expose her breasts, dust on her brow and cheeks and bosom. On her knees, very quiet, but not sleeping, lay a baby boy, and on the little breast there flowered a crimson wound. Klaus recognized it—a gladiator knew the trademark of his calling!—a sword-cut. Half a hand's-span long, ragged at the edges, sunk so deep into the baby flesh that the glinting white of breastbone showed between the raw wound's gaping, bloody lips.

"Who hath done this thing?" The Northman's eyes were hard as fjord-ice, and a grimness set upon his bearded lips like that they wore when he faced a Cappadocian netman in the circus. "Who hath done this to thee, woman?"

The young Jewess looked up from her keening. Her eyes were red and swollen with much weeping, and the tears had cut small rivulets into the dust with which her face was smeared, but even in her agony she showed some traces of her wonted beauty.

"The soldiers," she replied between breath-breaking sobs. "They came and went from house to house, as the Angel of the Lord went through the land of Egypt, but we had no blood to smear our lintels. They came and smote and slew; there is not a man-child left alive in all the village. Oh, my son, my little son, why did they do this thing to thee, thou who never did them any harm? Oh, woe is me; my God hath left me comfortless, my firstborn, only son is slain——"

"Thou liest, woman!" Klaus's words rang sharp as steel. "Soldiers do not do things like this. They war with men, they make no war on babes."

The mother rocked her body to and fro and beat her breast with small clenched fists. "The soldiers did it," she repeated doggedly. "They came and went from house to house, and slew our sons——"

"Romans?" Klaus asked incredulously. Cruel the Romans were at times, but never to his knowledge had they done a thing like this. Romans were not baby-killers.

"Nay, the soldiers of the King. Romans only in the armor that they wore. They came marching into town, and——"

"The soldiers of the King? Herod?"

"Yea, Barbarian. King Herod, may his name be cursed for evermore! Some days agone came travelers from the East who declared a king was born among the Jews, and Herod, fearing that the throne

might go to him, dispatched his soldiery throughout the coasts of Bethlehem to slay the sons of every house who had not reached their second year."

"Thy husband——"

"Alas, I am a widow."

"And hast thou store of oil and meal?"

"Nay, my lord, here is only death. *Ai-ai-ai*——"

Klaus took some copper from his pouch and dropped it in the woman's lap beside the little corpse. "Take this," he ordered, "and have them do unto the body of thy babe according to thy custom."

"The Lord be gracious unto you, Barbarian. To you and all your house be peace, for that thou takest pity on the widow in her sorrow!"

"Let be. What is thy name?"

"Rachel, magnificence; and may the Lord of Israel give favor to——"

Klaus turned away and left the weeping woman with her dead.

THE waxing moon rode high above the grove where Klaus lay bundled in his cloak. Occasionally, from the denser of the thickets came the chirp of bird or squeak of insect, but otherwise the night was silent, for robbers roamed the highways after dark, and though the soldiers of the Governor kept patrol, the wise man stayed indoors until the sun had risen. But the hardiest highwayman would stop and give the matter second thought ere he attacked a sworded giant, and the nearest inn was several miles away; also a journey of a thousand miles and more lay between the Northman and his home, and though his wallet bulged with gold saved from his years spent as a hired fighter in the Tetrarch's barracks, it behooved him to economize. Besides, the turf was sweet to smell, which the caravansaries were not, and the memory of the widow-woman's murdered son had set a canker in his brain. It were better that he had no traffic with his fellow men for several hours.

The broken rhythm of a donkey's hoofs came faintly to him from the highway. The beast walked slowly, as though tired, and as if he who led it were also weary and footsore, yet urged by some compulsion to pursue his journey through the night.

"By Thor," mused Klaus, "they are a nation of strange men, these Jews. Always disputing, ever arguing, never faltering in their lust for gold; yet withal they have a spirit in them like that no other people has. Should their long-sought Messiah finally come, methinks that all the might of Rome would scarcely be enough to stop them in their——"

The hail came piercingly, mounting in a sharp crescendo, freighted with a burden of despair. "Help, help—we be beset by robbers!"

Klaus smiled sardonically. "So anxious to be early at tomorrow's market that he braves the dangerous highway after dark; yet when the robbers set upon him——"

A woman's scream of terror seconded the man's despairing hail, and Klaus bounded from his couch upon the turf, dragging at the sword that hung between his shoulders.

A knot of spearmen clustered round a man and woman. From their crested helmets and bronze cuirasses he knew them to be soldiers in the livery of Rome. From their hook-nosed faces he knew them to be Syrians, Jewish renegades, perhaps, possibly Arabs or Armenians, for such composed the little private army which the Tetrarch kept for show, and to do the work he dared not ask the Roman garrison to do.

"Ho, there, what goes on here?" challenged Klaus as he hurried from the

woods. "What mean ye by molesting peaceful travelers——"

The decurion in command turned on him fiercely. "Stand aside, Barbarian," he ordered curtly. "We be soldiers of the King, and——"

"By Odin's ravens, I care not if ye be the Cæsar's soldiers, I'll have your reason for attacking this good man and wife, or the sword will sing its song!" roared Klaus.

"Seize him, some of you!" the decarch ordered. "We'll take him to the Tetrarch for his pleasure. The rest stand by, we have our task to do—give me thy baby, woman!" He bared his sword and advanced upon the woman seated on the ass, a sleeping infant cradled in her arms.

And now the wild war-madness of his people came on Klaus. A soldier sprang at him and thrust his lance straight at his face, but Klaus's long sword clove through bronze spearhead and ash-wood stave, and left the fellow weaponless before him. Then before his adversary could drag out his shortsword, Klaus thrust, and his blade pierced through the soldier's shield and through the arm behind it, and almost through the cuirassed body. The man fell with a gasping cry, and three more soldiers leaped at Klaus, heads low above their shields, their lances held at rest.

"Aie, for the song of the sword, aie for the red blood flowing, aie for the lay the Storm-Maidens sing of heroes and Valhalla!" chanted Klaus, and as he sang he struck, and struck again, and his gray-steel blade drank thirstily. Four soldiers of the Tetrarch's guard he slew before they could close with him, and when two others, rushing to attack him from behind, laid hands upon him, he dropped his sword and reaching backward took his adversaries in his arms as though he were some monstrous bear and beat their heads together till their helmets toppled off and their skulls were cracked and they fell dead, blood rushing from their ears and noses. Now only four remained to face him, and he seized the double-bladed ax that dangled at his girdle, and with a mighty shout leaped on his foes as though they had been one and he a score. His iron ax-blade clove through bronze and bullock-hide as though they had been parchment, and two more of the Tetrarch's guardsmen fell down dead; the other two turned tail and fled from this avenging fury with the fiery, wind-blown beard and long, fair hair that streamed unbound upon the night wind. Then Klaus stood face to face with the decurion.

"Now, thou sayer of great words and doer of small deeds, thou baby-killer, say, wilt thou play the man's game, or do I smite thee headless like the criminal thou art?" asked he.

"I did but do my duty, Barbarian," the decurion answered sulkily. "The great King bade us go through all this land and take the man-child of each house, if he were under two years old, and slay him. I know not why, but a soldier's duty is to bear his orders out——"

"Aye, and a soldier's duty is to die, by Odin's Twelve Companions!" Klaus broke in. "Take this for Rachel's child; the widow-woman's only son, thou eater-up of little, helpless babes!" And he aimed an ax-blow at the decarch, and never in his years of fighting in the circus had Klaus the Smiter smitten such a blow. Neither shield nor mail could stop it, for the ax-blade sheared through both as though they had been linen, and the ax-edge fell upon the decarch's side where neck and shoulder join, and it cut through bone and muscle, and the arm fell down into the white dust of the roadway, and the ax cleft on, and bit into the decarch's breast until it split his very heart in two, and as the oak-tree falls when fire from heaven blasts it, so fell the soldier of

King Herod in the dust at Klaus's feet, and lay there, quivering and headless.

Then Klaus unloosed the thong that bound the ax-helve to his wrist, and tossed the weapon up into the air, so that it spun around, a gleaming circle in the silver moonlight, and as it fell he caught it in his hand again and tossed it up above the whispering treetops and sang a song of victory, as his fathers had sung victory-lieder since the days when Northmen first went viking, and he praised the gods of Valhalla; to Odin, father of the gods, and Thor the Thunderer, and to the beauteous Valkyrior, choosers of the valiant slain in battle, he gave full praise, and on the bodies of his fallen foes he kicked the white road-dust, and spat upon them, and named them churls and nidderings, and unfit wearers of the mail of men of war.

His frenzy wore itself to calm, and, putting up his ax, he turned to look upon the little family he had succored. The man stood by the donkey's head, holding the leading-strap in one hand, in the other a stout stick which seemed to have been chosen for the double purpose of walking-staff and goad. He was some fifty years of age, as the gray which streaked his otherwise black beard attested, and was clothed from neck to heels in a gown of somber-colored woolen stuff which from its freshness evidently was the ceremonial best that he was wont to wear on Shabbath to the synagogue. A linen turban bound his head, and before his ears the unshorn locks of "David-curls" hung down each side his face. His clothes and bearing stamped him as a countryman or villager; yet withal there was that simple dignity about him which has been the heritage of self-respecting poverty since time began.

Unmindful of the battle which had taken place so near it, the donkey cropped the short grass at the roadside in somnolent content, indifferent alike to war's alarms and the woman seated on the cushioned pillion on its back. The woman on the ass was barely past her girlhood, not more than fifteen, Klaus surmised as he glanced appreciatively upon her clear-cut, lovely features. Her face was oval, her skin more pale than fair, her features were exquisite in their purity of outline; a faultless nose, full, ripe and warmly-colored lips, slightly parted with the fright the soldiers' rude assault had caused, a mouth where tenderness and trust were mingled in expression, large eyes of blue shaded by low-drooping lids and long, dark lashes, and, in harmony with all, a flood of golden hair which, in the style permitted Jewish brides, fell unconfined beneath her veil down to the pillion upon which she sat. Her gown was blue, as was her over-mantle, and a veil and wimple of white linen framed her features to perfection. Against her breast she held a tiny infant, bound round in Jewish fashion with layer on layer of swaddling-clothes, and a single glance showed the mother's beauty and sweet purity were echoed in her baby's face.

"We are beholden to you, sir," the man thanked Klaus with simple courtesy. "Those men were seeking our son's life. Only last night the Angel of the Lord forewarned me in a dream to take the young child and its mother and flee from Nazareth to Egypt, lest the soldiers of King Herod come upon us unawares. I hear that they have murdered many little ones whose parents had not warning from the Lord."

"Thou heard'st aright, old man," Klaus answered grimly, thinking of the widow-woman's son. "Back in the village yonder is the sound of lamentation; Rachel weeps for her dead and will not be comforted. Howbeit," he looked disdainfully upon the bodies in the road, "me-seemeth I have somewhat paid the debt

your kinsmen owed these murdering dogs."

"Alas!" the traveler returned; "you have put your life in jeopardy for us, sir. After this there is a price upon your head, and Herod will not rest until he nails you to a cross for all to see the vengeance of the King."

Klaus laughed, but not with mirth. "Methinks the sword will sing its song, and many more like these will journey to the storm-land ere they hang me on the doom tree," he answered as he leant to pick his sword up from the roadside turf.

The blue eyes of the woman were on his as he spoke, and he stopped abashed. Never in the score and two years of wild life which had been his had Klaus the Northman, Klaus the champion of gladiators, felt a gaze like hers.

"Your baby, mistress," he said awkwardly, "may I see its face before I go my ways? 'Tis something to have saved a little child from murderers' steel—pity 'tis I was not in the village to save the widow Rachel's child from them, as well."

The woman raised the infant in her arms, and the little boy's blue eyes were fixed on Klaus. The Northman took a forward step to stroke the smooth, pink cheek, then, as if it had been a stone wall that stopped him, halted where he stood. For a voice was speaking to him, or, rather, it was no mortal voice that spake, but a sound that touched his ears, yet seemed to come from nowhere.

"Klaus, Klaus," the softly-modulated voice proclaimed, "because thou hast done this for me, and risked thy life and freedom for a little child, I say to thee that never shall thou taste of death until thy work for me is finished."

Now, though the infant's lips moved not, Klaus knew the words proceeded from him. At first he was astonished, even frightened; for the world he knew was peopled with strange spirit-beings, all of whom were enemies to men. Yet as he looked into the little boy's blue eyes, so calm, so knowing for an infant's, he felt his courage coming back, and made answer as is fitting when addressing a magician of more than usual power.

"Lord Jarl," he said, "I would not live alway. There comes the time when arms grow weak and sight is dim, however strong and brave the heart may be, and a man is no more able to take part in the man's game. Say, rather, Lord, that I may die with sword and ax in hand, in full vigor of my manhood and while the crimson tide of battle runs full-spate. Let it be that Odin's beauteous daughters deem me worthy to be taken from the battlefield and borne aloft to that Valhalla where the heroes play the sword-game evermore."

"Not so, my Klaus. Thou who hast put thy life in forfeit for the safety of a little child hast better things than that in store for thee. When the name of Odin is forgot, and in all the world there is no man to do him reverence at his altars, thy name and fame shall live; and laughing, happy children shall praise thy goodness and thy loving-kindness. Thou shalt live immortally in every childish heart so long as men shall celebrate my birthday."

"I shall live past Götterdämmerung?"

"So long as gleeful children praise thy name at the period of winter solstice."

"Then I shall be a mighty hero?"

"A hero to be held in loving memory by every man who ever was a child."

"Lord Jarlkin, I think thou art mistaken. Rather would I die with the sword-song in my ears and the din of battle for a dirge, but if thou speakest sooth, why, then, a man follows his star, and where mine leads I go."

Then Klaus unsheathed his sword and flourished it three times above his head, and finally brought its point to rest upon

the road, for thus did heroes of the Northland pay respect to their liege lords.

The father cried out in affright when he heard the gray sword-blade whistle in the air, but the mother looked on calmly, nor did she seem to marvel that the Northling spake in heathen language to her infant, as though he answered to unspoken words.

So Klaus bade them safe faring on their way to Egypt land, and turned to face him toward the North Star and the road that led toward home.

2. *The Road to Calvary*

LUCIUS PONTIUS PILATE, Procurator of Judea, leant across the parapet and looked down at the night-bound city. Lights blossomed here and there among the flat-roofed houses; now and then the clatter of mailed hooves was heard upon the cobblestones; almost incessantly came the roar of jostling, fractious crowds. Jerusalem was crowded to the bursting-point; for days the people had been streaming through the Joppa gate, for a great feast was in preparation — these Jews were always celebrating either feast or fast—and the police power of his legionaries had been put upon its mettle.

"A turbulent and stiff-necked people, these, my Claudius," the Governor addressed the tall, blond-bearded man who stood three paces to his left and rear. "Ever disputing, always arguing and bickering, everlastingly in tumult of some sort. But yesterday, when the troops marched from the citadel with the Eagles of the Legion at their head, a band of townsmen stoned them, crying out that they bore idols through the Holy City's streets. It seems they hold it sin to make an image in the likeness of anything that walks or flies or swims. A stubborn, narrow-minded lot, methinks."

"Aye, Excellence, a stubborn and rebellious lot," the first centurion agreed.

The Procurator laughed. "None knows it better than myself, my Claudius. Thou wert here amongst them aforetimes, in the days of the great Herod, I've been told. How comes it that thou'rt here again? Dost like the odor of this sacred city of the Hebrews?"

The bearded soldier smiled sardonically. "I served King Herod as a gladiator a tricennium ago," he answered. "When my period of service was expired I found myself without scar or wound, and with a wallet filled with gold. I told the prætor I would fight no more for hire, and set out for my northern home, but on the way——" he stopped and muttered something which the Procurator failed to catch.

"Yes, on the way?" the Roman prompted.

"I became embroiled with certain soldiers of the King who sought to do a little family violence. Herod swore a vengeance on me, and I was hunted like a beast from wood to desert and from desert to mountain. At last I sought the shelter which so many hunted men have found, and joined the legions. Since then I've followed where my star—and army orders—led, and now once more I stand within these city walls, safe from the vengeance of King Herod's heirs."

"And right glad am I that thou art here," the Governor declared. "This is no sinecure I hold, my Claudius. I have but a single legion to police this seething country, and treason and rebellion lift their heads on every side. Do I do one thing? The Jews cry out against me for violating some one of their sacred rights or customs. Do I do the other? Again they howl to heaven that the iron heel of Rome oppresses them. By Jupiter, had I a dozen legions more—nay, had I but a single legion more of men like thee, my

Claudius—I'd drive this mutinous rabble at the lance-point till they howled like beaten dogs for mercy!" He gazed down at the city for a time in moody silence; then:

"What talk is this I hear of one who comes from Galilee claiming to be king of the Jews? Think ye that it bodes sedition? Had they but a leader they could rally to, I doubt not we should soon be fighting for our lives against these pestilent Judeans."

"I do not think we need fear insurrection from that point, your Excellence," the soldier answered. "I saw this teacher when he came into the city but four days agone. Mild of mien is he, and very meek and humble, riding on an ass's colt and preaching in the temple, bidding all men live as brothers, fear God, honor the King, and render unto Cæsar that which is his."

"Ha, sayest thou? I had thought otherwise. Caiaphas, the chief priest, tells me he foments sedition, and urges that I throw him into prison or give him over to be crucified as one who preaches treason to the Empire."

"Caiaphas!" the big centurion pursed his lips as though to spit. "That fatted swine! No wonder his religion bids him to refrain from pigs' flesh. If he ate of it he would be a cannibal!"

Pilate nodded gloomily. His quarrel with the high priest was an old one, and one in which the victories were even. Caiaphas had on occasion sent appeal to Rome, subtly intimating that unless the Governor yielded there was danger of rebellion. Word came back to Pilate that the Cæsar held him personally responsible for conditions in Judea, and that in case of revolution his would be the blame. Thus the high priest triumphed. On the other hand, the Governor had advantage in that appeal in criminal cases and matters of taxation lay with him, and by making use of this authority he could often bend the prelate to his will.

"I would we had another pontifex," he mused, "one more pliant to suggestion than this sacerdotal fool who rules their priestly council."

The jingling clink of metal sword-sheath on mailed kilts was heard as a legionary hurried out upon the roof, halted and saluted, then handed Claudius a scroll. The centurion returned the military salutation and, in turn, delivered the rolled missive to the Procurator.

"By Pluto's beard," swore Pilate as he broke the seal and read the message by the light of a small lantern set upon the parapet, "it comes sooner than we thought, my Claudius! Caiaphas has taken custody of this self-styled King of Jews, tried him before the Sanhedrin and judged him worthy to be crucified. Now he brings the case to me on high petition. What are we to do?"

"Why, bid the fat pig get him back unto his sty, your Excellence. None but Rome has jurisdiction in such cases. Caiaphas can no more condemn a man to death than he can don the toga of imperial authority——"

"Aye, but therein lies the danger. I alone, as Procurator, can mete out sentence of death, but if these priests and their paid underlings should rouse the louse-bit rabble to rebellion we have not troops enough to put it down. Furthermore, should insurrection come, Rome is like to have my life. I am sent out here to govern and to rule, but chiefly to collect the tax. A people in rebellion pays no tribute to the throne. Come, Claudius, my toga. Let us hear what harm this uncrowned king has done the state."

A MURMUR like a storm-wind in the treetops filled the hall of audience. In the brilliant light of flambeaux double files of prætorian guardsmen stood at stiff

attention as the Procurator took his seat upon the ivory and purple chair of state. Well forward in the hall, before the dais, stood Caiaphas with Simeon and Annas to his right and left. A knot of temple guards—tawdry imitations of the Roman legions—grouped about their prisoner, a tall young man in white, bearded in the Jewish fashion, but so fair of skin and light of hair that he seemed to bear no racial kinship to the swarthy men surrounding him.

"Hail, Procurator!" Meticulously Caiaphas raised his right hand in the Roman fashion, then bowed low with almost fawning oriental courtesy. "We come to you for confirmation of the sentence we have passed upon this blasphemer and traitor to the Empire."

Pilate's salutation was a merest lifting of the hand. "The blasphemy is your affair," he answered shortly. "What treason hath he wrought?"

"He hath proclaimed himself a king, and if you do not find that treason, then thou art not Cæsar's friend!"

"Art thou in very truth King of the Jews?" the Governor turned curious eyes upon the prisoner.

"Sayest thou this thing of me, or did others tell thee of it?" the young man answered.

"Am I a Jew?" the Procurator asked. "Thy own nation and thy chief priests have brought thee unto me for judgment. What hast thou done?"

There came no answer from the prisoner, but the murmuring outside the gates grew ominous. A mob was gathered at the entrance, and the guards were having trouble holding them in check.

Again the Procurator challenged: "Art thou in truth a king, and if so, of what kingdom?"

"Thou hast said it. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth . . ."

"What is truth?" the Governor mused. "I myself have heard the sages argue long about it, but never have I found two who agreed on it. Claudius!" he turned to the centurion who stood behind his chair.

"Excellence!"

"I am minded to put these people to the test. Go thou to the dungeons and bring the greatest malefactor thou canst find into the hall. We shall see how far this bigotry can go."

As Claudius turned to execute the order, the Governor faced the chief priest and his satellites.

"I will have him scourged, then turn him free," he pronounced. "If he has transgressed your laws the scourging will be punishment enough; as to your charge of treason, I find no fault in him."

Docilely the prisoner followed a decurion to the barrack-room where the soldiers stripped his garments off and lashed him to a pillar, then laid a tracery of forty stripes upon his naked back.

"The King of Jews is he?" laughed the decurion. "Why, by the eyes of Juno, every king should have a crown to call his own; yet this one has no crown at all. Ho, there, someone, make a fitting crown for Jewry's king?"

A chaplet of thorn-branch was quickly plaited and thrust upon the prisoner's head, and the long, sharp spines bit deeply in his tender flesh, so that a jewel-like diadem of ruby droplets dewed his brow. Then another found a frayed and tattered purple robe which they laid upon his bleeding shoulders. Finally, a reed torn from a hearth-broom was thrust between his tight-bound wrists for scepter, and thus regaled they set him on a table and bowed the knee to him in mock humility, what time they hailed him as Judea's new king. At length they tired of the cruel sport, and grinning broadly, brought him

back and stood him in the hall before the Governor and the priests.

"Behold the man!" the Procurator bade as they brought the figure of humiliation to the hall. "Behold your king!"

"We have no king but Cæsar!" answered Caiaphas self-righteously. "This one has declared himself a king, and whoso calls himself a king speaketh against Cæsar."

Meanwhile Claudius was hastening to the judgment hall with a miserable object. The man was of great stature, but so bowed with fetters that he could not stand erect. His clothing hung in tatters, no second glance was needed to know he was a walking vermin-pasture; the members of the guard shrank from him, fending him away with spear-butts lest the lice which swarmed upon his hair and garments get on them.

Then Pilate bade the prisoner from the dungeons stand before the priests, and motioned from him to the bound and thorn-crowned captive.

"It is your custom, men of Judea, that at the Passover I release to ye a prisoner," Pilate said. "Whom will ye therefore, that I set at liberty, this convicted robber, doomed to die upon the gallows tree, or this one ye have called your king?"

"We have no king but Caesar!" shouted Caiaphas in rage. "Away with this one. Crucify him!"

And outside the great bronze grilles that barred the hall the rabble took the cry up: "Away with him! Crucify him; crucify him!"

"What, crucify your king?" the Procurator asked in mock astonishment.

The carefully rehearsed mob of temple hangers-on who swarmed about the gates thundered back once more: "Crucify him! Crucify him!"

"Water in a ewer, and a napkin, Claudius," ordered Pilate, and when his aide returned he set the silver basin down before him, and laved his hands in water, then dried them on the linen napkin. "I am innocent of the blood of this just man. See ye to it!" cried the Procurator as he handed ewer and napkin back to Claudius.

"His blood be on our heads and on our children's heads!" responded Caiaphas, and the chorus massed outside the judgment hall took up the savage pæan of blood-guiltiness: "On our heads and on our children's! Crucify him!"

Lucius Pontius Pilate shrugged his shoulders. "I have done the best I could, my Claudius," he said. "Let him be led away to prison, and on the morrow have him taken with the other adjudged malefactors and crucified. My guard will have no part in it, but I would that you go with the execution party to make sure all is regularly done and"—his thin lips parted in a mocking, mirthless smile—"to put my superscription on the cross to which they hang him. The same nails that pierce his members are like to prick the vanity of Caiaphas, methinks," he added, chuckling to himself as though he relished some keen jest.

THE procession to the execution hill, or "Place of Skulls," began at dawn, for crucifixion was a slow death, and the morrow being Shabbath it was not lawful that the malefactors be left alive to profane the sacred day with their expiring groans. The crowds assembled in the city to keep Passover lined the Street of David and gathered in the alley-heads to watch the march of the condemned, making carnival of the occasion. Sweetmeat venders and water-sellers did a thriving trade among the merrymakers, and one or two far-sighted merchants who had come with panniers of rotten fruit and vegetables found their wares in great demand; for everyone enjoyed

the sport of heaving offal at the convicts as they struggled past beneath the burden of their crosses.

Claudius did not go with them. The Procurator rested late that morning, and there were routine matters to engage his time when he had finished at the bath. The sun was several hours high when a scrivener from the secretariat came into the officium with the titulus the Governor dictated, engrossed on stiffened parchment. Pilate smiled with grim amusement as he passed the scroll to Claudius.

"Take thou this unto the place of execution, and with thy own hand fix it over the young Prophet's head," he ordered. "'Twill give Caiaphas and his plate-lickers something fresh to whine about."

The centurion glanced down at the scroll. In letters large enough for those who walked to read yet not be forced to stop or strain their eyes, it proclaimed:

IESVS NAZARENVS
REX IVDAEORVM

Which was to say: "This is Jesus" (for such was the forename that the Prophet bore) "King of the Jews." Not only in Latin, but in Hebrew and in Greek, as well, was the legend writ, that all who passed the place of crucifixion, whatever tongue they spake, might read and understand.

"They have prated long about a king who should sweep away the power of Rome," the Procurator smiled. "Let them look upon him now, gibbeted upon a cross. By Jupiter, I would that I could see that fat priest's face when he reads the superscription!"

Three crosses crowned the bald-topped hill when Claudius reached the place of execution. On two of them hung burly robbers, nailed by hands and feet, supported by the wooden peg, or sedule, set like a dowel in the upright beam between their legs, that their bodies might not sag too much. In the center, spiked upon the tallest cross, hung the young Prophet, his frailer body already beginning to give way beneath the dreadful torment it endured. A decurion set a ladder up beside the cross, and armed with nail and hammer Claudius mounted quickly and fixed the placard to the upright beam above the bowed head of the dying man.

A high, thin wailing cry of astonishment and rage sounded as the legend on the card appeared. "Not that!" screamed Caiaphas as he put his hand up to his throat and rent his splendid priestly robe. "Not that, centurion! Yon superscription labels this blasphemer with the very title that he claimed, and for claiming which he now hangs on the gallows. Take down the card and change it so it reads that he is not our king, but that he claimed the kingly title in despite of Cæsar!"

There was something almost comic in the priests' malevolence as they fairly gnashed their teeth with rage, and Claudius, with the fighting-man's instinctive contempt for politicians, grinned openly as he replied, "'Twere best you made complaint to Pilate, priest. What he has written he has written, nor do I think he will change yon title for all your whining and complaints."

"Cæsar shall be told of this!" the wrathful high priest snarled. "He shall hear how Pilate mocked our people and incited them to riot by labeling a malefactor as our king——"

Claudius turned abruptly to the centurion commanding the execution squad. "Clear away this rabble," he directed. "Must we be pestered by their mouthings?"

From the figure on the central cross a low moan came: "I thirst."

Claudius took a sponge and dipped it in the jar of sour wine and myrrh that stood beside him on the ground. He put it on a lance and held it to the sufferer's lips, but the poor, weak body was too far spent to drink. A shudder ran through it, and with a final flash of strength the Prophet murmured: "It is finished. Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit." A last convulsive spasm, and the thorn-crowned head fell forward. All was over.

"We had best be finishing our work," the execution guard's commander said phlegmatically. "These priests are set on mischief, and we'll have a riot on our hands if one of these should live until the sundown." He motioned to a burly executioner who picked up a sledge and methodically went about the task of smashing the suspended felons' arm- and leg-bones.

"Now, by Father Odin's ravens, thou shalt not break the Prophet's legs," Claudius declared as he snatched a guardsman's spear. "Let him die a man's death!" With the precision taught by years of training in the circus and on the battlefield, he poised the lance and drove the long bronze spearhead between the Prophet's ribs, sinking it deep into the heart. As he withdrew the point a stream of water mixed with blood gushed forth, and Claudius returned the soldier's spear. "'Tis long since I have done that favor to a helpless man," he muttered as his memory flew back to his days in the arena when the blood-mad mob withheld the mercy sign and he had thrust his sword or lance through his defeated adversary—often the man with whom he'd drunk and diced the night before. "By Frigga's eyes," he added as he looked at the pale body stretched upon the cross, "he's beautiful! I've heard he called himself the son of God, nor is that hard to credit. 'Tis no man, but a god who hangs on yonder gallows—Baldur the Beautiful, slain by foul treacheries!"

A ringing sounded in his ears like the humming of innumerable bees, and through it he heard words, words in a voice he had not heard in more than thirty years, but which he recognized instantly. "Klaus, thou took pity on a little child attacked by murderers in days agone; this day thy pity bade thee save a dying man from brutish violence. According to thy lights thou dealtest mercifully when thou thrust the spear into my side. Knowest thou not me, Klaus?"

"Lord Jarlkin!" Klaus turned round and gazed in wonder at the slight, wilted body. "The little child whom I assisted on his way to Egypt land! What wouldst thou with thy liegeman, Lord? Did not my mercy-stroke drive true—is my work unfinished?" He stretched his hand out for the soldier's spear again, but:

"Thy work is not yet started, Klaus. I will call and thou wilt know my voice when I have need of thee."

The soldiers of the guard and the crowd of hang-jawed watchers at the execution ground were wonderstruck to see the Procurator's chief centurion draw himself up and salute the body pendent on the cross as though it were a tribune, or the Governor himself.

DARK clouds obscured the sun, and menacing thunder mingled with the stabbing spears of lightning as Klaus hurried through the Street of David on his way back to the Governor's palace. Once or twice there came a rumbling in the bowels of the earth, and the solid ground reeled drunkenly beneath his feet.

"Siguna goes to drain her cup, and Loki writhes beneath the sting of serpent-

venom," Klaus muttered as he dug his heels into his horse's sides. It would not be comfortable in that narrow street when the fury of the earthquake began to shake the buildings down. A temblor shook the riven earth afresh, and an avalanche of broken tile and rubble slid into the street, almost blocking it. Klaus leaped down from his saddle and gave his horse a smart blow on the flank.

"Go thou, good beast, and Thor see thee safely to thy stable," he bade, then took shelter by the blank-walled houses, dashing forward a few steps, then shrinking back again as spates of falling masonry cataracted overhead and fell crashing on the cobbles of the roadway.

"Ai—ai—ahee!" a woman's scream came thin-edged with terror. "Help, for the love of God—save me or I die! Have mercy, Master!"

The flicker of a lightning-flash lit up the pitch-black night-in-day that flooded through the street, and by its quivering light Klaus saw a woman's body lying in the roadway. A timber from a broken house had fallen on her foot, pinioning her to the cobbles, and even as she screamed, a fresh convulsion of the earth shook down a barrow-load of broken brick and tile, scattering brash and lime-dust over her. A stone fell clanging on his helmet as he rushed across the gloom-choked street, and a parapet-fragment crashed behind his heels as he leant to prize the timber off her ankle. She lay as limp as death within his arms as he dashed back to the shelter of the wall, and for a moment he thought he had risked his life in rescuing one beyond the need of succor; but as he laid her down upon the flagstones her great eyes opened and her little hands crept up to clasp themselves about his neck. "Art safe, my lord?" she asked tremulously.

"Aye, for the nonce," he answered, "but we tempt the gods by staying here. Canst walk?"

"I'll try." She drew herself erect and took a step, then sank down with a moan. "My foot—'tis broke, I fear," she gasped. "Do thou go on, my lord; thou hast done thy duty to the full already. 'Twould not be meet to stay and risk thy life for me——"

"Be silent, woman," he commanded gruffly. "Raise thy arms."

Obediently she put her arms about his shoulders and he lifted her as though she were a child. Then, his cloak about her head to fend off falling fragments of the buildings, he darted from house to house until the narrow street was cleared and they came at length into a little open space.

It was lighter here, and he could see his salvage. She was a pretty thing, scarce larger than a half-grown child, and little past her girlhood. Slender she was, yet with the softly rounded curves of budding womanhood. Her skin, deep sun-kissed olive, showed every violet vein through its veil of lustrous tan. Her hands, dimpled like a child's, were tipped with long and pointed nails on which a sheathing of bright goldleaf had been laid, so they shone like tiny mirrors. Her little feet, gilt-nailed like her hands, were innocent of sandals and painted bright with henna on the soles. On ankles, wrists and arms hung bangles of rose-gold studded thick with lapis-lazuli, topaz and bright garnet, while rings of the same precious metal hung from each ear almost to her creamy shoulders. A diadem of gold thick-set with gems was circled round her brow, binding back the curling black locks which lay clustering round her face. Her small, firm breasts were bare, their nipples stained with henna, and beneath her bosom was a zone of woven golden wire from which a robe

of sheerest gauze was hung, bound round the hips with a shawl of brilliant orange silk embroidered with pink shells and roses. Ground antimony had been rubbed upon her eyelids, and her full, voluptuous lips were stained a brilliant red with powdered cinnabar.

Klaus recognized her: one of the hetæræ from the house of love kept by the courtezan of Magdala before she left her harlotry to follow after the young Prophet they had crucified that morning. Her mistress gone, the girl had taken service as a dancer at Agrippa's court. He drew away a little. His clean-bred northern flesh revolted at the thought of contact with the pretty little strumpet.

"What didst thou in the street?" he asked. "Were there so few buyers of thy wares within the palace that thou must seek them in the highways?"

"I—I came to see the Master," she sobbed softly. "I had the dreadful malady, and I sought His cure."

"Aye? And did thou find it?"

"Yea, that did I. As He went by, all burdened with his gibbet, I called to Him and asked His mercy, and He did but raise the fingers of one hand and look on me, and behold—I am clean and whole again. See, is not my skin as fresh and clean as any maiden's?"

Klaus moved a little farther from her, but she crept toward him, holding out her hands for him to touch. "Behold me, I am clean!" she whispered rapturously. "No more will I be shunned of men——"

"By this one thou wilt be," he broke in grimly. "What have I to do with thee and thy kind, girl? The earthquake passes; it is safe for thee to walk the streets. Get thee gone."

"But my broken foot—I cannot walk. Wilt thou not help me to my place——"

"Not I, by Thor. Let scented darlings of the palace see to that." He shook her clinging hands away and half rose to his feet when a voice—the well-remembered voice his inward ear had heard before—came to him:

"Despise her not. I have had mercy on her, and thou—and I—have need of her. Klaus, take her to thee."

He stood irresolute a moment; then: "I hear and obey, Lord," he answered softly and sank down again upon the turf. "How art thou called?" he asked the girl.

"Erinna."

"A Greek?"

"Tyrian, my lord." She moved closer to him and rubbed her supple body against his breastplate with a gentle, coaxing gesture. "They brought me over the bright water whilst I was still a child, and schooled me in the arts of love, and I am very beautiful and much desired, but now I am all thine." She bowed her head submissively and put his hand upon it. "Thou didst battle with the earthquake for me, and rived me from his clutches; now am I thine by right of capture."

Klaus smiled, a trifle grimly. "What need have I, a plain, blunt soldier, of such as thee?"

"I am very subtle in the dance, and can sing and play sweet music, even on the harp and flute and cymbals. Also I am skilled at cookery, and when thou hast grown tired of me thou canst sell me for much gold——"

"Men of my race sell not their wives——"

"Wife? Saidst thou wife, my lord?" She breathed the word incredulously.

"Am I a Greek or Arab to have slave-girls travel in my wake? Come, rouse thee up; we must to the palace, where quarters can be found for thee until I take thee to mine own."

TEARS streamed down her face, cutting little rivers in the rouge with which her cheeks were smeared, but her smile looked through the tear-drops as the sun in April shines through showers of rain. "In very truth, He told my future better than I knew!" she cried ecstatically, and, to Klaus's utter consternation, bent suddenly and pressed a fervid kiss upon his buskin.

"What charlatan foretold thy fortune?" he demanded, raising the girl and crooking an arm beneath her knees, for her broken foot was swelling fast, and walking was for her impossible.

"The Master whom they crucified—may dogs defile their mothers' graves! When I bowed me in the dust and begged Him to have pity on me, He looked at me and smiled, e'en though He trod the way to torture and to death, and was borne down with the gallows' weight, and He told me, 'Woman, thy desire shall be unto thee.' I thought He meant that I was healed, but——" She flung both arms about her bearer's neck and crushed his face against her bosom as she sighed ecstatically.

"But what, wench?"

"I have seen thee from afar, my Claudius. Long have I watched thee and had pleasure in thy manly beauty. At night I used to dream that thou wouldst notice me, perchance come unto me, or even buy me for thy slave; but that ever I should bear the name of wife"—again her voice broke on a sigh, but it was a sigh of utter happiness—"that I, Erinna the hetæra——"

"Thy Greek name likes me not," he interrupted.

"What's in a name, my lord? I'll bear whatever name thou givest me, and be happy in it, since 'tis given me by you. By Aphrodite's brows, I'll come like any dog whene'er thou callest me by such name as you choose to give——"

"Let be this talk of dogs and slaves," he broke in sharply. "Thou'lt be a wife and equal—aye, by Thor's iron gauntlets, and whoso fails to do thee honor shall be shorter by a head!"

Pilate's legion was recruited largely from Germanic tribes, and enough of his own people could be found to enable Klaus to have a marriage ceremony shaped on Northern custom. Erinna's name was changed to Unna, and on the day they wed she sat in the high bride's-seat robed in modest white with a worked head-dress on her clustering black ringlets, a golden clasp about her waist and gold rings on her arms and fingers. And the Northlings raised their drinking-horns aloft and shouted *"Skoal!"* and *"Waes heal!"* to the bride and bridegroom, and when the feast was finished and the bride's-cup had been drunk, because her broken foot was not yet mended, Klaus bore Unna in his arms unto the bride's-bed. Thus did Claudius the centurion, who was also Klaus the Northling, wed a woman out of Tyre in the fashion of the Northmen.

NOW talk ran through the city of Jerusalem that the Prophet whom the priests had done to death was risen from the tomb. Men said that while His sepulcher was watched by full-armed guards an angel came and rolled the stone away, and He came forth, all bright and glorious. And many were the ones who testified that they had seen Him in the flesh.

The priests and temple hangers-on cast doubt upon the story, and swore that whilst the guardsmen slept the Prophet's followers had come and stolen Him away, but Klaus and Unna both believed. "Said I not He was a god,

e'en as He hanged upon the gallows tree?" asked Klaus. "Baldur the Beautiful is He; Baldur the Fair cannot be holden by the gates of Hel; He is raised up again in their despite."

"He is in truth the Son of God, as Mary Magdalene said," Unna answered as she laid her cheek against her husband's breast. "He healed me of my malady and gave me that which I desired above all things."

Klaus kissed his new-made wife upon the mouth. "He said that I had need of thee, my sweetling," he whispered softly. "I knew it not, but He spake sooth. And," he added even lower, "He said that He likewise had need of thee. We shall hear His call and answer Him whenever He shall please to summon us, though the summons come from lowest Niflheim."

3. *The Long, Long Road*

MEN grew old and grayed and died in the service of Imperial Rome, but neither death nor old age came to Klaus. His ruddy hair retained its sheen, and when the men who joined the legions as mere beardless youths laid their swords aside and sate them in the inglenook to tell brave tales of battles fought and won upon the sea or field he was still instinct with youthful vigor. For years he followed Pilate's fortunes, acting as his aide-de-camp and confidant, and when the aging Governor went from Palestine to Helvetia it was Klaus who went with him as commander of his soldiery. When death at last came to his patron, Klaus stood among the mourners and watched the funeral flames mount crackling from the pyre, then turned his face toward Rome, where men of valor still were in demand. With the rank of a tribune he fought Arminius under Varus, and though the legions suffered such defeat as they had never known before when the German tribesmen swept down on them in Teutoburg Forest, the soldiers under his command made an orderly retreat.

As commander of a legion he stood with Constantine the Great at Malvian Bridge when, beneath the emblem of the once-despised cross, Maximian's youthful son defeated old Maxentius and won the purple toga of the Cæsars. With Constantine he sailed across the Bosporus and helped to found the world's new capital at Byzantium.

Emperors came and went. The kingdom of the Ostrogoths arose in Italy, and strange, bearded men who spoke barbarian tongues ruled in the Cæsars' stead. But though the olden land of Latium no longer offered reverence to the Empire, it owed allegiance to the name of Him the priests had crucified so long ago in Palestine; for nowhere, save in the frozen fjords and forests of the farthest North and in the sun-smit deserts of the South, did men fail to offer prayer and praise and sacrifice to the Prophet who had come to save His people from their sins, and had been scornfully rejected by their priests and leaders.

And now a mighty conflict rose between the Christians of the West and the followers of Mahound in the East; and Klaus, who knew the country round about Jerusalem as he knew the lines that marked his palms, rode forth with Tancred and Count Raymond and Godfrey of Bouillon to take the Holy City from the Paynims' hands. With him rode his ever-faithful, thrice-beloved Unna, armed and mounted as a squire. Never since the morning of their marriage had she and he been out of voice-call of each other; for she had shared his life in camp and field, marching with the legions dressed in armor like a man, going with him to

Byzantium when the new Empire was founded, riding at his side across the troubled continent of Europe when the old Empire broke to pieces and the little kings and dukes and princelings set their puny courts up in the midst of their walled towns. Sometimes she cut her long hair close and went forth in male attire; again, in those brief intervals of peace when they dwelt at ease in some walled city, she let her tresses grow and assumed the garb of ladies of the time, and ruled his house with gentleness and skill as became the mate of one who rated the esteem of prince and governor, general and lord, for her husband's fame at weaponry and sagacity in war had given him great standing among those who had need of strong arms and wise heads to lead their soldiery and beat their foemen back.

Now, Klaus, with Unna fighting at his elbow as his squire, had assailed the walls when Godfrey and Count Eustace and Baldwin of the Mount leaped from the flaming tower and held the Paynims back till Tancred and Duke Robert broke Saint Stephen's Gate and forced their way into the Holy City; but when the mailed men rode with martial clangor through the streets and massacred the populace, they took no part. In the half-darkness of the mosque that stood hard by the ancient Street of David where aforetime the young Prophet had trod the Via Dolorosa they saw old Moslems with calm features watch their sons' heads fall upon the musty praying-carpets, then in turn submit to slaughter as the Christians' axes split their skulls or swords ripped through their bellies. They saw the Paynim women cling in terror to their men-folk's bending knees, what time they pleaded for mercy, panting and screaming till sword or lance ripped open their soft bodies and they cried no more. They tried to stop the wanton killing, and begged the men-at-arms and knights to stay their hands and show their helpless, beaten foemen clemency, whereat the priests and monks who urged the wearers of the cross to slay and spare not cried out on them, and swore they were no true and loyal lovers of the Prince of Peace.

But when the killing and the rapine ceased and men went forth to worship at the holy places, Klaus and Unna walked the city, and their eyes were soft with memories. "Here it was they led Him to the place of crucifixion," Unna told a group of noble women who had come to make the pilgrimage to Calvary upon their knees, and, "Here He raised His hand and blessed the very men who did Him injury." But when the Frankish women heard her they would not believe, but hooted her away; for the priests, who never till that time had seen Jerusalem, had shown them where the Master's blessed feet had trod, and sooth, a learned holy man knew more of sacred things than this wild woman of the camp who wore her hair clipped short and swaggered it amongst the men-at-arms with a long sword lashed against her thigh!

But when she told them that she knelt upon those very stones and watched Cyrenian Simon bear the cross toward Golgotha, they shrank from her in terror and crossed themselves and called on every saint they knew for succor, and named her witch and sorceress. And presently came priests' men who bound her arms with cords and took her to the prison-house beneath the Templars' stable and swore that on the morrow they would burn her at the stake, that all might see what fate befell a woman who spake blasphemy within the very confines of the Holy City.

When she came not to their dwelling-place that night, Klaus was like a man

made mad by those foul drugs the Paynims use to give them courage in the fight. And he went unto the prison-house and smote the warders where they stood, so that they fled from him as from a thing accursed, and with his mighty ax he brake the heavy doors that shut her in, and they went forth from that place and took to horse and rode until they reached the sea, where they took ship and sailed away. And no man durst stand in their way, for the fire of Northern lightnings burned in Klaus's eyes, and he raged like a wild berserker if any bade them stand and give account of whence they came and where their mission led them.

THE years slipped swiftly by like rapid rivers running in their courses, and Klaus and Unna rode the paths of high adventure. Sometimes they rested in the cities, but more often they were on the road, or fighting in the armies of some prince or duke or baron, and always fame and fortune came to them. But they could not abide in any place for long, for betimes they came in conflict with the priests; for when these heard them speak of the Great Teacher as though they had beheld Him in the flesh they sought to have them judged as witch and warlock, and so great was these men's power that had they not been fleet of foot and strong of arm they were like to have been burned a dozen times and more.

"Now, by the Iron Gloves of Thor," swore Klaus one time when they were flying from the priestly wrath, "meseemeth that of all men on the earth the priest doth change the least. 'Twas Caiaphas and his attendants whose foul plottings hanged our Master on the cross, and today the truth He died for is perverted and withheld by the very men who claim to be His priests and servants!"

ONE Yuletide Klaus and Unna lodged them in a little city by the Rhine. The harvest was not plentiful that year, and want and famine stalked the streets as though an enemy had set siege to the town. The feast of Christmas neared, but within the burghers' houses there was little merriment. Scarce food had they to keep starvation from their bellies, and none at all to make brave holiday upon the birthday of the Lord.

Now as they sate within their house Klaus thought him of the cheerless faces of the children of the town, and as he thought he took a knife and block of wood and carved therefrom the semblance of a little sleigh the like of which the people used for travel when the snows of winter made the roads impassable for wheels or horsemen.

And when Unna saw his work she laughed aloud and clipped him in her arms and said, "My husband, make thou more of those, as many as the time 'twixt now and Christmas Eve permits! We have good store of sweetmeats in our vaults, even figs from Smyrna and sweet, dried grapes from Cyprus and from Sicily, and some quantity of barley sugar, likewise. Do thou carve out the little sleighs and I will fill them to the brim with comfits; then on the Eve of Christ His birthday we'll go amongst the poorest of the townsmen and leave our little gifts upon their doorsteps, that on the morrow when the children wake they shall not have to make their Christmas feast on moldy bread and thin meat broth."

The little sleighs piled up right swiftly, for it seemed to Klaus his fingers had a nimbleness they never had before, and he whittled out the toys so fast that Unna was amazed and swore his skill at wood-carving was as great as with the sword and ax; whereat he laughed and whittled all the faster.

It was bitter cold on Christmas Eve, and the members of the night watch hid themselves in doorways or crept into the cellars to shield them from the snow that rode upon the storm-wind's howling blast; so none saw Klaus and Unna as they made their rounds, leaving on each doorstep of the poor a little sleigh piled high with fruits and sweets the like of which those children of that northern clime had never seen. But one small lad whose empty belly would not let him sleep looked from his garret window and espied the scarlet cloak Klaus wore, for Klaus went bravely dressed as became a mighty man of valor and one who walked in confidence with princes. And the small boy marveled much that Klaus, the mighty soldier of whose feats and fame men spoke with bated breath, should stop before his doorstep. But anon he slept, and when he waked he knew not if it were a dream he dreamed, or if he had seen Klaus pass through the storm.

But when the church bells called the folk to prayer and praise next morning and the house doors were unbarred and the people found the sleighs all freighted with their loads of comfits on their thresholds, great and loud was the rejoicing, and little children who had thought that Christmas was to be another day of fasting and starvation clapped their hands and raised their voices in wild shouts of happy laughter. And Klaus and Unna who went privily about the streets saw their work and knew that it was good, and their hearts beat quicker and their eyes shone bright with tears of happiness for that they had brought joy where sorrow was before, and they clasped each other by the hand and exchanged a kiss like lovers when their vows are new, and each swore that the other had conceived the scheme, and each denied it; so in sweet argument they got them to the minster, and then unto their house, where their feast of goose and herbs was sweeter for the thought of joy they had brought to the children of the town.

But when the priests were told about the miracle of fruits and sweets that came unmarked upon the doorsteps of the poor they were right wroth, and swore this was no Christian act, but the foul design of some fell fiend who sought to steal men's souls away by bribing them with Satan's sweetmeats.

The lad whose waking eyes had seen Klaus's scarlet mantle told his tale, and all the poor folk praised his name, and one and all they named him Santa Klaus, a saint who walked the earth in human guise and had compassion on the suffering of the poor.

But the churchmen went unto the city's governor and said, "Go to, this man foments rebellion. He hath sought to buy thy people's loyalty away by little gifts made to their children. Look thou to it, if thou failest to put him in restraint before he does more mischief thou art no friend of the landgrave from whom thou holdest this city as a fief."

So the graf would fain have put them into prison on a charge of treason, but the townsmen came to them and warned them of the plot; so they escaped before the men-at-arms came clamoring at their door, and fled across the winter snows. Behind them swept a raving tempest, so that those who sought to follow were engulfed in drifting snows and lost their tracks upon the road, and finally turned and fought their way back to the city with the tidings that they surely must have perished in the storm.

But Klaus and Unna did not die, for the storm that followed hard upon their heels delayed its pace to cover their retreat, and anon they came unto another town where they rested safe throughout the winter, and in the springtime set out on their journeys once again.

Now their travels took them to the Baltic shores, and as they passed across the country of the Lappmen they came into a valley ringed about with nine small hills, and no man durst go to that place; for 'twas said the little brown men of the land beneath the earth had power there, and whoso met them face to face was doomed to be their servant alway, and to slave and toil beneath the ground for evermore, because these people had no souls, but were natheless gifted with a sort of immortality, so that they should live until the final Judgment Day when they and all the great host of the olden gods should stand before the throne of the Most High and hear sentence of an everlasting torment.

But Klaus and Unna had no fear of the ælf people or of any harm that they might do, for both of them wore crosses round their necks, and in addition each was girt with a long sword, and the ax that had aforetime laid the mightiest of foemen in the dust was hung upon Klaus's saddle-bow.

So they bent their road among the haunted Nine Hills, and behold, as they rode seaward came a great procession of the ælfmen bearing packs upon their backs and singing dolefully. "*Waes hael* to thee, small ælfmen," Klaus made challenge; "why go ye sadly thus, singing songs of dole and drearihead?"

"Alack and well-a-day!" the ælf King answered; "we take our way to Niflheim, there to abide until the time shall come when we are sent to torment everlasting, for the people whom aforetime we did help, cry out upon us now and say that we are devils, and set no pan of milk or loaf of barley bread beside their doorstep for us; nor do they tell the tales their fathers told of kindly deeds done by the Little People, but only tales of terror and of wickedness. For this we are no longer able to come out and play upon the earth's good face, neither to dance and sing by moonlight in the glades, and, worst of all, our human neighbors have no use for our good offices, but drive us hence with curse and song and bell and book and candle."

Now Klaus laughed long and loud when he heard this, for well was he reminded of the time when he and Unna had to flee for very life because they had done kindness to the poor; so he made answer: "Would ye then find it happiness to serve your human neighbors, if ye could?"

"Aye, marry, that would we," the ælf King told him. "We be great artificers in both wood and stone and metal. There are no smiths like unto us, nor any who can fashion better things of wood, and much would it delight our hearts to shape things for men's service and bestow them on the good men of the farms and villages; but they, taught by their priests, will have none of our gifts. Why, to call a thing a fairy gift is to insult the giver in these days!"

Now as Klaus listened to this plaint there came a ringing as of many bells heard far away within his ears, and once again the voice he knew spake to him, and he heard: "Klaus, thou hast need of these small men. Take them with thee on the road which shall be opened to thy feet."

So he addressed the ælfmen's King and said: "Wouldst go with me unto a place of safety, and there work diligently to make the things which children joy to have? If thou wilt do it, I'll see thy gifts are put into the hands of those who will take joy in them and praise thy name for making them."

"My lord, if thou wilt do this thing for us, I am thy true and loyal vassal now and ever, both I and all my people,"

swore the ælf King. So on the fresh green turf he kneeled him down and swore the oath of fealty unto Klaus, acknowledging himself his vassal and swearing to bear true and faithful service unto him. Both he and all his host of tiny men pronounced the oath, and when they rose from off their knees they hailed Klaus as their lord and leader.

Then from their treasure-store they brought a little sleigh of gold, no larger than the helmet which a soldier wears to shield his skull from sword-blows, but so cunningly contrived that it could stretch and swell till it had room for all of them, both the ælf King and his host of dwarfs, and Klaus and Unna and their steeds, as well. And when they had ensconced them in the magic sleigh they harnessed to it four span of tiny reindeer, and at once these grew until they were as large as war-steeds, and with a shout the ælf King bade them go, and straightway they rose up into the air and drew the sleigh behind them, high above the heaving billows of the Baltic.

"Bid them ride on until they have the will to stop," Klaus ordered, and the ælf King did as he commanded, and presently, far in the frozen North where the light of the bridge Bifrost rests upon the earth, the reindeer came to rest. And there they builded them a house, strong-timbered and thick-walled, with lofty chimneys and great hearths where mighty fires roared ceaselessly. And in the rooms about the great hall they set their forges up, and the air was filled with sounds of iron striking iron as the nimble, cunning dwarfs fashioned toys of metal while others of their company plied saw and knife and chisel, making toys of wood, and others still made dolls of plaster and of chinaware and clothed them in small garments deftly shaped from cloth which cunning ælfmen under Unna's teaching fashioned at the great looms they had built.

When Christmastide was come again there was a heap of toys raised mountain-high, and Klaus put them in the magic sleigh and whistled to the magic reindeer, and away they sped across the bridge Bifrost where in olden days men said the gods had crossed to Asgard. And so swiftly sped his eight small steeds, and so well his sleigh was stocked with toys, that before the light of Christmas morning dawned there was a gift to joy the heart of children laid upon each hearth, and Klaus came cloud-riding back again unto his Northern home and there his company of cunning dwarfs and his good wife Unna awaited him, and a mighty feast was made, and the tables groaned beneath the weight of venison and salmon and fat roast goose, and the mead-horns frothed and foamed as they bid each other skoal and *waes hael* and drank and drank again to childhood's happiness.

Long years ago Klaus laid aside his sword, and his great ax gathers rust upon the castle wall; for he has no need of weapons as he goes about the work foretold for him that night so long ago upon the road to Bethlehem.

Odin's name is but a memory, and in all the world none serves his altars, but Klaus is very real today, and every year ten thousand times ten thousand happy children wait his coming; for he is neither Claudius the centurion nor Klaus the mighty man of war, but Santa Klaus, the very patron saint of little children, and his is the work his Master chose for him that night two thousand years ago; his the long, long road that has no turning so long as men keep festival upon the anniversary of the Savior's birth.

"Something pale and cloudy was making itself visible."

The Hairy Ones Shall Dance

By GANS T. FIELD

A novel of a hideous, stark horror that struck during a spirit séance—a tale of terror and sudden death, and the frightful thing that laired in the Devil's Croft

Foreword

TO WHOM It May Concern:

Few words are best, as Sir Philip Sidney once wrote in challenging an enemy. The present account will be accepted as a challenge by the vast army of skeptics of which I once made one. Therefore I write it brief and bald. If my story seems unsteady in spots, that is because the hand that writes it still quivers from my recent ordeal.

Shifting the metaphor from duello to military engagement, this is but the first

gun of the bombardment. Even now sworn statements are being prepared by all others who survived the strange and, in some degree, unthinkable adventure I am recounting. After that, every great psychic investigator in the country, as well as some from Europe, will begin researches. I wish that my friends and brother-magicians, Houdini and Thurston, had lived to bear a hand in them.

I must apologize for the strong admixture of the personal element in my narrative. Some may feel that I err against good taste. My humble argument is that I was not merely an observer, but an actor, albeit a clumsy one, throughout the drama.

As to the setting forth of matters which many will call impossible, let me smile in advance. Things happen and have always happened, that defy the narrow science of test-tube and formula. I can only say again that I am writing the truth, and that my statement will be supported by my companions in the adventure.

TALBOT WILLS.

November 15, 1937.

1. *"Why Must the Burden of Proof Rest with the Spirits?"*

"YOU don't believe in psychic phenomena," said Doctor Otto Zoberg yet again, "because you *won't.*"

This with studied kindness, sitting in the most comfortable chair of my hotel room. I, at thirty-four, silently hoped I would have his health and charm at fifty-four—he was so rugged for all his lean length, so well groomed for all his tweeds and beard and joined eyebrows, so articulate for all his accent. Doctor Zoberg quite apparently liked and admired me, and I felt guilty once more that I did not entirely return the compliment.

"I know that you are a stage magician——" he began afresh.

"I was once," I amended, a little sulkily. My early career had brought me considerable money and notice, but after the novelty of show business was worn off I had never rejoiced in it. Talboto the Mysterious—it had been impressive, but tawdry. Better to be Talbot Wills, lecturer and investigator in the field of exposing fraudulent mediums.

For six years I had known Doctor Otto Zoberg, the champion of spiritism and mediumism, as rival and companion. We had first met in debate under auspices of the Society for Psychical Research in London. I, young enough for enthusiasm but also for carelessness, had been badly outthought and out-talked. But afterward, Doctor Zoberg had praised my arguments and my delivery, and had graciously taken me out to a late supper. The following day, there arrived from him a present of helpful books and magazines. Our next platform duel found me in a position to get a little of my own back; and he, afterward, laughingly congratulated me on turning to account the material he had sent me. After that, we were public foemen and personal inseparables. Just now we were touring the United States, debating, giving exhibitions, visiting mediums. The night's program, before a Washington audience liberally laced with high officials, had ended in what we agreed was a draw; and here we were, squabbling good-naturedly afterward.

"Please, Doctor," I begged, offering him a cigarette, "save your charges of stubbornness for the theater."

He waved my case aside and bit the end from a villainous black cheroot. "I wouldn't say it, here or in public, if it weren't true, Talbot. Yet you sneer even at telepathy, and only half believe in

mental suggestion. *Ach,* you are worse than Houdini."

"Houdini was absolutely sincere," I almost blazed, for I had known and worshipped that brilliant and kindly prince of conjurers and fraud-finders.

"*Ach,* to be sure, to be sure," nodded Zoberg over his blazing match. "I did not say he was not. Yet, he refused proof—the proof that he himself embodied. Houdini was a great mystic, a medium. His power for miracles he did not know himself."

I had heard that before, from Conan Doyle as well as Zoberg, but I made no comment. Zoberg continued:

"Perhaps Houdini was afraid—if anything could frighten so brave and wise a man it would assuredly come from within. And so he would not even listen to argument." He turned suddenly somber. "Perhaps he knew best, *ja.* But he was stubborn, and so are you."

"I don't think you can say that of me," I objected once more. The cheroot was alight now, and I kindled a cigarette to combat in some degree the gunpowdery fumes.

Teeth gleamed amiably through the beard, and Zoberg nodded again, in frank delight this time. "Oh, we have hopes of you, Wills, where we gave up Houdini."

He had never said that before, not so plainly at any rate. I smiled back. "I've always been willing to be shown. Give me a fool-proof, fake-proof, supernormal phenomenon, Doctor; let me convince myself; then I'll come gladly into the spiritist camp."

"*Ach,* so you always say!" he exploded, but without genuine wrath. "Why must the burden of proof rest with the spirits? How can you prove that they do not live and move and act? Study what Eddington has to say about that."

"For five years," I reminded him, "I have offered a prize of five thousand dollars to any medium whose spirit miracles I could not duplicate by honest sleight-of-hand."

He gestured with slim fingers, as though to push the words back into me. "That proves absolutely nothing, Wills. For all your skill, do you think that sleight-of-hand can be the only way? Is it even the best way?"

"I've unmasked famous mediums for years, at the rate of one a month," I flung back. "Unmasked them as the clumsiest of fakes."

"Because some are dishonest, are all dishonest?" he appealed. "What specific thing would convince you, my friend?"

I thought for a moment, gazing at him through the billows of smoke. Not a gray hair to him—and I, twenty years his junior, had six or eight at either temple. I went on to admire and even to envy that pointed trowel of beard, the sort of thing that I, a magician, might have cultivated once. Then I made my answer.

"I'd ask for a materialization, Doctor. An ectoplasmic apparition, visible and solid to touch—in an empty room with no curtains or closets, all entrances sealed by myself, the medium and witnesses shackled." He started to open his mouth, but I hurried to prevent him. "I know what you'll say—that I've seen a number of impressive ectoplasms. So I have, perhaps, but not one was scientifically and dispassionately controlled. No, Doctor, if I'm to be convinced, I must make the conditions and set the stage myself."

"And if the materialization was a complete success?"

"Then it would prove the claim to me—to the world. Materializations are the most important question in the whole field."

He looked long at me, narrowing his shrewd eyes beneath the dark single bar of his brows. "Wills," he said at length,

"I hoped you would ask something like this."

"You did?"

"*Ja.* Because—first, can you spare a day or so?"

I replied guardedly, "I can, I believe. We have two weeks or more before the New Orleans date." I computed rapidly. "Yes, that's December 8. What have you got up your sleeve, Doctor?"

He grinned once more, with a great display of gleaming white teeth, and flung out his long arms. "My sleeves, you will observe, are empty!" he cried. "No trickery. But within five hours of where we sit—five hours by fast automobile—is a little town. And in that town there is a little medium. No, Wills, you have never seen or heard of her. It is only myself who found her by chance, who studied her long and prayerfully. Come with me, Wills—she will teach you how little you know and how much you can learn!"

2. "You Can Almost Hear the Ghosts."

I HAVE sat down with the purpose of writing out, plainly and even flatly, all that happened to me and to Doctor Otto Zoberg in our impromptu adventure at psychic investigation; yet, almost at the start, I find it necessary to be vague about the tiny town where that adventure ran its course. Zoberg began by refusing to tell me its name, and now my friends of various psychical research committees have asked me to hold my peace until they have finished certain examinations without benefit of yellow journals or prying politicians.

It is located, as Zoberg told me, within five miles by fast automobile of Washington. On the following morning, after a quick and early breakfast, we departed at seven o'clock in my sturdy coupé. I drove and Zoberg guided. In the turtle-back we had stowed bags, for the November sky had begun to boil up with dark, heavy clouds, and a storm might delay us.

On the way Zoberg talked a great deal, with his usual charm and animation. He scoffed at my skepticism and prophesied my conversion before another midnight.

"A hundred years ago, realists like yourself were ridiculing hypnotism," he chuckled. "They thought that it was a fantastic fake, like one of Edgar Poe's amusing tales, *ja?* And now it is a great science, for healing and comforting the world. A few years ago, the world scorned mental telepathy——"

"Hold on," I interrupted. "I'm none too convinced of it now."

"I said just that, last night. However, you think that there is some grain of truth to it. You would be a fool to laugh at the many experiments in clairvoyance carried on at Duke University."

"Yes, they are impressive," I admitted.

"They are tremendous, and by no means unique," he insisted. "Think of a number between one and ten," he said suddenly.

I gazed at my hands on the wheel, thought of a joking reply, then fell in with his mood.

"All right," I replied. "I'm thinking of a number. What is it?"

"It is seven," he cried out at once, then laughed heartily at the blank look on my face.

"Look here, that's a logical number for an average man to think of," I protested. "You relied on human nature, not telepathy."

He grinned and tweaked the end of his beard between manicured fingers. "Very good, Wills, try again. A color this time."

I paused a moment before replying, "All right, guess what it is."

He, too, hesitated, staring at me side-

wise. "I think it is blue," he offered at length.

"Go to the head of the class," I grumbled. "I rather expected you to guess red—that's most obvious."

"But I was not guessing," he assured me. "A flash of blue came before my mind's eye. Come, let us try another time."

We continued the experiment for a while. Zoberg was not always correct, but he was surprizingly close in nearly every case. The most interesting results were with the names of persons, and Zoberg achieved some rather mystifying approximations. Thus, when I was thinking of the actor Boris Karloff, he gave me the name of the actor Bela Lugosi. Upon my thinking of Gilbert K. Chesterton, he named Chesterton's close friend Hilaire Belloc, and my concentration on George Bernard Shaw brought forth a shout of "Santa Claus." When I reiterated my charge of psychological trickery and besought him to teach me his method, he grew actually angry and did not speak for more than half an hour. Then he began to discuss our destination.

"A most amazing community," he pronounced. "It is old—one of the oldest inland towns of all America. Wait until you see the houses, my friend. You can almost hear the ghosts within them, in broad daylight. And their Devil's Croft, that is worth seeing, too."

"Their what?"

He shook his head, as though in despair. "And you set yourself up as an authority on occultism!" he sniffed. "Next you will admit that you have never heard of the Druids. A Devil's Croft, my dull young friend, used to be part of every English or Scots village. The good people would set aside a field for Satan, so that he would not take their own lands."

"And this settlement has such a place?"

"*Ja wohl*, a grove of the thickest timber ever seen in this over-civilized country, and hedged in to boot. I do not say that they believe, but it is civic property and protected by special order from trespassers."

"I'd like to visit that grove," I said.

"I pray you!" he cried, waving in protest. "Do not make us unwelcome."

WE ARRIVED shortly before noon. The little town rests in a circular hollow among high wooded hills, and there is not a really good road into it, for two or three miles around. After listening to Zoberg, I had expected something grotesque or forbidding, but I was disappointed. The houses were sturdy and modest, in some cases poor. The greater part of them made a close-huddled mass, like a herd of cattle threatened by wolves, with here and there an isolated dwelling like an adventuresome young fighting-bull. The streets were narrow, crooked and unpaved, and for once in this age I saw buggies and wagons outnumbering automobiles. The central square, with a two-story town hall of red brick and a hideous cast-iron war memorial, still boasted numerous hitching-rails, brown with age and smooth with use. There were few real signs of modern progress. For instance, the drug store was a shabby clapboard affair with "Pharmacy" painted upon its windows, and it sold only drugs, soda and tobacco; while the one hotel was low and rambling and bore the title "Luther Inn." I heard that the population was three hundred and fifty, but I am inclined to think it was closer to three hundred.

We drew up in front of the Luther Inn, and a group of roughly dressed men gazed at us with the somewhat hostile

interrogation that often marks a rural American community at the approach of strangers. These men wore mail-order coats of corduroy or suede—the air was growing nippier by the minute—and plow shoes or high laced boots under dungaree pants. All of them were of Celtic or Anglo-Saxon type.

"Hello!" cried Zoberg jovially. "I see you there, my friend Mr. Gird. How is your charming daughter?"

The man addressed took a step forward from the group on the porch. He was a raw-boned, grizzled native with pale, pouched eyes, and was a trifle better dressed than the others, in a rather ministerial coat of dark cloth and a wide black hat. He cleared his throat before replying.

"Hello, Doctor. Susan's well, thanks. What do you want of us?"

It was a definite challenge, that would repel or anger most men, but Zoberg was not to be denied. He scrambled out of the car and cordially shook the hand of the man he had called Mr. Gird. Meanwhile he spoke in friendly fashion to one or two of the others.

"And here," he wound up, "is a very good friend of mine, Mr. Talbot Wills."

All eyes—and very unfriendly eyes they were, as a whole—turned upon me. I got out slowly, and at Zoberg's insistence shook hands with Gird. Finally the grizzled man came with us to the car.

"I promised you once," he said glumly to Zoberg, "that I would let you and Susan dig as deeply as you wanted to into this matter of spirits. I've often wished since that I hadn't, but my word was never broken yet. Come along with me; Susan is cooking dinner, and there'll be enough for all of us."

He got into the car with us, and as we drove out of the square and toward his house he conversed quietly with Zoberg and me.

"Yes," he answered one of my questions, "the houses are old, as you can see. Some of them have stood since the Revolutionary War with England, and our town's ordinances have stood longer than that. You aren't the first to be impressed, Mr. Wills. Ten years ago a certain millionaire came and said he wanted to endow us, so that we would stay as we are. He had a lot to say about native color and historical value. We told him that we would stay as we are without having to take money from him, or from anybody else for that matter."

GIRD'S home was large but low, all one story, and of darkly painted clapboards over heavy timbers. The front door was hung on the most massive hand-wrought hinges. Gird knocked at it, and a slender, smallish girl opened to us.

She wore a woolen dress, as dark as her father's coat, with white at the neck and wrists. Her face, under masses of thunder-black hair, looked Oriental at first glance, what with high cheek-bones and eyes set aslant; then I saw that her eyes were a bright gray like worn silver, and her skin rosy, with a firm chin and a generous mouth. The features were representatively Celtic, after all, and I wondered for perhaps the fiftieth time in my life if there was some sort of blood link between Scot and Mongol. Her hand, on the brass knob of the door, showed as slender and white as some evening flower.

"Susan," said Gird, "here's Doctor Zoberg. And this is his friend, Mr. Wills."

She smiled at Zoberg, then nodded to me, respectfully and rather shyly.

"My daughter," Gird finished the introduction. "Well, dinner must be ready."

She led us inside. The parlor was rather plainer than in most old-fash-

ioned provincial houses, but it was comfortable enough. Much of its furniture would have delighted antique dealers, and one or two pieces would have impressed museum directors. The dining-room beyond had plate-racks on the walls and a long table of dark wood, with high-backed chairs. We had some fried ham, biscuits, coffee and stewed fruit that must have been home-canned. Doctor Zoberg and Gird ate heartily, talking of local trifles, but Susan Gird hardly touched her food. I, watching her with stealthy admiration, forgot to take more than a few mouthfuls.

After the repast she carried out the dishes and we men returned to the parlor. Gird faced us.

"You're here for some more hocus-pocus?" he hazarded gruffly.

"For another séance," amended Zoberg, suave as ever.

"Doctor," said Gird, "I think this had better be the last time."

Zoberg held out a hand in pleading protest, but Gird thrust his own hands behind him and looked sternly stubborn. "It's not good for the girl," he announced definitely.

"But she is a great medium—greater than Eusapia Paladino, or Daniel Home," Zoberg argued earnestly. "She is an important figure in the psychic world, lost and wasted here in this backwater——"

"Please don't miscall our town," interrupted Gird. "Well, Doctor, I agree to a final séance, as you call it. But I'm going to be present."

Zoberg made a gesture as of refusal, but I sided with Gird.

"If this is to be my test, I want another witness," I told Zoberg.

"*Ach!* If it is a success, you will say that he helped to deceive."

"Not I. I'll arrange things so there will be no deception."

Both Zoberg and Gird stared at me. I wondered which of them was the more disdainful of my confidence.

Then Susan Gird joined us, and for once I wanted to speak of other subjects than the occult.

3. "That Thing Isn't My Daughter——"

It was Zoberg who suggested that I take Susan Gird for a relaxing drive in my car. I acclaimed the idea as a brilliant one, and she, thanking me quietly, put on an archaic-seeming cloak, black and heavy. We left her father and Zoberg talking idly and drove slowly through the town.

She pointed out to me the Devil's Croft of which I had heard from the doctor, and I saw it to be a grove of trees, closely and almost rankly set. It stood apart from the sparser timber on the hills, and around it stretched bare fields. Their emptiness suggested that all the capacity for life had been drained away and poured into that central clump. No road led near to it, and I was obliged to content myself by idling the car at a distance while we gazed and she talked.

"It's evergreen, of course," I said. "Cedar and a little juniper."

"Only in the hedge around it," Susan Gird informed me. "It was planted by the town council about ten years ago."

I stared. "But surely there's greenness in the center, too," I argued.

"Perhaps. They say that the leaves never fall, even in January."

I gazed at what appeared to be a little fluff of white mist above it, the whiter by contrast with the black clouds that lowered around the hill-tops. To my questions about the town council, Susan Gird told me some rather curious things about the government of the community. There were five councilmen, elected every year, and no mayor. Each of the five presided at a meeting in turn. Among

the ordinances enforced by the council was one providing for support of the single church.

"I should think that such an ordinance could be set aside as illegal," I observed.

"I think it could," she agreed, "but nobody has ever wished to try."

The minister of the church, she continued, was invariably a member of the council. No such provision appeared on the town records, nor was it even urged as a "written law," but it had always been deferred to. The single peace officer of the town, she continued, was the duly elected constable. He was always commissioned as deputy sheriff by officials at the county seat, and his duties included census taking, tax collecting and similar matters. The only other officer with a state commission was the justice; and her father, John Gird, had held that post for the last six years.

"He's an attorney, then?" I suggested, but Susan Gird shook her head.

"The only attorney in this place is a retired judge, Keith Pursuivant," she informed me. "He came from some other part of the world, and he appears in town about once a month—lives out yonder past the Croft. As a matter of fact, an ordinary experience of law isn't enough for our peculiar little government."

She spoke of her fellow-townsmen as quiet, simple folk who were content for the most part to keep to themselves, and then, yielding to my earnest pleas, she told me something of herself.

The Gird family counted its descent from an original settler—though she was not exactly sure of when or how the settlement was made—and had borne a leading part in community affairs through more than two centuries. Her mother, who had died when Susan Gird was seven, had been a stranger; an "outlander" was the local term for such, and I think it is used in Devonshire, which may throw light on the original founders of the community. Apparently this woman had shown some tendencies toward psychic power, for she had several times prophesied coming events or told neighbors where to find lost things. She was well loved for her labors in caring for the sick, and indeed she had died from a fever contracted when tending the victims of an epidemic.

"Doctor Zoberg had known her," Susan Gird related. "He came here several years after her death, and seemed badly shaken when he heard what had happened. He and Father became good friends, and he has been kind to me, too. I remember his saying, the first time we met, that I looked like Mother and that it was apparent that I had inherited her spirit."

She had grown up and spent three years at a teachers' college, but left before graduation, refusing a position at a school so that she could keep house for her lonely father. Still idiotically mannerless, I mentioned the possibility of her marrying some young man of the town. She laughed musically.

"Why, I stopped thinking of marriage when I was fourteen!" she cried. Then, "Look, it's snowing."

So it was, and I thought it time to start for her home. We finished the drive on the best of terms, and when we reached her home in midafternoon, we were using first names.

GIRD, I found, had capitulated to Doctor Zoberg's genial insistence. From disliking the thought of a séance, he had come to savor the prospect of witnessing it—Zoberg had always excluded him before. Gird had even picked up a metaphysical term or two from listening to the doctor, and with these he spiced his normally plain speech.

"This ectoplasm stuff sounds reasonable," he admitted. "If there is any such thing, there could be ghosts, couldn't there?"

Zoberg twinkled, and tilted his beard-spike forward. "You will find that Mr. Wills does not believe in ectoplasm."

"Nor do I believe that the production of ectoplasm would prove existence of a ghost," I added. "What do you say, Miss Susan?"

She smiled and shook her dark head. "To tell you the truth, I'm aware only dimly of what goes on during a séance."

"Most mediums say that," nodded Zoberg sagely.

As the sun set and the darkness came down, we prepared for the experiment.

The dining-room was chosen, as the barest and quietest room in the house. First I made a thorough examination, poking into corners, tapping walls and handling furniture, to the accompaniment of jovial taunts from Zoberg. Then, to his further amusement, I produced from my grip a big lump of sealing-wax, and with this I sealed both the kitchen and parlor doors, stamping the wax with my signet ring. I also closed, latched and sealed the windows, on the sills of which little heaps of snow had begun to collect.

"You're kind of making sure, Mr. Wills," said Gird, lighting a patent carbide lamp.

"That's because I take this business seriously," I replied, and Zoberg clapped his hands in approval.

"Now," I went on, "off with your coats and vests, gentlemen."

Gird and Zoberg complied, and stood up in their shirt-sleeves. I searched and felt them both all over. Gird was a trifle bleak in manner, Zoberg gay and bright-faced. Neither had any concealed apparatus, I made sure. My next move was to set a chair against the parlor door, seal its legs to the floor, and instruct Gird to sit in it. He did so, and I produced a pair of handcuffs from my bag and shackled his left wrist to the arm of the chair.

"Capital!" cried Zoberg. "Do not be so sour, Mr. Gird. I would not trust handcuffs on Mr. Wills—he was once a magician and knows all the escape tricks."

"Your turn's coming, Doctor," I assured him.

Against the opposite wall and facing Gird's chair I set three more chairs, melting wax around their legs and stamping it. Then I dragged all other furniture far away, arranging it against the kitchen door. Finally I asked Susan to take the central chair of the three, seated Zoberg at her left hand and myself at her right. Beside me, on the floor, I set the carbide lamp.

"With your permission," I said, and produced more manacles. First I fastened Susan's left ankle to Zoberg's right, then her left wrist to his right. Zoberg's left wrist I chained to his chair, leaving him entirely helpless.

"What thick wrists you have!" I commented. "I never knew they were so sinewy."

"You never chained them before," he grinned.

With two more pairs of handcuffs I shackled my own left wrist and ankle to Susan on the right.

"Now we are ready," I pronounced.

"You've treated us like bank robbers," muttered Gird.

"No, no, do not blame Mr. Wills," Zoberg defended me again. He looked anxiously at Susan. "Are you quite prepared, my dear?"

Her eyes met his for a long moment; then she closed them and nodded. I, bound to her, felt a relaxation of her en-

tire body. After a moment she bowed her chin upon her breast.

"Let nobody talk," warned Zoberg softly. "I think that this will be a successful venture. Wills, the light."

With my free hand I turned it out.

All was intensely dark for a moment. Then, as my eyes adjusted themselves, the room seemed to lighten. I could see the deep gray rectangles of the windows, the snow at their bottoms, the blurred outline of the man in his chair across the floor from me, the form of Susan at my left hand. My ears, likewise sharpening, detected the girl's gentle breathing, as if she slept. Once or twice her right hand twitched, shaking my own arm in its manacle. It was as though she sought to attract my attention.

Before and a little beyond her, something pale and cloudy was making itself visible. Even as I fixed my gaze upon it, I heard something that sounded like a gusty panting. It might have been a tired dog or other beast. The pallid mist was changing shape and substance, too, and growing darker. It shifted against the dim light from the windows, and I had a momentary impression of something erect but misshapen—misshapen in an animal way. Was that a head? And were those pointed ears, or part of a headdress? I told myself determinedly that this was a clever illusion, successful despite my precautions.

It moved, and I heard a rattle upon the planks. Claws, or perhaps hobnails. Did not Gird wear heavy boots? Yet he was surely sitting in his chair; I saw something shift position at that point. The grotesque form had come before me, crouching or creeping.

Despite my self-assurance that this was a trick, I could not govern the chill that swept over me. The thing had come to a halt close to me, was lifting itself as a hound that paws its master's knees. I was aware of an odor, strange and disagreeable, like the wind from a great beast's cage. Then the paws were upon my lap—indeed, they were not paws. I felt them grip my legs, with fingers and opposable thumbs. A sniffing muzzle thrust almost into my face, and upon its black snout a dim, wet gleam was manifest.

Then Gird, from his seat across the room, screamed hoarsely.

"That thing isn't my daughter——"

In the time it took him to rip out those five words, the huddled monster at my knees whirled back and away from me, reared for a trice like a deformed giant, and leaped across the intervening space upon him. I saw that Gird had tried to rise, his chained wrist hampering him. Then his voice broke in the midst of what he was trying to say; he made a choking sound and the thing emitted a barking growl.

Tearing loose from its wax fastenings, the chair fell upon its side. There was a struggle and a clatter, and Gird squealed like a rabbit in a trap. The attacker fell away from him toward us.

It was all over before one might ask what it was about.

4. "I Don't Know What Killed Him."

JUST when I got up I do not remember, but I was on my feet as the grapplers separated. Without thinking of danger—and surely danger was there in the room—I might have rushed forward; but Susan Gird, lying limp in her chair, hampered me in our mutual shackles. Standing where I was, then, I pawed in my pocket for something I had not mentioned to her or to Zoberg; an electric torch.

It fitted itself into my hand, a compact little cylinder, and I whipped it out with my finger on the switch. A cone of white

light spurted across the room, making a pool about and upon the motionless form of Gird. He lay crumpled on one side, his back toward us, and a smudge of black wetness was widening about his slack head and shoulders.

With the beam I swiftly quartered the room, probing it into every corner and shadowed nook. The creature that had attacked Gird had utterly vanished. Susan Gird now gave a soft moan, like a dreamer of dreadful things. I flashed my light her way.

It flooded her face and she quivered under the impact of the glare, but did not open her eyes. Beyond her I saw Zoberg, doubled forward in his bonds. He was staring blackly at the form of Gird, his eyes protruding and his clenched teeth showing through his beard.

"Doctor Zoberg!" I shouted at him, and his face jerked nervously toward me. It was fairly cross-hatched with tense lines, and as white as fresh pipe-clay. He tried to say something, but his voice would not command itself.

Dropping the torch upon the floor, I next dug keys from my pocket and with trembling haste unlocked the irons from Susan Gird's wrist and ankle on my side. Then, stepping hurriedly to Zoberg, I made him sit up and freed him as speedily as possible. Finally I returned, found my torch again and stepped across to Gird.

My first glance at close quarters was enough; he was stone-dead, with his throat torn brutally out. His cheeks, too, were ripped in parallel gashes, as though by the grasp of claws or nails. Radiance suddenly glowed behind me, and Zoberg moved forward, holding up the carbide lamp.

"I found this beside your chair," he told me unsteadily. "I found a match and lighted it." He looked down at Gird, and his lips twitched, as though he would be hysterical.

"Steady, Doctor," I cautioned him sharply, and took the lamp from him. "See what you can do for Gird."

He stooped slowly, as though he had grown old. I stepped to one side, putting the lamp on the table. Zoberg spoke again:

"It is absolutely no use, Wills. We can do nothing. Gird has been killed."

I had turned my attention to the girl. She still sagged in her chair, breathing deeply and rhythmically as if in untroubled slumber.

"Susan," I called her. "Susan!"

She did not stir, and Doctor Zoberg came back to where I bent above her. "Susan," he whispered penetratingly, "wake up, child."

Her eyes unveiled themselves slowly, and looked up at us. "What——" she began drowsily.

"Prepare yourself," I cautioned her quickly. "Something has happened to your father."

She stared across at Gird's body, and then she screamed, tremulously and long. Zoberg caught her in his arms, and she swayed and shuddered against their supporting circle. From her own wrists my irons still dangled, and they clanked as she wrung her hands in aimless distraction.

Going to the dead man once more, I unchained him from the chair and turned him upon his back. Susan's black cloak lay upon one of the other chairs, and I picked it up and spread it above him. Then I went to each door in turn, and to the windows.

"The seals are unbroken," I reported. "There isn't a space through which even a mouse could slip in or out. Yet——"

"I did it!" wailed Susan suddenly. "Oh, my God, what dreadful thing came out of me to murder my father!"

I UNFASTENED the parlor door and opened it. Almost at the same time a loud knock sounded from the front of the house.

Zoberg lifted his head, nodding to me across Susan's trembling shoulder. His arms were still clasped around her, and I could not help but notice that they seemed thin and ineffectual now. When I had chained them, I had wondered at their steely cording. Had this awful calamity drained him of strength?

"Go," he said hoarsely. "See who it is."

I went. Opening the front door, I came face to face with a tall, angular silhouette in a slouch hat with snow on the brim.

"Who are you?" I jerked out, startled.

"O'Bryant," boomed back an organ-deep bass. "What's the fuss here?"

"Well——" I began, then hesitated.

"Stranger in town, ain't you?" was the next question. "I saw you when you stopped at the Luther Inn. I'm O'Bryant —the constable."

He strode across the door-sill, peered about him in the dark, and then slouched into the lighted dining-room. Following, I made him out as a stern, roughly dressed man of forty or so, with a lean face made strong by a salient chin and a simitar nose. His light blue eyes studied the still form of John Gird, and he stooped to draw away the cloak. Susan gave another agonized cry, and I heard Zoberg gasp as if deeply shocked. The constable, too, flinched and replaced the cloak more quickly than he had taken it up.

"Who done that?" he barked at me.

Again I found it hard to answer. Constable O'Bryant sniffed suspiciously at each of us in turn, took up the lamp and herded us into the parlor. There he made us take seats.

"I want to know everything about this business," he said harshly. "You," he flung at me, "you seem to be the closest to sensible. Give me the story, and don't leave out a single bit of it."

Thus commanded, I made shift to describe the séance and what had led up to it. I was as uneasy as most innocent people are when unexpectedly questioned by peace officers. O'Bryant interrupted twice with a guttural "Huh!" and once with a credulous whistle.

"And this killing happened in the dark?" he asked when I had finished. "Well, which of you dressed up like a devil and done it?"

Susan whimpered and bowed her head. Zoberg, outraged, sprang to his feet.

"It was a creature from another world," he protested angrily. "None of us had a reason to kill Mr. Gird."

O'Bryant emitted a sharp, equine laugh. "Don't go to tell me any ghost stories, Doctor Zoberg. We folks have heard a lot about the hocus-pocus you've pulled off here from time to time. Looks like it might have been to cover up some kind of rough stuff."

"How could it be?" demanded Zoberg. "Look here, Constable, these handcuffs." He held out one pair of them. "We were all confined with them, fastened to chairs that were sealed to the floor. Mr. Gird was also chained, and his chair made fast out of our reach. Go into the next room and look for yourself."

"Let me see them irons," grunted O'Bryant, snatching them.

He turned them over and over in his hands, snapped them shut, tugged and pressed, then held out a hand for my keys. Unlocking the cuffs, he peered into the clamping mechanism.

"These are regulation bracelets," he pronounced. "You were all chained up, then?"

"We were," replied Zoberg, and both Susan and I nodded.

Into the constable's blue eyes came a sudden shrewd light. "I guess you must have been, at that. But did you stay that way?" He whipped suddenly around, bending above my chair to fix his gaze upon me. "How about you, Mr. Wills?"

"Of course we stayed that way," I replied.

"Yeh? Look here, ain't you a professional magician?"

"How did you know that?" I asked.

He grinned widely and without warmth. "The whole town's been talking about you, Mr. Wills. A stranger can't be here all day without his whole record coming out." The grin vanished. "You're a magician, all right, and you can get out of handcuffs. Ain't that so?"

"Of course it's so," Zoberg answered for me. "But why should that mean that my friend has killed Mr. Gird?"

O'Bryant wagged his head in triumph. "That's what we'll find out later. Right now it adds up very simple. Gird was killed, in a room that was all sealed up. Three other folks was in with him, all handcuffed to their chairs. Which of them got loose without the others catching on?" He nodded brightly at me, as if in answer to his own question.

Zoberg gave me a brief, penetrating glance, then seemed to shrivel up in his own chair. He looked almost as exhausted as Susan. I, too, was feeling near to collapse.

"You want to own up, Mr. Wills?" invited O'Bryant.

"I certainly do not," I snapped at him. "You've got the wrong man."

"I thought," he made answer, as though catching me in a damaging admission, "that it was a devil, not a man, who killed Gird."

I shook my head. "I don't know what killed him."

"Maybe you'll remember after a while." He turned toward the door. "You come along with me. I'm going to lock you up."

I rose with a sigh of resignation, but paused for a moment to address Zoberg. "Get hold of yourself," I urged him. "Get somebody in here to look after Miss Susan, and then clarify in your mind what happened. You can help me prove that it wasn't I."

Zoberg nodded very wearily, but did not look up.

"Don't neither of you go into that room where the body is," O'Bryant warned them. "Mr. Wills, get your coat and hat."

I did so, and we left the house. The snow was inches deep and still falling. O'Bryant led me across the street and knocked on the door of a peak-roofed house. A swarthy little man opened to us.

"There's been a murder, Jim," said O'Bryant importantly. "Over at Gird's. You're deputized—go and keep watch. Better take the missus along, to look after Susan. She's bad cut up about it."

We left the new deputy in charge and walked down the street, then turned into the square. Two or three men standing in front of the "Pharmacy" stared curiously, then whispered as we passed. Another figure paused to give me a searching glance. I was not too stunned to be irritated.

"Who are those?" I asked the constable.

"Town fellows," he informed me. "They're mighty interested to see what a killer looks like."

"How do they know about the case?" I almost groaned.

He achieved his short, hard laugh.

"Didn't I say that news travels fast in a town like this? Half the folks are talking about the killing this minute."

"You'll find you made a mistake," I assured him.

"If I have, I'll beg your pardon handsome. Meanwhile, I'll do my duty."

We were at the red brick town hall by now. At O'Bryant's side I mounted the granite steps and waited while he unlocked the big double door with a key the size of a can-opener.

"We're a kind of small town," he observed, half apologetically, "but there's a cell upstairs for you. Take off your hat and overcoat—you're staying inside till further notice."

5. *"They Want to Take the Law into Their Own Hands"*

THE cell was an upper room of the town hall, with a heavy wooden door and a single tiny window. The walls were of bare, unplastered brick, the floor of concrete and the ceiling of whitewashed planks. An oil lamp burned in a bracket. The only furniture was an iron bunk hinged to the wall just below the window, a wire-bound straight chair and an unpainted table. On top of this last stood a bowl and pitcher, with playing-cards scattered around them.

Constable O'Bryant locked me in and peered through a small grating in the door. He was all nose and eyes and wide lips, like a sardonic Punchinello.

"Look here," I addressed him suddenly, for the first time controlling my frayed nerves; "I want a lawyer."

"There ain't no lawyer in town," he boomed sourly.

"Isn't there a Judge Pursuivant in the neighborhood?" I asked, remembering something that Susan had told me.

"He don't practise law," O'Bryant grumbled, and his beaked face slid out of sight.

I turned to the table, idly gathered up the cards into a pack and shuffled them. To steady my still shaky fingers, I produced a few simple sleight-of-hand effects, palming of aces, making a king rise to the top, and springing the pack accordion-wise from one hand to the other.

"I'd sure hate to play poker with you," volunteered O'Bryant, who had come again to gaze at me.

I crossed to the grating and looked through at him. "You've got the wrong man," I said once more. "Even if I were guilty, you couldn't keep me from talking to a lawyer."

"Well, I'm doing it, ain't I?" he taunted me. "You wait until tomorrow and we'll go to the county seat. The sheriff can do whatever he wants to about a lawyer for you."

He ceased talking and listened. I heard the sound, too—a hoarse, dull murmur as of coal in a chute, or a distant, lowing herd of troubled cattle.

"What's that?" I asked him.

O'Bryant, better able to hear in the corridor, cocked his lean head for a moment. Then he cleared his throat. "Sounds like a lot of people talking, out in the square," he replied. "I wonder——"

He broke off quickly and walked away. The murmur was growing. I, pressing close to the grating to follow the constable with my eyes, saw that his shoulders were squared and his hanging fists doubled, as though he were suddenly aware of a lurking danger.

He reached the head of the stairs and clumped down, out of my sight. I turned back to the cell, walked to the bunk and, stepping upon it, raised the window. To the outside of the wooden frame two flat straps of iron had been securely bolted to act as bars. To these I clung as I peered out.

I was looking from the rear of the hall toward the center of the square, with the war memorial and the far line of shops and houses seen dimly through a thick curtain of falling snow. Something

dark moved closer to the wall beneath, and I heard a cry, as if of menace.

"I see his head in the window!" bawled a voice, and more cries greeted this statement. A moment later a heavy missile hit the wall close to the frame.

I dropped back from the window and went once more to the grating of the door. Through it I saw O'Bryant coming back, accompanied by several men. They came close and peered through at me.

"Let me out," I urged. "That's a mob out there."

O'Bryant nodded dolefully. "Nothing like this ever happened here before," he said, as if he were responsible for the town's whole history of violence. "They act like they want to take the law into their own hands."

A short, fat man spoke at his elbow. "We're members of the town council, Mr. Wills. We heard that some of the citizens were getting ugly. We came here to look after you. We promise full protection."

"Amen," intoned a thinner specimen, whom I guessed to be the preacher.

"There are only half a dozen of you," I pointed out. "Is that enough to guard me from a violent mob?"

As if to lend significance to my question, from below and in front of the building came a great shout, compounded of many voices. Then a loud pounding echoed through the corridor, like a bludgeon on stout panels.

"You locked the door, Constable?" asked the short man.

"Sure I did," nodded O'Bryant.

A perfect rain of buffets sounded from below, then a heavy impact upon the front door of the hall. I could hear the hinges creak.

"They're trying to break the door down," whispered one of the council.

The short man turned resolutely on his heel. "There's a window at the landing of the stairs," he said. "Let's go and try to talk to them from that."

The whole party followed him away, and I could hear their feet on the stairs, then the lifting of a heavy window-sash. A loud and prolonged yelling came to my ears, as if the gathering outside had sighted and recognized a line of heads on the sill above them.

"Fellow citizens!" called the stout man's voice, but before he could go on a chorus of cries and hoots drowned him out. I could hear more thumps and surging shoves at the creaking door.

Escape I must. I whipped around and fairly ran to the bunk, mounting it a second time for a peep from my window. Nobody was visible below; apparently those I had seen previously had run to the front of the hall, there to hear the bellowings of the officials and take a hand in forcing the door.

Once again I dropped to the floor and began to tug at the fastenings of the bunk. It was an open oblong of metal, a stout frame of rods strung with springy wire netting. It could be folded upward against the wall and held with a catch, or dropped down with two lengths of chain to keep it horizontal. I dragged the mattress and blankets from it, then began a close examination of the chains. They were stoutly made, but the screw-plates that held them to the brick wall might be loosened. Clutching one chain with both my hands, I tugged with all my might, a foot braced against the wall. A straining heave, and it came loose.

At the same moment an explosion echoed through the corridor at my back, and more shouts rang through the air. Either O'Bryant or the mob had begun to shoot. Then a rending crash shook the building, and I heard one of the councilmen shouting: "Another like that and the door will be down!"

His words inspired additional speed

within me. I took the loose end of the chain in my hand. Its links were of twisted iron, and the final one had been sawed through to admit the loop of the screw-plate, then clamped tight again. But my frantic tugging had widened this narrow cut once more, and quickly I freed it from the dangling plate. Then, folding the bunk against the wall, I drew the chain upward. It would just reach to the window—that open link would hook around one of the flat bars.

THE noise of breakage rang louder in the front of the building. Once more I heard the voice of the short councilman: "I command you all to go home, before Constable O'Bryant fires on you again!"

"We got guns, too!" came back a defiant shriek, and in proof of this statement came a rattle of shots. I heard an agonized moan, and the voice of the minister: "Are you hit?"

"In the shoulder," was O'Bryant's deep, savage reply.

My chain fast to the bar, I pulled back and down on the edge of the bunk. It gave some leverage, but not enough—the bar was fastened too solidly. Desperate, I clambered upon the iron framework. Gaining the sill, I moved sidewise, then turned and braced my back against the wall. With my feet against the edge of the bunk, I thrust it away with all the strength in both my legs. A creak and a ripping sound, and the bar pulled slowly out from its bolts.

But a roar and thunder of feet told me that the throng outside had gained entrance to the hall at last.

I heard a last futile flurry of protesting cries from the councilmen as the steps echoed with the charge of many heavy boots. I waited no longer, but swung myself to the sill and wriggled through the narrow space where the bar had come out. A lapel of my jacket tore against the frame, but I made it. Clinging by the other bar, I made out at my side a narrow band of perpendicular darkness against the wall, and clutched at it. It was a tin drainpipe, by the feel of it.

An attack was being made upon the door of the cell. The wood splintered before a torrent of blows, and I heard people pushing in.

"He's gone!" yelled a rough voice, and, a moment later: "Hey, look at the window!"

I had hold of the drainpipe, and gave it my entire weight. Next instant it had torn loose from its flimsy supports and bent sickeningly outward. Yet it did not let me down at once, acting rather as a slender sapling to the top of which an adventuresome boy has sprung. Still holding to it, I fell sprawling in the snow twenty feet beneath the window I had quitted. Somebody shouted from above and a gun spoke.

"Get him!" screamed many voices. "Get him, you down below!"

But I was up and running for my life. The snow-filled square seemed to whip away beneath my feet. Dodging around the war memorial, I came face to face with somebody in a bearskin coat. He shouted for me to halt, in the reedy voice of an ungrown lad, and the fierce-set face that shoved at me had surely never felt a razor. But I, who dared not be merciful even to so untried an enemy, struck with both fists even as I hurtled against him. He whimpered and dropped, and I, springing over his falling body, dashed on.

A wind was rising, and it bore to me the howls of my pursuers from the direction of the hall. Two or three more guns went off, and one bullet whickered over my head. By then I had reached the far side of the square, hurried across the

street and up an alley. The snow, still falling densely, served to baffle the men who ran shouting in my wake. Too, nearly everyone who had been on the streets had gone to the front of the hall, and except for the boy at the memorial none offered to turn me back.

I came out upon a street beyond the square, quiet and ill-lit. Along this way, I remembered, I could approach the Gird home, where my automobile was parked. Once at the wheel, I could drive to the county seat and demand protection from the sheriff. But, as I came cautiously near the place and could see through the blizzard the outline of the car, I heard loud voices. A part of the mob had divined my intent and had branched off to meet me.

I ran down a side street, but they had seen me. "There he is!" they shrieked at one another. "Plug him!" Bullets struck the wall of a house as I fled past it, and the owner, springing to the door with an angry protest, joined the chase a moment later.

I WAS panting and staggering by now, and so were most of my pursuers. Only three or four, lean young athletes, were gaining and coming even close to my heels. With wretched determination I maintained my pace, winning free of the close-set houses of the town, wriggling between the rails of a fence and striking off through the drifting snow of a field.

"Hey, he's heading for the Croft!" someone was wheezing, not far behind.

"Let him go in," growled another runner. "He'll wish he hadn't."

Yet again someone fired, and yet again the bullet went wide of me; moving swiftly, and half veiled by the dark and the wind-tossed snowfall, I was a bad target that night. And, lifting my head, I saw indeed the dense timber of the Devil's Croft, its tops seeming to toss and fall like the black waves of a high-pent sea.

It was an inspiration, helped by the shouts of the mob. Nobody went into that grove—avoidance of it had become a community habit, almost a community instinct. Even if my enemies paused only temporarily I could shelter well among the trunks, catch my breath, perhaps hide indefinitely. And surely Zoberg would be recovered, would back up my protest of innocence. With two words for it, the fantasy would not seem so ridiculous. All this I sorted over in my mind as I ran toward the Devil's Croft.

Another rail fence rose in my way. I feared for a moment that it would baffle me, so fast and far had I run and so greatly drained away was my strength. Yet I scrambled over somehow, slipped and fell beyond, got up and ran crookedly on. The trees were close now. Closer. Within a dozen yards. Behind me I heard oaths and warning exclamations. The pursuit was ceasing at last.

I found myself against close-set evergreens; that would be the hedge of which Susan Gird had told me. Pushing between and through the interlaced branches, I hurried on for five or six steps, cannoned from a big tree-trunk, went sprawling, lifted myself for another brief run and then, with my legs like strips of paper, dropped once more. I crept forward on hands and knees. Finally I collapsed upon my face. The weight of all I had endured—the séance, the horrible death of John Gird, my arrest, my breaking from the cell and my wild run for life—overwhelmed me as I lay.

Thus I must lie, I told myself hazily, until they came and caught me. I heard, or fancied I heard, movement near by, then a trilling whistle. A signal? It sounded like the song of a little frog.

Odd thought in this blizzard. I was thinking foolishly of frogs, while I sprawled face down in the snow. . . .

But where was the snow?

There was damp underneath, but it was warm damp, like that of a riverside in July. In my nostrils was a smell of green life, the smell of parks and hothouses. My fists closed upon something.

Two handfuls of soft, crisp moss!

I rose to my elbows. A white flower bobbed and swayed before my nose, shedding perfume upon me.

Far away, as though in another world, I heard the rising of the wind that was beating the snow into great drifts—but that was outside the Devil's Croft.

In the fascinating next installment of this story, Talbot Wills comes face to face in mortal combat with the frightful terror of the Devil's Croft. Reserve your copy at your magazine dealer's now.

Joean Matjan

By VENNETTE HERRON

It happened in Java, that strange, weird, incredible thing that the natives fully believe but the white man refuses to credit—the story of a tiger and a woman

AT A DINNER given by the British consul in Batavia I first met the Lady Violette Adair; but one way or another we met rather often after that and became friends, until finally she asked me to visit her. The house which she had had built out there—one in which to hide herself away for months on end alone with her writing and painting—was a quaint affair of mixed *billiek* and stucco; an enormous round studio, with its upper wall a ring of skylight windows under the eaves, hung with thick mustard-gold and mauve curtains, which could be drawn to shut out either sun or moon when desired, and no windows below; with a half-circle of small rooms, like monks' cells, at the back—and entered by a door stolen from a temple in Bali. The door was of intricately carven teak, covered with an incredible detail of tiny symbolic figures, at which many Europeans would probably have sniggered or blushed, but which made a perfect frame for the strangely blond and mask-like, more Scandanavian than British beauty of the Lady Violette. And the threshold of the door was a solid block of hand-hewn wood nearly a foot square, forming the central and topmost step of a little bridge of stairs, which led up to and then down into the studio, the floor of which was sunken a couple of feet below the level of the ground outside. A fascinating house, with a personality as exotic as that of its mistress, which is saying a great deal. And in it also there was the white cat.

"What a gorgeous animal, Violette!" For we had become fast friends before ever she invited me there.

"Two creatures of another world they seemed, one no more royal than the other."

"Yes, isn't it?"

But still she did not tell me its story—not until several weeks later indeed, only a few evenings before I was to leave. Then, however, she did. Not that I asked it of her even then, much as I would have liked to, but it was one of those portentous happenings which one simply has to relate to someone, sometime. And the hour was ripe, and I was there; wherefore, thanks be to Allah, I heard it. We were sitting side by side upon the threshold of the temple door, just at twilight, smoking lazily and watching the sunset behind the distant Tangomann Prahoe, sensing the exquisite melancholy of the rose-gray dusk, of the long lines of black-winged flying-foxes flapping westward into infinity; out of one cave, then into another, with a flash across space between—symbol of sad yet seaching little egos born to die, while life itself goes on for ever.

"What would you think," propounded Lady Violette suddenly, "if you saw a tiger pass across the lawn right now? *I* did, one night—a little later than this, just after the moon had risen. I was sitting here alone just as we are now when all at once I heard a piteous bleat from

the goat-pens, and a great clamor of frightened fowls. And then I saw the tiger, with a kid in its mouth. He was padding along rather slowly, not even looking at the house, as though knowing that nothing would harm him, and content with his kill, enjoying the night."

"Weren't you frightened? What did you do, Violette?"

"I dashed inside, and came back with the short, double-barreled shotgun which I always keep loaded for jungle emergencies; and he was still in sight—right over there by those trees." She pointed. "But just as I raised the gun to my shoulder, suddenly he stopped stock-still and looked at me. And—I never saw anything quite so magnificent! Tawny-striped, enormous, royal—'fearful symmetry' indeed! With great golden-green moon-eyes, wise, flaming, wild and sad. With blood dripping from his jowls—with in every line of him that marvelous feline pride which makes a few creatures appear above all pettiness, above all little common things, no matter what they may do. And without trying to escape, it just stood there staring. I don't know what it saw in *me,* but *I* saw beauty incarnate, and some awful unnamable cosmic tragedy. It was speaking with its soul—in words, just as you and I speak; and suffering as no human being can suffer because in words it could not speak. The natives believe, you know, that the souls of their great hero ancestors and likewise those of some of the lesser gods are locked up in tiger bodies. They will never kill one of the beasts themselves, if they can help it; and if they meet one in the jungle, instead they kneel and pray to it. And they'll all swear that, if one does that, the tiger will pass on without harming anyone."

"But what did *you* do?" I asked my hostess, intensely curious to know, and thinking to myself that the tiger might well have seen in her—in her mystic golden egg-shell fairness, in the fey blue eyes beneath the thread-thin dark arcs which were her brows, in the mask-like oval of her face—very much what she'd seen in it. Both were greater even than their super-finished shells. And both were part of a pitiful personal transciency, terribly and rebelliously aware of all around and just outside of themselves a mocking, jibing, ruthlessly ruminating, living eternity—Garoeda or the Sphinx—knowing it there; yet never quite able to break into and become a part of it.

"I?" replied the Lady Violette Adair. "What *could* I do after that? I lowered my gun and salaamed to him. *'Toean matjan besar*—great Lord Tiger,' I said, 'go home in peace. You are too beautiful to kill. But don't steal any more of my live-stock, please'."

"And then?"

"Then he did a strange thing. He opened his mouth and let the dead kid fall onto the grass; his lips curled in a tiger-smile, showing off his great white fangs, and he gave a little low rumbling roar. Then he was gone, like a streak of bright light—not daylight, but light of enchantment—burning its way beneath the trees, leaving behind him a ripple and swish of dew-drenched foliage, like a phosphorescent wake, for a second; then nothingness—a kind of soundless blank, which had not been there before he passed."

"And did you ever see him again?"

HER face was dreaming, inscrutable, with its lips slightly parted and queerly quirked at the corners, like the mask of a *serimpe*—one of the Javanese dancers of the Soesoehoenan's court. "That very same night once again I heard him. After I'd gone to bed, suddenly

upon the roof above my room there came a soft heavy thud and the grate of a slithering tile. Then a long soft, savagely tender purring, which went on and on."

"And still you weren't afraid?"

The Lady Violette smiled. "I fell asleep listening to it," she said, "and knew that I was protected."

"And is that the end of the story?"

She shook her head. "Oh no—only the beginning. The next morning Ati—my head-boy, as you know—brought me the kid, with his face gone almost white with excitement. 'Look, *nonja!*' he said. 'It was killed by a tiger—there are marks of its teeth on the body, and also its foot-prints, gigantic ones, in the dust of the compound. Something out of the ordinary indeed must have happened to cause it to drop its prey; but probably it will return. What does the *nonja* want us to do? Shall we set a trap for it? For if it has once killed——'

"But I hastened to reassure him. 'Don't worry, Ati. I talked to the tiger myself, even as your old men and *doekoens* talk, knowing the truth, even I, in so much of their knowledge and ways. And the tiger answered me. It said that it would attack nothing here again, that no one belonging to me need be afraid; and of its own accord it left the kid to show that it would keep its word.' "

"And the boy believed you?"

"Of course." My hostess shrugged, a trifle impatiently.

"And did it ever come back after that?"

The Lady Violette hesitated, then went on: "The natives believe also, you know, that the tiger can change its shape at will—like the werewolf—like all of the animals which are half-gods. Be that as it may, several days after that first appearance, as I was sitting at breakfast one morning in the studio, I looked up and beheld in the doorway, backed by a sheet of gold sun, an enormous white cat."

I started. *"Matjan Ketjil?"*

She nodded. "The same. Thoroughbred and dainty, with a great plume of a tail—like something out of fairyland. And its eyes—have you noticed them? In miniature they are twin replicas of those of the tiger. Without scruple, yet so fastidious, so aloof. And flooding in all around him was the scent of sun-bruised marigolds."

"I know." As indeed I did—that peculiar pungence which seemed to contain in it the very essence of Java mornings. "And then?"

"I held out my hand and called to it—in high Malay, suited to its rank. 'Enter, cat; dost want to be friends? Welcome to my house.' Then I told Ati to fetch a saucer of cream and offer it to him; but when the boy approached, the animal arched its back and spat. Then I ordered Ati to set the cream upon the table opposite me and to draw up a chair as though for a guest; and I myself salaamed to the cat and again held out my hand. 'Wilt do me the honor of sharing my meal, *Matjan Ketjil*—little tiger?' I invited. And at that my visitor walked over, with the tip of its coral tongue and the grace of a courtier kissed my fingers, then sprang onto the chair and with a comically polite little mew commenced to lap up the cream.

"And after breakfast," continued my friend, "it followed me all about the studio, until finally I placed a big velvet pillow for it beside my work-chair and sat down at my writing-table. Then *Matjan Ketjil*—for of course already that was his name—arranged himself upon the cushion and remained there, unblinking, unstirring, sometimes purring, sometimes seeming to sleep, occasionally looking up at me. And then——"

"Well?"

"My dear, I scarcely know how to tell you—it was the queerest thing! Of course everything in the East speaks to me; but between us two there was pure communication. I was not conscious of hearing sentences—of an audible voice at all; but simply all kinds of fantastic ideas beyond any that I had ever known flowed in and out of me—and I understood the East and the cosmos as never before, and wrote as I had never thought to write. And I felt strangely young and well, too. It was fascinating and exhilarating, a kind of enchantment. I wrote on and on. Some day very likely you will read some of it; but much of it will never be published until after I am dead. And since then the cat comes every day, as you yourself have seen. And toward dusk, as you will have noted too, he leaves and goes into the jungle."

I looked at my friend. Her eyes were shining stars, her lashes were infinitesimal glittering bronze-gold wires curving up to meet her brows; her mouth was a scarlet hibiscus blooming against a pale bamboo wall. Many men had paused to look at her; but it was often said that, except for the impersonal courtesy and consideration which was a part of her breeding, she never looked back at them; but confined her gaze instead to statues and shrines, to masks and animals, to occult lore, to the things which gave to the innermost core of her a thrill and to nothing else. Very ancient was the ego of the Lady Violette, although her so strangely perfect body was still so young. "Your cat is a magic creature—even without knowing what you've just recounted, and even though he will never let me stroke him," I said.

"He'll never let anyone touch him but me," Violette answered. "But likewise he will never harm you." Then she added slowly: "And neither would the tiger. Should you ever chance to see him, although I doubt if you will—but should you, you need not be afraid."

"You mean that the tiger too still sometimes returns?" I was not precisely afraid; but I peered across at the compound, from out of which seeped every now and again the comforting night sounds of sleepy goats and fowls, the stamp of Violette's riding-horse, or the whining wail of a Malay love-song—peered with the sort of horrified unable-not-to feeling with which one regards a mangling accident in a street.

"Sometimes he purrs on my roof at night—he's not apt to while you're here; but should you ever hear him, be calm—you have nothing to fear."

"You are a strange woman, Violette! But thank you for telling me."

"That's not quite all, either," she said. "And the rest may sound to you pretty terrible. But stark beauty is that, isn't it? Do you want to hear it?"

"Of course," I responded, wondering what could be more, if there were any inner truth in it at all, than what she'd already told me.

"Did you ever know Haviland Nesbit? He was rather the rage in London at one time. Just after—yes, that one. Then you know how handsome he was. But perhaps you don't know that he came out here last year—just wandering, as he so often did—and hunted me up, with a letter from my aunt, Lady Leila Carruthers. Yes, I thought you must have. Well——" She paused, then went on musingly: "Men as a rule do not attract me—I suppose you know that too; but more than any other Haviland Nesbit did. There *was* something about him which made me feel more—more as I suppose most other women feel; and I've never cared a damn for conventions, of course—so I asked him to stop awhile up here. And he did. But still we were

only friends—although he would have liked, of course——"

"And was that *after* the episode of the tiger—and the white cat?" I interrupted, too interested to consider whether or not I was being rude.

My hostess laughed. "Of course! I forgot that *you* couldn't just know," she said—kindly, but as though there were a way in which I might have known without asking. "But after the first day of his visit, *Matjan Ketjil* walked out, and did not return until after Haviland was—was gone." For an instant her face was inhuman in its cold, clear, dreaming beauty.

"Yes?" I ventured, to egg her on.

"I MISSED my — my companion, of course; yet the days were complete and full. Until—until after some weeks like that, there finally arrived a night when I too thought that there might, after all, be something in—in that something which usually is between a man and a woman shut up alone together. A night when I called myself a fool for at least not trying and learning. A night when at last—standing down there in the moonlight, just outside the temple door, Haviland Nesbit put his arms about me —and I let him. And we kissed. And just at that moment, although neither of us had heard even a rustle before, there came a spring from the roof, and somehow I was knocked to one side; while Haviland—not even much mauled, but dead of a broken neck before he could so much as cry out—lay in a crumpled heap at my feet. And then I saw the tiger, without a backward look, like a fierce yellow river, flowing off through the jungle."

"Violette!" I shuddered, and glanced involuntarily up toward the eaves beneath which we were sitting.

At which my hostess laughed again—a little, low, pearly gurgle, soulless and bell-like—fairy laughter. "And still you need not be afraid," she repeated gently. "For he knows now that I will not experiment again."

"But what did you do—about Haviland? For no one at home has ever heard what became of him—have they?"

"You see how I trust you, having made you my friend," she answered. "No, no one knows—nor will, till I too am dead. But then, if you should happen to be still alive, you may tell, if you like. But no, I didn't tell then. My aunt would have hated it so—all the talk; and there seemed no reason to. I called Ati, and we buried him over there, under that lovely tree, half purple flowers on one side and orange berries on the other. I don't know where he would rather lie for that last long rest—do you? But I was furious then too—furious! If *Matjan* had come back then in any shape—especially in his big tiger body——"

"Violette, you don't mean that you actually believe——"

"It's no matter. You may think what you like, but if the tiger had returned. . . . However, he didn't—not then; and neither did the white cat. Not for several days. But then one morning I looked up and there he was, standing in the door again, with the sun a bright blob behind him. And I took down a kris from the wall, the one which hangs always above my desk, and I walked toward him—meaning to put an end to it all, of course—remembering poor Haviland, who had hardly earned the fate which befell him. But then—but then—*Matjan Ketjil* didn't run away, you see; instead just stood and looked at me. And I knew myself better by then—so what would you? I am not as other women. This *is* my life. And although I am fond of you, my dear, very—and one or two

others—still I am always a little lonely, except when I am alone. And he *was* too beautiful to kill. So—so after a moment I hung the kris back on the wall again. And that's all."

For a breath we both sat silent. Then over our shoulders came the voice of Ati. "*Nonja, makan* is served." And we rose and went in.

AFTER dinner, over our coffee and liqueurs, there was a little more talk—fragmentary, but satisfying—mostly about the East. But I felt unusually tired and so excused myself early and withdrew to my cubicle—so perfect in its appointments, but so austere and cell-like. Then hastily I prepared for bed, but weary as I was, found that I could not sleep. And presently I heard a soft thud and a slithering tile, not quite above my room, but somewhere not far away upon the roof of the house. And I sprang from bed and stood on tiptoe to look out through my single window—a very high one, protected by stout steel bars. From there I could catch a glimpse of the lawn, backed by a black wall of jungle. The clearing was a bowl of moonlight, white and clean and lonely, with no movement in it at first. Then I saw my hostess walk across the open space in her trailing white dinner-gown, with a cigarette, glowing like a fire-fly, in her hand. Like some rare white tropical bird, stately and cold and lovely, she paced back and forth, slowly, superbly. And then—then I saw melt out of the shadows, like a thicker shadow forming, a sinuous, splendid shape, tawny-striped and fearful. And suddenly there was a tiger walking beside the woman. Two creatures of another world they seemed, one no more royal than the other, both lofty, lord-like, stately, pacing up and down in the witchlight, in a weird contentment of untellable communion. And God, how beautiful they were! I stared until my teeth chattered, then crept back to bed, feeling myself very small and child-like and earthy.

And the next morning the white cat came as always, and lapped its cream, sitting solemnly upon a chair placed for it between my hostess and me. And I saw that its eyes were two slit-gashed moons, solemn and wise, sad and inscrutable—and big—bigger than it. And later it lay upon its cushion, while Violette as usual, even when I was there, sat at her desk for a little, writing—with the sun-scent of marigolds all about them—concentrated in them. And I knew that in all that she wrote there would be the swirling, spiraling, leering, heart-scorching, twisted, other-world thoughts which had once gotten themselves engraved upon all of the temple doors out there—thoughts like the carvings upon the door which guarded the house I was in. The sun on the fur of the cat was blinding—the hair of my friend was virgin gold. They were sun and snow on a mountain—they were all that most of us are not. . . .

TWO days later I came away.

And now Violette Adair is dead of a fever, and lies buried—not beside Haviland Nesbit, but by her own request, just beneath the ground, very shallowly, in the center of the lawn before her own house, where her bones may be blessed and bleached for ever by the sun and the moon and the rains of Java. And no one goes near or disturbs her; for it is said by the natives that night and day a tiger, or its ghost, patrols her grave.

Whether that last is true or not, I do not know; but I do know what I saw. . . . And now that she is gone, as she said I might, I give you her story.

"The captive abruptly realized the speaker was inspired by insanity."

The Voyage of the Neutralia

By B. WALLIS

An exciting story of weird adventures and a strange voyage through space to other planets—by the author of "The Abysmal Horror" and other fascinating thrill-tales

The Story Thus Far

AYLMER CARSCADDEN, eminent American scientist, discovers and manufactures metal impervious to gravitation, and also under intense cold repelled by other substances. He is financed by Hugh Burgoyne. They construct a large shell, christened *Neutralia,* with which to explore beyond our planet's atmosphere. The two, with

Jacob Flint, an old employee, set out for our satellite. After starting, two former employees, Kobloth and Whipps, discharged for spying, are found stowaways in the storeroom.

After some experiments in arresting the stupendous speed of the shell they arrive safely at the moon. Finding an atmosphere, though rarefied, capable of supporting life, they alight in the great crater of Copernicus. Moss and giant cacti are the sole vegetation; but gold and diamonds are found in large deposits.

While the scientist is inspecting these, Kobloth and Whipps suddenly attack Carscadden and Flint, stunning them with rocks. The treacherous pair instantly dash for the shell, hoping to make off with it and later return to exploit the vast wealth they have seen. Burgoyne, however, arrives on the scene and at the point of his gun compels them to surrender.

Carscadden and Flint recovering, all return, and the prisoners are locked in the storeroom. Then the shell is headed for Mars. Traveling at a million miles an hour they arrive and alight. They find the surface is covered by a network of great cables. A curious carriage comes racing along a cable, and its occupant immediately attacks them with electrified wires. Other carriages arrive and join in the attack.

One of the carriages is shot down; it contains a number of electrical instruments and a loathsome spider-like creature. The *Neutralia* is nearly captured by the Martians. After a sharp struggle the adventurers succeed in regaining it, though Whipps is apparently electrocuted and dragged to a carriage by a cable. Carscadden rendered unconscious by a gas-bomb cast by the Martians, his companions were compelled to head out into space without direction or objective. Later Carscadden regains consciousness and finds the shell is attracted by Jupiter and heading for that planet at enormous speed. Near Jupiter they pass through its ring of meteoroids and narrowly escape destruction. They manage to alight on an inner satellite. As their air supply is dangerously low they are compelled at once to endeavor to return to the earth. Sixty hours later they discover that the sun's pull must carry them beyond the earth to plunge into the flaming giant; a slight error in a decimal was the cause of this terrible catastrophe. When they try to head for Venus, they find that the shell's cover has become jammed. At the last second they manage to force the cover over and change direction to Venus, now dangerously close to them.

The story continues:

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12. A Tropic World. The Centipedes

RECOVERING quickly, but still dazed and shaken, the four men slowly let down the ladder and descended. They were well armed, and the world they had alighted on seemed a very calm and peaceful one, a very different world from the others they had visited. It was more like the earth than the moss- and lichen-covered wild rocks of the moon, the red deserts and gloomy ravines of Mars, or the glowing swirling gaseous Jupiter. Here was life—grasses, trees, flowers, and pure life-giving air, just as in their own honest planet.

The *Neutralia* had fallen on a stretch of rising ground, crushing several large trees in its descent. All around them, in every direction stretched the shady forest; a mass of trees of many varieties, shapes, and heights, some leafy, some fir-like, some gorgeous with vivid-hued blossoms, and many hung with sprays and clusters of large brilliant-hued fruit. Among the

branches flitted strange birds, and the spot resounded with curious cries and whistling calls. Great and grotesque-looking insects buzzed and droned incessantly. Squirrels and lizard-like animals darted among the undergrowth and hung on to the tree trunks, chattering and gaping at the intruders. Away in the distance, where the rising ground they stood on, and a stretch of thinner vegetation, permitted it, were visible a great green plain and the silver line of a river threading it. They also were conscious that the air was very humid and hot, and the direct glare of the sun, now much larger than it appears from the earth, was almost unbearable, although it was shining through a thin cloud veiling, a veiling so extensive that not a gleam of blue sky was visible through it.

It was a tropic world into which they had fallen—a world of intense, humid heat, and of prolific fauna and flora.

"Do you reckon any of this fruit is safe to eat?" asked Flint, eyeing a large tree whose branches were laden profusely with clusters of green-skinned, pear-like objects. "I'm sick of the canned junk we have been feeding on."

"I don't know, but I'm going to take a chance on these extra-sized bananas," declared Burgoyne, tearing off what certainly did look like a gigantic banana, fully a foot long, from a palm-like tree.

The others laughed but refrained from following his example, Carscadden remarking that it would be unwise for all to chance being ill at the same time; and if the experimenters expired it was all for the good of science.

"And now, what is our next move?" asked Kobloth.

"As Venus is practically the same size as the earth, and the day the same length, I will take the sun's altitude and we can set our watches to Venus' time. Then we must fill the air-tanks, and be ready for instant flight, if necessary. After that we can shut ourselves up in the globe and make up for lost sleep."

This program was completed before nine o'clock, the hour of sundown; and long before that the four men were experiencing the enervating lassitude that invariably follows hard upon a time of stress and intense emotion, and had become so drowsy that even their novel surroundings failed to interest them. All they craved was rest and sleep, and the Nirvana of their couches inside the *Neutralia*.

KOBLOTH, the first to awake the following morning, lay for a little enjoying the soft mellow light of a hazy dawn that filled the globe's interior. The effect was beautiful in the extreme, and for a while he regarded it with much approval. But the light also showed him the forms of his three sleeping companions, and the sight aroused the basic evil of his nature. He had no love for them, and it pleased him to conjure up mental pictures of the revenge he fervently trusted would one day be vouchsafed him, when the three would be as completely at his mercy as they were that moment, wrapped in their slumber. It was a balm to his vindictive pride to know that even then he could have shot the three without the least chance of reprisal or future discovery. It would have been very simple, for he still retained the revolver with which he had aided in repulsing the spider-Martians. Their corpses could be left on this lonely planet, or discarded later in the profundity of space. As for navigating the *Neutralia*—well, he had picked up enough knowledge of its rudiments to feel confident that the return to the earth from this planet would be a comparatively simple problem. He could use a compass and sextant; and wait until the

earth's place in its orbit lay exactly at right angles to that of this planet, turn the great cover, and slow down when close to his objective.

Was the moment propitious? Why not? Moreover, he had left word with an assistant in Prague to spread a report in the scientific journals that he was experimenting with a space-ship; when these fools had kept their intention a profound secret. Could anything be better? He had only to rid himself of his jailers, and he could return and claim all the honor and glory, not to say fortune, that would be heaped on the originator of this tremendous undertaking. The tantalizing thought fired his evil spirit to rash and impetuous action. Why not?

His hand crept to his pocket, and his fingers closed on the butt of a loaded gun. A set, malignant glare leapt into his narrow eyes. Yes! now was the moment! Then Burgoyne stirred, sat up, rubbed his eyes, and yawned leisurely. The action unnerved Kobloth; he knew that a single slip would seal his fate, there would be no next time. His fingers relaxed their hold on the thing in his pocket; he was too late. Another time——

"Good morning, Herr Kobloth," greeted the unsuspecting Burgoyne. "You see, that banana wasn't so deadly after all; I'm going out to sample another."

Now the others awakened, and the door was opened, and breakfast eaten in the open, a meal that included several of those delicious giant bananas. Of course they went armed, and kept their eyes open, but so far had not seen the least sign of any form of life that could be thought seriously inimical. As yet it was not so hot as on their landing, for the heavy white clouds had not been dissipated by the sun's later fierce energy.

"If it were not for the immense quantity of moisture in the air of this planet we should be roasted to death before midday," remarked Carscadden. "We have landed on the southern hemisphere, and in the height of summer. The constant cloudy veiling protects all this luxuriant vegetation from scorching, but even at that we must be prepared to experience a heat unknown to our own planet."

"I presume you will investigate for a while, and take some more photographs to add to your wonderful collection?" queried Kobloth suavely, and suppressing his chagrin at the prospect of a hasty departure, which the scientist's words seemed to hint at. For he realized that this was the last, and the ideal, occasion on which he might hope to consummate the crime his mind was set on.

"So long as we can stand the heat, and find no hostile life that menaces our safety, there is no particular hurry. Starting in the night I could reach the earth any time within the next eight weeks," declared Carscadden with decision.

"Are we likely to find any brainy nightmares here, do you think?" asked Burgoyne, leaning his broad back against a fallen forest monarch.

"I hardly think so; the planet is younger than the earth and the time has been too short to evolve a high grade of intelligence. No doubt there is an abundance of wild animals, poisonous insects, reptiles and the lower forms of life—in fact, a much exaggerated replica of the conditions met with on the steaming coast of West Africa. But, I say, Hugh, just come over here, will you? Quickly!" Suddenly his voice had grown urgent and commanding, and so compelling that without a word Burgoyne at once rose to his feet and stepped beside him.

"What's the trouble?" he asked in great surprize.

"Look there, on the tree trunk you leaned against!" he directed with a pointing finger.

A long, rusty brown object was creeping along the rotting bark that Burgoyne had leaned against. Its long body was set low on many-jointed legs, and its head carried a pair of lobster-like mandibles, which were open-jawed, and held high above as though ready for instant offensive. It was fully a foot in length, and its repulsive head had not been more than the same distance from Burgoyne's when the scientist noted it; for the brute up to then had been hidden by a loosened fold of the rotting bark—a fact that was patent when, as the four men started, another of the hideous creatures suddenly appeared from behind the same loosened strip.

"Centipedes, or scorpions? You have had a narrow escape! I do not doubt but a bite on neck or face from one of those brutes would kill a man very quickly and painfully."

"Look out! there's another—and the brutes are coming for us!" cried Kobloth.

These loathsome things were evidently hostile, and not in the least frightened at their first sight of human beings. For there was no doubt that they were making toward the watchers. The men hastily snatched up whatever happened to be handy, thick broken tree limbs, and some small boulders. But at close quarters the brutes were quicker at turning and twisting than they bargained for. Burgoyne and Kobloth with a hail of savage blows smashed to pulp a couple of them, but Flint, who happened to be standing amid some trailing vines, missed his footing as he aimed a blow, and sprawled headlong. In a flash the brute had seized his boot between the keen points of his jaws, and had pierced clean through the stout leather and into the foot. A cry of pain from Flint announced the fact, and in a second Carscadden had come down with the brute beneath his heavily shod feet, crushing the scaly segments.

No time could be lost, for they did not know how venomous these brutes might be. At once the victim's boot and stocking were torn off, and the two little punctures slashed with a knife and made to bleed freely. Then Kobloth, who had rushed to the globe, produced an antiseptic and bandages. By the way he handled the wound it was obvious that he had some medical knowledge, and the others were pleased with the deft and business-like way he treated the injury. Kobloth also was pleased: he desired beyond all to create an atmosphere of amity between the three and himself and lull the suspicions he knew they never lost sight of.

"I do not think this will be very serious," he said as they carried Flint within the *Neutralia*, where he would be safe from further attacks of a similar nature. "I imagine that most of the poison these brutes carry in their hollow jaws was expended in passing through the leather. If he had received a full dose I have no doubt by now the limb would be paralyzed, and he would be unconscious."

"Quite so," agreed Carscadden in a more gracious tone than he had so far used in addressing the Austrian. "But we must be more careful; likely there are many more of their kind in these thick forests."

"I hardly think so. The forest would not be so full of small creatures if such savage brutes were plentiful. But it would be a good idea to leave one of our number always on board the globe, to guard it against a possible invasion of such giant insects," Kobloth suggested craftily, for this would divide their forces and much simplify matters for him.

"A good idea, Kobloth; we will at once put it in operation. But, although it may sound unfriendly after the way you have just aided us, I must ask you always to

make one of the party exploring. Apart from other considerations, your entomological and botanical knowledge will be very useful on such occasions," he added to soften the seeming ungracious demand. On this matter Carscadden was adamant; for though they had come to look on the Austrian as a changed and repentant man after the awful death of his companion, yet he had with Burgoyne decided that never again would they let him out of their sight or leave him alone with the *Neutralia*. However, the demand was exactly what Kobloth expected, and fitted in very nicely with a scheme he had recently been hatching.

As Flint's foot was so painful and weak that he was unable to walk, it devolved upon Carscadden and Burgoyne to take turns at sentry duty. Kobloth always accompanied one or the other, and he did not fail to make himself very agreeable and even useful; for he was a keen observer, and really had a fund of accurate knowledge of the natural sciences.

SEVERAL days passed busily. The forest was searched in many directions. Photographs were taken until all their films were exhausted. Large collections of insects and the small animals that abounded in the shady woods were killed and temporarily preserved in a mixture of Carscadden's own invention. Many astronomical observations were taken, and the scientist congratulated himself that the cause of science would be advanced even more than he had hoped when he started.

At last there seemed little more that they could accomplish without a prolonged exploration, which was impossible under the circumstances. Moreover, the heavy, humid heat began to tell on them, sapping their energies, mental and physical, and the enormous flies and other vicious insect pests were at times almost unbearable. Of the mongrel centipede-scorpions they saw but two more specimens, which they promptly killed.

Then one evening the Austrian casually suggested an expedition.

"I should like to obtain a few more specimens of the Venezian fish," he observed thoughtfully. "And a few more bottles of the water; it certainly contains elements not found in our home waters. Do you think you could spare the time to go with me, Mr. Carscadden? I should like your opinion on a curious rock formation I noted a little way off on our last trip in that direction." He asked the question quietly and with a pleasing deference to the scientist's opinion.

"Yes, we might make a final trip. Yet I don't know, Kobloth, that we ought to delay our departure much longer, unless you have really set your mind on this expedition. Somehow I mistrust the peace and security that has surrounded us on this planet—it seems unnatural after our other experiences," replied Carscadden doubtfully.

But the very elements played into Kobloth's hands. They were standing in the doorway of the *Neutralia*, watching the glow of sunset vanishing amid the tree-clad slopes of the western hills, when a sudden bright splash of vivid flame burst out of one of the hill crests. It was followed by a soaring cloud that mushroomed gigantically aloft like a huge opened umbrella, and then came a tremendous roar of sound, and the ground shook and the *Neutralia* rocked perceptibly.

"An eruption!" cried Carscadden. "Astronomers have thought they detected signs of volcanic activity on Venus. Now we can confirm their observations. Yes, we will certainly make the trip, Kobloth. Luckily this volcano lies in the same direction."

For a little the voyagers remained watching the red glow of the eruption, though no more bursts of flame or thunderous explosions were emitted; but the mushroom steadily grew larger and in its reflected glow was seen to mingle with the ever-present cloud veiling.

In the morning, an hour after sunrise, Carscadden and Kobloth set out on their tramp through the forest. They had blazed a rough trail on their previous journeys, so found no difficulty in holding to their direction. The Austrian proved an entertaining companion, and from a scientific angle the two had much in common. The forest was alive with birds, animals and insects of strange and grotesque shapes and vivid coloring. The atmosphere of Venus is a hotbed for the growth of gigantic vegetation, and for gorgeous flowers.

Passing a little to the right of the river that Kobloth had desired to examine again, by noon they were at the foot of the volcanic hill. A heavy steam-cloud, now and again lit up by flashes of crimson flame, still poured from the crater, and down one side of the hill several small streams of lava cascaded sluggishly.

"It is still erupting. Shall we chance ascending?" said Carscadden, though he was already, and eagerly, leading the way to a slope that seemed fairly scalable and free from lava streams.

"There is a curious black patch, over there to the northwest, that I cannot make anything of," remarked the scientist when they had come as near to the crater as they dared. "It is neither rock nor forest, as far as I can tell. What do you make of it?" he asked Kobloth as he stood and stared at the thing that was puzzling him.

"Queer," agreed Kobloth shortly. "Probably scorched jungle or grass," he suggested after a single glance at the spot his companion indicated. For Armand Kobloth was thinking of something very different.

THEY walked a little way to one side and inspected a lava flow, a mere trickle a few yards wide, and already crusting, though still so hot that they could not approach closely. Then they descended, and before reaching the shelter of the dense forest Carscadden turned and stared once more at the black patch in the distance. But it had grown larger, and was wider and nearer, and he fancied a faint humming sound came from it, borne toward them on the light warm breeze.

"It's moving—coming this way like a swarm of locusts! It must be living. We must get back to the *Neutralia* in time to warn them. We know nothing of what strange forms of life may exist in these hills," he muttered uneasily.

"We have plenty of time," Kobloth assured hastily. "See, it is not moving in the direction of the *Neutralia*, though it will probably pass over the spot we stand on," he cried, as he too noted the movement and its direction. "Look out! Centipedes!" he shouted in warning.

Carscadden sprang aside just in time to escape the quick rush of one of the fearless voracious monsters, and a blow from a heavy stick Kobloth carried quickly dispatched it. But another, and still another, came out of the low brush that clothed the hillside, and met a similar fate.

As the two men looked about them, they became aware that the living things in the brush, and in the forest close to them, were in a state of commotion and panic. Birds flew off to the south in flocks and clouds; squirrels and rat-like things emerged into the open, then scurried off in the same direction; and lizards and all kinds of crawling things squirmed and twisted after them.

"Reminds me of a forest fire," cried

Kobloth. "They all seem badly scared at something."

"It must be that blackness. It must be a swarm of living things, perhaps those very centipedes! They are certainly the most ferocious brutes we have seen here. Like ants, they may send their skirmishers ahead of the main body, and those we have just killed are the advance agents! It is high time that we too get a move on," cried Carscadden with decision.

"Ah, there's another of the brutes! It looks as though you might be right; for every living thing is certainly deadly scared of something." He paused, as a sudden resolve leapt upon him. "And that settles it!"

As Carscadden stepped aside to avoid the scorpion, Kobloth brought his heavy stick crashing down on his companion's head. Instantly stunned, the scientist fell forward on his face and lay silent and motionless. A quick blow accounted for the monstrous insect, and then the Austrian bent over his unconscious victim.

"Couldn't have been better!" he muttered jubilantly. "Just stunned enough for my purpose. Now, you arrogant fool, who is the master?" he sneered in bitter derision, as he pulled a long length of stout cord out of a capacious pocket.

Raising the limp body, he propped it erect against a massive tree trunk, to which he bound it, rapidly but carefully. As he finished his task the scientist's eyes flicked open, and for a moment he stared dully and uncomprehendingly at his captor. Then abruptly he realized what had happened.

"What are you going to do, you treacherous scoundrel?" he demanded coolly, but he knew that neither reason nor emotion would turn his captor from his purpose, whatever that might be.

"Just leave you to yourself. Nothing violent, I assure you, Mr. Carscadden," replied Kobloth, rubbing his thick hands together and smiling as though the decision immensely pleased him. "You know, the wheel must turn sooner or later, and now I find that our positions are reversed; I am the dictator and you are the despised supplicant. When I saw the eruption, I fancied that you might like to be here in case of a second outburst; and when this immense swarm of savage insects came on the scene, I knew my revenge would be as complete as even I could wish for. Can you picture what a mess these brutes will make of you when they arrive? By that time I shall most probably be comfortably installed in the *Neutralia*, and congratulating myself on having also come to an understanding with our friend Burgoyne—a final one. As for old Flint, I shall just heave him out and leave him to find what is left of you. Thanks to your instructions, I can work the *Neutralia* very nicely now, and I anticipate no difficulty in returning. I, Armand Kobloth, the only man ever to return from such an epochal journey! Glory, fame, wealth awaits me, while you, Mr. Carscadden, will learn a great deal about centipedes! A good, and long, day to you, Aylmer Carscadden!" And as the last words fell smoothly from his lips, there flamed in his evil eyes such a light of rapture, derision and hate that the captive abruptly realized the speaker was most certainly inspired by insanity; the man was a homicidal maniac!

13. The March of the Centipedes

LOOKING back now and again, Kobloth went down the hill, reached the forest, turned and waved his hand in derision. As soon as he disappeared, the captive set himself to breaking loose. But after a half-hour's fierce struggling he was forced to acknowledge defeat. He was helpless, alone, left there to meet death in horrible guise, either to be torn

to shreds by loathsome brutes, the fiery agony of molten lava, or the long-drawn-out misery of thirst and hunger!

There was little ground for hope; Kobloth would get back to the *Neutralia* easily before sunset, take Burgoyne by surprize, and Flint in his present condition would be easy to dispose of. And meanwhile the Future was racing to meet the Present!

From his already painful position he could see the black horde of insects coming nearer and nearer, and could plainly hear the humming drone they made in their progress. Like a vast black tide they surged over precipice and gully, rolling along and spreading out on both flanks their savage myriads, in a front that must have been many hundred yards wide, yet so densely packed that not a speck of rock or vegetation was visible between them.

Watching their rate of advance, he estimated that they would reach the volcanic hill about two hours before dusk, long before any aid could reach him, even had it already started. He shuddered at the awful thought, yet, in a curiously impersonal sort of way, found himself wondering what could be the reason of this migration of the monstrous insects. What blind instinct compelled them to band together and invade new territory, devouring every living thing that could not escape them, as they poured on their way to some unknown objective? A similar cause no doubt inspires the lemmings of Norway, the Orient locusts, and some species of tropical ants. Well, what did it matter?—the end was inevitable.

How time passed he could scarcely tell. Already the torment of his position, the humid heat, the intolerable vicious flies, the insects that crawled over him, made every moment unutterably miserable. And every moment the black tide was surging nearer.

The time came when several of the advance guard raced past him in pursuit of the small fleeing creatures that streamed by him, but none noticed the bound man staring with horror at them.

The sun sank low in the sky, and soft dusky shadows crept into the forest below him. Where he lay there was a deep bay of sparse vegetation, and the forest, a long finger of growth up a shallow depression, meandered between him and the oncoming tide. With straining eyes he was now searching this green finger, waiting to see the vanguard of loathsome brutes emerge from it.

Abruptly strange and ominous rumblings shook the hillside and a red glow came into the cloud veiling about it, and a fine dust began to fall all around him. Another eruption was evidently brewing. So far up the slope his position would be one of extreme danger. Well, better far to die thus than to be torn to pieces by that stream of smothering abomination.

The noise continued, rising to a thunderous roaring, interspersed now and again with violent concussions that shook the ground and brought heavy masses of rock crashing down the hillside. Even the tree he was bound to trembled and lurched unsteadily. The fine dust came down so thickly that he had to close his eyes to avoid being blinded. But one thing he had to be thankful for: the dust had driven away the vicious flies, and the crawling insects seemed to abate their energy.

For a while he stood, unseeing, patient, endeavoring to brace himself for the terrible moment, to meet his fate with fortitude. Then, hearing the dreadful droning even through the uproar, he knew that the black tide was fast nearing him. He opened his eyes, and through the veil-

ing dust, which was now quickly abating, he saw the foremost ranks of the crawling brutes just emerging from the long finger of forest. Everything around was lighted up by the red glow from lurid heavens.

At that moment a terrific crash resounded, and a huge tongue of flame was spat out of the crater; then the bound man heard the swift rush of something cascading down the hillside behind him. It was not visible, but he knew it was a stream of lava. Whatever was going to happen would now shortly be over!

Meanwhile, apparently indifferent to the clamor, the living tide poured on through the forest. Now the foremost of the repulsive things, a monster nearly two feet long, was not a couple of hundred of yards from him. It appeared to sight the captive, for it suddenly quickened its pace, a horrible wriggling, squirming motion, and came straight for him.

Then into his field of view, from behind him, came another racing monster; and this one was darkly glowing, and advanced by a constant overbrimming of a crimson life that flooded and overtook it from behind; and as it ran, blue lambent spurts of flame and puffs of wispy smoke told of the intense heat raging within the stream of lava.

Helpless and fascinated, Carscadden watched the fiery stream, and the holocaust that instantly was consummated; watched the leader vanish in a tiny squirt of vapor, and the oncoming thousands of the front ranks, driven ahead by the horde behind them, licked up by the fiery flood in a second; and to him was wafted, on a slight breeze, the abominable stench of the cremated myriads.

Not one passed the deadly river, for it lay exactly between the black tide and the tree he was bound to. At last, with a great flanking movement the horde swung southward, and side by side the two terrible streams swept down the hillside on their devastating migration, and a line of smoking reek ran ever between them—the countless thousands of loathsome things being scorched to cinders.

For the moment he was saved from instant extinction, but not for long could he count on that succor. For the stream of lava was increasing in volume and its banks fast widening, and every minute its edge was creeping nearer him. Shortly he could feel the heat from it, and his eyes smarted with its pungent gases. Soon the fiery breath was as a blast from a furnace, and he was choking, and gasping for breath; drumming noises filled his head, and whirling lights flashed before him. He was just conscious of falling into a black and seemingly bottomless abyss, and was dimly aware of a huge round, gray object descending from the sky, close to him—and then he fell into the abyss of nothingness.

14. The Fight in the Neutralia

WHILE the second eruption was in full progress, Kobloth reached the foot of the knoll the *Neutralia* rested upon. He was creeping from tree to tree very cautiously, and gradually working his way toward the little clearing. At the last bit of cover he halted and minutely scrutinized the vicinity of the great globe.

As he hesitated, listening intently, Burgoyne and Flint came to the open doorway. Kobloth's revolver, already in his grasp, snapped up to the level of his shoulder. The two men were talking; the leveled arm dropped back again, and its owner quietly listened.

"I had better get off," Burgoyne was saying. "It is late already, and I have a queer hunch that something has happened to Carscadden. You know, in spite of his changed manner, I don't trust the Austrian, and I don't like this long ab-

sence," he declared, shaking his head gloomily.

"Yes, I reckon you're right—I've no use either for that blasted Austrian, though Mr. Carscadden seems to think he's been converted, got sort of civilized. But take care of yourself—and I'm not stuck on being left alone at nightfall in this dark forest," said Flint emphatically.

"You will be all right in the *Neutralia*. Don't worry; you can shut the door and nothing can get at you. As for myself, I'll keep my eyes skinned; and save for those centipedes we haven't seen a thing to be afraid of," Burgoyne rejoined as he descended the ladder.

He passed within a few feet of the crouching Kobloth, and that worthy, now calm and cool in his malevolent purpose, had sense enough to let him go unmolested.

"A good riddance!" he muttered under his breath. "That will save a shell, and possibly a little trouble with the other."

A little later he rose to his feet and boldly walked to the *Neutralia* and ascended the rope ladder. He stepped into the globe before Flint, who was resting, had heard him.

"Where's Burgoyne?" he cried in assumed concern. "I want him at once—Mr. Carscadden has had an accident. Quick! Where is he? We must go to the aid of our friend at once," he exclaimed as though greatly worried.

"Why, haven't you met him? He has only been gone a few minutes."

"I came by a short-cut through the forest," Kobloth explained hastily. "Has he gone many minutes?" he asked anxiously.

"Possibly five minutes—he cannot be half a mile away. But what——" commenced Flint eagerly.

"Come to the door," Kobloth interrupted impatiently. "We can talk later. I must get him back at once. Let us shout and fire a few shots; he cannot help hearing them."

Flint, fearful for the unknown injury his master had suffered, immediately limped to the door, and was about to shout at the top of his lung power, when the Austrian gave him a violent shove forward. Taken unawares, the old man tottered on his lame foot, clutched wildly around for support, and crashed earthward with a loud cry for help. Luckily, however, he snatched at the ladder as he fell, and though it was torn from his grasp, yet it greatly broke his fall. As it was, he came down heavily on his injured foot, and collapsed on the ground in agony.

"Ah, my dear Flint, how unfortunate! Another accident case to attend to," sneered Kobloth with a mocking laugh, as he looked down on the writhing sufferer. "I regret, however, that I shall not have time to devote to it. Good day, Mr. Jacob Flint," laughed the callous maniac.

As he spoke, Kobloth whipped out a long knife he had again got hold of secretly, and began to slash at the stout rope that secured the globe to a great tree trunk; for of course he could not close the door until it was removed.

But Flint was not so helpless as the Austrian had thought, and by a strong effort of will pulled himself together and twisting around managed to extract the revolver from his belt, and taking a hasty aim fired at the scoundrel. By a mere chance the bullet smashed a finger of Kobloth's right hand, causing him to drop the knife and give vent to a yell of pain and rage. In a fury of mad passion he grasped his own revolver with his left hand and, quite reckless of the noise he would create, fired three shells at the old man. However, what with rage, and the awkwardness of using this little-trained hand, the object of his aim suf-

fered no damage. Flint, in spite of his pain, pluckily fired off his remaining five shells, and a bullet whistling close to Kobloth's ear caused the Austrian to retreat from the doorway just as Burgoyne, at top speed, dashed into the clearing.

"He's inside!" gasped Flint. "I've driven him in! He will be off in a minute if we can't stop him!" he cried weakly, and then collapsed.

Burgoyne did not hesitate a second.

"I'll stop him, if I die for it!" he cried fiercely as he rushed to the ladder. As he swung himself through the doorway, he heard the clang and rattle of gearing being strained at, and likely it was this clamor that accounted for the Austrian not hearing his voice or the noise of his ascent.

The scoundrel was madly tearing at the wheel, but obviously something had gone wrong with the mechanism, for beyond an inch or so in either direction there was no turning it. Just so much Burgoyne saw as he leapt at the maniac—for that too was obvious; no man in his right senses, and knowing what Kobloth knew, would dream of releasing the *Neutralia* without first closing the door; for in a single second the globe would be beyond the atmosphere, and the intense cold of outer space would freeze the occupant to a block of solid ice in a twinkling.

15. We Must Chance It!

BURGOYNE might be young, very muscular, and in good training, but Kobloth was tough, and for the moment endowed with the prodigious strength of a maniac. Twice the Austrian went down, but all hands, feet, and teeth, and snarling like some wild animal, he recovered himself and renewed the battle with unabated vigor. But the end came suddenly, and chance vanquished the tiger and devil incarnate. Stepping backward he lost his balance, and Burgoyne thrust all his two hundred pounds of big bone and hard muscle against him. The maniac went crashing, and his head struck the steel spokes of the wheel he had been vainly striving to move. With a choking grunt he collapsed and his muscles relaxed. The battle had ended.

This was no time to be squeamish, and Burgoyne was certainly not the man to indulge in such luxury. Without waiting to discover what damage had been inflicted, or if he even lived, Burgoyne dragged him to the trap-door, and flinging it open, tumbled his late opponent into the dark hold as though he were handling a sack of flour.

"Thank goodness, Flint!" he cried as in the doorway he saw that the man he had left unconscious now had his eyes open and was weakly struggling to his feet. "I was afraid he had potted you badly."

"No, he didn't get me; just an old man's foolishness going off like that," Flint called back apologetically. "I reckon you have settled him?" he queried angrily.

"Thanks to good luck he's quiet enough now. He may be dead, but I fancy he's too tough to exterminate so easily. But what are we to do about Aylmer?" he asked anxiously as he slid to the ground. "I am afraid the brute has killed him, or done some terrible injury to him."

"There's only one thing we can do," he declared after Flint had briefly sketched what had occurred previous to Burgoyne's appearance. "We must endeavor to rouse up the scoundrel and extract the truth from him. Can you manage the ladder, Flint?"

With a little assistance Flint ascended the ladder, and the two men went into the hold. Switching on the light, they

saw the Austrian lay huddled limply against one of the tanks.

"He's had a nasty smash," said Burgoyne after a hasty examination. "But I don't think any bones are broken. Looks like a case of concussion. However, we must do our best to pull him round, for the sake of Carscadden."

They applied restoratives, and in a few moments the Austrian's eyes opened.

"Kobloth, where is Mr. Carscadden?" said Burgoyne quietly, but very sternly. "Listen! We are going to have the truth from you, if we have to torture or hang you to get it!" he added fiercely; and though the latter infliction would have defeated its purpose, yet no man noticed it, so grim was the tone of the speaker.

But not a word of response broke from the Austrian's lips, neither excuse, nor denial, nor defiance. Nor did his eyes betray the slightest fear, or interest, or even consciousness of anyone speaking. Instead, the narrow eyes stared vacantly at them, and he commenced to mutter incoherently.

Burgoyne and Flint stared at each other in consternation. Was it delirium, or madness, or was the cunning scoundrel merely shamming? They bent down to catch what they might of the broken babbling. But all they could distinguish was a word or two now and again that conveyed no information, or even the least promise of intelligence. "Look out!" he repeated several times, and "Damned centipedes!" he muttered amid a stream of incoherent babblings. Then once he called out excitedly, "They've got him!" after which he relapsed into silence, though his lips moved with unuttered ramblings.

Was this shamming, or had his brain really gone astray? The minutes were flying, and Carscadden might be still alive, but in fearful danger. Abruptly Burgoyne came to a decision.

"See here, Flint," he cried loudly. "This man is shamming. Well, he'll either quit it, or we'll be well rid of a scoundrel. We'll give him one last chance—put your pistol to his ear, and if he refuses to answer, blow his brains out. No one will ever be the wiser, and I'm sick of this villain and his evil doings," he commanded in a tone of such pitiless ferocity that for a second Flint was deceived by it, and stared aghast at him. But noting that the eyelid hidden from Kobloth unaccountably closed and snapped open again, he readily obeyed its owner, and in a prompt and business-like manner cocked his revolver and placed the muzzle against the Austrian's ear.

"Now, Kobloth, what is it to be? An answer, or—your grave on Venus!" But Kobloth still stared vacantly at them, and seemed not a bit distressed by the pressure of the menacing barrel. "Right, I give you exactly sixty seconds to decide," said Burgoyne, taking out his watch. "Thirty past—Flint, get ready!" he snapped, and Flint responded by thrusting the hard barrel more firmly against its resting-place.

And it was then the Austrian again commenced to babble, and Burgoyne bent down and gazed most intently into the vacant eyes, and distinctly heard the word "volcano" repeated several times, then three words strung together: "Run, the lava!" and then a jumble of mere sounds.

"Yes, whether you are mad or shamming, I think that is a hint good enough to act on," said Burgoyne thoughtfully. "But see her, my friend, don't make any mistake—this is only a postponement, not a reprieve. If we don't find Aylmer, or if he is killed, as sure as you now live a bullet will end you." And such was the cold sincerity of his tone that even Flint knew he was no longer bluffing.

"Come along, Flint!" he cried. Though we'll first rope this brute in case he feels like playing some more of his devil's games."

In a minute they had Kobloth securely bound with his hands behind him.

"Now to make for the volcano! I must carry flashlights and lantern, as it will be dark very soon now," exclaimed Burgoyne, turning to seek these things in the case they were stored in.

"IT'S fully twelve miles to that volcano," Flint said slowly. "It's impossible for you to make the trip through the forest in the dark; besides, it would take you all of four hours, and by that time——" He left the sentence unfinished, though his companion knew what he hinted at.

"But we must do something! And not having wings I must walk," declared the big man impatiently.

"Wings? No, but we can fly there, or try to," replied Flint.

"How? You mean the *Neutralia*? It's a good idea, just a chance. But hold! something has gone wrong with the turning-gear—I saw Kobloth straining at it as I rushed in."

"Yes, very likely," agreed Flint coolly. "See here!" He limped to the wheel, and sliding back the cover of the gearing-box, thrust in his hand and withdrew it grasping a deeply scratched and indented specimen of a four-inch nail.

"Phew! what the deuce?" was all Burgoyne could say.

"Took a liberty. I got to thinking after you went off; kind of mistrusted that guy; reckoned he would think it was pie with me alone to worry about. So I guessed I'd get things fixed so he couldn't monkey with the *Neutralia;* I'm a mechanic, and I know just where to drop a spike so that a team of elephants couldn't get a single kick out of that wheel," Flint explained with a little simple pride.

"My hat's off to you, Flint! The *Neutralia* would be thousands of miles away by this time but for that spike. Put it aside—it's going to have a gold setting when we get back to the good old earth. Now what about this jump to the volcano. You are quite a scientist too—can we do it?" queried Burgoyne, knitting his brows doubtfully.

"I reckon we can chance it anyway. This Venus planet revolves west to east. The volcano is due west exactly on our parallel; Mr. Carscadden took the observation just yesterday. Venus revolves about fourteen miles a minute; all we have to do is to shut out just enough of her pull to rise above the atmosphere and wait there while she does her stuff, rolls round and in less than a minute we shall be above the volcanic hill. It will be snappy work, but I reckon we can do it," explained Flint, who had taken a great interest in his master's experiments.

"A great notion! We'll chance it. I'll work the wheel, and you do the navigating. Come on, let's get busy," replied Burgoyne, in high spirits at the prospect of such a rapid transition.

Instantly the rope was severed and the steel door shut; everything was ready for the twelve-mile jump.

"It will take us about fifty-three seconds to do the jump, likely a second more to rise above the atmosphere, but as our course in rising and descent will form segments of converging arcs, we need not worry about the rise or fall. At least that's how I figure it out. Now keep your eyes glued on me if you please, Mr. Burgoyne. Are you ready? Right—off!" snapped Flint as sharply as a veteran sergeant on a parade ground.

In a twinkling Burgoyne had twirled the wheel and moved the cover so that it shut off most of the planet's pull, but not

entirely, as Flint had previously advised him. Instantly the *Neutralia* was roaring through the Venezian atmosphere; an uplifted hand from Flint, and the cover was moved a trifle backward, and, pull and repulsion being now almost equal, the globe hung motionless while the planet sped round below them.

One quick glance Burgoyne had of a vast, fire-shot steam-cloud that seemed to be racing toward them at an appalling speed; then the hand again went up. A spoke or two of the wheel was reversed, and the *Neutralia* fell Venusward, a lightning-like return of a spoke, that just softened the shock of grounding; and then, as the wheelsman swung the cover clear above them, they struck the ground with a great crash that sent both men sprawling.

16. A Matter of Minutes Only

BY THE chance that governs such things, and the aid of Flint's unexpected skill in navigation, the *Neutralia* alighted in a shallow depression not a hundred yards from the tree to which the now unconscious captive was bound.

In the murky crimson glow that bathed the scene, they at once perceived that they had arrived just in the nick of time, and it was a matter of minutes only before the fiery lava would brim over the crest of the hollow it ran in, and inevitably overwhelm their captain.

In a rush they severed his bonds, and carried him, senseless but still breathing, to the shell. Here with a rope beneath his arms they hauled him inside the globe.

"We must get away at once! That lava stream will be round us in a minute, and hopelessly jam the cover. Say the word, Flint!" cried Burgoyne as he leapt to the levers and closed the door, and in a twinkling had shut it, and was beside the wheel.

"Right! We must chance where we land, and make a longer hop this time. Stand by! Go ahead!"

Again came the sudden shrieking clamor of their passage through the Venezian atmosphere, then silence, as the previous maneuvers were repeated, though the intervals between were a little longer.

This time more gently, the *Neutralia* alighted in the forest, where no gleam from the now distant volcano penetrated the dense lofty growths that surrounded them; but of course their electric equipment rendered them indifferent to the inky darkness.

"Good boy, Flint! You've done splendidly. Now we can attend to poor Aylmer," cried Burgoyne as he stepped to the side of the unconscious man.

It was some while before the scientist regained consciousness; the strain of his cramped position, and the heat from the approaching lava, had greatly weakened the heart action, and left their mark on him. However, eventually he came round, and again the light of intelligence suffused his serious dark eyes. But he was excessively weak and weary, and after listening to a few hurried words of explanation from his friend, which he seemed but partly to comprehend, he again sank into unconsciousness; though now it was the blessed balm of a profound slumber, the slumber of utter exhaustion. As there was nothing further they could do, Burgoyne and Flint divided the night into watches, and slept alternately, as soundly as though they were safe in their beds in their home planet, twenty-five million miles distant!

The full fresh light of new day was saturating the deep shaft that the descent of the *Neutralia* had torn through the forest when Carscadden awoke. But little

of it penetrated into the globe through the windows. He was greatly refreshed and had regained full possession of his mental equipment, and remembered every incident of the previous day's happenings. Though a little wondering who had been responsible for the skilful navigation of the globe, yet he had no trouble in piecing together the line of events that had ended in his rescue; the brief explanation of Burgoyne affording a basis for some rapid and accurate guesswork. But he was puzzled why the light filtering through the windows should be so faint, and he could distinguish a muffled queer humming sound. And gazing attentively at the windows he perceived that the light varied a little from time to time, sometimes darker, then again strangely lighter. It seemed as though the light itself was in motion! Then he knew what had happened, and, a little weakly, rose to his feet and went to the switchboard.

"Hugh! Flint! Rouse up!" he called as the globe was flooded with brilliance. "The enemy are upon us!"

"What! Kobloth again?" cried Burgoyne, leaping to his feet.

"No, I don't even know if he's alive. It's the centipedes; they're all over the *Neutralia,* trying to force a way in! I need not say that nothing less than a high-powered rifle bullet would splinter those windows."

"A swarm of them!" exclaimed the two men, who as yet had no knowledge of what their captain had suffered. "And I had dozed at my post!" owned up Burgoyne contritely. "Though we did both finally agree that there was no need for sentinel duty," he added in justification.

"A swarm? Yes, there must be millions of the brutes out there. Listen to this," said the scientist. And briefly he outlined his terrible experiences.

"The scoundrel! We should leave him for the centipedes to deal with," cried Burgoyne savagely. And he related what had occurred during their captain's absence.

"It would be simple justice to leave him," agreed Carscadden as he realized the villainy of the Austrian and the narrow escape all three had from a horrible and hopeless ending. "But we can't do it; we are civilized citizens of a great nation, and we cannot lower ourselves to his level. You say he is quite insane? We must have a look at him, and consider what we shall do with the scoundrel. But just look at those brutes attacking the glass, and you will realize what I went through before the lava came between us."

It was, indeed, a strange and horrible thing they stared at. The great horde, diverted from their original course by the eruption, had surged through the forest all night, and reaching the *Neutralia* soon after dawn, besieged it. To the brutes, every living thing was something to destroy and devour, and sighting the sleeping men within they savagely sought to get at them. The humming noise was made by their ceaseless movements, and the rustling together of their stupendous myriads. Every minute or two, there would also resound a loud clicking, caused by an unusually violent rush of a score or so at the glass. Probably many thousands were killed thus, by their own savagery.

"How would it be to take another hop to the westward?" asked Flint, who had an innate loathing of all crawling things.

"Better not," said the scientist. "It is dangerous work. Of course it is very fortunate that you chanced it; but the *Neutralia* might easily have struck a higher mountain, or alighted with such force that it would have been damaged beyond our present ability to repair it. It is irritating not to be able to make use of our

last day on Venus, but we are quite safe, and at nightfall will leave this horror behind us." He paused and then resumed in a puzzled tone. "But how did you managed to navigate so well, Flint? I did not imagine you understood the working of the *Neutralia* so nicely."

"But I'm no navigator," Flint objected hastily. "Don't run away with that notion. But after our first experience with this guy Kobloth, it struck me that it wouldn't be a bad idea if I knew enough to take a little spin, just in case of accidents. So I've paid particular attention to the way you fixed things, and taken note in writing of the course and speed of the planets, and such-like things I've heard you talk about. But I'm no navigator—no more than a harbor tugboat skipper could take a liner across the Pacific. Reckon it was chance did the most of it, anyway."

"Well, we won't quarrel about it," laughed Carscadden. "But I don't think it would take you long to get your captain's ticket for space-navigating, Flint."

The day dragged by wearily enough. The voracious centipedes ceaselessly swarmed over the globe, darkening the windows, and keeping up their monotonous droning. The three men descended to the hold and inspected their captive. He seemed to sleep most of the time, and when wakened he stared vacantly at them and broke out into incoherent ramblings, in which now and then they could catch words and sentences indicating that the wrecked brain was busy with past and recent experiences. Carscadden, after a careful inspection, came to the conclusion that the man was really insane; and seeing that he seemed quite harmless, and at any rate was securely imprisoned in the hold, they removed the lashings from him. Food and water he accepted as a child might, unquestioning, but with a healthy appetite. Reprisal and punishment were out of the question, for one cannot dispense justice on a madman.

Toward dusk, the scientist looked up from some calculations he had been going over. "At nine o'clock we will start," he said. "We shall be exactly in a line with the earth, and need anticipate no difficulty in making the twenty-five million mile jump of our last journey."

"Old Broadway will look good to me!" was Burgoyne's brief observation.

"I'm not crying—Venus has got my goat!" muttered Flint, staring in disgust at the darkened windows.

17. For Ever Through Trackless Space

SHARP at nine o'clock Carscadden gave the signal, and the great cover sliding over the globe crushed hundreds of the horrible giant insects in its resistless sweep. Instantly they rushed upward through a shrill roaring, and a thrill of damp choking heat. In another minute or two they had passed beyond the dense Venezian atmosphere and out into the silence and cold of interplanetary space.

The hours passed quickly, but not too quickly for their impatience; for now all were filled with a very human longing for home and security. It had been a great and wonderful adventure, but they were glad it was nearly over. Humanity is not built for a too prolonged absence from its own species.

Twice a sudden fierce uproar gave evidence that the *Neutralia* had met one of the dense swarms of meteors that ceaselessly swing round our sun. Luckily they encountered no large fragments, and were soon through the scurrying vagrants.

Half-way across to the earth, Carscadden announced that their speed must be arrested.

"We have still twelve million miles to traverse, but our speed is so enormous

that we must from now begin to check it. Moreover I am not at all certain that the neutralium metal has not been affected by the intense cold of space; on our last landing in Venus I fancied that the *Neutralia* was a trifle slow in responding to the repulsive effect. Of course I may be mistaken, but there is no harm in being prepared," announced Carscadden gravely.

"And if you are not mistaken, I suppose we stand a chance of being fused to vapor the moment we enter the earth's atmosphere. A pleasing prospect!" said Burgoyne with a wry grimace.

"Probably, but it's no use crossing bridges before we come to them. Are you ready, Hugh? Turn a couple of spokes and slide the cover down a bit," the scientist ordered.

In a little the registers announced that the slowing effect was in progression, but not so diminished as their captain had expected.

"Not enough. Give her another spoke, Hugh," said the grave-eyed man at the registers.

"I fear my suspicion was only too well founded—the metal has certainly been affected; it acts, but not so absolutely as when we started. We must slide the cover right over." And now a startled query had come into the eyes of the men he addressed.

Half an hour later it was fairly certain that they would enter the earth's atmosphere at a pace which, though not rapid enough to fuse the *Neutralia,* yet must inevitably entail a catastrophe at landing, if the excessive heat had not already destroyed them by that time.

Chronometer in hand, watching the speed dials, Carscadden relapsed into silence. His two companions also had nothing to say, but just stood watching him and waiting for the world that was rushing along its orbit to annihilate them. There was nothing more to do, simply wait and wonder at the cruel fate that after so many perils had overtaken them.

"We are about to enter the earth's atmosphere," said Carscadden quietly, as he replaced his watch in his pocket, and a sigh of relief escaped his thin, firm lips—relief that the suspense was now over, and in a minute they would know the worst, or know—nothing!

"Well, we have had a run——" began Burgoyne, but the sentence was left unfinished; for at that moment a terrific rushing clamor filled the globe, and instantly the sky above turned from an inky black to a glowing ultramarine blue. The stars vanished, and only the old familiar sun shone through cerulean heavens. Then steam clouded every window, rose from them in little cloudlets, and the interior was plunged in the fog and stifling heat of a Turkish bath. The *Neutralia* was falling through the earth's air envelope at a pace no human being could hope to survive at its finish. But for the immensely thick asbestos lining of the globe, already the three men above, and the maniac below, would have had the life scorched out of them by the heat engendered by the globe's swift passage.

Likely it was only a matter of seconds when the roaring came to a finish in a great concussion, which was immediately followed by a loud hissing. And the men who were thrown off their feet, found themselves plunged in darkness, and felt a sudden abatement of temperature.

"What's happened?" shouted Burgoyne, and his voice was only just audible above the insistent hissing.

Carscadden switched on the lights. The windows looked as though they had been daubed outside with a dull green paint.

"That is what I hardly dared hope for," said the scientist, pointing to the green squares. The hissing was abating

greatly and his voice was quite audible. "We have fallen into the sea!"

"The sea!" cried his companions together.

"Yes. Likely we are a thousand feet deep under it by now. Had it not been for that bit of good luck we should have been smashed to splinters. As it is, we are already rising and will reach the surface very quickly. Then we must take one of those flying hops you originated, Flint, and land somewhere on something more solid," said Carscadden jocularly.

Now, that the suspense was over, each man felt inclined to laugh hilariously, slap backs, play leap-frog, or any other boy's trick, just from the pure exuberance they experienced in the joy of being still alive, and back on the honest old earth again.

THE shell, having the cover still beneath it, shot buoyantly out of the water and soared high in the air, as though minded to be off on another journey; for though affected by the intense cold of its stupendous voyage, yet the metal, save at the most excessive speeds, was still practically non-gravitational.

By skilful maneuvering it was brought to a halt for a few minutes, and hung motionless in space while the earth revolved and slid away beneath them. In less than five minutes land appeared below, and in another minute the *Neutralia* was resting safely on the topmost slope of a well-wooded hill.

The great adventure was over, and the voyagers, sound in wind and limb, and rich in experiences such as no other human beings had ever experienced, had descended from the great globe and were rapturously gazing at a scene of tropic vegetation that yet seemed very dear and home-like to them.

Burgoyne, who had lived for a little in Ceylon, soon identified the hill upon which they had alighted as the famous Adam's Peak, not far from the port of Columbo.

"We must seek help to convey our collections and specimens to safety. But I think it would be wise to first remove all the stuff from the *Neutralia;* then we can close the door and keep out prying natives, who likely would destroy and steal a good deal of the movable gearings. For the time I have had enough of space-traveling—what do you say, Hugh? Shall we leave the *Neutralia* to her own devices for a little?" asked Carscadden.

"Same here! I've had more than enough of space-traveling. But what about Kobloth?" Burgoyne asked.

"Bring him out, he must go with us. We can decide later what to do with him. Perhaps better let him go; when our story is known, the authorities can deal with him if they wish. You see he has not actually killed anyone, nor has he stolen anything; besides, the man is insane," said his friend, indifferently. What mattered now? They were safe and sound and the voyage had been successful beyond his wildest dreams.

So Kobloth was landed; looking rather shaken and amazed, but still preserving silence, the silence that later had succeeded his ramblings. But for this he appeared almost normal, rather haggard and morose-looking, yet calm and harmless enough.

He expressed no astonishment at their rapid passage, made no comment on its violent ending, and appeared indifferent to where they had alighted. He simply stood silently and moodily watching the process of unloading. Obviously the man's mind was entirely vacant.

The work was finished and the toilers sat down to a well-earned meal, but he refused all offers of food and stalked gloomily away in the shade cast by a

large tree. The three friends were seated in the shadow at the rear of the globe.

They were all laughing and conversing happily, when Burgoyne, whose ears were the quickest, leapt to his feet.

"Did you hear that! He's back in the *Neutralia!*" and he rushed round the globe to the doorway.

True enough he was in the *Neutralia,* had climbed noiselessly up the rope ladder, pullled it inside, and shut the door. This last action was the cause of the sound that had caught Burgoyne's hearing.

As they stood helplessly under the shut door, the great cover began to turn, coming over noiselessly and resistlessly.

As the huge globe rose from the ground, which it did before the cover had entirely gone round the lower half, and the earth's pull was not quite cut off, the door, some twelve feet above them, was opened, and Kobloth appeared in the opening. At that second the *Neutralia* suddenly leapt upward and, as it went, they could see he was speaking, shouting to them, but his words came in a torrent of meaningless sounds, the unintelligble ravings of a madman, muffled by the distance. The globe gathered way; evidently the turning-gear left unlocked was permitting the cover to slide gradually over, and his voice rose to a scream of insane passion. Then there came a shrill hissing that rapidly subsided, and the *Neutralia* had vanished.

"The door was open!" exclaimed Burgoyne.

"Yes. By now he will be a block of ice out in the silence and blackness of space!" said Carscadden gravely. "The *Neutralia* has commenced her last awful journey; and it is quite possible that ten thousand years from this hour, Armand Kobloth will still be standing in that doorway on his eternal voyage through space."

[THE END]

Lost Dream

By EMIL PETAJA

Exalted, they whose far-off visions see
In memory's mist a land of whispered dreams
Where beings god-like move in shadowed schemes,
A silver city by a sapphire sea.
They work their spells, and plan when they will be
Among the mystic dancers, under beams
Of crystal crescent moons whose radiance seems
A light of necromantic sorcery.

I gaze enchanted while they pass me by;
Ascend the hill where crumbling ruins lie—
An eery sea-deep sound rings out the moor;
They pause before a rock which hides a door:
One fumbles in his scarlet cloak. I see
His slender fingers move—he turns a key. . . .

The Light Was Green

By JOHN RAWSON SPEER

A brief weird story by the author of "Symphony of the Damned" and "The Carnal God"

SUDDEN madness at seventy miles an hour! Alone in the cab of a locomotive with a madman. Will Bryant, the engineer of the Fire Flyer, was insane. But why?

What had suddenly turned this man I had worked with for over six years, and had known as a quiet, steady-going person, into the raving madman I now saw before me?

His eyes violent, his face contorted with fear, he was cowering there in the cab, pleading with some invisible presence. For a paralyzing instant I felt that presence. But there was no time to lose. As the fireman of the Fire Flyer, I would have to assume Will's responsibility. There was no time to ask questions. I had to get to the throttle of that locomotive.

As I rushed to him from my side of the cab, he suddenly seized a shovel and struck me over the head. Blood trickled into my eyes, blurring my vision, and then I slipped away into unconsciousness with only a fading but horrible picture of Will Bryant, insane.

What happened after that in the cab of that engine, pulling a train-load of passengers seventy miles an hour, terrifies me constantly.

When I regained my senses after the blow Will had given me, I found him staring at the steam gage, and gibbering like an idiot. The air was set on the brakes, and the Flyer was pulled in alongside the main track, waiting for Number 93 to pass her.

I must have been unconscious for fully fifteen minutes. During that time the Fire Flyer had thundered on her way with no one at the throttle—unless it was, as Will Bryant swears, the spirit of Nat Carson. Nat Carson had been dead for ten years!

There was nothing to do but turn Will over to the authorities, who committed him to an asylum.

Although I had been his closest friend, there were things in his life which he had never mentioned, even to me. The doctors, after much deliberation, decided remorse, coupled with a deep sense of guilt, had caused Will to have this intense belief in the return of the dead. I followed their theories with interest, and for some time believed that he would eventually realize that only his worry-ridden mind had produced the sight he claimed he saw in the cab that night.

But I know now that Will Bryant will never recover. The last visit I had with him made me see how hopeless it was. Some of the fear that comes to lock him in delirious madness now attaches itself to me.

I can still see him, the way he looked that last day I talked to him in Terrington Asylum; his eyes dull, a hopeless sorrow showing from within them as he said:

"Steve, I am sane, as sane as any man, but I can never take my place in normal society again. Don't you think I have tried to convince myself that there was nothing unnatural about that night? I've

gone over every detail of the affair, but the result is always the same: Nat Carson, dead though he may have been, sat in the cab of our engine; he pulled that train, and I know what he intended to do. I know, Steve! He was there. I saw him, I tell you. I did! I did!"

"Will, please!" I gripped his shaking hands and held them tightly. "Don't talk or think about it if it disturbs you. I only want to help you. I want to see you well again so that you can leave this place."

Will shook his head sadly.

"I don't want to leave here now, Steve. I feel safer here where they can watch me at night. I have a room here, Steve, where there are no train whistles blasting in my ears.

"Steve, I'm going to tell you everything, just as I see it. They call me crazy, but that is because they have no other term for my affliction. It is not really insanity; 'haunted' is the word.

"You remember hearing about the train wreck I was in ten years ago? As you know, Nat Carson was the engineer who allowed his train to run by a signal supposed to be set against him. I was firing for him then. See these scars on my arms—all from that wreck. We crashed through the rear of a freight train, plowed through a chain of box-cars as if they had been mere cigar boxes. Both of us missed death for no other reason than that it wasn't our time to go.

"At the Board of Investigation, I told them what I believed I should. I told them that Nat had been drinking a little. He did take chances, unforgivable chances like that. I used to warn him that some day he would be caught. Nat could be drunk and still not show it. Of course the fact that I was in love with his girl and had never really liked him had something to do with my testimony.

"At the trial he claimed he saw the signal as green. He swore the red signal set against us was green, and that I was a liar. 'You're sending me to hell!' he cried. But I stuck to my testimony.

"You know the rest; two weeks later Nat Carson killed himself. I tried to believe like all the others that he had done it because he realized the crime he had committed in risking the lives of all those passengers.

"The years went on. I was promoted to engineer, a regular 'hog head' with my own train to pull. I seldom thought of Nat any more; only when stories of that wreck were recalled would I think of him. That was only natural.

"Not until one night in the yards, years later, did I come face to face with what has doomed me. I had checked my engine over to the round-house hostler and was walking across to the dispatcher's shack. The steam and smoke from the trains was all mixed up with the fog that was settling down over the yards. Brakemen's lanterns were bobbing in and out among the cars. You know how it is on foggy nights in the yards. I wasn't paying much attention to anything when, out of that fog, a face leered at me, then vanished. It was quick, so quick that, although I was frightened, I did not believe I had actually seen it. Surely I had only imagined that I saw Nat Carson.

" 'What am I thinking about?' I asked myself; even laughed a little. 'Must be seeing ghosts,' I said, and went on into the dispatcher's office.

"I didn't think any more about it. That's how much it meant to me then. People are often imagining that they see faces of those who are dead. They're like flashes, quick pictures from the subconscious mind.

"Two nights later, at the other end of the run, I saw a figure walking toward me. I noticed it particularly because it

seemed intent upon walking right through me. It was under a street lamp on the corner near my home. This time it did not disappear, and there was no doubt in my mind as to who it was. He stood there sneering at me, Steve! I couldn't move or talk as he eyed me with contempt, moved around me, and finally walked on down the street.

"All that night I tried to tell myself that it was only my imagination playing tricks. But why should it?

"For weeks I would see Nat Carson, always at night, usually in the yards or around my home. It was then that I began thinking of the testimony I had given at the Board of Investigation.

"That Nat Carson was trying to communicate with me from beyond the borders of this life seemed the only conclusion to draw. That he was accusing me of his death, there was no doubt.

"The last night before the thing really happened, I was looking at a green switch-lantern. A voice whispered in my ear: 'It's green! Green like the night we crashed that freight. Green, I tell you!'

"I turned and saw Nat Carson's face. I called out to him, but he turned and ran. From then on I could feel his presence all around me.

"You remember how you looked at me when I climbed into the cab that last night I took the run, Steve? I felt that somewhere on that train Nat Carson was hiding, waiting to confront me. Just before we pulled out I was on the verge of getting out of the cab and leaving the train.

" 'A-b-o-a-r-d!' I heard the conductor drawl. From force of habit, I started my train.

"SLOW at first (I never jerked the Flyer, you know that), easy, evenly we started. I dreaded to see the lights from the station moving by. Gradually faster, yard lights, crossings, twinkling stars—green signals—open country! The Fire Flyer was on its way.

"The headlight's gleaming spear of silver shot through the darkness; wheels clicked over track joints; a crossing whistled by. She was rolling smoothly, powerfully on.

" 'Green!' I called to you from my side of the cab when I saw the signal.

" 'Green!' you answered back to me when you saw it. And from somewhere I heard that damned voice: 'It's green, green like that night we crashed into that freight!'

"I tried to control myself, tried to throw out the thoughts that were crowding into my brain. But as we rolled along, I found myself thinking: 'This *is* like the night we went through those box-cars!'

"Again I felt that cold breath upon my neck, eyes peering into my back. I turned, but no one was there—only the swaying coaches, and you down on the bridge tending your fire.

"Pulling myself together again, I peered straight ahead at the glistening track. Another green signal! 'Nat! Nat!' Each clack of steel upon steel seemed to sing out, 'Nat! Nat!'

"Again that voice, the feeling of his presence behind me. I wanted to cry out, to stop the train, and search for that voice. Conscience? I tried to tell myself that it should not bother me. Why didn't he leave me alone to run my train? I wasn't fit to highball a fast locomotive over the road with such voices, such icy breaths upon my back.

"Gladly I welcomed the lights of a

station, the first station on the run. I wanted to climb down out of the cab and remain there. Something horrible, I knew, lay ahead of me on that lone stretch of track. It was impossible to confess to you how I felt. Words would not come to me, Steve.

"Miles yet ahead, miles of torture. Would daylight never come? Perhaps that might drive away the awful fear.

"Speeding again in the country, only the lights from the interlocker towers five miles apart, only an occasional farmhouse with a lonely lamp lit. Shadows on the hills, creeping shadows, and that chilling breath, that voice: 'Green! It was green!'

"This time the voice seemed louder, much more real and certain. Only by sheer force of mind could I keep my back turned to it.

"It came again! I had to look. A grim, awful-looking face was staring at me from the tender. I swear it was Nat Carson, and he spoke to me. Somehow I mumbled the words: 'Nat, where in God's name did you come from?'

" 'From the blinds maybe,' he laughed. 'Maybe I been ridin' 'em all night waitin' for this little stretch of track. Ten years since we rode side by side in the cab of an engine, ain't it? Ten years ago tonight we were ridin' along this same old road, you an' me. Only difference was that I was settin' at the throttle and you was tossin' coal into the belly of the old hog.

" 'Watchin' your signals, pal? Crack train you're pullin' now. How's it feel to be settin' there watchin' the drivers go up and down?'

"He moved toward me. I screamed because I couldn't help it. I wanted to beat out the sight of that leering face. It must have been at that time that I struck you with the shovel, Steve, although I do not remember that. All I know is that Nat Carson, who was dead, who had been dead all those years, was now climbing onto my seat in the cab. Nothing I could do would make him go away.

"I saw him climb up onto the seat and take hold of the throttle. He said, 'I'm pullin' this train tonight. She's my train again!'

"I tried to push him away. 'Nat, you're crazy!' I cried.

" 'Crazy!' He laughed as his fingers pulled the throttle out, and the locomotive bellowed with the force of steam driving its wheels on to greater speed.

" 'Yes, crazy! I've been crazy ever since that night when I saw the signal green. Then those cars . . . remember how we piled into 'em? Remember how the old 789 looked when she bit through that "crumm," plowed off the track, and dug her pilot into the dirt? Remember!'

" 'Nat, watch those signals!' I begged. 'Let me up there, Nat. Take your punishment out on me, but don't risk the lives of others.'

"The Flyer hit a sharp curve, bounced uncertainly from side to side a moment, then fled madly down the track.

" 'Ten years ago,' Nat began slowly, 'ten years ago we both saw that signal green. But you lied! You lied to make me lose my job, to lose Lucille because you wanted her, and because you hated me. You told them about my drinking. In every way you put the blame of that wreck upon my soul. I thought I could escape it when I sought death, but it was still there. And now you're going to pay for every moment of doubt and torture. Tonight we celebrate the tenth anniversary of that wreck!'

" 'What are you going to do?' I asked hoarsely.

" 'What am I going to do? He gave

the throttle another pull. 'I'm going to pull the Flyer tonight. Somewhere along this road there's a red signal set against us, and we're going by it, seventy miles an hour we're going by it!'

" 'No, Nat! No! You can't do this!'

" 'Seventy, eighty miles an hour we're going by it,' he chanted. 'And then, if you live, try to tell the Board of Investigation why you went by that danger signal. Try to tell them that a man who has been dead for ten years forced you to run by that signal. Listen to them laugh as you tell your crazy story. See the doubt on their faces as I saw it when I tried to tell them the signal was green.'

"Giving the throttle one final jerk, he sent the locomotive roaring like some wounded animal charging blindly to its own destruction.

"He sang out: 'The Flyer to Hell! No signals—clear track! Red means green, and green means nothing. A dead man at the throttle, pulling the fastest train that ever polished steel. We're on our way. We're highballing it to hell!'

"On we roared, with all those passengers slumbering in the Pullmans or chatting and talking. All of them innocently riding behind an engine headed for death —pulled by death itself!

"I closed my eyes and tried to pray. I don't know how long I stood there or what went on after that. The next thing I remember was hearing the scream of the whistle, the sound of the air being set on the brakes, the flanges biting into the wheels, and the train groaning to a stop.

"When I looked we were pulled onto a siding at Elva. Far ahead on the track beside us I could hear a train coming at full speed. It was Number 93. Before we left the last station there had been no orders to pull onto the siding to let 93 go by.

"All that time, Steve, our train had been out of our hands. You were unconscious; I was helpless. Someone pulled that train onto the siding! Who, Steve, who?"

WILL was shaking now. Terror, relived, had made him a trembling, sobbing wreck.

"But, Will, if the spirit of Nat Carson intended to destroy that train, why did we find it safely side-tracked to permit another train to pass us as per changed-schedule?" I tried to reason with him, for my sake as well as his own, for now even I felt that perhaps it was true.

"There is only one answer," Will replied brokenly. "Nat Carson stopped at the last station before Elva and received orders side-tracking us. No matter what revenge he had planned for me, something would not let him kill the others. He took that train onto the siding, left it standing there, and went away; his revenge was realized. Just as I had sent him for ever from the cab of an engine, so he has sent me.

"Nat Carson pulled that train. Nat Carson's dead but he pulled that train. He still comes back to remind me that I sent him to hell! He'll come tonight, and tomorrow night, and every night of my life. Oh, God, help me!"

Will broke into uncontrollable sobbing. The attendants were rushing to him. Nothing I could say would calm him.

"Nat Carson's dead! I sent him to hell. He pulled that train. He came back to pull that train. Nat Carson returned from the dead!"

As I started to go, a thought came to me; a brilliant thought it seemed at the time. Those orders, received at the last station before the side-track at Elva, had to be signed! Will must have signed

them. Surely he had only gone into a trance of terror and imagined all he told me. If those orders were signed with Will's name they would prove everything to him. I would be able to recognize his signature no matter how shaken he might have been when he signed it.

I hurried to the station dispatcher, and, running through his orders, I found the date of Will's last run.

My heart stopped, then began beating wildly.

The signature on those orders was Nat Carson's!

Valley of Bones

By DAVID H. KELLER

What weird tragedy took place in that African spot where the bones of a murdered people were scattered?

"YOU were kind to me in England," said the Zulu.

I looked at him, and tried to remember, but I could not drag the past out of the subconscious. Not wishing to offend him, I simply said,

"It is nice to know that you have some reason to remember me."

He smiled.

"After all, you do not remember. We were in the same classes at Oxford. All the men there were courteous to me, but they never accepted me as their social equal. You had me in to tea several afternoons. We talked about psychology. You were majoring in it, and I told you some things about my people."

"I remember now!" I replied, rather sharply. "In fact, I wonder why I did not recognize you in the first place. But it was a long time ago, over thirty years. We were young then, and—now? You look young, but I know that I am nearly sixty. Yet we were interested in the same thing at that time, and I saw no real reason for not accepting you as, well, as a brother; because, after all, there was something of kin between us. Strange that we meet after all those silent years; meet in Africa!"

"Hunting?"

"I suppose you might call it that."

"But you have not killed anything. I have been watching you for five days. Game all around you, and you do not kill."

"No. There has been enough killing. I carry a gun for protection in emergencies, but I do not kill, except when I have to."

"I remember. You used to think that animals had rights and souls. You even thought that they might live on after the first death."

"Yes," I said, laughing, "but I never have proved it, and I have not talked about that idea for a great many years. My close friends started to worry about me—thought I was insane. Are you hunting?"

"Yes; but I also hunt without a gun."

"You don't mean you use a spear?" I asked, curiously.

"At times; when I need food, but on this trip I am going to use something older than a spear. In fact, I am going to be, like you, simply an observer, of life, and death."

WE CAMPED together that night. He was alone, and I had only two porters. Before supper I suggested that we dress for the occasion.

"Two Oxford men," I remarked. "We should not omit the conventions of polite society. I came from Idaho, you from Africa. For the evening let us forget our origins and remember our cultural education."

Rather to my surprize he agreed. So, we dined according to the best traditions of Oxford. It was moonlight when we finished, and I asked him to share the camp with me that night. We even sat on camp chairs near the fire. He was silent. I tried to make conversation. At last he seemed to wake from his dreams.

"You thought animals lived after death?"

"Yes."

"Do men?"

"Perhaps."

"Should you like to be sure?"

"Delighted! I should be the first man to know it."

"Not the first. My ancestors have always known it. Often they sleep for years, perhaps for centuries. But, when they wish to, they awake and live again till their work is done. Then they sleep again."

"Tradition? Folk-lore?" I asked.

"Fact."

"Can you show me?"

"Yes. Years ago you gave me cups of tea, little cakes and some hours of your time. You were kind to me. I said to myself that some day I would repay you. Will you leave your camp and porters here and come with me?"

"Yes."

"We will start at once."

"Tonight?"

"Yes. It is necessary. First, I will take off these clothes. For supper I was willing to wear them. Now, I am going back."

Half an hour later we left the camp. and started over the veldt. Fortunately, it was moonlight, almost as light as day.

For three days and nights we walked, with little talking. Every hour seemed to increase the moodiness of my companion.

On the evening of the third day we came to a hill. Below us was a little cup-shaped valley.

"This is the end," the Zulu said, and sat down on a stone.

I was glad to follow him. Tough as I was, the trip had taxed my endurance. For two hours we rested. Then the moon started to shine.

"Now, I will talk," said the dark man.

"I am listening," I replied, and took a deep sigh.

"The story starts when I was a boy of twelve," he said. "I was the son of the chief of a Zulu tribe. It was just a little tribe, not more than a hundred warriors, but we were rather rich. We kept our isolation, refused to become involved in the Zulu wars with the white people. Because of this reservation, we lived on. The world did not know there was such a tribe.

"One day a hunter came and found us. He said that we were friends. To show that he meant that, he said he would give us a feast. My father believed his words. All of our warriors believed him, but

there was one old man who doubted. He told me to go hunting and not to come back for three days. I did as he told me, and, when I returned, I found all of my people dead. Down in that valley that lies before us they were on the rocks, dead. All of them: the warriors, the women and the little ones. But the hunter was gone, and he had taken with him all of our wealth: the gold bracelets, the ornaments of the women, the things of gold that we had for many generations."

"Poison?" I asked.

"Yes. He fed them and killed them."

"But the old man who warned you? He must have known something."

"Perhaps, but we are fatalists. No doubt he thought that it had to happen, because it had to happen. I do not know. He was a very old and very wise man. I sat here on this very rock for two days, and then I left. After that I met another hunter. He liked me. We lived together. He took me to England. He educated me. When he died, he made me his heir. But I came back to Africa."

"And you made no effort to find the man who had killed your people?"

"Yes. I hunted him, but not with a gun. I simply kept him under observation."

"I guess it must have been the Oxford influence!"

"No. Not that. But I had an idea that when the time came my people would act."

"But you said that they were all dead?"

"Yes. They were dead. I have walked among them, year after year, and I could take you down there now and show you the bones. Some of the bones are still together; others have been torn apart by animals. But the bones are there. See that little fire over there? That is the campfire of the hunter. He has come back, and perhaps my people knew it. I knew that he intended to."

"It is a small fire."

"That is because he is alone. He could not hire any native to come with him, but he wanted to come; so, he came alone, with a wagon and four oxen. He was after something."

"But you said that he took all the gold!"

"Yes, but that is spent. He sold many of the ornaments to museums. I have seen them. I even bought some of the duplicates. Now, he has learned that he left part of the riches behind him. The war-axes, and spears. He can sell them to the museums. Some are very old. So, he decided to come back and take the last of our treasures."

"In a way, he must be a brave man."

"Yes, but only through ignorance. He thinks that my people are dead, just so many bones. So, he camps among them, and tomorrow he will search among those bones for things that he can sell. At least, he thinks he can. Perhaps my people have other thoughts. That is why I brought you with me. Tonight I want to show you something. I want to pay you for being kind to me."

"Are you going to kill him?"

"No. I am going to sit here in the moonlight with you, and help you watch."

"It is full moon."

"Yes. We can see. It is not far to his camp; so, we can hear."

I LOOKED at my watch. It was only a little after nine. Tired as I was, I knew that I could not sleep. The Zulu sat motionless, his eyes shut. At ten I touched him.

"Do you know what is going to happen?" I asked.

"I know what should happen, but I am uncertain. You see, there are two sets of

emotions tearing at each other inside me. My Oxford education tells me that the thing is impossible and my inherited memories tell me that it has to happen. So, I am going to sit here. The old man who saved my life was a very wise man. He is down there, and, perhaps, he knows better than you or I."

Eleven o'clock came and then, finally, a quarter of twelve.

"The cattle are restless," said the Zulu, softly. "They feel something that the sleeping man cannot feel. I think that they will run away. It would be best. They have done nothing for which they should be punished."

During the next five minutes the four oxen broke. We could see them galloping across the rocks. The fire started to burn brighter, and near it we could see a man standing.

"He heard his cattle and awoke," commented my friend. "It is good that he is awake."

"There are white things moving down there!" I whispered sharply. "They all seem to be moving toward the fire."

"Yes. We see them. Now the hunter sees them. We had better flatten ourselves against the rock. He will start shooting very soon. I do not want you to be hurt."

Then those white things started to run toward the fire, and we heard the sharp explosion of a magazine rifle, followed by the staccato of two automatic revolvers. After that, the gun-fire ceased, and we heard the shrieks of a man, afraid and dying. Then came silence, and the fire was out.

"It is over!" cried the Zulu. "Now, you go to sleep, and in the morning we will see what happened to the hunter."

I tried to sleep, but I could not. Even with my eyes shut I could still see those white-lined things running toward the hunter and the fire.

Morning came at last. I turned to the Zulu. He sat there, eyes open, but, seemingly, in a dream. I shook him by the shoulder.

"The day has come!" I said.

"I know it," he replied. "Shall we go down into the valley?"

We walked down to the bottom of the cup, toward the camp of the hunter. While still a hundred yards away I saw a little hill of bones. When we came nearer, we saw that the camp, the wagon and the dead fire were covered with bones, and with the bones there were spears and battle-axes, sticking here and there among the long and rounded and whitened ivory.

The Zulu turned to me and said,

"You are a white man and the hunter was a white man. The traditions of your race should be remembered. Will you bury him? You will find him at the bottom of the bones. His skull is crushed with battle-axes; his body is pierced with a hundred lances. In his heart there is a dagger, and the handle is still held by the white hand of my father. Will you go and throw the bones to this side and that and bury your white man?"

"How do you know?" I asked, almost hysterically.

"I was there last night. I saw the hunter killed by my family, by my tribe. I sat by you while the killing was on, but my spirit was with my own people. It seems that I remember seeing my father bury his dagger."

"The hunter has dug his own grave, and your people have raised a monument above him!" I cried.

"Go back to the world and tell them what you saw."

"Never! I saw it happen, and you saw it happen, and we know, but the world would never believe."

"Oxford is, after all, very ignorant," replied the Zulu.

The Third Interne

By IDWAL JONES

A brief tale of a surgical horror in the Arctic wastes of northern Russia

DOCTOR ALEXIS GARSHIN poured himself a glass of wine, sank deep into his leathern armchair, and watched the hearth-flames through the haze of an excellent cigar. Outside, the wind howled morosely like a thief. A blizzard had come up from the tundra, and it was plastering the windows with gobbets of snow. Certainly, Yarmolinsk Prison, near the Arctic line, was the most desolate the little Government inspector had yet visited. A man could very well go mad in the solitude. But its chief, Doctor Melchior Pashev, found it a heaven: nobody to trouble him, all the time he wanted to carry on his researches in biology, a fair salary, and little to do; for the prison and its hospital rarely held more than a dozen souls, beyond the staff of five. Garshin, a neurologist himself, admired him greatly.

Pashev had just gone out, to visit a dying trapper up the river a way, excusing himself for leaving his guest so hastily, but he would return in an hour, and dinner would keep. A bleak night, and Garshin shuddered at the idea of facing that howling wind, with snow in his teeth. Himself, he rather loved comfort. But a restful hour would do him good, and there was nobody afoot in this wing of the prison.

The door opened. A young man entered—a pallid, tousle-haired young man, with the burning eyes of a fanatic. A theological student, Garshin thought.

"Good evening, sir," said Garshin. "Doctor Pashev has gone out for an hour."

"He is gone for ever," said the young man, closing the door. "He is never coming back."

"Indeed?" queried Garshin. "I might even say, you surprize me."

"Now is my opportunity to give word to humanity, to the outside world, from which I have been a prisoner for two years," began the young man, drawing up a chair and fixing his eyes on Garshin. "Listen to me:

"I AM the third interne. There were two, and the woman, Katerina Ivanovna. We came here from the University of Astrakhan, where a small band of us had devoted ourselves to the study of the brain and the nervous system. Our God was the great Pavlov, promulgator of the theory of the conditioned reflex. He received us once, and we stayed with him a month. Then we left, because we had discovered a far greater scientific man than he—Doctor Melchior Pashev, the brilliant worker in neurology.

"You probably know nothing about him, for you must be an engineer. I can see that, because your face is not hard. Sir, with all due respect to you, you are an infant in learning compared to Pashev. He is as aloof as an icy summit of the Alps; he dwells in the realm of pure brain; human beings are nothing to him but matter to dissect. He would immolate his own mother on the altar of science. But he is a master. Pavlov, Ein-

stein, Metchnikoff—not one of these is worthy to latch his shoes or fetch in his shaving-water.

"We read at Astrakhan his report on the spinal accessory nerve, proving that it not only controls the motor fibers of the larynx but some of the fibers of the heart as well. This is only a trifle in the vast researches of the man, who became at once the most renowned thinker in the world.

"Pavlov's experiments on dogs were child's play, sir. Pashev began where Pavlov left off, and went to an astronomical height beyond him. He cut off the head of a mastiff, and kept it alive, functioning beautifully, for three years. It barked, drank water, blinked its eyes with affection, and showed all the normal reactions of a canine, save that it had no body.

"Our enthusiasm when we read of this knew no bounds. It made us delirious with admiration. Here was a genius on the track of the larger synthesis, who would crack open the last secrets of life, make himself the mightiest genius that ever was born. We would go to him and beg him to take us on as his apprentices. The two friends, Benno and Nicolai Suvorin, my fiancée, who was Katerina Ivanovna, and myself.

"So we pooled our funds, borrowed money right and left and came here to Yarmolinsk, half starved, weary and more dead than alive, and he took us in. An epidemic of bubonic plague had decimated the province, all the nurses and internes in this hospital had died, and so had Doctor Plotkin, Pashev's assistant. He died right in the chair you are sitting in. Don't start, sir. It all happened three years ago.

"We began working. We tended the sick, swept the wards, buried the dead, did all the menial work that came to hand; and at night studied in the dissecting-room, working with the great man himself. It was Katerina Ivanovna, with whom I was in love, and I who worked out with him the theory, first proposed by the learned Bengali, Professor Gobind Lal, that the ganglia send out their own impulses.

"I know I am obscure, sir, but you will never know how indefatigably we toiled, like slaves, devotedly, eager to serve the man we idolized, feeling rewarded enough that he tolerated us about him.

"But Katerina was devoted to me, also. We had our plans. After two years we were to go to Moscow and start up in practise as specialists on the brain. Renown and fortune would be ours. I would be professor at Moscow University, Katerina my asistant, and we would care for nothing but each other, our science and music. Katerina was a fine pianist, and kept her skill fresh, practising an hour a day before she went to her routine in the ward, which was as early as five in the morning.

"We mastered that dog's head. Pashev had now gone beyond that, and was having success in keeping alive the head of a chimpanzee. His device was most ingenious. The head was mounted on a glass base. The facial, auditory, oculmotor nerves—all the nerves of the head were given stimuli and nourishment by a fine series of magnetic networks, terminating in a cell-box. The circulatory system was kept going by a delicate motor and pump. And to crown all, there was Pashev's masterpiece, a chain of ganglia, made of rubber and platinum, which took the place of the spinal cord.

"That chimpanzee's head roared, opened its mouth, blinked at the light, winced at a mirror flash or the prick of a pin. It was as alive as mine. Nicolai and Benno, bereft of all interest in life

save this tremendous achievement, worshipped Pashev more than ever. They bowed to him, shrinking in awe. It went far beyond idolatry.

"One day they came to him and pleaded. 'You cannot find out by the head of an anthropoid ape what the conscious brain is doing. If it were a man's head, it could talk back to you. Think of the service such a head would do for pure science!'

" 'Well?' said Pashev.

" 'We offer ourselves to you for experimentation.'

"THEY meant it. Even Pashev was moved, touched almost to tears of joy at the offer. He tried to dissuade them, spoke to them for nearly five minutes. But they were insistent. They had no relatives, no ties of any kind, no love for anything but science. So Pashev agreed. The decapitation was done in the operating-room. The heads were immediately removed to glass bases, the severed edges cauterized, and the wires and arterial tubes and ganglia fibers, already prepared, were attached.

"Where was I? Sir, I fell ill of a brain fever and was confined for three weeks. The horror of it was too much for me. That was my way of escape, swooning to the floor when I learned Pashev had agreed to do this favor for Nicolai and Benno, my friends.

"I recovered, but it was weeks and weeks before I was myself, and I had fears that I should go mad. Insanity has long been a matter of interest to me, sir. But, as I said, my health and mental poise returned, with reason unshaken.

"What hurt me was the horror, the contempt with which Katerina now viewed me. She regarded me as a renegade to science, a coward, a pitiful wretch, unfit to love. It was another blow to me, but you never know the depth of a woman's forgiveness, and in time she loved me again.

"So we had rather a happy life, sometimes radiantly happy, especially when of a winter evening—the nights are long here at Yarmolinsk, sir—she would play on the piano for us, a little Schubert or a folk-song of our Astrakhan land. Pashev had a vulnerable spot in his armor: he was susceptible to the charms of music, and he would listen to Katerina play or sing, listen to her by the hour, elbows on his knee, his eyes fixed on her lovely face. I believe, sir, that all scientific men should cultivate one of the arts, else their imagination becomes atrophied. Darwin, to the end of his days, never ceased to regret that he had lost all taste for poetry. I have always admired Einstein for his devotion to the violin. And Professor Gobind Lal for his delight in painting little water-colors.

"I sometimes imagined the two were in love—merely a fancy of mine, but it shadowed my spirits often, though it went as swiftly as it came. Pashev, my idol, was beyond such weakness, and Katerina was loyal to me.

"It was my task to minister to the two heads, to see that the pumps and the cells were functioning as they should. You, as an engineer, sir, will appreciate the importance of my task. It was Pashev who made all the notes, who conversed with Nicolai and Benno, holding to their barely-moving lips a microphone attached to a device strapped to his ears. They spoke of how they felt, what their reactions were to heat and cold, to the prick of a pin, the flash of a mirror. They spoke only of matters of laboratory interest; for them the rest of the world did not exist. Were they happy, you ask? I presume so. They were like souls that had attained Nirvana, beyond good and

evil, beyond all feeling save response to sensory stimuli by eye, ear and the nerves of the skin.

" 'They never did have much imagination,' Pashev said once, coldly, as if disappointed. 'A woman, now—ah, what help one could get out of a woman!'

"Katerina spoke at once. With the light of a fanatical devotion for an ideal in her eyes she spoke to Pashev, offering herself; nay, insisting that he decapitate her and add one more chapter to his great work on the sensory reactions of the head *sans corpus*. I froze with horror, then went mad again. I can still see the pity on the face of the doctor, the joy and pride of the master whose pupil has come up to his highest expectations.

"For weeks I was ill, lost to the world, and when I returned, feeble, to my work, Katerina was gone. Her body was gone, but her head was on the heavy glass shelf, alongside that of Nicolai.

"You look horror-stricken, sir, and I can well understand how you feel. Light your cigar. See, your hand is shaking. Perhaps you now get an inkling of the hell I have lived through, and the bitter disillusion of my life when I found that my idol was a fiend, a demon out of the bottomless pit.

"Every night I say good-bye to the heads of the only human beings I ever loved. Why did my heart turn against Pashev? Ah, I must tell you. But don't stare at me so, your frighten me. I was in the laboratory alone one night, going through with a candle, when I heard a voice. It was Katerina's.

" 'Coward!' she was saying. 'Coward! Here we all are but you. Ah, what a fool you were, and blind! I loved only Doctor Pashev. He seduced me the very night I came.'

"I fled past them with the candle, gibbering, my head turned so I shouldn't see the pity in the eyes of Nicolai and Benno, who knew the truth all along. And upstairs I wondered what they were saying to each other in the darkness. I heard them laugh! A laugh of contempt!"

* * * * *

"MY DEAR friend, here I am!"

In the doorway stood Doctor Pashev, tall, benevolent and smiling, his fur coat whitened with snow.

"I am happy to tell you the trapper will pull through, after all."

The pallid young man had risen, then fell to the floor in a convulsion. It was an attack, Garshin observed, of hystero-epilepsy, an interesting case. Pashev stooped at once and carried the victim out of the room. When he returned, the Government inspector said to him, firmly:

"Doctor Pashev, you must allow me to go into your laboratory for a minute."

"Certainly. There is the door, to the left."

Garshin entered and moved to the heavy glass mantelpiece. It held nothing but three skulls, which he lifted curiously. He could find no tubes nor wires nor any attachment. They were old, dust-covered, marked with ink, as if they had been kept there for years and years. He left the laboratory, thoughtful. The tale was naught but a figment of the imagination.

"I suppose," said Pashev, lighting a cigarette, "that poor fellow has been telling you some weird story about heads and some woman he loved, eh?"

"Yes. He had me on edge for an hour. I don't think I was ever so frightened in my life. Reminded me I had nerves, after all."

"He tells the story well," said Pashev, sadly, "because he has told it often—to everyone who comes here. It is rather pitiful. He came here three years ago

with two youths, friends of his, and a young woman that he loved, to assist me during that distressful outbreak of the plague. The three died inside of a week. The shock to him was permanent. But he is harmless, and quite a help to me in the laboratory."

A servant entered with a large tray.

"Ah, here comes our belated dinner," said Pashev. "Let us sit down. There's nothing like a sledge-ride to give a fillip to one's appetite. Pigeons and claret! We do ourselves well, here. Your health, my dear friend!"

Ethan Brand*

By NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE

BARTRAM the lime-burner, a rough, heavy-looking man, begrimed with charcoal, sat watching his kiln, at nightfall, while his little son played at building houses with the scattered fragments of marble, when, on the hillside below them, they heard a roar of laughter, not mirthful, but slow, and even solemn, like a wind shaking the boughs of the forest.

"Father, what is that?" asked the little boy, leaving his play, and pressing betwixt his father's knees.

"Oh, some drunken man, I suppose," answered the lime-burner; "some merry fellow from the bar-room in the village, who dared not laugh loud enough within doors lest he should blow the roof of the house off. So here he is, shaking his jolly sides at the foot of Graylock."

"But, father," said the child, more sensitive than the obtuse, middle-aged clown, "he does not laugh like a man that is glad. So the noise frightens me!"

"Don't be a fool, child!" cried his father, gruffly. "You will never make a man, I do believe; there is too much of your mother in you. I have known the rustling of a leaf startle you. Hark! Here comes the merry fellow now. You shall see that there is no harm in him."

Bartram and his little son, while they were talking thus, sat watching the same lime-kiln that had been the scene of Ethan Brand's solitary and meditative life, before he began his search for the Unpardonable Sin. Many years, as we

* A chapter from an abortive romance.

have seen, had now elapsed since that portentous night when the *idea* was first developed. The kiln, however, on the mountainside, stood unimpaired, and was in nothing changed since he had thrown his dark thoughts into the intense glow of its furnace, and melted them, as it were, into the one thought that took possession of his life. It was a rude, round, tower-like structure, about twenty feet high, heavily built of rough stones, and with a hillock of earth heaped about the larger part of its circumference; so that the blocks and fragments of marble might be drawn by cart-loads, and thrown in at the top. There was an opening at the bottom of the tower, like an oven-mouth, but large enough to admit a man in a stooping posture, and provided with a massive iron door. With the smoke and jets of flame issuing from the chinks and crevices of this door, which seemed to give admittance into the hillside, it resembled nothing so much as the private entrance to the infernal regions, which the shepherds of the Delectable Mountains were accustomed to show to pilgrims.

There are many such lime-kilns in that tract of country, for the purpose of burning the white marble which composes a large part of the substance of the hills. Some of them, built years ago, and long deserted, with weeds growing in the vacant ground of the interior, which is open to the sky, and grass and wild-flowers rooting themselves into the chinks of the stones, look already like relics of antiquity, and may yet be overspread with the lichens of centuries to come. Others, where the lime-burner still feeds his daily and night-long fire, afford points of interest to the wanderer among the hills, who seats himself on a log of wood or a fragment of marble, to hold a chat with the solitary man. It is a lonesome, and, when the character is inclined to thought, may be an intensely thoughtful occupation; as it proved in the case of Ethan Brand, who had mused to such strange purpose, in days gone by, while the fire in this very kiln was burning.

The man who now watched the fire was of a different order, and troubled himself with no thoughts save the very few that were requisite to his business. At frequent intervals, he flung back the clashing weight of the iron door, and, turning his face from the insufferable glare, thrust in huge logs of oak, or stirred the immense brands with a long pole. Within the furnace were seen the curling and riotous flames, and the burning marble, almost molten with the intensity of heat; while without, the reflection of the fire quivered on the dark intricacy of the surrounding forest, and showed in the foreground a bright and ruddy little picture of the hut, the spring beside its door, the athletic and coal-begrimed figure of the lime-burner, and the half-frightened child, shrinking into the protection of his father's shadow. And when again the iron door was closed, then reappeared the tender light of the half-full moon, which vainly strove to trace out the indistinct shapes of the neighboring mountains; and, in the upper sky, there was a flitting congregation of clouds, still faintly tinged with the rosy sunset, though thus far down into the valley the sunshine had vanished long and long ago.

THE little boy now crept still closer to his father, as footsteps were heard ascending the hillside, and a human form thrust aside the bushes that clustered beneath the trees.

"Halloo! who is it?" cried the lime-burner, vexed at his son's timidity, yet half infected by it. "Come forward, and show yourself, like a man, or I'll fling this chunk of marble at your head!"

"You offer me a rough welcome," said a gloomy voice, as the unknown man drew nigh. "Yet I neither claim nor desire a kinder one, even at my own fireside."

To obtain a distinct view, Bartram threw open the iron door of the kiln, whence immediately issued a gush of fierce light, that smote full upon the stranger's face and figure. To a careless eye there appeared nothing very remarkable in his aspect, which was that of a man in a coarse, brown, country-made suit of clothes, tall and thin, with the staff and heavy shoes of a wayfarer. As he advanced, he fixed his eyes—which were very bright—intently upon the brightness of the furnace, as if he beheld, or expected to behold, some object worthy of note within it.

"Good evening, stranger," said the lime-burner; "whence come you, so late in the day?"

"I come from my search," answered the wayfarer; "for, at last, it is finished."

"Drunk!—or crazy!" muttered Bartram to himself. "I shall have trouble with the fellow. The sooner I drive him away, the better."

The little boy, all in a tremble, whispered to his father, and begged him to shut the door of the kiln, so that there might not be so much light; for that there was something in the man's face which he was afraid to look at, yet could not look away from. And indeed, even the lime-burner's dull and torpid sense began to be impressed by an indescribable something in that thin, rugged, thoughtful visage, with the grizzled hair hanging wildly about it, and those deeply sunken eyes, which gleamed like fires within the entrance of a mysterious cavern. But, as he closed the door, the stranger turned toward him, and spoke in a quiet, familiar way, that made Bartram feel as if he were a sane and sensible man, after all.

"Your task draws to an end, I see," said he. "This marble has already been burning three days. A few hours more will convert the stone to lime."

"Why, who are you?" exclaimed the lime-burner. "You seem as well acquainted with my business as I am myself."

"And well I may be," said the stranger; "for I followed the same craft many a long year, and here, too, on this very spot. But you are a newcomer in these parts. Did you never hear of Ethan Brand?"

"The man that went in search of the Unpardonable Sin?" asked Bartram, with a laugh.

"The same," answered the stranger. "He has found what he sought, and therefore he comes back again."

"What! then you are Ethan Brand himself?" cried the lime-burner, in amazement. "I am a newcomer here, as you say, and they call it eighteen years since you left the foot of Graylock. But, I can tell you, the good folks still talk about Ethan Brand, in the village yonder, and what a strange errand took him away from his lime-kiln. Well, and so you have found the Unpardonable Sin?"

"Even so!" said the stranger, calmly.

"If the question is a fair one," proceeded Bartram, "where might it be?"

Ethan Brand laid his finger on his own heart.

"Here!" replied he.

And then, without mirth in his countenance, but as if moved by an involuntary recognition of the infinite absurdity of seeking throughout the world for what was the closest of all things to himself, and looking into every heart, save his own, for what was hidden in no other breast, he broke into a laugh of scorn. It was the same slow, heavy laugh that had almost appalled the lime-burner when it heralded the wayfarer's approach.

The solitary mountainside was made dismal by it. Laughter, when out of place, mistimed, or bursting forth from a disordered state of feeling, may be the most terrible modulation of the human voice. The laughter of one asleep, even if it be a little child,—the madman's laugh,—the wild, screaming laugh of a born idiot,—are sounds that we sometimes tremble to hear, and would always willingly forget. Poets have imagined no utterance of fiends or hobgoblins so fearfully appropriate as a laugh. And even the obtuse lime-burner felt his nerves shaken, as this strange man looked inward at his own heart and burst into laughter that rolled away into the night, and was indistinctly reverberated among the hills.

"Joe," said he to his little son, "scamper down to the tavern in the village, and tell the jolly fellows there that Ethan Brand has come back, and that he has found the Unpardonable Sin!"

THE boy darted away on his errand, to which Ethan Brand made no objection, nor seemed hardly to notice it. He sat on a log of wood, looking stedfastly at the iron door of the kiln. When the child was out of sight, and his swift and light footsteps ceased to be heard treading first on the fallen leaves and then on the rocky mountain-path, the lime-burner began to regret his departure. He felt that the little fellow's presence had been a barrier between his guest and himself, and that he must now deal, heart to heart, with a man who, on his own confession, had committed the one only crime for which Heaven could afford no mercy. That crime, in its indistinct blackness, seemed to overshadow him. The lime-burner's own sins rose up within him, and made his memory riotous with a throng of evil shapes that asserted their kindred with the Master Sin, whatever it might be, which it was within the scope of man's corrupted nature to conceive and cherish. They were all of one family; they went to and fro between his breast and Ethan Brand's, and carried dark greetings from one to the other.

Then Bartram remembered the stories which had grown traditionary in reference to this strange man, who had come upon him like a shadow of the night, and was making himself at home in his old place, after so long absence that the dead people, dead and buried for years, would have had more right to be at home, in any familiar spot, than he. Ethan Brand, it was said, had conversed with Satan himself in the lurid blaze of this very kiln. The legend had been matter of mirth heretofore, but looked grisly now. According to this tale, before Ethan Brand departed on his search, he had been accustomed to evoke a fiend from the hot furnace of the lime-kiln, night after night, in order to confer with him about the Unpardonable Sin; the man and the fiend each laboring to frame the image of some mode of guilt which could neither be atoned for nor forgiven. And, with the first gleam of light upon the mountaintop, the fiend crept in at the iron door, there to abide the intensest element of fire, until again summoned forth to share in the dreadful task of extending man's possible guilt beyond the scope of Heaven's else infinite mercy.

While the lime-burner was struggling with the horror of those thoughts, Ethan Brand rose from the log, and flung open the door of the kiln. The action was in such accordance with the idea in Bartram's mind, that he almost expected to see the Evil One issue forth, red-hot from the raging furnace.

"Hold! hold!" cried he, with a tremulous attempt to laugh; for he was ashamed of his fears, although they over-

mastered him. "Don't, for mercy's sake, bring out your Devil now!"

"Man!" sternly replied Ethan Brand, "what need have I of the Devil? I have left him behind me, on my track. It is with such half-way sinners as you that he busies himself. Fear not, because I open the door. I do but act by old custom, and am going to trim your fire, like a lime-burner, as I was once."

He stirred the vast coals, thrust in more wood, and bent forward to gaze into the hollow prison-house of the fire, regardless of the fierce glow that reddened upon his face. The lime-burner sat watching him, and half suspected his strange guest of a purpose, if not to evoke a fiend, at least to plunge bodily into the flames, and thus vanish from the sight of man. Ethan Brand, however, drew quietly back, and closed the door of the kiln.

"I have looked," said he, "into many a human heart that was seven times hotter with sinful passions than yonder furnace is with fire. But I found not there what I sought. No, not the Unpardonable Sin!"

"What is the Unpardonable Sin?" asked the lime-burner; and then he shrank farther from his companion, trembling lest his question should be answered.

"It is a sin that grew within my own breast," replied Ethan Brand, standing erect, with a pride that distinguishes all enthusiasts of his stamp. "A sin that grew nowhere else! The sin of an intellect that triumphed over the sense of brotherhood with man and reverence for God, and sacrificed everything to its own mighty claims! The only sin that deserves a recompense of immortal agony! Freely, were it to do again, would I incur the guilt. Unshrinkingly I accept the retribution!"

"The man's head is turned," muttered the lime-burner to himself. "He may be a sinner, like the rest of us,—nothing more likely,—but, I'll be sworn, he is a madman too."

Nevertheless, he felt uncomfortable at his situation, alone with Ethan Brand on the wild mountainside, and was right glad to hear the rough murmur of tongues, and the footsteps of what seemed a pretty numerous party, stumbling over the stones and rustling through the underbrush. Soon appeared the whole lazy regiment that was wont to infest the village tavern, comprehending three or four individuals who had drunk flip beside the bar-room fire through all the winters, and smoked their pipes beneath the stoop through all the summers, since Ethan Brand's departure. Laughing boisterously, and mingling all their voices together in unceremonious talk, they now burst into the moonshine and narrow streaks of firelight that illuminated the open space before the lime-kiln. Bartram set the door ajar again, flooding the spot with light, that the whole company might get a fair view of Ethan Brand, and he of them.

THERE, among other old acquaintances, was a once ubiquitous man, now almost extinct, but whom we were formerly sure to encounter at the hotel of every thriving village throughout the country. It was the stage-agent. The present specimen of the genus was a wilted and smoke-dried man, wrinkled and red-nosed, in a smartly-cut, brown, bobtailed coat, with brass buttons, who, for a length of time unknown, had kept his desk and corner in the bar-room, and was still puffing what seemed to be the same cigar that he had lighted twenty years before. He had great fame as a dry joker, though, perhaps, less on account of any intrinsic humor than from a certain flavor of brandy-toddy and tobacco smoke, which impregnated all his ideas

and expressions, as well as his person.

Another well-remembered though strangely altered face was that of Lawyer Giles, as people still called him in courtesy; an elderly ragamuffin, in his soiled shirt-sleeves and tow-cloth trousers. This poor fellow had been an attorney, in what he called his better days, a sharp practitioner, and in great vogue among the village litigants; but flip, and sling, and toddy, and cocktails, imbibed at all hours, morning, noon, and night, had caused him to slide from intellectual to various kinds and degrees of bodily labor, till, at last, to adopt his own phrase, he slid into a soap-vat. In other words, Giles was now a soap-boiler, in a small way. He had come to be but the fragment of a human being, a part of one foot having been chopped off by an ax, and an entire hand torn away by the devilish grip of a steam-engine. Yet, though the corporeal hand was gone, a spiritual member remained; for, stretching forth the stump, Giles stedfastly averred that he felt an invisible thumb and fingers with as vivid a sensation as before the real ones were amputated. A maimed and miserable wretch he was; but one, nevertheless, whom the world could not trample on, and had no right to scorn, either in this or any previous stage of his misfortune, since he had still kept up the courage and spirit of a man, asked nothing in charity, and with his one hand —and that the left one—fought a stern battle against want and hostile circumstances.

Among the throng, too, came another personage, who, with certain points of similarity to Lawyer Giles, had many more of difference. It was the village doctor; a man of some fifty years, whom, at an earlier period of his life, we introduced as paying a professional visit to Ethan Brand during the latter's supposed insanity. He was now a purple-visaged, rude, and brutal, yet half-gentlemanly figure, with something wild, ruined, and desperate in his talk, and in all the details of his gesture and manners. Brandy possessed this man like an evil spirit, and made him as surly and savage as a wild beast, and as miserable as a lost soul; but there was supposed to be in him such wonderful skill, such native gifts of healing, beyond any which medical science could impart, that society caught hold of him, and would not let him sink out of its reach. So, swaying to and fro upon his horse, and grumbling thick accents at the bedside, he visited all the sick-chambers for miles about among the mountain towns, and sometimes raised a dying man, as it were, by miracle, or quite as often, no doubt, sent his patient to a grave that was dug many a year too soon. The doctor had an everlasting pipe in his mouth, and, as somebody said, in allusion to his habit of swearing, it was always alight with hell-fire.

These three worthies pressed forward, and greeted Ethan Brand each after his own fashion, earnestly inviting him to partake of the contents of a certain black bottle, in which, as they averred, he would find something far better worth seeking for than the Unpardonable Sin. No mind, which has wrought itself by intense and solitary meditation into a high state of enthusiasm, can endure the kind of contact with low and vulgar modes of thought and feeling to which Ethan Brand was now subjected. It made him doubt—and, strange to say, it was a painful doubt—whether he had indeed found the Unpardonable Sin, and found it within himself. The whole question on which he had exhausted life, and more than life, looked like a delusion.

"Leave me," he said bitterly, "ye brute beasts, that have made yourselves so, shriveling up your souls with fiery liquors! I have done with you. Years

and years ago, I groped into your hearts, and found nothing there for my purpose. Get ye gone!"

"Why, you uncivil scoundrel," cried the fierce doctor, "is that the way you respond to the kindness of your best friends? Then let me tell you the truth. You have no more found the Unpardonable Sin than yonder boy Joe has. You are but a crazy fellow,—I told you so twenty years ago,—neither better nor worse than a crazy fellow, and the fit companion of old Humphrey, here!"

He pointed to an old man, shabbily dressed, with long white hair, thin visage, and unsteady eyes. For some years past this aged person had been wandering about among the hills, inquiring of all travelers whom he met for his daughter. The girl, it seemed, had gone off with a company of circus-performers; and occasionally tidings of her came to the village, and fine stories were told of her glittering appearance as she rode on horseback in the ring, or performed marvelous feats on the tight-rope.

The white-haired father now approached Ethan Brand, and gazed unsteadily into his face.

"They tell me you have been all over the earth," said he, wringing his hands with earnestness. "You must have seen my daughter, for she makes a grand figure in the world, and everybody goes to see her. Did she send any word to her old father, or say when she was coming back?"

ETHAN BRAND'S eye quailed beneath the old man's. That daughter, from whom he so earnestly desired a word of greeting, was the Esther of our tale, the very girl who, with such cold and remorseless purpose, Ethan Brand had made the subject of a psychological experiment, and wasted, absorbed, and perhaps annihilated her soul, in the process.

"Yes," murmured he, turning away from the hoary wanderer; "it is no delusion. There is an Unpardonable Sin!"

While these things were passing, a merry scene was going forward in the area of cheerful light, beside the spring and before the door of the hut. A number of the youth of the village, young men and girls, had hurried up the hillside, impelled by curiosity to see Ethan Brand, the hero of so many a legend familiar to their childhood. Finding nothing, however, very remarkable in his aspect,—nothing but a sunburnt wayfarer, in plain garb and dusty shoes, who sat looking into the fire, as if he fancied pictures among the coals,—these young people speedily grew tired of observing him. As it happened, there was other amusement at hand. An old German Jew, traveling with a diorama on his back, was passing down the mountain-road toward the village just as the party turned aside from it, and, in hopes of eking out the profits of the day, the showman had kept them company to the lime-kiln.

"Come, old Dutchman," cried one of the young men, "let us see your pictures, if you can swear they are worth looking at!"

"O yes, Captain," answered the Jew,—whether as a matter of courtesy or craft, he styled everybody Captain,—"I shall show you, indeed, some very superb pictures!"

So, placing his box in a proper position, he invited the young men and girls to look through the glass orifices of the machine, and proceeded to exhibit a series of the most outrageous scratchings and daubings, as specimens of the fine arts, that ever an itinerant showman had the face to impose upon his circle of spectators. The pictures were worn out, moreover, tattered, full of cracks and wrinkles, dingy with tobacco-smoke, and otherwise in a most pititable condition. Some pur-

ported to be cities, public edifices, and ruined castles in Europe; others represented Napoleon's battles and Nelson's sea-fights; and in the midst of these would be seen a gigantic, brown, hairy hand,—which might have been mistaken for the Hand of Destiny, though, in truth, it was only the showman's,—pointing its forefinger to various scenes of the conflict, while its owner gave historical illustrations. When, with much merriment at his abominable deficiency of merit, the exhibition was concluded, the German bade little Joe put his head into the box. Viewed through the magnifying-glasses, the boy's round, rosy visage assumed the strangest imaginable aspect of an immense Titanic child, the mouth grinning broadly, and the eyes and every other feature overflowing with fun at the joke. Suddenly, however, that merry face turned pale, and its expression changed to horror, for this easily impressed and excitable child had become sensible that the eye of Ethan Brand was fixed upon him through the glass.

"You make the little man to be afraid, Captain," said the German Jew, turning up the dark and strong outline of his visage, from his stooping posture. "But look again, and, by chance, I shall cause you to see somewhat that is very fine, upon my word!"

Ethan Brand gazed into the box for an instant, and then starting back, looked fixedly at the German. What had he seen? Nothing, apparently; for a curious youth, who had peeped in almost at the same moment, beheld only a vacant space of canvas.

"I remember you now," muttered Ethan Brand to the showman.

"Ah, Captain," whispered the Jew of Nuremburg, with a dark smile, "I find it to be a heavy matter in my show-box,—this Unpardonable Sin! By my faith, Captain, it has wearied my shoulders, this long day, to carry it over the mountain."

"Peace," answered Ethan Brand, sternly, "or get thee into the furnace yonder!"

The Jew's exhibition had scarcely concluded, when a great elderly dog—who seemed to be his own master, as no person in the company laid claim to him—saw fit to render himself the object of public notice. Hitherto, he had shown himself a very quiet, well-disposed old dog going round from one to another, and, by way of being sociable, offering his rough head to be petted by any kindly hand that would take so much trouble. But now, all of a sudden, this grave and venerable quadruped, of his own mere motion, and without the slightest suggestion from anybody else, began to run round after his tail, which, to heighten the absurdity of the proceeding, was a great deal shorter than it should have been. Never was seen such headlong eagerness in pursuit of an object that could not possibly be attained; never was heard such a tremendous outbreak of growling, snarling, barking, and snapping—as if one end of the ridiculous brute's body were at deadly and most unforgivable enmity with the other. Faster and faster, round about went the cur; and faster and still faster fled the unapproachable brevity of his tail; and louder and fiercer grew his yells of rage and animosity; until, utterly exhausted, and as far from the goal as ever, the foolish old dog ceased his performance as suddenly as he had begun it. The next moment he was as mild, quiet, sensible, and respectable in his deportment, as when he first scraped acquaintance with the company.

As may be supposed, the exhibition was greeted with universal laughter, clapping of hands, and shouts of encore, to which the canine performer responded by wagging all that there was to wag of his tail, but appeared totally unable to repeat

his very successful effort to amuse the spectators.

MEANWHILE, Ethan Brand had resumed his seat upon the log, and moved, it might be, by a perception of some remote analogy between his own case and that of this self-pursuing cur, he broke into the awful laugh, which, more than any other token, expressed the condition of his inward being. From that moment, the merriment of the party was at an end; they stood aghast, dreading lest the inauspicious sound should be reverberated around the horizon, and that mountain would thunder it to mountain, and so the horror be prolonged upon their ears. Then, whispering one to another that it was late, — that the moon was almost down, — that the August night was growing chill, — they hurried homeward, leaving the lime-burner and little Joe to deal as they might with their unwelcome guest. Save for these three human beings, the open space on the hillside was a solitude, set in a vast gloom of forest. Beyond that darksome verge, the firelight glimmered on the stately trunks and almost black foliage of pines, intermixed with the lighter verdure of sapling oaks, maples, and poplars, while here and there lay the gigantic corpses of dead trees, decaying on the leaf-strewn soil. And it seemed to little Joe—a timorous and imaginative child — that the silent forest was holding its breath, until some fearful thing should happen.

Ethan Brand thrust more wood into the fire, and closed the door of the kiln; then looking over his shoulder at the lime-burner and his son, he bade, rather than advised, them to retire to rest.

"For myself, I cannot sleep," said he. "I have matters that it concerns me to meditate upon. I will watch the fire, as I used to do in the old time."

"And call the Devil out of the furnace to keep you company, I suppose," muttered Bartram, who had been making intimate acquaintance with the black bottle above mentioned. "But watch, if you like, and call as many devils as you like! For my part, I shall be all the better for a snooze. Come, Joe!"

As the boy followed his father into the hut, he looked back at the wayfarer, and the tears came into his eyes, for his tender spirit had an intuition of the bleak and terrible loneliness in which this man had enveloped himself.

WHEN they had gone, Ethan Brand sat listening to the crackling of the kindled wood, and looking at the little spurts of fire that issued through chinks of the door. These trifles, however, once so familiar, had but the slightest hold of his attention, while deep within his mind he was reviewing the gradual but marvelous change that had been wrought upon him by the search to which he had devoted himself. He remembered how the night dew had fallen upon him,—how the dark forest had whispered to him,—how the stars had gleamed upon him,—a simple and loving man, watching his fire in the years gone by, and ever musing as it burned. He remembered with what tenderness, with what love and sympathy for mankind, and what pity for human guilt and woe, he had first begun to contemplate those ideas which afterward became the inspiration of his life; with what reverence he had then looked into the heart of man, viewing it as a temple originally divine, and, however desecrated, still to be held sacred by a brother; with what awful fear he had deprecated the success of his pursuit, and prayed that the Unpardonable Sin might never be revealed to him. Then ensued that vast intellectual development, which, in its progress, disturbed the counterpoise between his mind and heart. The Idea

that possessed his life had operated as a means of education; it had gone on cultivating his powers to the highest point of which they were susceptible; it had raised him from the level of an unlettered laborer to stand on a starlit eminence, whither the philosophers of the earth, laden with the lore of universities, might vainly strive to clamber after him.

So much for the intellect! But where was the heart? That, indeed, had withered,—had contracted,—had hardened,—had perished! It had ceased to partake of the universal throb. He had lost his hold of the magnetic chain of humanity. He was no longer a brother-man, opening the chambers or the dungeons of our common nature by the key of holy sympathy, which gave him a right to share in all its secrets; he was now a cold observer, looking on mankind as the subject of his experiment, and, at length, converting man and woman to be his puppets, and pulling the wires that moved them to such degrees of crime as were demanded for his study.

Thus Ethan Brand became a fiend. He began to be so from the moment that his moral nature had ceased to keep the pace of improvement with his intellect. And now, as his highest effort and inevitable development,—as the bright and gorgeous flower, and rich, delicious fruit of his life's labor,—he had produced the Unpardonable Sin!

"What more have I to seek? what more to achieve?" said Ethan Brand to himself. "My task is done, and well done!"

Starting from the log with a certain alacrity in his gait and ascending the hillock of earth that was raised against the stone circumference of the lime-kiln, he thus reached the top of the structure. It was a space of perhaps ten feet across, from edge to edge, presenting a view of the upper surface of the immense mass of broken marble with which the kiln was

heaped. All these innumerable blocks and fragments of marble were red-hot and vividly on fire, sending up great spouts of blue flame, which quivered aloft and danced madly, as within a magic circle, and sank and rose again, with continual and multitudinous activity. As the lonely man bent forward over this terrible body of fire, the blasting heat smote up against his person with a breath that, it might be supposed, would have scorched and shriveled him up in a moment.

Ethan Brand stood erect, and raised his arms on high. The blue flames played upon his face, and imparted the wild and ghastly light which alone could have suited its expression; it was that of a fiend on the verge of plunging into his gulf of intensest torment.

"O Mother Earth," cried he, "who art no more my Mother, and into whose bosom this frame shall never be resolved! O mankind, whose brotherhood I have cast off, and trampled thy great heart beneath my feet! O stars of heaven, that shone on me of old, as if to light me onward and upward!—farewell all, and for ever. Come, deadly element of Fire, —henceforth my familiar friend! Embrace me, as I do thee!"

THAT night the sound of a fearful peal of laughter rolled heavily through the sleep of the lime-burner and his little son; dim shapes of horror and anguish haunted their dreams, and seemed still present in the rude hovel, when they opened their eyes to the daylight.

"Up, boy, up!" cried the lime-burner, staring about him. "Thank Heaven, the night is gone, at last; and rather than pass such another, I would watch my lime-kiln, wide awake, for a twelvemonth. This Ethan Brand, with his humbug of an Unpardonable Sin, has done me no such mighty favor, in taking my place!"

He issued from the hut, followed by little Joe, who kept fast hold of his father's hand. The early sunshine was already pouring its gold upon the mountaintops; and though the valleys were still in shadow, they smiled cheerfully in the promise of the bright day that was hastening onward. The village, completely shut in by hills, which swelled away gently about it, looked as if it had rested peacefully in the hollow of the great hand of Providence. Every dwelling was distinctly visible; the little spires of the two churches pointed upward, and caught a foreglimmering of brightness from the sun-gilt skies upon their gilded weathercocks. The tavern was astir, and the figure of the old, smoke-dried stage-agent, cigar in mouth, was seen beneath the stoop. Old Graylock was glorified with a golden cloud upon his head. Scattered likewise over the breasts of the surrounding mountains, there were heaps of hoary mist, in fantastic shapes, some of them far down into the valley, others high up toward the summits, and still others, of the same family of mist or cloud, hovering in the gold radiance of the upper atmosphere. Stepping from one to another of the clouds that rested on the hills, and thence to the loftier brotherhood that sailed in air, it seemed almost as if a mortal man might thus ascend into the heavenly regions. Earth was so mingled with sky that it was a day-dream to look at it.

To supply that charm of the familiar and homely, which Nature so readily adopts into a scene like this, the stage-coach was rattling down the mountain-road, and the driver sounded his horn, while echo caught up the notes, and intertwined them into a rich and varied and elaborate harmony, of which the original performer could lay claim to little share. The great hills played a concert among

themselves, each contributing a strain of airy sweetness.

Little Joe's face brightened at once.

"Dear father," cried he, skipping cheerily to and fro, "that strange man is gone, and the sky and the mountains all seem glad of it!"

"Yes," growled the lime-burner, with an oath, "but he has let the fire go down, and no thanks to him if five hundred bushels of lime are not spoiled. If I catch the fellow hereabouts again, I shall feel like tossing him into the furnace!"

With his long pole in his hand, he ascended to the top of the kiln. After a moment's pause, he called to his son.

"Come up here, Joe!" said he.

So little Joe ran up the hillock, and stood by his father's side. The marble was all burnt into perfect, snow-white lime. But on its surface, in the midst of the circle,—snow-white too, and thoroughly converted into lime,—lay a human skeleton, in the attitude of a person who, after long toil, lies down to long repose. Within the ribs—strange to say—was the shape of a human heart.

"Was the fellow's heart made of marble?" cried Bartram, in some perplexity at this phenomenon. "At any rate, it is burnt into what looks like special good lime; and, taking all the bones together, my kiln is half a bushel the richer for him."

So saying, the rude lime-burner lifted his pole, and, letting it fall upon the skeleton, the relics of Ethan Brand were crumbled into fragments.

VIRGIL FINLAY'S drawing on the first page of this issue illustrates a weird passage of poetry so striking that Dante Gabriel Rossetti ranked it as one of the two Pillars of Hercules of modern human imagination. It is from Samuel Taylor Coleridge's unfinished poem, *Kubla Khan.* (The other "pillar" is from Keats's *Ode to a Nightingale.*) Mr. Finlay's imaginative full-page illustrations of famous bits of weird poetry will be a monthly feature in WEIRD TALES.

Literary Quality

K. Moor writes from Southport, England: "One gets so sick of magazines about Federal agents, terror stories and Western thrillers that it is a wonderful change to find a WT on a book-stand, with its correct English and its fluent style. Here you find no 'spitting guns snarling their song of death,' and no 'bleeding, mangled bodies oozing blood from the seams of their clothes.' Instead one finds stories of the imagination and the unusual that rival H. G. Wells or Edgar Allan Poe for their clear-cut style and striking sentences. Congratulations on a fine magazine."

Trudy's Letter

Gertrude Hemken writes from Chicago: "I allus had an idea that lamas were kindly fellows—on the order of monks. Mr. Quinn has again shattered an old belief that these men are so pious — in his *Living Buddhess.* Werry intrestin' the manner he describes for the bad bad Oriental to enter some unsuspecting victim in this so-unusual manner. Yes, indeedy—and once more li'l pal Jules comes to the rescue—no kiddin', I do like that fellow immensely. . . . *The* story of the issue is all I've expected it to be—and more. I've been curious all these months to learn by what methods and under what circumstances would Jirel and Northwest Smith meet. The story is somewhat lovely—seems as though I awakened from a fantastic dream after I had read it. The abstract lives bro't to mind the yarns of Aladdin's lamp and its genie. The illustration is superb. Jirel looks like a screen heroine—and the two men seem rather 20th Century in attire and general appearance. The dancing flame-stars seem like a very strange rain. Needless to say—*The Quest of the Starstone* is outstanding, in my opinion. Robert Bloch getting oogy again—huh? *The Secret of Sebek* was just about that—only the closing paragraphs didn't appeal to me. They were too mellerdramatic—and as is usual with such—I look ahead to the ending —and then the whole story is spoiled for me. You know—I'd like to take Paul Ernst by the shoulders and give him a good shaking. I feel quite sure that he can write some mighty fine stories, but something seems to be held back. In his *Dread Summons,* I enjoyed going through the old mansion with Meller and helping him smash the nice fineries to tiny bits—but I just got plain disgusted at the end. *The Lake of Life* ended nicely after a great deal of excitement. The Guardians weren't such dumb critters after all—and I can realize their strange weariness. Who, in his right senses, wants to live for ever? This story had just about everything —excitement, adventure, thrills—the lower element, savages, scientific explanations, a strange life back to archaic days, fighting, weirdness, queerness — just about full of everything to please most anyone—even romance."

Three Rousing Cheers

V. C. Clowe writes from San Francisco: "Three rousing cheers for the story entitled

The Lake of Life concluded in the November issue. Three more rousing cheers for *Mrs. Brundage* and her front cover. Pay no attention to the nitwits who clamor against her masterpieces. They are the most charming pictures that ever a magazine carried. Give us more of them."

Abyss Under the World

E. Jean Magee, of Los Angeles, writes: "Congratulations to Mr. Paul Suter for his *Abyss Under the World*. To my mind, here is really fine writing: The swinging spur in silvery light, the color, suspense and farewell of the priest all carried the reader into a world of beauty and dreams. Although the explanation is a natural one, this in no way detracts from the principal character's weird adventure—an adventure of the subconscious mind. Glad to see Clark Ashton Smith is with us again in the September issue."

A Valentine

Harry Sivia writes from Palestine, Texas: "A valentine to Miss Moore and Mr. Kuttner for that splendid story, *Quest of the Starstone*. Best in the November copy. There was another tale, though, a real, honest-to-God scary yarn that ran a fine race. I refer to Rex Ernest's *The Inn*. Something about that gave me the creeps, even though it had to end that way. Kuttner's rejection slip tale was good, too. Apparently Mr. Kuttner has known the sting of the editorial veto and does not particularly cherish the memory."

From Way Down Under

William H. Russell, of Wellington, New Zealand, writes: "I enjoy your magazine and hardly ever fail to get my copy, though out here we get our numbers late. The best story so far in WEIRD TALES, in my opinion, has been *The Globe of Memories*. I would like to read more in the same style. I did not care so much for *The Guardian of the Book;* I must confess it left me rather cold. In my humble opinion such stories of cosmic horrors are rather above the average man-in-the-street life from other planets, and par-

ticularly with such a fantastic theme as *The Guardian of the Book;* it exceeds the bounds of credulity. Such stories as *The Last Archer* are narratives concerning everyday things; and who knows, with the legends we have of ancient curses, there may be some grain of fact about them. I will mention another: *I, the Vampire;* that story was quite good. We are all familiar with Hollywood and with such a novel background, as I have stated. I like your stories dealing with everyday affairs. I also read a story some time ago in which the locale was a little cinema where a film was screened with dead actresses and an actor featured in it. More stories of that kind are just in my street." [That story was *The Theater Upstairs,* by Manly Wade Wellman.—THE EDITOR.]

A Magazine for Skeptics?

Sylvia B. Baker writes from Fallbrook, California: "Someone once wrote in the Eyrie that WEIRD TALES was a magazine for skeptics. His idea seemd to be that it would be harmful to the superstitious. I believe that the readers who will enjoy it most are students and thinkers. Witchcraft and sorcery interest the psychiatrist. Astronomers and biologists, who have an imagination, enjoy interplanetary stories and others which show the path evolution *might* have taken. Among the latter is one of the best stories you have ever printed, *Carnate Crystal.*"

To Him the Laurels Belong

Clifford Ball writes from Astoria, New York: "Although the task of writing a fan-letter is distasteful to me, I feel compelled to add my vote to the numbers doubtlessly already pouring into your office, requesting that the blue ribbon for the November issue be awarded to the team of Moore and Kuttner. *The Quest of the Starstone* was a fast-moving, interest-holding, well-balanced piece of work and easily the best story in the current issue even if the famed characters of Smith and Jitel are possibly unknown to the later readers. I trust these two authors will be encouraged to continue their partnership. They have the knack of producing masterpieces. But I wish to humbly suggest that they do not attempt to bring N. S. or J. J. together again, for that might spoil the superb effect of this last story. Not that I mean they should discontinue the characterizations; either one is too magnificent to allow extermination. Robert Bloch's *Secret of Sebek* deserves second place. I admire his smoothness of description. But the November issue was so good in its entirety I hardly know just where to praise. The conclusion of the serial, *The Lake of Life,* for instance, exceeds anything I've read from Hamilton's pen, and I have followed him through other magazines as well as yours. Last, but not least—could you allow Mr. Kuttner another little piece or two of whatever laurels you might have in stock for his short, *The Case of Herbert Thorp?* The ending touched me so; I cannot forgive you for not illustrating the tale. It should have been done on the front cover. How I would like to own a framed picture of a dead editor—clutching a rejection slip!"

Superb Poem by Howard

H. K. Weiss writes from Boston: "Thanks a million for printing *Futility* by R. E. Howard in the November issue—it is *superb.* Unfortunately 'superb' has been used in too many other connections far less vital for it to be exactly the word. But it's about the order of magnitude. *Futility* is—in sixteen lines—the mood that WT is striving for. It's completely so. Many of your stories have come close to it—Lovecraft is most consistently near it—and that is what makes WT worth buying—because it says something and hints at so infinitely much more. The reader takes out of it a portion of undefined knowledge exactly in ratio to his ability to understand. Thanks again for *Futility* and for WEIRD TALES."

Grandeur and Horror

James O'Regan writes from Springfield, Missouri: "A fascinating story is *The Voyage of the Neutralia.* A globe wheeling madly toward some distant place, there to find unspeakable grandeur and horror. I have long enjoyed such a tale as this. The author has concocted a well-written tale. There are several fine descriptive passages. This is my first letter to the Eyrie, although I have read and enjoyed WT for four years. I was only thirteen when I purchased my first copy, but I enjoyed your magazine even at that tender age. During the past four years, I have read all but three issues of WT. Now, may I please offer a suggestion? I do

not care for stories with practical endings, and judging from letters I've seen in the Eyrie, other readers are of the same opinion. Remember, your magazine did not reach its enviable position by printing such stories."

The Same Old Thrill

Charles H. Bert writes from Philadelphia: "Congratulations on the fine November issue, the best in months in cover and contents. I was delighted with *Hypnos* by the old master Lovecraft. I've read the yarn many years ago, and rereading it I got the same old thrill. Lovecraft stories are real masterpieces of literature. For beauty and forcefulness of style, few equal them. Please show some consideration for other authors in your reprint department. Authors like Whitehead, *(Sea Change, The Shadows, Jumbee);* Quinn, *(Tenants of Broussac, Out of the Long Ago);* B. Wallis, *(The Whistling Monsters, The Abysmal Horror);* etc. . . . I chuckled over *The Case of Herbert Thorp.* Better beware, editor, or you may find yourself in the fourth or some-such dimension for rejecting stories for being 'unconvincing.' *Dread Summons* by Ernst had some wonderful descriptions and excellent realism. I derive a certain amount of satisfaction over the fate of Herb Meller. Nice end of a rat. *The Inn* was the best short short-story I've read in some months. Liked the tricky, ironic ending. I would like to see more stories by Mr. Ernst."

The Three Rover Boys

Clifton Hall writes from Los Angeles: "I consider *Quest of the Starstone* by Moore and Kuttner the best yarn in the November number. We've been waiting a long time for the return of Jirel and N. W. Smith, and to have them on the same program is gratifying indeed. Can we have them soon again? The conclusion of *The Lake of Life* takes second spot. The theme was a trifle threadbare, but the effect was lusty and vigorous. Quinn's *Living Buddhess* is third best, with de Grandin continuing merrily on his spook-chasing way. I was a little disappointed, on the other hand, with *The Voyage of the Neutralia.* I think it might better have been titled *The Three Rover Boys from Planet to Planet.* . . . I'm still carrying the torch for 'non-climax-giving-away' illustrations. There are a couple of stories in every number the cul-

minations of which are completely deflated by a give-away picture. Can anything be done about it?"

Announce the Reprints

Lorne W. Power writes from Windsor, Ontario: "I think that many readers will support me in demanding that reprints be included in the 'coming next month' list. It is exasperating to have to wait until the next month, meanwhile wondering what the reprint will be. Speaking of reprints, some of E. F. Benson's stories would make excellent ones. Paul Ernst's *Dread Summons* grabs first place for November, while Finlay's illustration for the tale is a 'humdinger.' Bloch's usual tale of grisly horror, while indicating originality and literary skill, cannot compare with his superb *Shambler from the Stars*. For some reason or other, he has never been able to equal that ghoulish masterpiece, that horrendous and blood-chilling super-tale of grotesque midnight fantasy."

In a Suggesting Mood

Eugene Benefiel, of Los Angeles, writes: "How about an annual reprint edition of WT, say of one particular author's works selected by popular vote? If the idea takes hold, I nominate for first issue either Lovecraft or Howard—preferably Howard in view of the fact that a volume of HPL's works is already on the way. And while I feel in a suggesting mood, how about trying to do away with some of that printing on the cover of WT? A strip along the bottom of the painting or drawing could be utilized for the necessary lettering without imposing it on the scene pictured by the artist, and it seems to me that this idea would be heartily favored by the readers. I have noticed that many of your writers—not, of course, your topnotchers—feel they must rationalize or explain the weird phenomena they introduce into their tales. This, however, can be found in any pulp detective thriller, and it is a shame to dissipate a well-built spine-tingling effect by telling the reader that it was accomplished by mirrors. C. L. Moore, Bloch, Smith, Quinn, Hasse, and the late masters Howard and Lovecraft do not and did not destroy their effectiveness by lamely ending with a 'proper' explanation, and they are easily the class of the weird fiction field."

Unguarded Moments

Franklin Earle Ham writes from Desert Center, California: "It has been with a great deal of entertainment and pleasure that I have read your fine magazine for the past three years. With invisible fingers it seems to reach into that thesaurus of will-o'-the-wisp, fantasmic dreams which, to the dreamer, are vital, pulsing realities, perhaps matters of life and death; there to pluck and bring into sharp focus some of the weird beauty and horror that the subconscious self experiences at unguarded moments."

Dinosaur Bones

Dorothy C. Greene, of Valhalla, New York, writes: "Have been reading WT ever since it started away back in the days when I lived in a cave chewing on dinosaur bones and cave-bear steak. This is my first letter to you, however, and it is an urgent request, practically a demand, for a big, fat quarterly such as you published once in 1924, only bigger, and with piles of illustrations. Am enclosing my list of well-remembered stories which I would certainly love to read again. . . . When this bumper edition appears for sale, you will hear my whoop of pure joy all the way across the continent, so please do not keep me waiting for it longer than you can help."

Circumventing the Hero

Robert Bloch writes from Milwaukee: "I noted Mr. Wilson's homily in the Eyrie, with his accusation that in WT the hero always wins. Might I politely toss the gauntlet? Let's get down to cases and see what the Good Book reveals about Virtue Triumphant. Take the case of Henry Kuttner . . . not legally, of course. He can be convicted of murdering his protagonists right and left. He even has the effrontery to kill me, without so much as asking my permission. Friend August Derleth seldom slips up on a chance to knife the characters in his tales. Certainly Clark Ashton Smith writes many of his splendid yarns with little thought of 'the hero wins.' Earl Peirce exhibits definitely sadistic tendencies in his stories; Hazel Heald swings a mean bludgeon; Long and Wandrei always have been the coroner's little helpers. Such is the case, as every informed reader knows, with Lovecraft's work—indeed, it is silly to think of a consummate artist like H. P. L. trifling with

the puerile notion of writing a tale about a 'hero.' Whitehead never bothered with 'pulp limitations;' H. Warner Munn's immensely popular *Werewolf of Ponkert* tales were founded on the fact that his demon invariably triumphed; his torture studies were superbly indifferent to hero-clichés. Francis Flagg, Mary Elizabeth Counselman, Frank Owen, and many others never spared the rod when necessary. And there have been multiple similar examples. I fear that Mr. Wilson has taken but a superficial survey of the publication, or else he would reconsider this rash indictment when so many citations to the contrary may be used. To my mind, the chief excellence of WT is and always has been that undue truckling to a 'hero wins' formula is not a policy at all."

From an Old-time Reader

Ralph Rayburn Phillips, of Portland, Oregon, writes: "I desire to thank you for giving regularly to discriminating readers such excellent stories as appear in WEIRD TALES. I have been reading your splendid magazine since it was first published, never miss an issue. I have saved all of my copies and value them highly. You never have disappointed your readers; you have maintained the same high standard and have given us the very best weird stories. Many of your contributing writers are brilliant; some have considerable mystical and occult knowledge as I well know, for I have been a student of these subjects and of Eastern philosophy for years. . . . The quality of your illustrations in WEIRD TALES is very high. Virgil Finlay is truly a master, his technique is most unusual, his work is both beautiful and weird. Margaret Brundage's covers are often beautiful; the June, 1933, cover was exquisite, a masterpiece, jade and black with a faultless female figure, nude of course, but as it should be. There is something fundamentally wrong with people who object to nude figures; they are not advanced and can have no place in the Golden Age that is to come. . . . And now I want to express my appreciation for a new and different type of story by Seabury Quinn: *Strange Interval.* Please let us have more different stories by this very able writer. The omnipotent Jules de Grandin who regularly vanquishes all the Powers of Darkness that come from everywhere to infest Harrisonville, N. J., grows tiresome. John Flanders in *The Mystery of*

the Last Guest, October, 1935, gave us a story of horror that resembles the works of the old masters Poe and Bierce. Let's have more from John Flanders. H. P. Lovecraft is the modern master of weird fiction writing in a class by himself; his stories of old New England, where I was born, make me wish to return and explore some of the old towns."

New Zealand Discovered

Roy B. Burdett, of Auckland, New Zealand, writes: "It sure took you a long time to find out that there is such a place as N. Z.! Anyway, we folks out here have been getting WT every month since January this year, and I guess that we must be thankful for that much. Being a science-fiction fan first and foremost, it was through that type of literature that I first heard of WT. I have read (or I should say, have tried to read) some of the other pulp mags that print a lot of mystery drivel, and really it was quite revolting. But then a Stf pen-pal of mine who is also a rabid WT fan sent me out a huge bunch of back numbers and converted me. I have been going to write for a long time, but it took the July issue with its Finlay cover and illustrations to give me that final urge. I cannot express in cold print my praise of Finlay, but his style and tones are admirably suited to the taste of your publication. Inspiration is in his work, and his nudes are beautiful without a trace of vulgarity. As with all other fans, my idol was H. P. L., and although I have only read about eight of his works, I am beginning to realize the seriousness of his passing. I think that C. A. Smith made a truly magnificent gesture in writing that symbolic poem, *To H. P. L.* I am a keen admirer of the mercurial Frenchman J. de Grandin, and I hope to read another of his exploits in the exceptionally near future. I have noticed that a regular contributor to the Eyrie is Miss Gertrude Hemken, and her quaint spelling. Well, I read back somewhere in my back numbers, where some guy flew off the handle about it. I say, keep on with it, 'Trudy;' your letters are a humorous relief from the more serious and more concise letters. Clifford Ball, Robert Bloch and C. L. Moore are the writers I like most, but it is a difficult job trying to put one author before another, as they are all so good."

Ups and Downs

Charles Waldman, of Far Rockaway, New York, writes: "I've just finished the October issue of WEIRD TALES and I've been disappointed in it. Keller's *Tiger Cat* especially is, to my way of thinking, an unweird, silly yarn. Your issues have peculiar ups and downs, I've noticed. One month good, next bad. The September issue was excellent, even the cover surpassed M. Brundage's usual efforts. According to formula therefore the next issue, November, should be outstanding."

Concise Comments

Henry Hasse, of Indianapolis, writes: "I've noticed that your last seven or eight reprints have all been from past issues of WT. The selections were admirable, but there's no reason why you should delve exclusively into past issues for the reprint stories. There are still a great many outside stories worthy of your reprint department, which you could make into one of the best parts of the magazine."

Dorothy Hoyt, of New York City, writes: "Jirel and Northwest Smith were all they should have been. *Quest of the Starstone* was worth waiting for. My heart is set on *more* Northwest Smith stories. Please."

Jack Williamson writes from New Mexico: "Keller's *Tiger Cat*, in the current issue, is a swell piece of work. It has the artistic simplicity that makes his best things great."

Nils H. Frome writes from Fraser Mills, British Columbia: "I always get a kick out of stories like *The Inn*—mysterious happenings that, like everything else in the world, don't leave you with more than a hint of explanation. Life is like that—only a much better story if you can read it right."

Norman Garrison, of Bridgeton, New Jersey, writes: "Just a line to tell you your magazine is getting better with the passing of years. Your art work is wonderful, especially Finlay's. Continue on your road to a still better magazine."

Most Popular Story

Readers, what is your favorite story in this issue? The most popular story in the November issue, as shown by your votes and letters, was *Quest of the Starstone* by those two WEIRD TALES favorites, C. L. Moore and Henry Kuttner.

COMING NEXT MONTH

THE wood was heavy but not hard, and our tools cut through it easily. In fifteen minutes we had forced a lengthwise girdle round the box, and bent to lift the lid.

A coat of hoarfrost fell away in flakes, and beneath it showed a glossy dome with little traceries of rime upon it. Between the lace-like meshes of the gelid veil we glimpsed a woman lying quiet as in sleep. There was a sort of wavering radiance about her not entirely attributable to the icy envelope enclosing her. Rather, it seemed to me, she matched the brilliant beams of the electric light with some luminescence of her own. Nude she was as any Aphrodite sculptured by the master-craftsmen of the Isle of Melos; a cloven tide of pale-gold hair fell down each side her face and rippled over ivory shoulders, veiling the pink nipples of the full-blown, low-set bosom and coursing down the beautifully shaped thighs until it reached the knees. The slender, shapely feet were crossed like those on mediæval tombs whose tenants have in life made pilgrimage to Rome or Palestine; her elbows were bent sharply so her hands were joined together palm to palm between her breasts with fingertips against her chin. Oddly, I was conscious that this pallid, lovely figure typified in combination the austerity of sculptured saint, lush, provocative young womanhood and the innocent appeal of childhood budding into adolescence. Somehow, it seemed to me, she had lain down to die with a trustful resignation like that of Juliet when she drained the draft that sent her living to her family's mausoleum.

"Nikakova!" whispered our companion in a sort of breathless ecstasy, gazing at the quiet figure with a look of rapture.

"Hein?" de Grandin shook himself as though to free his senses from the meshes of a dream. "What is this, *Monsieur?* A woman tombed in ice, a beautiful, dead woman——"

"She is not dead," the other interrupted. "She sleeps."

"Tiens," a look of pity glimmered in the little Frenchman's small blue eyes, "I fear it is the sleep that knows no waking, *mon ami.*"

"No, no, I tell you," almost screamed the young man, "she's not dead! Pavlovitch assured me she could be revived. We were to begin work tonight, but they found him first, and——" . . .

This is an arresting story, a different story, which you cannot afford to miss. It is the story of a weird exploit of a great surgeon who was murdered before he could complete his experiment. It will be published complete in the February issue of WEIRD TALES:

FROZEN BEAUTY

By Seabury Quinn

——Also——

THE GODDESS AWAKES

By CLIFFORD BALL

A striking weird novelette about a roving soldier of fortune, a sinister, evil stone idol in the form of a black panther, and a race of women warriors.

THE DIARY OF ALONZO TYPER

By WILLIAM LUMLEY

What terrible fate befell the intrepid investigator who dared to brave the occult evil that lurked beyond the iron door in that old house?

THE STRANGLING HANDS

By M. G. MORETTI

The story of the Eye that was stolen from an idol in a jungle shrine, and the weird doom that pursued those who stole it.

WORLD'S END

By HENRY KUTTNER

A weird-scientific tale of travel through Time, and the terrific Black Doom, spawned in the heart of a meteorite, that will menace our descendants.

February Issue Weird Tales . . . Out January 1

KNOWLEDGE
THAT HAS
ENDURED WITH THE
PYRAMIDS

A SECRET METHOD FOR THE MASTERY OF LIFE

WHENCE came the knowledge that built the Pyramids and the mighty Temples of the Pharaohs? Civilization began in the Nile Valley centuries ago. Where did its first builders acquire their astounding wisdom that started man on his upward climb? Beginning with naught they overcame nature's forces and gave the world its first sciences and arts. Did their knowledge come from a race now submerged beneath the sea, or were they touched with Infinite inspiration? From what concealed source came the wisdom that produced such characters as Amenhotep IV, Leonardo da Vinci, Isaac Newton, and a host of others?

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