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# Weird Tales

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FEBRUARY

## DEATH IS AN ELEPHANT

*a thrill tale of the circus*

By NATHAN HINDIN

●

## THE HOUSE WHERE TIME STOOD STILL

*a fascinating Jules de Grandin story*

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# Weird Tales

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Published monthly by Weird Tales, 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York, N. Y. Entered as second class matter September 24, 1938, at the post office at New York, N. Y. Single copies, 25 cents. *Subscription rates:* One year in the United States and possessions, Cuba, Mexico, South America, Spain, $2.50; Canada, $2.75; elsewhere, $3.00. English Office: Charles Lavell, Limited, 4 Clements Inn, Strand, London W.C.2, England. The publishers are not responsible for the loss of unsolicited manuscripts, although every care will be taken of such material while in their possession. The contents of this magazine are fully protected by copyright and must not be reproduced either wholly or in part without permission from the publishers.

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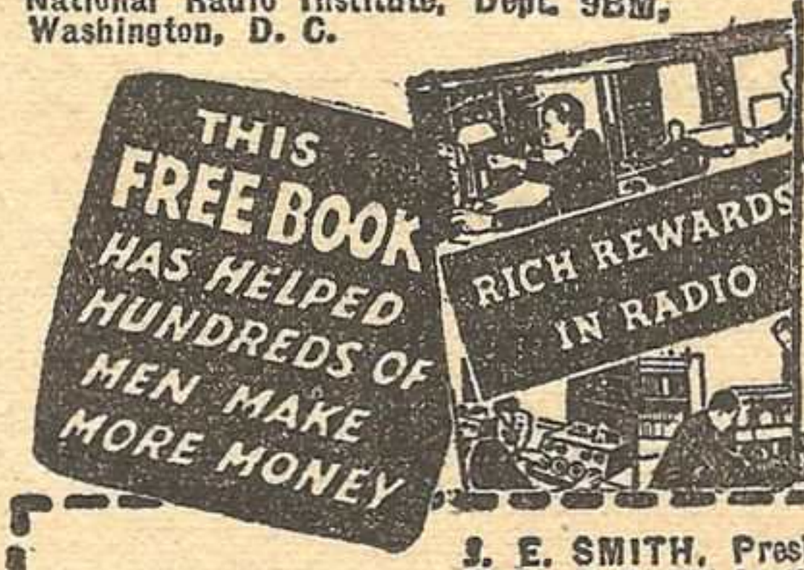

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# *The* King and the Oak

By ROBERT E. HOWARD

Before the shadows slew the sun the kites were soaring free,
And Kull rode down the forest road, his red sword at his knee;
And winds were whispering round the world: "King Kull rides to the sea."

The sun died crimson in the sea, the long gray shadows fell;
The moon rose like a silver skull that wrought a demon's spell,
For in its light great trees stood up like specters out of hell.

In spectral light the trees stood up, inhuman monsters dim;
Kull thought each trunk a living shape, each branch a knotted limb,
And strange unmortal evil eyes flamed horribly at him.

The branches writhed like knotted snakes, they beat against the night,
And one great oak with swayings stiff, horrific in his sight,
Tore up its roots and blocked his way, grim in the ghostly light.

They grappled in the forest way, the king and grisly oak;
Its great limbs bent him in their grip, but never a word was spoke;
And futile in his iron hand, the stabbing dagger broke.

And through the tossing, monstrous trees there sang a dim refrain
Fraught deep with twice a million years of evil, hate and pain:
"We were the lords ere man had come and shall be lords again."

Kull sensed an empire strange and old that bowed to man's advance
As kingdoms of the grass-blades bow before the marching ants,
And horror gripped him; in the dawn like someone in a trance

He strove with bloody hands against a still and silent tree;
As from a nightmare dream he woke; a wind blew down the lea
And Kull of high Atlantis rode silent to the sea.

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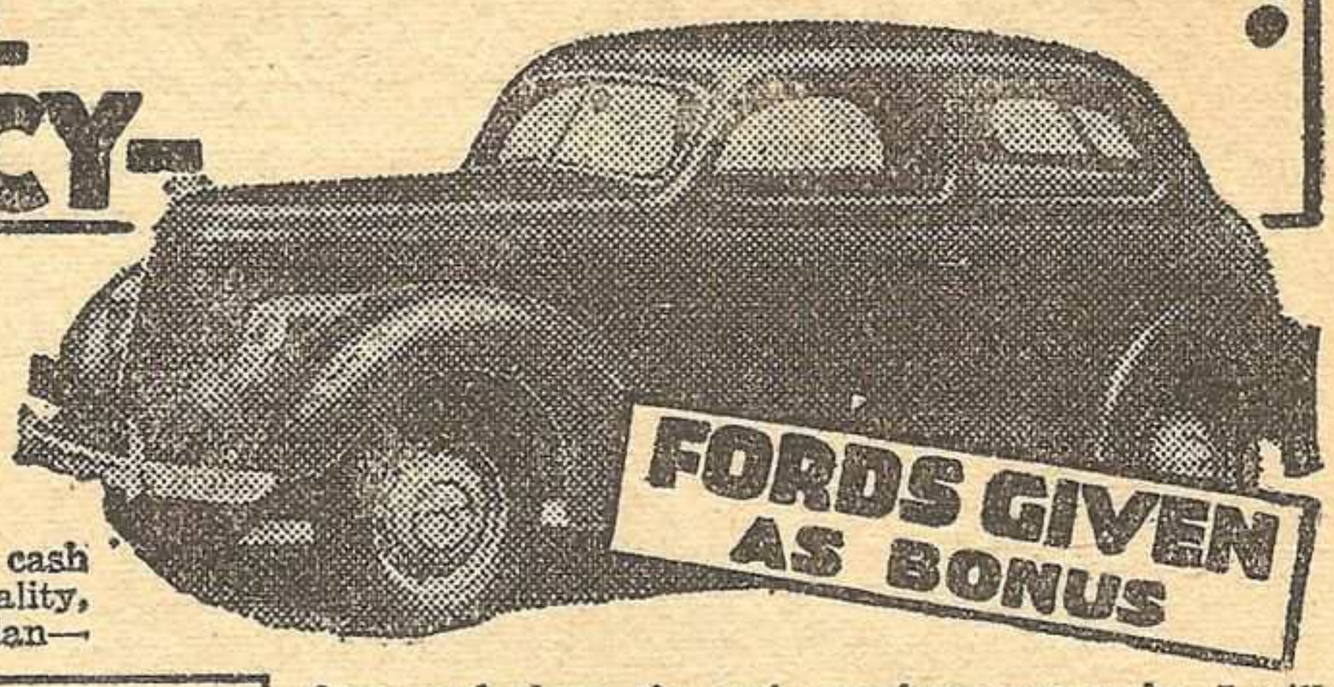


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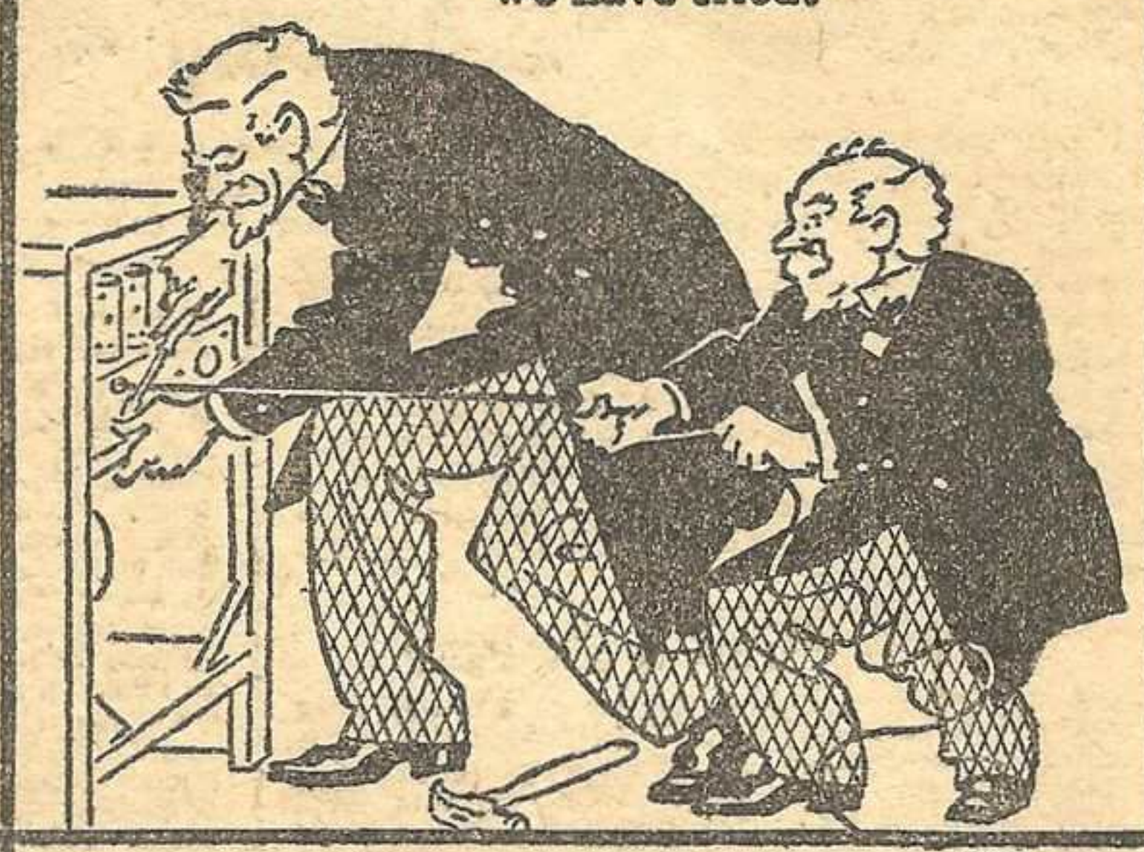

"Yes, Mr. Moore,
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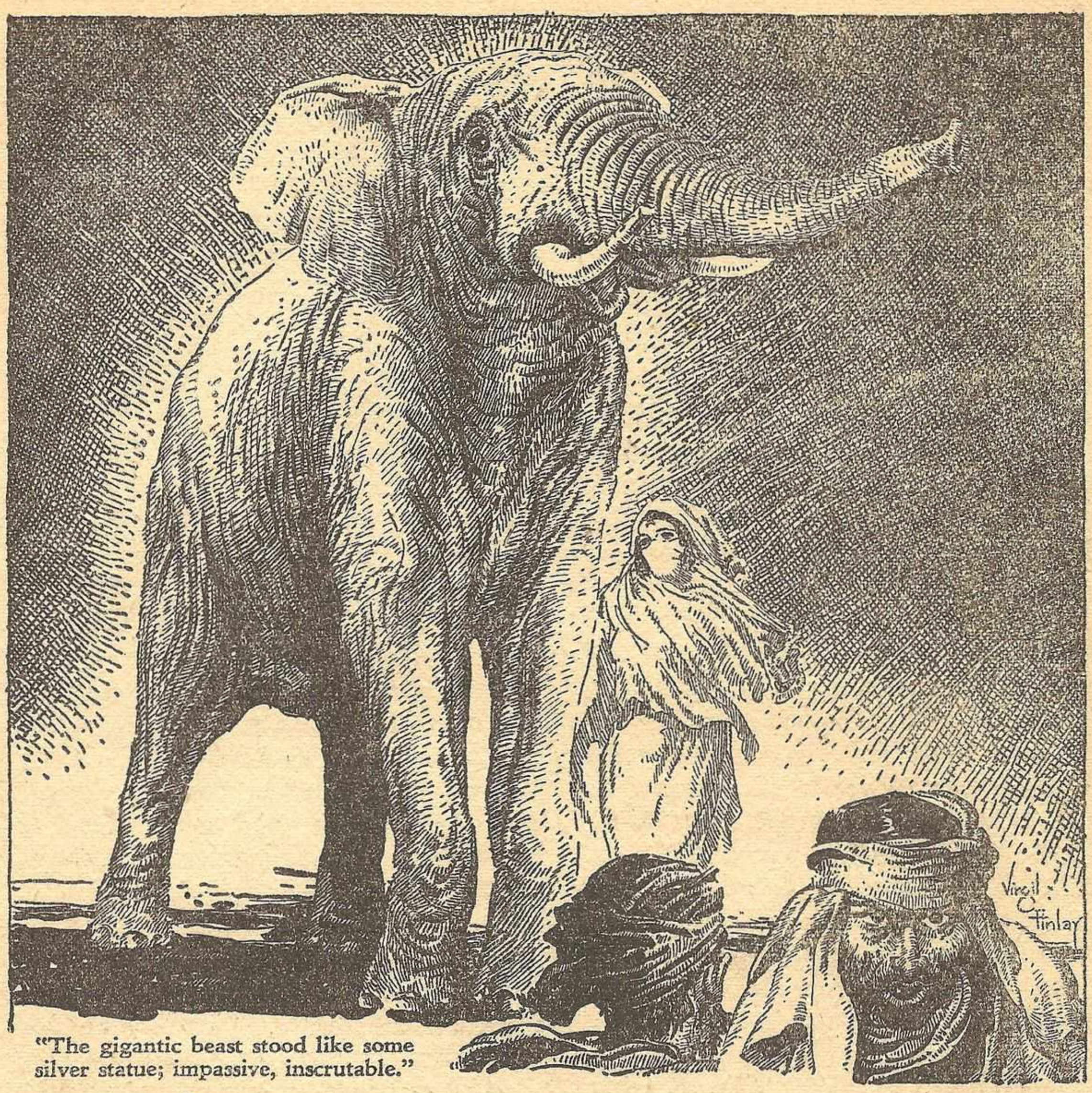


"The gigantic beast stood like some silver statue; impassive, inscrutable."

# Death is an Elephant

By NATHAN HINDIN

*A fascinating story of a circus, a sacred white elephant, and the series of dreadful deaths that haunted the dreams of the rajah of Jadhore*

"Death is an elephant
Torch-eyed and horrible
Foam-flanked and terrible."
—Vachel Lindsay: *The Congo.*

IT'S not the easiest job in the world, this being press agent for a circus. The ordinary routine is bad enough, what with temperamental stars and equally temperamental newspaper men to deal with. There are a thousand angles to every story, and a thousand tricks to play in order to get that story printed.

But the very devil of it is, the best stories are those which can never be printed: fascinating, mysterious, in-

credible stories set against the background of circus glamor—stories which I can never write—that's the worst side of this business.

Of course, there's a way out, and I'm taking it. The queer business about the animal trainer, Captain Zaroff, has already seen publication; with radical changes in the names of the principals involved.

I have an itch to see the yarns in print; there's ink in my blood, as the boys say. Particularly when the tales are true; then there comes a time when I can no longer suppress the urge to reveal them to the world.

Such a story and such a time is here again. Hence this document, with names, dates, and slight details altered —but with a strange story, to the truth of which my eyes can testify; for I was there to see it all. I saw the horror when first it crept from its lair in the jungle hills; I saw it stalk and stride. Sometimes I wish I could forget that striking, but still I dream. I dream of an elephant with blazing eyes, and feet that are blood-red. Blood-red. . . . But this is the tale.

IN THE fall of '36, Stellar Brothers Circus went into winter quarters and plans were begun for the following year, and a new show. The old man and I knew what we wanted and what the public always wants—novelty. But where to find that novelty? It's the perennial question which drives the entertainment world mad. Clowns, animals, acrobats—these are the eternal backbone of the circus's attraction; but novelty is the drawing-card.

Two weeks of planning, pondering, and bickering got us no place. The question of a novel star feature remained unsettled. To add to the confusion, the old man was in bad shape physically. As a result he left the whole situation in the balance, threw up the work, and sailed for a six-weeks' trip abroad.

Naturally, I accompanied him. I managed to see that the papers played it up in the right way; the boss was traveling to secure a mysterious foreign attraction for next year's show—an attraction so important that he personally would handle the affair.

This sounded pretty good, but it left us in a spot. We had to come back with something that lived up to expectations, and I swear neither of us had the faintest idea as to what it could be. It was up to Fate to deal the aces.

A Pacific crossing took us to Honolulu; thence to the Philippines. Gradually the old man's temper improved, and my own spirits were raised. After all, we were heading for the Orient, and there's plenty of circus material there. The best jugglers, acrobats, tumblers and freaks are found in the East, and as for animals and natural oddities, the woods are full of them.

Acting on a hunch, I cabled George Gervis in Singapore. Gervis is an animal man; a trapper and collector of circus beasts who knows the tropics like a book. I felt confident that he'd have something new for us, and arranged to meet him.

And that's how we got the Sacred White Elephant of Jadhore.

Gervis explained the situation carefully that first afternoon as we sat in his hotel room. I've known George for a number of years, and never have I seen him so excited. He tried hard to speak casually of the matter, and emphasize the fact that we had only an outside chance, but enthusiasm fairly oozed from him.

Briefly, the situation as he outlined it was this. Jadhore is one of the smaller

principalities of the Malay States, under British protectorate. The natives are ruled by their own hereditary rajah; for unlike the majority of the Straits Settlements, the inhabitants are more Hindoo than Moslem. They have their own priesthood, their own government—under British jurisdiction. For years it had been the custom of the English government to pay the rajah an annuity; this, in turn, maintained the dignity and splendor of his court.

At this time, however, the annuity had for some reason been discontinued, and the present rajah was in sore straits for money. If his splendor as a potentate diminished, he would lose face before the eyes of his own people and neighboring kingdoms. And this rajah, in accordance with the tenets of his faith, had a Sacred White Elephant. Now if we could tactfully broach the matter in such a way as not to offend the religious scruples of the rajah or his priests; well—there was our attraction!

It sounded like a natural to me. Evidently the old man felt the same way, for he immediately gave Gervis *carte blanche* in the matter and sent him off to Jadhore to negotiate the transaction.

It was nearly a week later that he returned—a very anxious and fretful week for the old man and myself, for we were fighting against time.

GERVIS had not brought the Sacred Elephant with him, but he had come to terms. These he now outlined for us.

The rajah definitely refused to sell the animal. His religious principles absolutely forbade the sacrilege. After consultation with the priests, however, he offered to rent the beast to the show for one season, provided that certain stipulations be made.

The animal must not be trained nor molested in any way. It must not be decorated, nor allowed to mingle with common pachyderms. It could, however, be placed on exhibition, and take part in any parades or processionals that were a feature of the performance. Special food and quarters would have to be provided as a matter of course. In addition, the rajah himself must be allowed to travel with the show, as guarantor of the Sacred Elephant's safety to the priests. Native attendants would be provided by the priests as well, and certain religious ceremonials must not be interfered with.

Such were the terms Gervis had agreed to. He had inspected the animal, and pronounced it to be a splendid specimen of its kind—abnormally large for the Indian elephant, and quite handsome.

At the conclusion of this report the old man blew up.

"Animal be damned!" he shouted. "I can't buy it, I can't train it, can't use it in the regular show. Can't even handle it myself—got to let a two-bit rajah and a gang of nigger priests feed it and burn incense in front of its trunk! What's the use? Special quarters, too—a gold freight car, I suppose. How much did you say?—seventeen hundred a week rental and expenses? Of all the——"

Here the boss demonstrated his restored health by going off into one of the profane tirades for which he is justly famous. I waited for him to cool a bit before I stuck my oar in.

Then I quietly pointed out certain obvious facts. These terms—they sounded difficult, but really were just what we wanted. Novelty—we'd play

up the restrictions ourselves. "The Sacred White Elephant of Jadhore—Accompanied by the Priests of Worshipping Millions! See the Sacred Rites of the Jungle Temples! Personally Accompanied by the Illustrious Char Dzang, Rajah of Jadhore!" And so on.

I recalled for his benefit the success of the old white elephant importation of other days, which resulted in the famous Barnum-Forepaugh feud. Barnum's white elephant was a great success, and Adam Forepaugh, a rival circus-owner, thereupon took an ordinary beast and whitewashed its hide. The subsequent exposure of this hoax and the resultant publicity attendant had made fortunes for both men.

I showed the old man how the religious angle would pack them in. We'd play up the sanctity, the restrictions, the priests and attendants. And imagine a circus with a real rajah! Why, this was an attraction that would sell itself—no other build-up was needed.

When I had finished I knew from the look on the old man's face that my case was won.

"How soon can you arrange to get the animal down here?"

"Within two days," the animal-man promptly replied.

"Get going," said the old man, lighting a fresh cigar. Then to me, "Come on. We're heading for the steamship office."

2

TRUE to his promise, Gervis returned on the third morning. We were already on the dock, waiting, for the boat sailed at noon. Passage had been arranged, quarters for the beast made ready; cables had been sent ahead to winter quarters. And I had just released a story that met with instant success. It was therefore with an air of pleased anticipation that we greeted the arrival of our prize and regal guests.

Nor was our first glimpse disappointing. Today, in view of the sinister aftermath of the whole affair, it seems almost incredible that we so blithely accepted our acquisitions; that we did not realize even then the curious and disturbing features of the itinerary. But that morning, as the procession came down the dock, I felt quite proudly satisfied with our work.

Two swarthy Hindoos led the way—little, turbaned, bearded men, clad in robes of purple and gold. Their hands held silvered chains, for they were leading the Sacred Elephant.

The mighty beast lumbered into view—I gasped a bit, I confess. Never had I seen an elephant like this! Fully ten feet tall was the White Elephant of Jadhore; a giant among the East Indian pachyderms. It had long, gleaming white tusks that swept outward from its massive jaws like twin sabers. Its trunk and hooves were enameled in gold, and on its back rested a howdah of hammered brass. But the color!

I had expected, from what I'd read, that a white elephant was a sort of sickly gray-skinned creature. This beast was almost silver; a leprous silver. From its oiled body glinted little shafts of scintillating light. It looked unreal, unearthly, yet magnificent.

At a word of command the beast halted and surveyed us with smoldering little eyes that rested like red rubies in a silver skull.

The occupants of the howdah dismounted and came forward, and again I was astonished. The rajah of Jadhore wore an ordinary business suit, and his face was clean-shaven in contrast to the bushy beards of the attendants. He wore a green turban that

seemed utterly incongruous in comparison to his modern attire. It seemed even more incongruous when he greeted us in perfect English.

"Are we ready, gentlemen?" he inquired. "Have arrangements been made to take this—er—sacred tub aboard ship? My men want to handle it, of course; there are certain religious restrictions against crossing water, y'know."

I stared at him, and I saw the old man's eyebrows rise in surprise as the rajah lit a cigarette and calmly tossed the match beneath the Sacred Elephant's gilded feet. He took charge of the situation.

"It was stipulated in the agreement, gentlemen, that the beast was to have a permanent religious attendant. Allow me to present her—the High Priestess of the Temple of Ganesha."

He beckoned the figure in the background to come forward. Out of the shadow cast by the elephant's body stepped a girl. And for the third time that morning I uttered a low murmur of surprise.

Now I understood the meaning of that beauty of which Oriental poets sing. For this woman was lovely past all understanding or describing. She was dressed in a robe of white, but the lissome curves of her perfectly molded body shone through her garments and caused all memory of them to be forgotten. Her hair was ebon as the jungle night, but it was coiled like a crown above a face of such bewitching perfection as to render powerless even a press-agent's powers of portrayal.

Was it the ripe scarlet blossom of her mouth, the gem-like facets of her high bronze cheeks, the creamy marble of her sweeping brow that so blended into a blaze of indescribable beauty? Or was it her eyes—those great green jewels with tawny flecks glittering in a serpent stare? There was icy wisdom here as well as loveliness; the woman had the look of Lilith about her. Woman, girl, priestess; she was all three as she gazed at us, acknowledging all introductions in calm silence.

"Leela speaks no English," the rajah explained.

Leela! Lilith! Green eyes—priestess of mystery. For the first time I was aware of an inner disturbance. I sensed now the reality of what we were doing; we were dabbling in sacred spheres. And I knew that this woman did not like us; that she scorned and hated this prostitution of her religion. We had made a dangerous opponent, I mused.

The truth of my surmise was soon to be horribly revealed.

In due time the elephant was hoisted aboard the ship and deposited in special quarters within the hold. The attendants and Leela accompanied the animal; the rajah joined us. At noon, we sailed from Singapore.

THE old man and I found the rajah a likable fellow. He was, as I suspected, educated in England; his present life frankly bored him. We found it easy to converse with him about our plans for the circus, and told him how we intended to use the elephant in the procession and build quarters in the menagerie tent. I even proposed that the High Priestess be a member of the Grand Entry number, riding in the howdah on the beast's back.

Here the rajah looked grave. No, he declared, the idea was out of the question. Leela was sacred; she would never consent. Besides, she had opposed the entire venture, and the priests had upheld her. It was best not to cross her, for she had mystic powers.

"Well," I interjected. "Surely you don't believe all that Oriental bosh."

For the first time the rajah of Jadhore lost his carefully-acquired British aplomb.

"I do," he said slowly. "If you were not ignorant of my people and their ways, you would also know that there are many things in my religion which you of the West cannot explain. Let me tell you, my friend, what the High-Priestess means to our faith.

"For thousands of years there has been a temple of Ganesha, the Elephant-God in our land. The Sacred White Elephant holds His Divine Spirit, bred through generations of the animals. The White Elephant is not like others, my friends. You noticed that.

"The God of my peoples is more ancient than your Christian one, and master of darker forces which only the jungle peoples know and can invoke. Nature-demons and beast-men are recognized today by your scientists; but priests of my simple people have controlled such strange forces before ever Christ or Buddha trod the earth. Ganesha is not a benevolent god, my friend. He has always been worshipped under many names—as Chaugnar Faugn, in the old places of Tibet; and as Lord Tsathoggua aforetime. And He is evil—that is why we treat His incarnation in the White Elephant as sacred. That is why there have always been High Priestesses in his temple; they are the holy brides and consorts of the Elephant One. And they are wise; bred from childhood in the black arts of worship, they commune with the beasts of the forest and serve to avert the wrath of the evil ones from their people."

"You believe that?" laughed the old man.

"Yes," said the rajah, and he was no longer smiling. "I believe. And I must warn you. This trip, as you must have heard, is against the wishes of my priesthood. Never has a Sacred Elephant crossed the great waters to another land, to be gaped at by unbelievers for a show. The priests feel that it is an insult to the Lord Ganesha. Leela was sent with the elephant by the priests for a purpose—she alone can guard it. And she hates you for what you're doing; hates me, too. I—I don't like to speak of what she can do. There are still human sacrifices in our temples at certain times, of which the Government knows nothing. And human sacrifices are made with a purpose—the old dark powers I spoke of can be invoked by blood. Leela has officiated at such rites, and she has learned much. I don't want to frighten you—it's really my fault for consenting to this—but you should be warned. Something may happen."

The old man hastened to reassure the rajah. He was smugly certain that the man was nothing but a savage beneath his veneer of superficial culture, and he spoke accordingly.

As for me, I wondered. I thought again of Leela's eery eyes, and imagined easily enough that they could gaze on bloody sacrifice without flinching. Leela could know evil, and she could hate. I remembered the rajah's final words, "Something may happen."

I went out on deck, entered the hold. The elephant stood in his stall, placidly munching hay. Leela stood stolidly beside him as I inspected the animal's chains. But I felt her eyes bore into my back when I turned away, and noticed that the Hindoo attendants carefully avoided me.

Other passengers had got wind of our prize, and they filed into the hold

in a steady stream. As I left, a fellow named Canrobert strolled up. We chatted for several minutes, and when I went up on deck he was still standing there before the beast. I promised to meet him in the bar that evening for a chat.

At dinner a steward whispered to me the story. Canrobert had come up from the hold late in the afternoon, walked to the rail in plain view of several passengers, and jumped overboard. His body was not recovered.

I took part in the investigation which followed. During the course of it we ventured down into the hold. The elephant still stood there, and Leela was still keeping watch beside him. But now she was smiling.

## 3

I NEVER did learn about the death of a man named Phelps on the third day out. But it was a hoodoo voyage for certain, and I was glad when we disembarked at last and headed for winter quarters.

I am a practical man, but I get occasional "hunches." That is why I avoided the rajah during the rest of our homeward journey. I fled when he approached, because I felt that he would have an explanation for the deaths of the two men—an explanation I did not care to hear. I didn't go near Leela nor the elephant either, and spent most of my time doping out the show with the old man.

It was good to see winter quarters again. A handsome stall had been built for the Sacred Elephant, and Ganesha (for so we had christened the beast) was quartered therein.

No greater compliment could have been paid to my advance publicity than the attention shown the beast by our hardened circus folk. Stars and supers alike, they crowded around the stall, eyed the mighty animal, gazed at the silent bearded attendants, and stared in speechless admiration at Leela. The rajah struck up an immediate acquaintance with Captain Dence, our regular elephant-keeper.

I immediately plunged into work with the old man, for the show opened shortly.

Therefore it wasn't until several weeks later that I began to hear the disquieting rumors that floated around the lot concerning our star attraction.

The restlessness of the other elephants, for example—how, in rehearsal for the Grand Entry, they shied away from the Sacred Ganesha, and trumpeted nightly in their picket line. The queer story of how the foreign woman *lived* in the stall with the animal; ate and slept there in stolid silence. The way in which one of the clowns had been frightened while passing through the animal barn one evening; how he had seen the two Hindoos and the girl bowing in worship before the silver beast, who stood amidst a circle of incense fires.

Even the old man mentioned a visit from the rajah and Captain Dence during which both men pleaded to break the contract and allow the animal and its attendants to return to Jadhore before the show opened. They spoke wildly of "trouble" to come. The proposal was of course rejected as being out of the question; our publicity was released, and both men were evidently under the influence of liquor at the time.

Two days later Captain Dence was found hanging from a beam behind the elephant-line. It was a case of suicide beyond question, and there was no in-

vestigation. We had a show funeral, and for a while a gloomy shadow overcast our lot. Everyone remarked about the shocking look of horror on poor Dence's death-distorted face.

About this time I began to wake up. I determined to find out a few things for myself. The rajah was almost always intoxicated now, and he seemed to avoid me purposely; staying in town and seldom visiting the lot. I know for a fact that he never again entered the menagerie barn.

But I learned that others did. Perhaps it was morbid curiosity; but the show-folk, even after their first trips of inspection, seemed to spend much of their time around the elephant lines. Shaw, our new keeper, told me that they were continually before the stall of the Sacred Elephant. In his own opinion many of the men performers were stuck on that "pretty foreign dame." They stared at her and at the elephant for hours on end; even the big stars came.

Corbot, the trapeze artist, was a frequent visitor. So was Jim Dolan, the acrobatic clown, and Rizzio, our equestrian director.

Another was Captain Blade, our knife-thrower in the side-show. What they found in the woman he couldn't say, for she never spoke and they were silent.

I could make nothing of this report. But I determined to watch the beautiful High Priestess for myself.

I got into the habit of sauntering through the menagerie at odd hours and glancing at the Sacred Elephant. Whatever the time of day, there was Leela, her emerald eyes burning into my back. Once or twice I saw some of the performers gazing raptly at the stall. I noticed that they came singly at all times. Also I saw something which proved the keeper's theory to be wrong.

They were not infatuated with the woman, for they looked only at the elephant! The gigantic beast stood like some silver statue; impassive, inscrutable. Only its glistening oiled trunk moved to and fro; that, and its fiery eyes. It seemed to stare mockingly in return, as though contemptuous of attentions from the puny creatures before it.

Once, when the place was deserted, I saw Leela caressing its great body. She was whispering to it in some low and outlandish tongue, but her voice was ineffably sweet and her hands infinitely tender. I was struck by a curious and somewhat weird thought—this woman was acting toward the beast as a woman in love acts toward her lover! I remembered how the rajah spoke of her as the bride of Ganesha, and winced. When the animal's serpentine trunk embraced the lovely girl she purred in almost blissful satisfaction, and for the first time I heard the beast rumble in its massive throat. I left, quickly so as to be unobserved.

OPENING day loomed, and once again I was forced to turn my mind to other things. The cars were loaded for Savannah; the dress rehearsal was performed; I sent the advance men on the night before we left, and the regular routine got under way.

The old man was pleased with the show, and I must admit that it was the best we'd ever turned out. Corbot, the trapeze artist, was a good drawing-card; we got him from the big show through sheer good fortune. Jim Dolan, the chief clown, was always a draw. We had some fine animal acts, and many novelty features as well. And the Sacred Elephant of Jadhore was bid-

ding fair to becoming a household name before the public had ever seen it.

We had a private car for the animal and its three attendants; the two Hindoos smiled happily when they saw it, and even Leela was slightly taken aback with its splendor. On our arrival under canvas the beast was installed in a superb new station atop a platform in the center, and with its hide newly oiled and decorated it looked superb.

The menagerie crowd on the opening day was highly impressed. They stared at the impassive Hindoos and positively gaped at Leela in her white ceremonial gown. The rajah they did not see—he was shaking drunk in his own quarters, behind locked doors.

I didn't even have time to think of the superstitious coward. I'm like a kid when a new show opens each year, and the old man is no different. We sat in our box and positively beamed with joyous excitement as the trumpet blasts announced the Grand Entry.

Our procession was Oriental—Arabian riders, Egyptian seers on camels, harem beauties on elephants, califs and sultans in jeweled litters. At the very last came the Sacred White Elephant of Jadhore; the mightiest of them all. The great silver beast moved with a sort of monstrous beauty; in regal dignity Ganesha padded on to the beat of thundering drums. The two Hindoos led the way, but Leela was not present. The great spotlight followed every step; so did the eyes of the crowd. I can't explain it, but there was *something* about that animal which "clicked." It had beauty—and that unearthly majesty I had noticed. It was the Sacred Elephant indeed.

The procession vanished. The show was on. Sleek black ponies galloped into the rings, and whips cracked in merry rhythm with their hooves. The music altered its tempo; the clowns strutted in to do the first of their walk-arounds. Applause, laughter, and the ever-beating rhythm of the band. Excitement, as the jugglers vied with a troupe of seals in dextrous competition.

The star acts were coming up, and I nudged the old man to attract his special attention.

With a flurry of drums the big spot in the center ring blazed forth as the other lights dimmed. Alonzo Corbot, the trapeze star, raced in. His white body bounded across the ring to the ropes beneath the main pole where his partner waited.

The snare-drums snarled as the two performers mounted up—up—up—sixty feet in the air to the platform and the trapeze rings.

Out they swung now, silver bodies on silver rings; out into the cold clear light that bathed the utter emptiness of the tent-top. Swing—swoop—soar; rhythmically rise, unfalteringly fall. Tempo in every movement of the clutching hands; timing even in the feet that danced on empty air.

Corbot was a marvel; I'd seen him work in rehearsal many times and was never tired of watching the perfection of motion he displayed. He trained rigorously, I knew; and he never slipped. He caught his partner by the hand, the wrist, the elbow, the shoulder, the neck, the ankle. Feet suspended from the rings, he shot to and fro like a human pendulum while his partner somersaulted through space into his waiting hands. At precisely the exact fraction of a second they met in midair; an error in timing meant certain death. There were no nets—that was Corbot's boast.

I watched, the old man watched, the audience watched, as two men fluttered

like tiny birds so far above. Birds? They were demons with invisible wings now in the red light that flashed on for the climax of the act. Now came the time when Corbot and his partner would both leave the rings, leap out into that dizzying space and turn a complete somersault in midair, then grasp the rings on the opposite side of their present position.

The drums went mad. The red light glared on that little hell of high space where two men waited, their nerves and muscles tense.

I could almost feel it myself—that moment of dread expectancy. My eyes strained through the crimson haze, seeking Corbot's face so far above. He would be smiling now; he was preparing to leap. . . .

DRUMS, cymbals crashed. The waiting figures sprang. Corbot's arms were ready to grasp his partner in whirling space—or were they? Good God, no—*they were stiff at his side!*

There was a streaking blur crossing that empty scarlet expanse of light, and then it was gone. Something struck the center ring with a heavy thud. Somebody screamed, the band blared a desperate march, and the lights went up. I saw that Corbot's partner Victoire had saved himself by catching a ring just in time, but my eyes did not linger above. They centered themselves on the ground; on the center ring where something lay in a pool of crimson that came from no light.

Then the old man and I were out of our box and running across the tent with attendants at our side. And we stared for a sickening second at that boneless pulpy red thing that had once been Alonzo Corbot the trapeze star. They took him away; fresh sawdust covered the spot where he had fallen, and the band, the lights, the music covered the audience's panic until their fears were forgotten. The clowns were out again as the old man and I left, and the crowd was laughing—a bit weakly, perhaps, but laughing nevertheless. Corbot's hail and farewell was typical; the show went on.

Victoire, the partner, staggered in as we gathered by the body in the dressing-room. Pale, limp, badly shaken, he wept convulsively when he saw—it—lying there.

"I knew it!" he gasped. "When he stood on the other platform just before he leaped, I saw his eyes. They were dead and far away. Dead. . . . No, I don't know how it happened. Of course he was all right before the show. I hadn't seen him much lately; between rehearsals he spent a lot of time some place. . . . His eyes were dead. . . ."

We never learned anything more from Victoire. The boss and I hurried through the menagerie to the main office. As we passed the big platform where the Sacred Elephant was quartered, I noticed with a shock that it was empty of attendants. Something brushed against me in the dark as I hurried on. It was Leela, the High-Priestess, and she was smiling. I had never seen her smile before.

That night I dreamed of Leela's smile, and Corbot's redly ruined face. . . .

4

THERE'S only a little more to tell. For that I'm thankful, because the rest is even now a nightmare I would rather forget. We learned nothing of Corbot's death from anyone. It created a flurry, of course, and the performers' nerves were shattered. After all, an opening-day tragedy like that is disquieting.

The old man raved, but there was nothing to do. The show went on; the morbid public swarmed in that second day, for despite my efforts publicity was released.

Nor was the morbid public disappointed. For on the second night, our fourth show—Jim Dolan died.

Jim was our acrobatic clown, and a star in his own right. He'd been with us twelve seasons, always doing his regular routine of juggling and pantomime.

We all knew Jim and liked him as a friend. He was a great kidder; nothing of the pagliaccio about Dolan. But on that second evening he stopped for a moment in his routine before the center ring, put down his juggling-clubs, pulled out a razor, and calmly slit his throat.

How we got through that night is still a mystery to me. "Jinx" and "hoodoo" were the only two words I heard. The show went on, the boss raved, and the police quietly investigated.

The following afternoon Rizzio, our equestrian director, walked into the line of the bareback routine, and a horse's hoof broke his spine.

I'll never forget that twilight session after the show, in the old man's tent. Neither of us had slept for two days; we'd talked ourselves out, and our souls were sick with fear and nameless apprehension. I've never believed in "curses," but I did then. And so I looked at the official reports and the headlines in the papers, glanced at the old man's gray face, and buried my own in my arms. There was a curse on the show.

Death! I'd walked with it for weeks now. Those two chaps on the boat, then Captain Dence, the elephant man, then Corbot, Dolan, Rizzio. Death—ever since we had taken the Sacred White——

The rajah's words! His story about curses and queer rites; the vengeance of the god and his priests! The Priestess Leela, who smiled now! Hadn't I heard stories about the performers visiting the elephant's stall? —why, all three of the men who died here in the show had done that! The rajah knew—and I had thought him a drunken coward.

I sent a man off to find him. The old man, utterly collapsed, slept. I spent an anxious hour waiting.

The rajah entered. A glance at my face told him the story.

"You know now?" he said. "I thought you would never come to your senses. I could do nothing without your belief, for *she* knows I understand, and she hates me. I have tried very hard to forget; but now men die and this thing must be stopped. Ganesha may send me to a thousand hells for this, but it is better so. It is magic, my friend."

"How do you know?" I whispered.

"I know." He smiled wearily, but there was black despair in his eyes. "I watched from the beginning. She is cunning, that Leela, so very cunning. And she knows *arts*."

"What arts?"

"You of the West call it hypnotism. It is more than that. It is transference of will. Leela is an adept; she can do it easily with the elephant as medium."

I tried vainly to understand. Was the rajah crazed? No—his eyes burned not with derangement but with bitter hatred.

"Post-hypnotic suggestion," he breathed. "When fools came to watch the Sacred Elephant, she was always there. Her eyes did it; and when they watched the gleaming trunk of the

beast it acted as a focal point. They came back again and again, not knowing why. And all the while she was willing them to act; not then, but later. That is how the two men died on the boat. She experimented there, told them to drown themselves. One went immediately, the other waited several days. All that was needed was for them to see her once at the time she willed for them to die. Thus it was. And here, in the menagerie, it has been the same way. They stare at the silver elephant. She willed them to die during the performance. At the proper time she stood in the entrance-way; I have seen her there. And the men died—you saw that.

"She hates the show, and will ruin it. To her the worship of Ganesha is sacred, and she is wreaking vengeance. The old priests that sent her must have instructed this, and there must be an end. That is why I dare not face her."

"What's to be done?" I found myself asking. "If your story is true, we can't touch her. And we can't give up the show."

"I will stop her," said the rajah slowly. "I must."

Suddenly, he was gone. And I realized with a start that the show was almost ready to begin. Quickly I roused the old man from his slumber. Then I dashed out. Collaring a roustabout, I ordered him to find the rajah at once. There would be a showdown tonight; there must be.

I HAD two guards with guns secretly posted at the side entrance to the tent, where the performers came in. They had orders to stop anyone who loitered there during the show. There must be no Leela watching and commanding that night.

I dared not incarcerate her at once for fear of a row while the show was on. The woman was evidently capable of anything, and she must not suspect. Still, I wanted to see her for myself. A half-hour before the menagerie opened I hurried in. The elephant's stall was again untended!

I ran around to the side entrance. There was no one there. Out on the midway I raced, mingling with the crowd. Then it was that I noticed the excited throng before the side show. Elbowing through, I came upon two men and the barker as they emerged from the tent carrying a limp form in their arms. It was the girl assistant of Captain Blade, the knife-thrower. He had missed.

Leela passed me in the crowd, smiling. Her face was beautiful as Death.

When I rushed back to the boss tent, I found the roustabout and the rajah. The latter was trembling in every limb.

Hastily I collared the potentate and dragged him through the crowd toward the main tent.

"I believe you now," I whispered. "But you're not going to do anything rash. Give me your knife."

I'd guessed correctly. He slipped a dirk out of his sleeve and passed it to me unobserved.

"No more bloodshed," I muttered. "I have two men at the side entrance. She'll not watch *this* show and cast any spells. When the performance is over, I'll have her behind the bars on your testimony. But no disturbance before the crowd."

I shouldered my way into my regular box and he followed after me.

The big tent was crowded. There was an air of grim waiting, as if the spectators were *expecting* something. I knew what they expected; hadn't the papers been full of "the Hoodoo Circus" for the past three days? There

was a low murmur as of massed whispering voices. I thought of a Roman amphitheater and shuddered.

The big drums rolled. The parade swept into view, and I cast an anxious glance at the side entrance when it cleared. There were my two guards, armed with efficient-looking guns. No trouble tonight! And the rajah was safe, with me.

The Sacred Elephant swept into view; serene, majestic, lumbering gigantically on ivory hoofs. There was only one Hindoo leading him tonight and—the howdah was on his back!

In it sat—Leela, the High Priestess of Ganesha.

"She knows," breathed the rajah, his brown face suddenly animal-like with convulsed terror.

Leela was smiling. . . .

Then horror came.

The lights flickered, failed, blinked out. The vast tent plunged into nighted darkness and the band ceased. There was a rising wail of sound, and I rose in my seat with a scream on my lips.

There in the darkness glowed the silver elephant—the Sacred White Elephant of Jadhore. Like a leprous monster, its body gleamed with phosphorescent fire. And in the darkness I saw Leela's eyes.

The elephant had turned now, and left the parade. As shrieks rose in a thousand throats it thundered forward —straight for our box.

The rajah broke from my grasp and vaulted over the railing to the ground. My hand flew to my pocket and I cursed in dismay. The knife he had given me was gone. Then my eyes returned to the hideous tableau before me.

The elephant charged with lifted trunk, tusks glistening before it. There was a shrill trumpeting from its silver throat as it bore down on the slight figure of the man who raced toward it.

He ran to death, but his head was high. He was seeking that black figure in the howdah on the beast's back.

In a moment everything was over. A gleaming arc in the air as something long and thin and silver whizzed up to the elephant's back. A woman's shrill scream and gurgling sob. A mighty bellowing of brutish, berserk rage. A thud of massive feet as the silver giant trampled on. The crunching . . . the screams, the shots, and the great shock as the great body turned and fell.

And then the audience rose and fled. When the lights went on once more, there was nobody in the tent but the performers and the roustabouts.

In the center of the areaway lay the gigantic Ganesha, silver sides streaked with scarlet in death. The crumpled howdah held all that remained of Leela the High Priestess. The rajah's knife had struck home, and her torn throat was not a pretty sight.

As for the rajah himself, there was only a slashed red horror dangling on the end of those ivory tusks; a mashed and pulpy thing.

THUS ended the affair of the Sacred White Elephant. The police accepted our story of the animal's running *amok* during the show when the lights failed.

They never learned of the Hindoo who had so horribly short-circuited the connection with his own body, and we buried his seared remains in secret.

The show closed for two weeks and we re-routed it for the rest of the year. Gradually, the papers let the story die and we went on.

I never told the truth to the old man. They're all dead anyway, and I'd like

to forget it myself. But I have never liked novelty acts since, nor visited the Orient; because I know the rajah's story was true, and Leela had killed those performers as he had explained it. Those priests and priestesses have secret powers, I am convinced.

I've figured it all out—Leela found out that the rajah had told me the facts; knew she'd be exposed, and acted accordingly.

She sent the Hindoo to fix the lights, then arranged to have Ganesha the elephant charge our box and kill the rajah as she'd planned.

I have it all figured out, but I'd never tell the old man. There's one other fact I know which I must not reveal.

The rajah's knife did not kill Leela as she rode on the elephant's back. It could not, for she was already dead; dead before she entered the tent.

One of the two guards I stationed had shot her two minutes before at the side entrance as she rode past in the howdah of Ganesha, the Sacred White Elephant.

It seems that she must have hypnotized the beast, too—or did she? The Soul of Ganesha inhabits the body of the Sacred Elephant, the rajah said. And Ganesha wreaks a vengeance of his own.

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# The City of Death

By EDITH HURLEY

There is a city far, whose turrets tall
  Have never known the kindly light of day,
  And in whose squares no laughing children play;
Upon old towers the wavering moonbeams fall;
Dim, ghostly sentries pace the crumbling wall;
  While in its habitations foul Decay
  And Dissolution hold unquestioned sway:
And Silence hangs above it like a pall.

Within its narrow lanes strange figures creep,
  Monstrous, misshapen creatures of the Night,
Denied the blessed anodyne of Sleep,
  Robbed of the precious heritage of light,
Who bow in darkness, desolate and lone,
Before a god implacable as stone.

"In that instant pandemonium broke loose."

# The Poltergeist of Swan Upping

By SEABURY QUINN

*A brilliant exploit of Jules de Grandin, the mercurial little French scientist, occult detective and ghost-breaker—a story about a murderous elemental*

*DEAR TROWBRIDGE* [read the letter from Scott Thorowgood]: *As you know, I bought the old house at Swan Upping on the Mullica last July and at once set out to renovate it. Restoration was completed in October and we moved in the middle of that month. Almost immediately*

*things began to happen—unpleasant things. Servants swore they met with spectral persecutions in halls and on the stairs, bed-clothes were jerked off at night. Crockery and kitchenware fell from shelves and hooks without apparent reason, and last Wednesday morning a maid was set on as she went upstairs and thrown so violently that she sustained a broken collarbone. Neither my daughters nor I have seen anything nor been troubled in any way, and if it were not for the girl's injury I should say the whole thing is attributable to some malicious gossip; but her hurts are real enough—as I who pay her hospital bills can testify—and she persists in saying she was the victim of assault and not of accident.*

*Thus far it's been more annoying than frightening, but if things keep up this way we shall have to close the house for want of help, as we find it practically impossible to keep servants in the place. Do you think you can persuade Doctor de Grandin, of whose success with occult pests I've heard considerable, to come and "fumigate" Swan Upping for us? I shall, of course, be willing to pay whatever fee he asks.*

"Well, can I persuade you?" I asked, passing the letter to de Grandin. "I know you're not much interested in the fee, but——"

"Who says so?" he demanded as he laid the letter down. "Why should I not be?"

"Why, I know you've turned down cases time and time again when the fees offered were almost fantastic——"

"*Précisément.* You have right, my friend. I reserve the right to take such cases as appeal to me, and to decline others. But in such cases as I take the laborer is worthy of his hire, and I think that your friend Thorowgood is one who has respect for money, whether in himself or others. This letter has a tone of command in it. One assumes *Monsieur* Thorowgood is used to having what he pays for and paying well for what he gets. *Bien.* I shall serve him well, and he shall pay accordingly. I shall be interested in both the fee and this so snobbish ghost who gives attention only to the servants and leaves the master of the house alone. When do we leave?"

"He says to take the train to Upsam's Station, then wait for him to pick us up. There's only one train down a day in wintertime. We'll have to pack immediately."

JULES DE GRANDIN thrust his small pointed chin another inch into the collar of his fur coat, drove his hands into his pockets till his elbows all but disappeared, and eyed me with a stare as icy as the fading winter afternoon. "Me," he announced bitterly, "I am a fool of the first magnitude!"

"Indeed?" I replied. "I'm glad to hear you confess it. I've suspected something of the sort at times, but—"

"I am," he insisted, "the prize zany of the winter's crop. Five little hours ago we were warm and comfortable in Harrisonville. Now, if you please, observe us—marooned here in a trackless wilderness, retreat cut off, progress impossible. *Mon Dieu,* I perish miserably!"

"Oh, it's not that bad," I comforted. "Thorowgood will surely be here in a little while. If he can't come himself he'll send somebody——"

"*Mais oui,* and they will find our stiffening dead corpses on the station platform——"

"Maybe that's our man, now," I interrupted as an ancient car of the model which made Detroit famous in the days

before the war drew up beside the waiting-platform and an aged Negro wrapped almost to the eyes in a sheep-coat descended and ambled toward the stack of freight piled at the station's farther end.

"At any rate, it is a sign of rescue," de Grandin nodded and hurried toward the dusky motorist. "*Holà, mon brave,*" he greeted. "How much will it cost us to be conveyed to Swan Upping? You know the place, of course."

"Yassuh, Ah knows hit," the other answered with a marked lack of enthusiasm.

"Very well, my priceless Jehu. What is your price for transportation thither?"

The colored man spoke with a rich Virginia accent. Obviously, he was not indigenous to southern Jersey. Just as obviously, he was much impressed by the fur coat de Grandin wore. "Cap'n, suh," he answered as he touched his battered hat, "mah bizness ain't been good dese las' two months."

"Indeed? One grieves to hear it. But we shall pay you royally, reward you with a princeling's ransom for taking us to Swan Upping. We are thoroughly disgusted with the scenery hereabouts, and would away to bright new scenes. Accordingly——"

The Negro gazed at him with something close akin to rapture. With the uneducated man's love of large words he was entranced with Jules de Grandin's eloquence, yet . . . Regretful resolution hardened in his wrinkled face. "Con'ol, suh," he interrupted, "mah bizness has been pow'ful bad dis season. Folks ain't haulin' like dey uster."

"One gathered as much; and from these preliminaries one assumes your price will be enormous. Very well, then. A dollar each? Two dollars?

"Naw, suh."

"*Grand Dieu,* a profiteer, a usurer, a *voleur de chemin!* How much, then, my grand rascal? Three dollars each? I swear we'll pay no more!"

"Doctah, suh" — such munificence seemed to warrant a new title of respect—"Ah'd suttinly enjoy to make me six dollahs, but you all cain't hire me to take yuh to Swan Uppin'. Not dis time o' day, suh."

"Eh, how is that? Surely it cannot be so far——"

"Hit ain't so far to go, suh. Dat ain't whut's worryin' me. Hit's de gittin' back dat counts. Ah ain't aimin' to go pesticatin' round no daid folks' bizness."

"I do not understand. What have the dead to do with taking us to Swan Upping?"

"Plenty, suh. Dey's got a plenty to do wid hit. Don't yuh know dat place is *ha'nted?*"

"Bosh!" I broke in. "You know there aren't such things as ghosts?"

"Yassuh. Ah knows hit right enough in daytime, but de sun is settin' fast, an' it'll be pitch-black befo' we gits dere. Ah ain't goin' nowheres *near* dat place in darkness, suh."

There the matter rested. Plead, argue and cajole as we would, we could not prevail on him to take us to Swan Upping. With a regretful look at us he re-entered his decrepit chariot, set his wheezing motor going and drove off into the lengthening shadows, leaving us as hopelessly cut off at the small way-station as survivors of *H.M.S. Bounty* were on Pitcairn Island.

The prospect was not too inviting. Festoons of dripping icicles hung from the platform's open-sided shelter, patches of half-melted snow alternated with still larger patches of foot-fettering mud, and a chill wind whipped the waters of the Mullica into angry little

whitecaps, then hurried on to howl a keening dirge around the corners of the boarded-up summer hotel. There was neither waiting-room nor ticket office, for the station consisted of a board platform roofed over at one end to afford temporary shelter to freight and such unfortunates as had to wait the trains that stopped on signal only. Nowhere, look as we would, could we descry a sign of anyone who might have been a messenger from Swan Upping. Meanwhile the sun was sinking steadily behind the western timberline, and long blue shadows reached out toward us like malignant fingers.

"We should have motored down," I said. "Railway service to this section of the state's not anything to brag about in winter, and——"

"*Morbleu,* we should have waited for the summer!" de Grandin interrupted. "Then, at least, we might have slept outdoors and sustained ourselves on berries. As it is, a gruesome death awaits us—*heurra,* it is a rescue!"

A STATION wagon pulled up alongside the platform, and Scott Thorowgood, wrapped to the heels in a chinchilla ulster, climbed from the driver's seat to wring my hand.

"Hullo, Trowbridge," he greeted heartily. "Mighty glad to meet you, Doctor de Grandin. Hope my little accident didn't inconvenience you too much. I got a flat just as I left the place and had to stop and change the wheel. Got your duffle ready? Fine, let's go."

"We were beginning to feel like orphans of the storm," I confessed as our vehicle got under way. "There was no way of telephoning you, and we thought there might have been some slip-up in train schedules. When we didn't find you here we tried to make arrangements with an old colored man to drive us over, but the deal fell through. He not only wouldn't entertain an offer, but intimated rather broadly that Swan Upping's——"

"I know, I know; don't tell me!" Thorowgood broke in. "It's all around the county, now. We just got a fresh staff from a New York employment office, but if they're here a week it'll set a record. Houseful of week-enders, too."

"You say these tales of haunting are all new, *Monsieur?*" de Grandin asked. "There is no legend of an ancient ghost?"

"No, our spook is this year's model, with all the late improvements," Thorowgood responded, swinging from the main road into a long private lane. "The original Swan Upping house dates back to Colonial days, and probably there's been enough deviltry pulled off there to warrant a battalion of ghosts moving in and making it a permanent headquarters, but as far as I can ascertain no one ever heard of any ghostly visitants till we moved in. Usually old deserted houses get an unsavory reputation, but in this case the rule's reversed. Everything was quiet as a Quaker meeting till we came here. The carpenters and plumbers had hardly moved out when the ghost moved in, and began scaring my cooks and maids and laundresses out of their wits. We've had about five hundred percent labor turnover since October, and if you can't rid us of the ghost we'll either have to close the house or do our own cooking and washing.

"I thought at first it might be someone trying to scare me into selling. I've put a lot of money in the place, and it would make an ideal summer boarding-house; so, fantastic as it sounds, I thought that maybe someone might have had a notion I could be scared

off and forced to sell out at a loss. That got my dander up, and I hired a crew of detectives to come and give the place a going over——"

"Indeed? And what did they discover?"

"Nothing. Not a blessed thing. The spook lay low while they were in the house, and we couldn't have asked a quieter time. Then, the very day they left, Daisy Mullins, the only one of all the servants who's been with us straight through, was set upon as she went up the stairs and thrown down the entire flight. She broke her collarbone and hurt her head, poor kid, but the harm it did her body isn't half as serious as what her mind suffered. I was over to see her in the hospital this morning, and she's almost a nervous wreck. The doctors tell me she may go into St. Vitus' dance."

"U'm? And what manifestations have you yourself observed?"

Thorowgood bit the end from a cigar and set it glowing with the dashboard lighter. "Nothing!" he exploded. "Neither my daughters nor I have seen anything out of the ordinary. No one but the servants has been troubled. That's what made me think it might have been some malicious person, or perhaps a practical joker, behind it all. I've offered a thousand dollars reward for the arrest and conviction of anyone caught playing ghost, but thus far no one's laid claim to it.

"Welcome to Spooky Hollow, gentlemen." He brought the station wagon to a halt beneath the porte-cochère and slammed the front door open. "Want to question the servants before dinner?"

"No, thank you," answered de Grandin. "I shall take the opportunity to look the terrain over before I form a plan of action, if you please."

"Certainly, certainly. You're the ghostologist on this case. It's up to you to prescribe whatever treatment you think proper."

When he did Swan Upping over, Thorowgood had taken thought for his guests' comfort. Our cozy room mocked at the winter darkness fingering at the window-panes. Bright curtains of glazed chintz hung at the casements, two fat armchairs had been drawn up to the blazing fire, a maple wall-case held a row of books—Heiser's *American Doctor's Odyssey*, Link's *Return to Religion* and Madame Curie's biography were three titles I saw at a glance. On the mantelpiece was a low bowl of Danish copper, jade-mellow with patina, in which a bouquet of flamboyant Cherokee roses was set. Immediately adjoining was a bathroom done in orchid tile with a deep, luxurious tub, a glassed-in shower and a row of great, fluffy towels warming themselves on a heated rack. "Name of a small green man," de Grandin murmured as his little blue eyes lighted with appreciation, "food never tastes so good as when one has been fasting, *hein*, my friend? Stand aside and let me pass, if you will be so good. I desire to defrost my frozen bones."

Half an hour later, showered, clothed and immeasurably cheered, we went out into the hall. "Now for dinner and the ghost of Monsieur Thorowgood!" announced Jules de Grandin.

It was a royal feast our host spread out that night. Besides de Grandin and me there were several people from New York and Philadelphia, a scattering of business associates from Newark and a little man whose name I understood was Bradley, but whose address I did not catch at introduction.

Wild duck, shot in the Jersey marshes ten days before and gamed to perfection, stewed green celery tops, quince jelly, spoon bread golden as new-minted coin, and burgundy as mellow as midsummer moonlight, combined to make the dinner a Lucullian banquet, and ten o'clock had sounded on the tall timepiece in the hall and echoed from the banjo clock in the library before the long Madeira cloth was cleared of silver and Wedgewood.

It was with something of the gesture of a prestidigitator ordering silence for his foremost trick that Thorowgood smiled at us benevolently as he turned to Perriby the butler. "Perriby," he ordered, slipping a small key from his watch-chain, "two bottles of the cognac de Napoléon, 1810."

"Mr. Thorowgood, sir, please"—Perriby returned to the dining-room, his florid face slightly paler than its wont, his long, smooth-shaven upper lip tremulous, and with no bottles in his hands—"may I speak with you a moment, sir, in private?"

"What's the matter?—where's that brandy?"

"If you please, sir, I'd rather not go into that smoke house. I thought I saw——"

"Oh, good Lord—you, too? Take a couple of the boys. Take half a dozen, if two aren't enough, and get that brandy."

"Yes, sir." The servant bowed with frigid respect and departed.

"He's brand-new here," Thorowgood half whispered to de Grandin. "I had to get a new outfit last week when Daisy Mullins took her tumble, and I've been as careful as I could to keep this gossip from reaching 'em, but—Lord! I hope the superstitious fools don't shy at their own shadows and drop a bottle of that cognac. That stuff cost me eighteen dollars a fifth, and the only thing needed to set me staring mad would be——"

"Mr. Thorowgood, sir!" The butler was once more at his elbow, and his face was gray with fright.

"Eh? What's the matter now? Don't tell me that you saw——"

"Oh, sir," the servant interrupted, his thick, throaty voice gone high and almost squeaky, "it's Meadows, sir. Meadows, the stable boy. 'E's dead, sir!" Excitement had played havoc with his carefully acquired aspirates, and his h's feel like autumn leaves in Vallambrosa.

"Dead?" Thorowgood repeated.

"Yes, sir. Kilt. You see, I asked 'im and Smith and Little to haccompany me to the smoke 'ouse, like you said, sir, hand they went, though most reluctantly. When I hunlocked the door somethink hinside 'issed at us, as hif it were a snyke, sir. I thought hit might be someone myking gyme of us, hif you don't mind me saying so, sir, and was about to hadmonish 'im, when Meadows, who always was a most wexatious little fighter, hif I may say so, sir, rushed right into the 'ouse, and next hinstant we 'eard 'im scream hand choke, and when I played the flashlight hinto the 'ouse, there 'e lay, all sprawled hout, as you might say, and directly I looked at 'im I knew 'e was——"

"Dead?"

"Quite so, sir. The hother boys are bringin' 'im back now. I ran ahead to tell you——"

"I'll bet you did!" his master cut in grimly. "All right. That'll do." To us:

"Will you examine him, please? It's probable he's only stunned or fainted. Perriby's such a hare-brained fool...."

But the butler's diagnosis was correct. Meadows, undersized and wiry

as a jockey or a flyweight fighter, was quite dead, and must have died instantly. His eyes were opened widely, almost forced from their sockets. His mouth gaped slightly and his tongue thrust forth between his teeth, as though death caught him in the act of gagging.

De Grandin took the dead boy's face between his palms and raised his head a little. It was as though the head were coupled to the body by a cord rather than a column of bone and muscle, for there was no resistance as it nodded upward. *"Le cou brisé,"* he told me. "His neck is broken, as if he had been hanged."

"But he wasn't hanged," I insisted, "and there's no mark of violence. Might he not have fallen——"

*"Non,"* he answered positively. "Those eyes, that tongue, the whole expression of his face bear testimony of throttling. Tremendous, sudden pressure was applied, making death almost immediate, and while there was undoubtedly a subconjunctival ecchymosis, it did not have time to show lividity before he died. In an hour, maybe two, we may find bruises. Certainly the autopsy will disclose a fractured hyoid bone as well as broken vertebræ."

"By heaven, this is too much!" Thorowgood stormed when he told him of our findings. "It was bad enough when this ghost hung round the place and scared my servants into fits, but murder is no joke, and murder has been done tonight. I suppose I'll have to notify the police and hold everybody here till they have finished their investigations. Meantime, I'm offering two thousand dollars, spot cash, to anyone who puts the finger on this murderer for me.

"Might as well get it over with, I suppose," he added as he squared his shoulders and went to notify the guests that no one was to leave till given permission by the police.

It was Doris Thorowgood who put the company's consensus into bald words. "Well," she announced, "I'm sorry for poor Meadows and all that, but we can't bring him back by being gloomy. I'm going to dance. Who's with me?"

Apparently they all were, for the radio was soon relaying latest swing selections from New York and Newark, and the faint *wisp-wisp* of thin-soled slippers on the polished floor mingled with the strains of syncopated music.

"Not dancing, gentlemen?" Little Mr. Bradley paused beside us.

De Grandin eyed him coldly. "I think the dead deserve some courtesy, even if he was no more than a mere stable boy," he answered.

"I agree with you, sir. It is an evil thing to dance in a house where death lurks. Indeed, I have a feeling we shall witness more misfortune."

"Specifically?" de Grandin raised his eyebrows quizzically.

"No, not specifically, but generally. The moment I came in this house I felt an atmosphere of menace."

"You are psychic, *Monsieur?*"

"Naturally." From his waistcoat pocket Bradley drew a card which he presented to the Frenchman. Leaning forward I read:

THADDEUS BRADLEY

Clairvoyant

He was a little man, not exactly dwarfish, but so well below the average stature that he scarcely reached de Grandin's chin. He was curiously stooped, too, whether as the result of a crippled shoulder or deliberate pose I

could not quite determine. By contrast, he had a large head with a shock of curling black hair, a wide forehead with delicately curved brows, a hooked, assertive nose and dark-brown eyes, set a thought too close together.

The little Frenchman looked at him with increased interest. "Tell me," he asked, "do you know anything about this house, *Monsieur?* Did Monsieur Thorowgood tell you——"

"Yes, sir, he did. He told me he'd been troubled by some spirit entities which were frightening his servants and had injured one of them. He asked me to come up from Philadelphia and see what I could do to find the ghost, if——"

"Did he say it was a ghost?"

"Well, not exactly. He said the servants said it was a ghost, but he thought it was something human. However, I'm known to possess psychic powers, and if I think the house is haunted—which I do, most certainly——"

Anger kindled in de Grandin's small blue eyes. "When did he summon you?" he interrupted.

"This morning, Doctor. I arrived shortly before noon——"

"*Le cochon, porc!* Does he think he can do this to me?"

"Eh, what's that?"

"Did he not tell you I was coming, that he had engaged my services——"

"Well, now you mention it, he did. Yes, sir. He said you had a reputation as a ghost-breaker, but he wanted to have my opinion, too——"

"*Parbleu,* this is intolerable, this is monstrous, this is not to be endured! He has made me insulted. That I should be spied upon——"

"Oh, now, don't take it that way, sir. I'm sure Mr. Thorowgood meant nothing by it. Just wanted to be sure, you know. It's just as if he called another doctor in for consultation in a case of illness. Anyway, what do we care? He's got to pay us each a fee. He doesn't think there are such things as ghosts. Let's convince him of his error. Maybe we could hold a séance for him, find the ghost and drive it out, then each collect his fee. That way everybody's satisfied——"

Before the rising fury in the Frenchman's eyes he quailed to silence. "Charlatan, impostor," de Grandin almost hissed, "you would involve me in a fraud? You would manufacture a ghost to put fear into Monsieur Thorowgood that you may collect a fee—*parbleu,* yes! Why not?"

"Wha—what is it?" stammered Bradley.

"You would hold a séance, *hein?* You would produce a rapping-of-the-table, perhaps go in a trance and relay messages from some defunct Indian sachem? *Très bon.* You shall conduct a séance, my fine friend, but it shall be genuine. Let us see if we can make this evil entity produce himself. Perhaps he will materialize——"

"No, no! Not that, sir. Not me; I can't do that! I'm not a spirit medium; I can contact controls and get through messages—I really can!—but when it comes to trying to materialize—I'm scared to monkey with it. I've seen some things——"

"*Corbleu,* my friend, as yet you have seen nothing. You have your choice. Either you will hold a séance here and now, or I denounce you publicly, tell everyone that you are an impostor who declared he would find a ghost here, whether it——"

"No, no, don't do that, sir; it would ruin me!"

"You are an apt pupil, *mon ami;* you apprehend my meaning perfectly.

Which is it to be, a séance or denunciation?"

THE guests were all enthusiastic. Dancing might be fun, but a séance, with a dead man practically in the next room . . . "My dear," I heard Letitia Thorowgood exclaim, "it's priceless—definitely! Maybe we can make poor Meadows tell who killed him, and why."

Every stage trick of the charlatan was evident as Bradley prepared for the séance. Lights were turned off in the drawing-room and the adjoining hall, the guests were seated round the wall in a wide circle, with hands joined, and Doris Thorowgood took her place at the piano, softly playing *Abide With Me.* Bradley seated himself at a small table with a nickel-plated paper-knife held upright in his hand. At his request de Grandin played a flashlight's ray upon the knife so that it stood out in the darkness like a lighted tower at night.

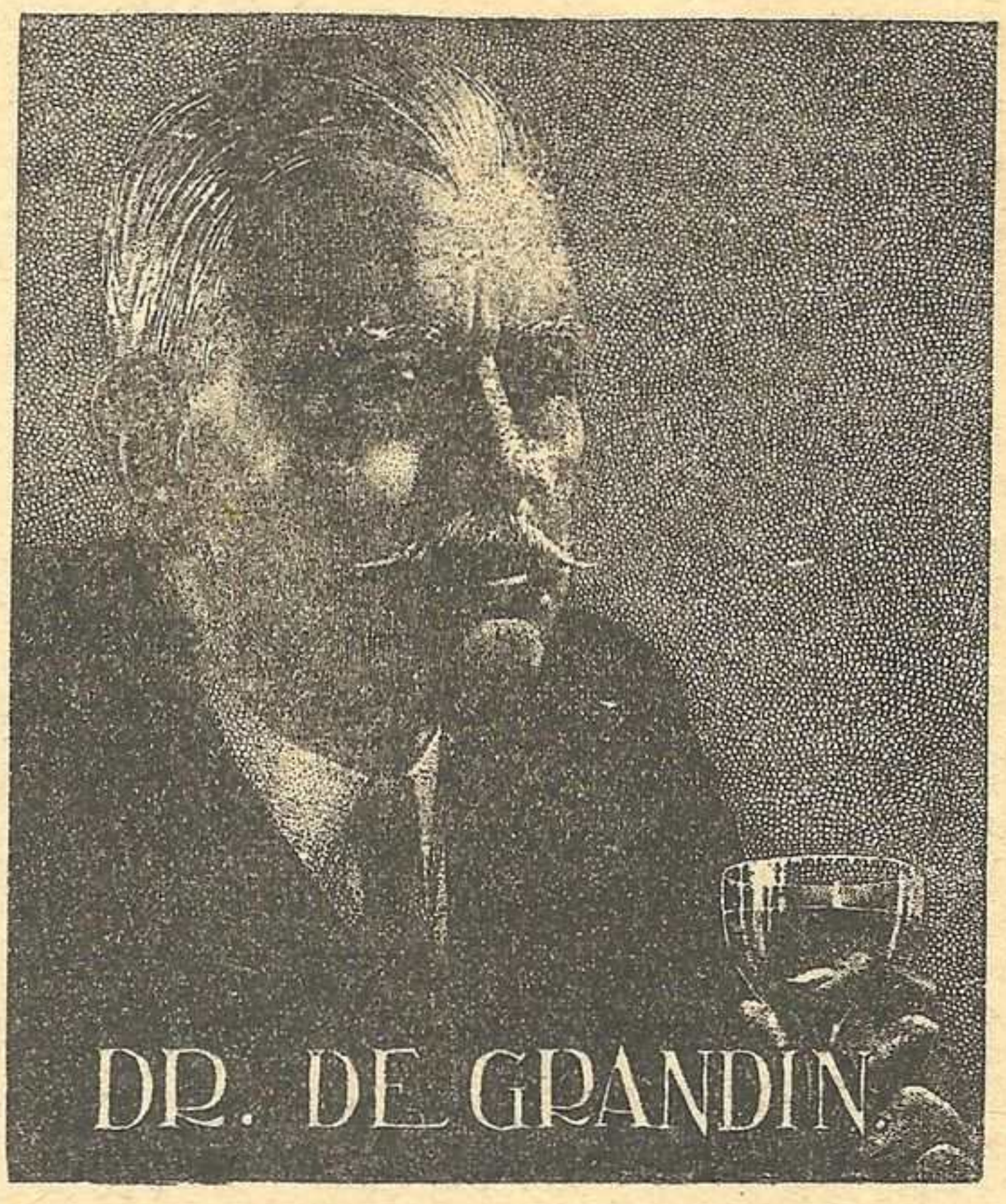
"No one is to speak or move until I give permission," cautioned Bradley, gazing fixedly at the knife-point gleaming in the dark.

Silence settled on the room. From the hall outside we heard the pompous, slow tick of the tall clock; softly, softer than the clock-tick, barely audible to us, came the piano's notes:

> I fear no harm with Thee at hand to bless,
> Ills have no weight and tears no bitterness;
> Where is death's sting, where, grave, thy victory? . . .

The paper-cutter wavered, swayed from right to left, and dropped to the floor with a light tinkle. Bradley's eyes closed and his head, leaned back against the chair, fell a little sideways as the neck muscles relaxed.

And in that instant pandemonium




broke loose. The music from the hallway banged *fortissimo* in the syncopated strains of *Satan Takes a Holiday,* and from Doris Thorowgood there came a laugh as eery as the blindfold-gropings of a lost mind; a wild, high-mounting burst of mirth that seemed to froth and churn and boil, then change from merriment to torture and geyser up into a stream that rose, flickered like a flame of torment, went up and up until it seemed no human throat could stand its strain, then dropped again until it was a chuckle of indecent glee.

Bradley was on his feet, hugging himself in sudden agony, his tortured face turned up to the groined ceiling, and with a crash as deafening as a thunder-clap every piece of fragile porcelain in a wall-cabinet was dashed down to the floor as though a giant broom had swept it from the shelves.

Then from the hall, foul as a suspiration from a charnel house, a gust of wind came sweeping, incredible, filthy, furious as a cyclone. I retched at it, I heard the man next to me give a gasp

and then a gagging choke. This was no mere fetor, it was the very noisome breath of Death, charged with the rottenness of putrefaction stored up since the first beginnings of mortality.

"Lights, lights, *pour l'amour d'un bouc!*" I heard de Grandin shout.

But there were no lights. When Thorowgood shook off his lethargy of disgust and pressed the wall-switch, a sharp *click* sounded, but the room remained as black as Erebus, and meanwhile filthiness unnamable, illimitable terror and disgust, filled the house to stifling overflowing. Coughing, strangling, almost fainting I stumbled to a window and wrenched at it. The sash was firmly set as if built in the masonry.

"*In nomine Domini conjuro te, sceleratissime, abire ad tuum locum!*" de Grandin's conjuration sounded, not loud, but with a force of earnestness more compelling than a shout. Then *crash!* he hurled a flower-bowl through the window. The shattered glass sprayed outward not more from his missile than from the pressure of the nameless, obscene filthiness that filled the house to inundation, and I gasped great lungfuls of revivifying air as a drowning man might fight for precious breath.

From the hallway the piano sounded, beating out its rhythm with the heavy, unaccented tone of an electric mechanism, and in accompaniment to the cacophony of beaten keys and tortured strings the wild, demoniac peals of laughter gushed from Doris' lips.

"Mademoiselle Doris, stop it, I command you!" de Grandin ordered sharply, but still the music sounded stridently, still she laughed like a witch-thing delighted at the success of some hell-brew she had concocted.

"Ha, so? Then this must be the way of it!" He gave her a resounding slap on the right cheek, then turned his hand and struck the other cheek a stinging blow.

The treatment was effective, for she raised her hands from the piano and held them to her smarting face, hysteria gone before the stimulus of sudden pain.

"One regrets heroic measures," he apologized as she looked at him in hurt wonder, "but there are times when they are necessary. This was one of them."

Bradley had fallen on his back and lay quaking spasmodically, hands pressed against his midriff, little buzzing noises sounding from his throat, as though he breathed through some obstruction.

"Up, man, up!" de Grandin cried, seizing him beneath the arms and dragging him up to his feet. "So! Bend over!" He bent the choking fellow forward almost as if he were a swimmer overcome by water, signaled me to hold his head between my hands, and struck him sharply on the back between the shoulders with the heel of his left hand. With the first two fingers of his right hand he traced a cross against the man's bent back, and murmured something in swift Latin of which I caught but a few words: ". . . *Deus, in nomine tuo . . . exorcizo uos . . . uade retro, Satanas . . .*"

Bradley gave a tortured choke, like one about to strangle, and from his lips there came what seemed to be a puff of smoke. But it was no light ethereal vapor, for it plummeted to the floor and hit the polished oak with a soft slap, almost like the smacking of an open hand. For a moment it lay there like a little cone of swirling vapor, or, perhaps a pile of fine-ground powder, but suddenly it appeared to take on semblance of a shape not well defined, but vague and semi-formed, like a mass

of colloid substance, or a jelly-fish which had been brought up from the bay. It was hard to define it, for it seemed to shift its outline, flowing, quivering, ever changing, now resembling a splash of albumen, now drawing in upon itself until it was almost a perfect circle, then lengthening until it seemed to be an ovoid.

The thing disgusted me. It seemed like some great spider tentatively stretching out its claws in search of prey. De Grandin seemed to realize its potency for evil, too, for while he kept the beam of the flashlight upon it and muttered Latin conjurations at it through clenched teeth, I noticed that he stood well back from it, as though he feared that it might spring at him. But it did not spring. Rather, it seemed at somewhat of a loss which way to go or what to do until, as if it formed quick resolution, it rolled as swiftly as a drop of mercury released from a thermometer to the shattered window, mounted to the sill so quickly that we had difficulty following its movement, and disappeared into the night.

"What was it?" I asked rather shakily. "I never saw a thing like that before——"

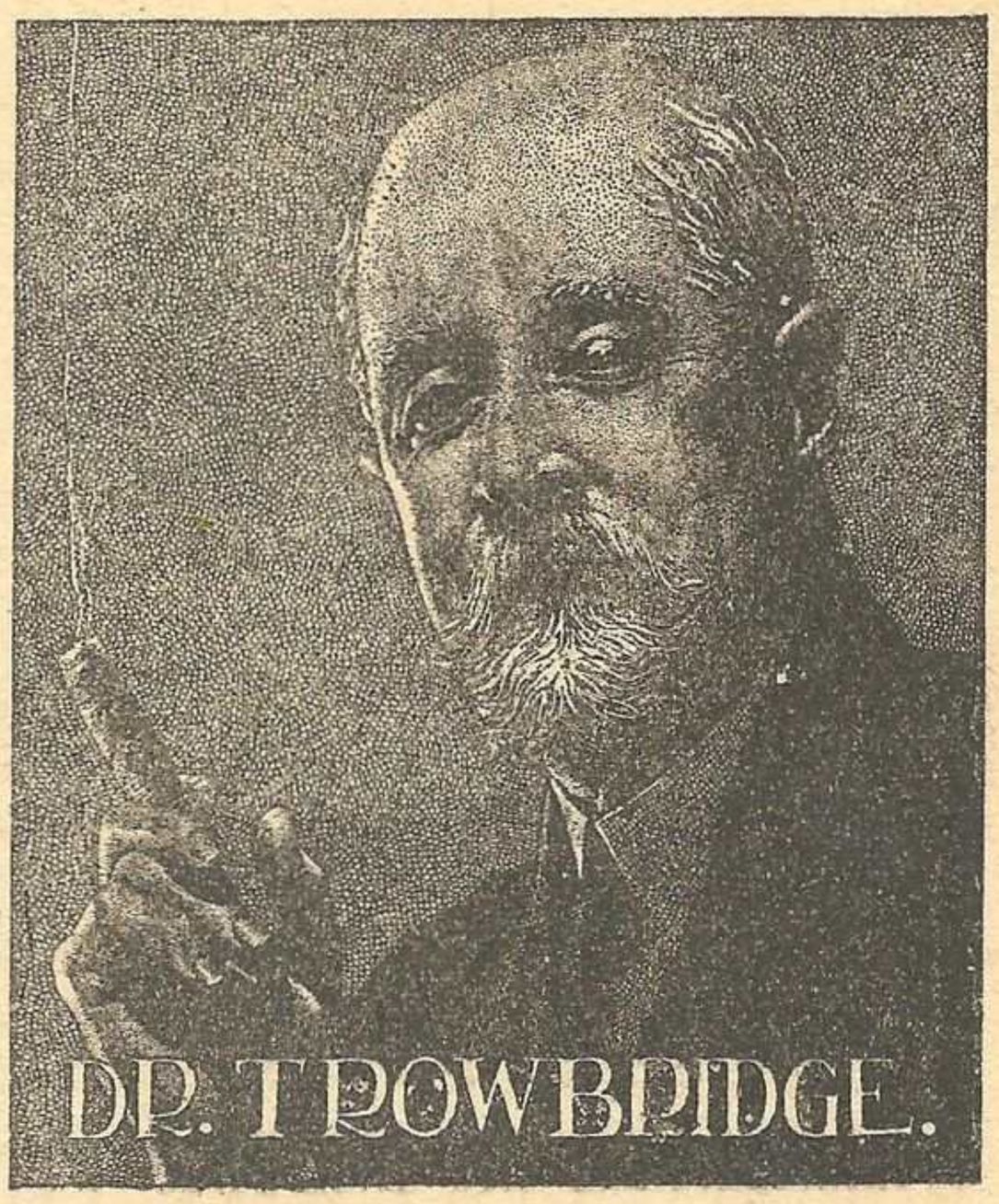
"*Parbleu,* you have not missed much amusement!" the Frenchman answered. "I cannot tell you what it was, my friend, but I know that it was very evil. It was that which killed the poor young Meadows—I would not give a centime for the life of anyone whom it attacked."

"It seemed to come from Bradley's throat——"

"Perfectly. Had we not acted quickly—and been lucky—it would have possessed him completely."

"Possessed? You mean in the Biblical sense?"

"*Précisément,* nothing less; our insti-




tutions for the insane are filled with people similarly afflicted."

"Something's choking me," moaned Bradley. "It's in my throat——"

"*Non,* it is no longer there," de Grandin soothed. "You feel the secondary pains, my friend. You fainted but you are all better, now. I should prescribe a glass of brandy. Indeed, I think that I shall join you in the medicine."

"THEN you've no idea what it could be?" I asked as we prepared for bed.

"On the contrary, I have several. When I first heard *Monsieur* Thorowgood's account of these strange happenings I was inclined to think he might be right in attributing the so-called phenomena to the servants' superstition or to human agencies. Even the murder of the stable boy might fit in with such a theory. Then this Thaddeus Bradley one accosted us, and I had the idea. 'This person doubtless is a charlatan,' I tell me, 'but he has played at spiritism for a long time. The claims of spirit-

ualism are debatable, to say the least. I have had a wide experience with the occult, but I would not say that it is possible for so-called mediums to get in contact with the spirits of the dead at will. On the other hand, I am convinced that there are many entities, both formed and unformed, who wish to break the barriers between the human and the super-human, or sub-human. For such as these the average medium is a gateway to desire. When he or she is entranced and off guard they enter through the breach left by his absent consciousness, usually with dire results to mankind. Also, although the usual medium is an arrant fraud, the very atmosphere in which he lives is favorable for such spirit-raids. I had no idea this Bradley could evoke the spirit which has worked his mischiefs in this place, but if I could make him go into the mummery of a séance we could get, perhaps, a glimpse of what we are opposed to. Conditions were ideal. Bradley focused all attention on himself, and every mind was intent on some manifestation of the other-worldly. The bars were down, the frontier was unguarded—if some malignant spirit hovered round the house and sought to force an entrance, this was his ideal opportunity. *Eh bien,* he recognized it!

"By his force he made Mademoiselle Doris pliant to his will. By the psychoplasm generated by the concentrated thought of all the company he assumed a sort of form and solidarity, and forced himself right into Bradley's throat. Had we not expelled him he would have found asylum there, fed and fattened on the poor man's physio-psychic substance, gained strength, and, like the fever germ which generates in one body, kills its host, then fares forth for more killing, would in time have issued from poor Bradley's corpse to wreak more havoc in the world."

"You think we've overcome it—whatever it is?"

"That would be a foolish boast at this time. I fear we have but started our campaign. We have balked, but not defeated it. Tomorrow, or the next day, or perhaps the next, we shall come to grips with it."

"You think it may be a malignant ghost, a murderer's, perhaps?"

"It may be, but I do not think so. I have met with such as that upon occasion, and usually they have a sort of pseudo-substance of their own. This one had not, but had to build himself a form of psychoplasm. As yet he is not very strong. He has not the staying power. His strength, by which his capacity for evil is bounded, flows and ebbs, like the tides. Whether he will grow too swiftly for us——"

"Then you think that it's an——"

"An elemental? *Bien oui.* I think that this is what for want of better nomenclature we call a 'spirit,' but it has never lived in human form. Evil, spiteful and dangerous it unquestionably is, but as yet it is evil discarnate. Should it become completely carnate our work will be that much more difficult."

"You've referred to psychoplasm several times. Just what is it?" I asked.

"*Tiens,* what is electricity? We know how to produce it, we can harness it to our needs, we recognize its results when we see them, but we have no definition for it. So with psychoplasm. It is something like the animal magnetism to which Mesmer attributed his success at hypnotism. It seems to be of nervous origin and physiologically connected with the internal secretory organs. As nearly as we can define it, it is an all-penetrating, imponderable emanation

which normally is dissipated quickly, but under certain conditions can be stabilized and energized by the intelligence of the living, or by discarnate intelligence. Often, but not always, it is luminous, the spirit-light we see at séances. Less often—*grâce à Dieu!*—it can in favorable conditions be made the vehicle to transmit force. It was through concrescence of this emanation that they which attacked Bradley became visible. But one wonders——"

He broke off, staring straight before him.

"What is it?"

"Where, by what means, did it get the necessary force to kill the Meadows boy?"

"Why——"

He waved my suggestion aside, and continued, speaking slowly, as though he thought aloud. "*Tenez,* we have more cause for worry. The psychoplasm which is loosed at every séance is the product of the minds of everybody present. It is put forth as a force.

"It leaves the body and the mind. Then what becomes of it? Is it reabsorbed? Perhaps. But does one reabsorb the very psychoplasm he put out? There is the question. We cannot surely say. Once it leaves its power house, or reservoir, it is beyond control of him from whom it emanated. It is quite likely to be seized and directed by"—he checked the possibilities off on his fingers—"stronger wills in the circle at the séance, lower, baser forms of discarnate intelligence, or by true ghosts, the spirits of ex-humans. Mademoiselle Doris was intent upon her music; she was also in a neutral state of mind, half doubting, half expecting something, though she knew not what. Certainly she was not intent on guarding from outside assaults. Thus she was an ideal prey for some mischievous thought-form."

"Great heavens, you think she was possessed, then?"

"No-o, neither possessed nor obsessed."

"What's the difference? I always thought the terms synonymous."

"By no means, not at all. In possession the demon steals the possessed's mind and personality. It is like vampirism, except the vampire animates a corpse; the possessing demon takes a living body from which he has forced its rightful occupant, and uses it for his own ends. In obsession the malignant spirit uses both mind and body of his victim, crippling or misdirecting the mentality, but not entirely ousting it.

"Mademoiselle Doris is nervous and high-strung, selfish, emotional, shallow, inclined to be erratic. When the spirit form attempted to invade her consciousness she gave way physically at once, and played a strain of wild and mocking music, as it bade. Mentally, she closed the bulkheads of her consciousness by going off into hysteria. Obsession has this much in common with hypnotism, it must have a mind on which to operate. No one can hypnotize an idiot or lunatic, neither can an idiot be obsessed. A person in the grip of hysteria is practically insane; therefore she was safe for the time being. But if he comes back to attack her while her mind is off its guard in sleep, or when she is controlled by evil thoughts, as in a fit of anger—*eh bien,* we may find our task a more complex one."

"But do we know it was hysteria and not possession?" I persisted. "That awful, ghoulish laugh and the expression on her face seemed scarcely human——"

He nodded thoughtfully. "Your

question is well put, my friend. But did not you notice how she came back to her senses when I slapped her in the face?"

"Yes, but——"

"No buts, if you will be so kind. In the possessed state the victim is unconscious of deeds done and words said. Thus far your case is good, but it is also true that one possessed is markedly insensitive to pain. The demon sitting at the wheel can feel no pain inflicted on the body he possesses; *alors*, we find a state of anesthesia in the possessed or obsessed. Hot objects may be handled with impunity, electric shocks are not felt.

"But was it so with Mademoiselle Doris? *Non.* I did not strike her hard, although I struck her sharply. Had she been truly possessed I might have beat her till her face was bloody, yet she would not have ceased her playing or her diabolic laughter. You see?"

"Yes, I suppose so. What's our next move?"

He patted back a yawn. "At present, *mon vieux*, I have a rendezvous with Morpheus. *A bientôt.*"

BEACHWOOD HOSPITAL where Daisy Mullins' broken clavicle was mending was a private institution with no wards and only about a hundred beds. As we strode along the corridor amid the faint but all-pervading atmosphere of antiseptics, drugs and shut-in humanity, I reflected Thorowgood had not been niggardly in providing treatment for his injured maid.

"Queer thing about that girl," said Doctor Broemel as he piloted us down the hallway, "she's not in much pain—it's just a simple fracture and it's healing beautifully—but her nerves are shot to pieces. She hardly speaks except to keep imploring us for a night nurse. That's absurd, of course. She doesn't need a night nurse any more than I need feather dusters on my heels. Of course, a tumble down a flight of stairs is quite a shock, but she should be well out of it by now. She's been here five days, and besides the broken clavicle and some slight contusions on the head she's as sound as a nut."

"Does she give reasons for desiring a night nurse?" de Grandin asked.

"No, she doesn't. Just keeps saying she's afraid to be left alone—with four nurses within twenty feet of her! Queer things, women patients."

"You are imparting information to us?" de Grandin answered as we stopped before the door to Daisy's room.

The place was all white tile and white enamel, with a narrow bed of spotless white. Daisy Mullins was half propped to a sitting posture, one hand strapped across her chest, a band of white gauze wound around her injured head, another bandage drawn beneath her chin to hold the first one firm. Somehow, with the wimple-like white cloths about her head and face, she had the look of a young nun, a nun carved out of tallow. Her cheeks seemed absolutely bloodless, so did her lips; her eyes seemed far too large for her countenance, and though they were light blue they seemed dark and cavernous against the pallor of her face. She glanced at us without interest. Indeed, I could not say she looked at us at all. Rather, it seemed, she was trying to see something just beyond her range of vision, and feared with desperate fear that she might sight it. It would be hard to make her tell us anything, I thought.

De Grandin laid the flowers and the huge box of bonbons he had brought

upon the bedside table, and stood gazing at her for a moment. Then, with his quick, infectious smile, "*Mademoiselle,* we have come to ask your help in fighting it," he announced.

The fear in her was suddenly a live thing, writhing like a wounded snake behind her eyes. "It?" she echoed in a whisper.

"Precisely. It. We cannot call it him or her; it is a thing — a very naughty thing, but we shall beat it, with your help."

"You can't fight it, it's no use. How can you fight a thing that you can't even see?"

"Ah, that is what you think, but you do not know me. I am a very clever person. I have neither fear of it nor doubt that I can conquer it, but I need your help. Will you not give it to me?"

"What d'ye want me to do?"

"Only tell us all about your accident —*non,* I mean your injury. Precisely how did it happen? We must know about this thing we are to fight, how it looked——"

"I tell you it didn't look at all. I couldn't see it. Only feel—and smell —it!"

"But if you could not see it, *Mademoiselle,* is it not possible that you fell down the stairs——"

"I didn't trip, I didn't fall; it threw me." The dammed-back memories of her ordeal flooded to her lips and she spoke rapidly, as if she had to finish in a given time. "It was last Wednesday morning, when I was takin' Miss Doris' breakfast tray up. I was goin' up the back stairs, and had reached the landin' on the second floor when it set on me. I didn't see nothin', there wasn't anything to see; but all at once I felt a pair o' hands about my throat, shakin' me till I dropped the tray, and then it threw me down the stairs so hard I tumbled half a dozen somersets as I went down, and then I must 'a' fainted, for the next thing I knew——"

"Quite yes, we know what happened next, but what of your assailant? Is it dark at the hall landing?"

"No, sir. It's quite light, for there's a window at the stair turn, and the sun was shinin'. If anything had been there I'd 'a' seen it, but there wasn't nothin' there, just an awful smell and then the hands around my throat——"

"Hands, *Mademoiselle?*"

"Well, no, sir, not exactly hands. It was more like someone wrapped a loop o' Turkish towel around me, and drew it tight an' sudden. A wet, cold towel, sir."

"And what kind of smell was it?.

"Dreadful, sir. It like to smothered me—like sumpin dead."

"Which did you notice first, the smell or the choking sensation?"

She wrinkled her smooth bandaged brow a moment, then: "I think it was the smell. I remember thinkin' that a rat must 'a' crawled into the walls and died, and just then it grabbed me."

De Grandin tweaked the waxed ends of his mustache. "A frightful smell, a choking grasp upon your throat, a blow that knocked you down the stairs," he recapitulated. "It was a most unpleasant experience——"

"An' that's not all, sir."

"No? What then?"

"It was here last night!"

"Name of a small blue man! Here, you say?"

"Yes, sir, that it was. I woke up last night about half-past nine, and smelt it in the room. Then, just as I was fixin' to cry out it snatched the bed-clothes off'n me an' piled 'em on my face. I know I wasn't dreamin', sir. How could I pull my covers off and put 'em on my face? They're tucked in at the foot

and sides, and I'm that helpless with my arm strapped up against me——"

"It is because of this you want a night nurse?" he broke in.

"Yes, sir. I'm scared. I'm terrible scared o' it."

"Very well, then you shall have one. I shall speak about it as we leave, and see you have a nurse with you all night."

"Oh, gee, thanks, sir!" The tired blood washed back in her wan cheeks. "I'll feel lots safer, now."

"THIS is the craziest business I ever heard of," I declared as we drove from the hospital. "There's no sense to any of it. Swan Upping's never had the reputation of being haunted, and certainly there's nothing about the Thorowgoods to attract ghostly visitants. Scott's as pragmatic as the iron pipe he manufactures, and from what I've seen of them I'd say that neither of his daughters is interested in anything appertaining to spirits, except the kind cocktails are made of. Why should a ghost move in on them?"

He nodded. "Why, indeed?"

"And it's such a silly, clownish sort of ghost. Scaring servants, snatching blankets off the beds, smashing crockery——"

"And killing people," he put in.

"Exactly. And killing people. If it confined itself to buffoonery or to malignancy I could understand it, but it seems like a peevish child turned loose in a toy shop. First it plays stupid, prankish tricks; then it kills as ruthlessly as a spoiled child might smash a toy; then goes back to silly, beetle-headed capers. Sometimes it's good-natured, sometimes vicious——"

"*Non*. There you make the mistake, *mon vieux*. It is never good-natured; always it is malignant."

"Why, but——"

"Consider, if you please: everything it does brings some measure of discomfort to someone, whether it be but the annoyance of knocking pots and pans and plates off of the kitchen shelves, tweaking bed-clothes off of sleepers, throwing a poor, frightened girl downstairs, or breaking the neck of a stable boy. You have compared it to a naughty child. *A juste titre*. Have you ever seen a small, dull-witted, rather vicious child play with a fly? Have you observed how he pulls off its wings, then watches it intently as it crawls in agony, thereafter pulling off its legs, one at a time, and pausing between torments to observe its helpless antics? Finally, you will recall, he kills it; not to put a period to its sufferings —oh, no—merely because he has grown tired of the cruel sport and can think of nothing else to do. There is playfulness of a sort in such actions, but there is a viciousness and cruelty, too. Does not all this remind you of the harmless pranks, as you have called them, of this poltergeist?"

Little chills of apprehension had begun to chase each other up my spine as he talked. To be confined in a house with an unseen but powerful malignancy, to be the subject of oafish experiments of a thing with the mentality of a four-year-old moron and the strength of a gorilla . . . "Is there any way for us to overcome this thing?" I asked.

For several seconds he did not reply, gazing straight before him, thughtful-eyed, tapping out a devil's tattoo on the silver handle of his cane. At last: "The thing confronting us is technically a poltergeist, though it displays some aspects I have not seen in such phenomena before. The distinguishing characteristics of polter-

geist hauntings are aimless violence unaccompanied by materialization of the manifesting entity. Generally these mischievous phenomena are associated directly or indirectly with children, adolescents, old, fragile people or those whose strength has been reduced by long illness. The skeptic's explanation is to attribute mischief or a desire to mystify or to be revenged on someone by the child, the invalid or the old one. However, it has been demonstrated that if the child or invalid suspected be removed and an accredited medium substituted, the disturbing manifestations will be continued as effectively as ever." He paused a moment, as if reaching out for loose thought-threads, and:

"Let's see if I understand you," I broke in. "A child, or someone in poor health, is generally associated with the antics of a poltergeist. Is there any explanation?"

"We cannot say, exactly. On a few occasions people in poor health, especially sufferers from enervating fevers or chronic disorders, have been seen to glow with, or exude, faint luminosity. This is scientifically attested. The haloes traditionally associated with the saints were not due to artists' whims, nor, as has sometimes been suggested, to poetic reference to the Pentecostal flames which shone on the Apostles. The records of the early and mediæval church testify that people noted for their piety and asceticism were often seen to radiate luminous auras. What the connection between bodily frailty and the emanation of this light may be we do not know; we only know there seems to be some. But may we not assume this luminosity is akin to astral light, psycho-physical in origin, and identical with psychoplasm? I think so. *Très bon.* The weakling child, the frail old man or woman, the invalid, can supply this force, then—"

"What about the adolescents? They are not often very frail——"

*"Précisément.* But they are peculiar people. We might almost say they are a third sex. As a physician you know of the derangement of the mind and body which accompanies adolescence; no one knows better that 'the long, long thoughts of youth' are often thoughts of suicide. The powerful derangements of our complex human organism accompanying adolescence make the boy or girl at that stage an ideal source of psychoplasm."

"But why the spiritualistic medium? They're mostly grown men and women; childish-minded, often, and sometimes rather frail, but——"

"Quite yes. But the medium who does not exude psychoplasm is no medium at all. Whether one is mediumistic because he is supplied with superabundant psychoplasm, or whether he is thus well stocked with it because he is a medium is as profitless to discuss as the question of priority between the chicken and the egg. *En tout cas,* mind cannot affect matter without the intervention of a human intermediary, whether it be a child, an invalid, an adolescent or a medium. One of these is always present. He supplies the needed psychoplasm to make the manifestation possible, serves as dynamo to generate the necessary energy——"

"But you just said that poltergeists do not materialize."

*"Bien oui.* Ordinarily they do not; also ordinarily they are harmless, though annoying. This one is very far from harmless, this one has partially materialized, and may succeed in doing so entirely. *Alors,* we can but reason by analogy. We cannot treat this as an ordinary poltergeist, nor can we look on it as a malignant strangler merely.

We must adapt our strategy to meet unusual conditions, and proceed most carefully."

A NOTE lay on de Grandin's dressing-table:

Dear Doctor: After what occurred in this house last night I do not dare stay here another minute. I am convinced the whole place reeks with evil and probably is haunted by a savage elemental which has but one desire, to work harm to humanity. Only fire can cleanse a place so fearfully attainted, and I have advised Mr. Thorowgood to burn the whole place, house, furniture and furnishings, without delay. Only by so doing can he hope to rid the neighborhood of a deadly peril, and it is my opinion that if he remains here with his family or permits this house to be inhabited, dreadful tragedy will result. For Mr. Thorowgood's sake, as well as your own, I hope you will add your advice to mine, and urge on him the need for acting quickly.

Yr. obt. svt.

THADDEUS BRADLEY.

"Well, what about it?" I demanded as I passed the letter back to him. "I've always heard that fire's a cure for hauntings."

His thrifty Gallic soul was horrified at the suggestion. "Burn this fine house, this so exquisite furniture? But no, I will not hear of it. We do not know just how this thing came in, nor why, but if it entered it can leave. Our problem is to provide an exit."

"Do you think it's an elemental?"

"*Je ne sais pas.* It may be so. The aimlessness of its violence indicates a very low mentality, and yet——" He broke off, staring into space.

"Yes?" I prompted.

"Have you not noticed an increasing method in its acts? At first it seemed experimenting, trying out its power; then when it had thrown the Mullins girl downstairs it murdered Meadows, then sought to give itself a ponderable form, to force an entrance into Monsieur Bradley's body. What will its next move be, more killing or a fresh effort to materialize? Which would you do, were you a poltergeist?"

"If I were a polt— don't be absurd!"

"I was never more serious, my friend. Conceive yourself as evil, infinitely evil, loving wickedness for its own sake and desiring above everything to gain strength that you might work more harm. What would you do?"

"Why, I suppose I'd try to draw vitality from some fresh victim. There's no strength to be had from the dead—"

"*Par la barbe d'un bouc vert!* Why had I not considered that? Come, my friend, let us hasten, let us rush, let us fly!"

"Where, in heaven's name——"

"To the hospital. At once. And we do go in heaven's name, too.

"You are invaluable, incomparable, my old one," he assured me as the big car gathered speed. "Had you not given me the suggestion——"

"Whatever are you talking of?"

"Of you, my priceless old one, and the hint that you let fall unwittingly. Did not you say, 'There's no strength to be had from the dead'?"

"Of course. Is there?"

"How do we know it? Who can say? In common with all discarnate intelligences, this thing we are opposed to gains strength from body emanations. Someone in that house had furnished these until it found itself sufficiently supplied with force to throw the poor young Mullins person down the stairs, to kill the so unfortunate young Meadows, finally to brave us all at the séance and make a bold attempt to take the Bradley person's body by assault. Is that not so?"

"Why, I suppose so, but——"

"No buts, I do entreat you. Where

else had it been yesternight? At half-past nine, to be specific?"

"Why, you can't mean the——"

"By blue, I do. I do, indeed! At half-past nine the Mullins girl was wakened by its noisome stink and felt it snatch the covers from her. She was its point of contact. It had handled her before, had overcome her. Is it not probable it had its motivating psychoplasm from her at the first?

"*Bien.* Let that question pass. We can return to it anon. What interests us immediately is that in a place devoted to the sick, the dying and the dead it would have found a feast of strength-imparting emanations, and that within half an hour of its visit there it returned to Swan Upping to do the poor young Meadows man to death.

"Now, attend me: Granted that such things thrive on vital force exuded from the human body, can we say with certainty—can we say at all, indeed—the flow of such force stops with death? Certainly, it continues during sleep. Is it not possible that the very process of disintegration of the body strengthens it? We know there are two kinds of death, somatic and molecular. A man 'dies' legally and perhaps medically when his respiration ceases and his heart stops beating. But though the man is dead his individual cells live on for varying periods. The brain, for instance, lives in this way for a possible ten minutes, while the muscle of the heart may survive twice that long. As for the hair-roots and the nails, they are the same a week succeeding death as they were when it occurred. Why should these emanations stop at death? The graves of saints become the shrines where miracles are wrought; many of the most revolting vampire phenomena are associated with unhallowed tombs. Why could not this thing have stored up energy from the sick, the dying and the dead in that hospital, then, after killing Meadows, used the vital force set free by him as rigor mortis crept upon him——"

"That's too fantastic——"

"*Parbleu,* the whole thing is fantastic! The fantastic seems to be the commonplace. Should things keep on as they are going, only the commonplace will be fantastic, I damn think!"

"IS THERE good reason for retaining the young Mullins woman here, *Monsieur?*" he questioned Doctor Broemel.

"Actually, there isn't, Doctor," Broemel answered. "Naturally, she's more comfortable here with our facilities than she would be at home, but she's certainly sufficiently advanced to go, if you desire it."

"*Merci beaucoup,*" de Grandin smiled.

Five minutes later, as we entered Daisy's room:

"*Mademoiselle,* we have the pleasant tidings for you. It has been decided that you leave the hospital——"

"But I can't do that, sir. I have no home. I'd been livin' in a furnished room in New York before I came down here in October, and I don't think Mr. Thorowgood will want me round the place, unable to dress myself, and everything——"

"*Ah bah,* you make the mistake. It is not to Swan Upping that you go, nor to a furnished room, but to an hotel at Asbury Park. A nurse will go with you to see that you are taken care of; arrangements will be made with a physician at the shore to inspect the progress of your healing fracture, and you shall stay there as the guest of Monsieur Thorowgood until you are all

well. Are not those joyous tidings?"

The girl burst into tears. "Y-you mean he's doing all this just for me—and my salary goes on, too, just like he said it would?"

"Indubitably, *Mademoiselle.*"

"When do I leave?"

"At once. As soon as you can get your clothes on. A motor is waiting to convey you to the shore."

"Oh, sir," she sobbed happily, "I'll never be able to tell him how delighted and surprized I am——"

*"Corbleu,"* de Grandin chuckled as we left the hospital, "I damn think he will be the surprized one, although, perhaps, he will not be delighted, when he learns what I have done in his name."

"What's our next move?" I asked as we drove back to Swan Upping.

"To ask some questions of Monsieur Thorowgood. One part of my surmise has proved correct. Undoubtlessly it was the Mullins girl from whom this haunting thing drew strength. You heard her say she came here in October. That must have been soon after Monsieur Thorowgood moved in. She is the perfect type, thin, inclined to anemia, undernourished. It was from her he drew his first vitality. Yes, certainly."

"Then why did he turn on her——"

*"Tiens.* He had no further use for her. He had gained sufficient strength from her to go about his own nefarious business; accordingly, he cast her away, literally."

"YES," Thorowgood told us, "the house was practically rebuilt, but we used old material as much as possible. The addition to the north wing where the servants' quarters are, and the smoke house which we use for wine cellar, were entirely built of old red brick and old timber. They've preserved the weathered colors beautifully, haven't they? No one would guess they weren't a part of the original house——"

"By blue, my friend, you would be surprized at things which people guess!" de Grandin interrupted. "Can you tell us where these bricks and timbers came from?"

"Why, yes. I picked 'em up at Blakeley's lumber yard at Toms River."

"Ah-ha, we make the progress. Excuse us, if you please. We go to interview this Monsieur Blakely."

His little round blue eyes were dancing with excitement; every now and then he gave a chuckle as we drove pell-mell toward Toms River.

"What are you so pleased about?" I asked. "You look like the cat that's just dined on the canary."

"Not quite, my friend," he answered with an impish grin. "Say rather that I look like one about to dine upon roast poltergeist." He raised his hands before him and brought them slowly toward each other. "We have him in a vise. Why did he trouble no one but the servants? Why was it that he failed to annoy guests or family until last night? Because he was a snob? *Mais non.* Because the servants' quarters and the smoke house where the so unfortunate young Meadows met his death were built of olden brick and timber——"

"What has that to do with it? The bricks and timbers of the main house are old as those they built the north wing and the smoke house with——"

*"Mais certainement,* but of a different origin undoubtlessly. Regard me, if you please:

"Thoughts are things. We cannot see or touch or weigh them, but they are things. They have the power to

impress themselves upon inanimate objects, on sticks and stones and bricks, and like wheat buried with the mummy they may lie dormant for an age, then sprout to life when given new and favorable environment. The sorcerer who treasures earth from an unhallowed grave or the rope which hanged some master criminal is practising more than mere symbolism, I assure you.

"Again: In every case of poltergeist activities we find that two things are essential, physical limits, as of walls, and some mediumistic person to transform the stored-up evil force from static to dynamic. Here we have the ideal combination, bricks and boards and timbers which undoubtlessly have been in contact with some evil-living, evil-thinking persons, and a source of psychoplasm—Daisy Mullins—to energize the accumulated force, to focus it and make it possible for it to have a physical and fulminant effect."

"Aren't you taking a lot for granted?"

He fairly glowered at me. "When you see a patient with high temperature, nose-bleed, abdominal tenderness and distension and an inclination toward profound lethargy, do you have to take a blood test, must you see the typhosus bacillus in your microscope before you decide he is suffering from enteric fever and begin appropriate treatment? Of course not. So in this case. So many diagnostic factors are apparent that I have no hesitancy in predicting what we shall learn when we speak with the peerless lumberman at Toms River."

"SURE, I remember that junk," the Blakeley foreman said. "It lay around our yard ten years. I thought that we were stuck with it for keeps till Mr. Thorowgood saw it."

"Ah, yes, and could you tell us where it came from?"

"Sure. Centermead, Doc Bouton's sanitarium. The old man ran a private bughouse there for close on thirty years, and went crazy as a basketful o' eels before he finally killed hisself. Say, how'd you 'a' liked to be shut up in a nut college with the doctor loony as a chinch-bug, beatin' up an' torturin' the patients, an' even killin' 'em, sometimes?"

Jules de Grandin drew a deep breath. "By damn, I can inform the cross-eyed world such treatment would have driven off my goat," he answered solemnly.

The foreman was still gaping when we drove away.

"YOU see, it matches perfectly," he said triumphantly. "Every necessary element is present. The long association with the mad—the living dead—the lustful cruelty of a doctor who had yielded up his sanity through contact with the sick in mind, the suffering, the torture, the despair. . . . But yes, could these bricks and timbers speak they would relate a tale to give us nightmare of the soul for many years to come. It is small wonder that the haunting influence acts with low intelligence; it is the tincture, the very distillate of compressed madness with which these bricks are saturated to the overflowing point. All that was needed was the energizing force supplied by Daisy Mullins."

"And what do we do next?"

"*Mais cela parle tout seul*—the thing speaks for itself. We have but to demolish that north wing and smoke house, remove the source of the infection, and the hauntings will be cured. My friend, this Jules de Grandin is one devilish clever fellow. Is he not?"

"I've heard you say so," I returned.

A wrecking-crew was already at work when we caught the solitary eastbound train for Harrisonville next morning.

"DOCTOR DE GRANDIN?" a Western Union messenger accosted us as we drew up before my house. "I have an urgent message for you."

The missive was brief with telegraph terseness, but imperative: "Men unable to continue work because of accidents stop need your advice immedidiately."

"Take the extension and listen as we talk, if you please," he asked me as he rang up Thorowgood. "I should like to have you hear the conversation.

*"Allo?"* as the connection was made. "It is I, de Grandin. What seems to be the matter, if you please?"

"Plenty," Thorowgood answered tersely. "You'd hardly left when things began to happen. A workman fell off the roof and broke his leg. He swore somebody pushed him, but I smelled liquor on his breath, so I can't be sure o' that. Then another man got a broken arm when half a dozen bricks fell on him; one of 'em hit his foot with a pick-ax and nearly cut it off. The place looked like a battlefield, and the men quit cold. Told me to go jump in the lake when I offered double time if they'd stay on the job. What're we going to do?"

*"Eh bien,* he is of the obduracy, this one. He does not take his ouster calmly."

"See here, this is no time to wisecrack. This thing has hurt a girl, killed a man and injured half a dozen others. Now it takes possession of my house. How're we going to get rid of it?"

"I would suggest you leave him in possession overnight. Move your entourage to an hotel, and come back tomorrow morning with a fresh crew of workingmen prepared to dynamite the walls. Also, bring back the young Mullins girl. I have need of her. Doctor Trowbridge and I will motor down and meet you at Swan Upping in the morning. *Au 'voir,* my friend.

"You will excuse me?" he asked as he put the monophone back in its cradle. "I have work to do. There are authorities to be consulted and *matériel* to be collected. I shall be back for dinner."

It was not until dessert that he spoke concerning his work of the afternoon. Then, irrelevantly: "You know the works of Judge Pursuivant?" he asked.

"Who?"

"The very learned, very able, very well-informed Keith Hilary Pursuivant. What a scholar, what a man! His book *The Unknown that Terrifies* is worth the ransom of an emperor to any occultist. I read him this afternoon, and in him I found comfort. Silver, says the learned Judge, is specific protection against every form of evil. You apprehend?"

"Was that bundle you brought home some magic formula of his?"

"Not precisely," he grinned. *"Monsieur le Juge* supplied the thought, I follow his suggestion. I secured a supply of silver wire and netting."

"Silver wire—for goodness sake!"

*"Précisément, mon vieux.* For goodness' sake, no less."

"But why silver? Wouldn't any other metal do as well?"

"By no means. Silver, as the learned judge has pointed out, with a number of citations, is a potent force against all evil. Iron, most earthly of all metals, is abhorrent to the ghostly tribe, so much so that when Solomon King of Israel reared his temple to the Most

High God with the help of Hiram King of Tyre and that great architect Hiram the Widow's Son, no tool of iron was heard to ring throughout the building operation, since they were helped by friendly *djinn* who could not have abided in the neighborhood of sharpened iron. But for discarnate evil, evil vague and without definition, silver is the better metal. Ghostly foes incapable of being killed to death with leaden bullets, witches, werewolves and vampires, all are vulnerable to silver shot. Does not your own Monsieur Whittier, who was a very learned man as well as a great poet, mention it? But certainly. In his narrative of the garrison beleaguered by a phantom foe he relates:

"Ghosts or witches," said the captain, "thus I foil the Evil One!"
And he rammed a silver button from his doublet down his gun.

"And you expect to overcome this powerful thing with silver netting and some wire?" I asked incredulously.

"I expect to overcome him in that manner," he replied in a flat, toneless voice, fixing an unwinking stare of challenge on me.

THE scene which greeted us at Swan Upping was reminiscent of a circus about to strike camp. Two trucks stood idling on the rear driveway; a crew of wreckers waited to commence work; back and to one side was a small red wagon with the word EXPLOSIVES lettered ominously on its sides and front.

"*Très bon.* All is prepared, I see," de Grandin smiled. "Where is the Mullins girl, if you please?"

"Waiting there with the nurse," Thorowgood waved toward a limousine.

"Ah, yes. Will you excuse me while I persuade her?" For some five minutes he engaged her in a whispered conversation, then came hurrying back to us. "She has consented, it is well," he told us as he cut the wrappings of his parcel.

His preparations were made quickly. A bed of blankets was laid in the partially demolished smoke house and Daisy Mullins lay on it. Working deftly he enveloped her in length on length of silver-wire gauze, laminating each fold on the next until she was encased in the light netting like a mummy in its wrappings. Only at her mouth did he permit an opening, and over this he hinged a little door of netting and tied a length of thread to it.

"*Bien,*" he patted her encouragingly. "I shall be but little longer, *Mademoiselle.*"

With heavier silver wire he wove a basket-like covering for her, leaving something like six inches between her body and the cage.

"You are quite comfortable?" he asked. She nodded, looking at him with wide eyes in which her confidence in him was struggling with abysmal fear. From the pocket of his jacket he drew a little mirror to which a string had been attached. This he twisted round his left forefinger, permitting the glass to hang pendulumwise. "Eyes upon the mirror, if you please," he ordered, as he began to swing it slowly back and forth.

"Tick—tock; tick—tock!" he recited in a monotone, keeping time to the slow oscillation of the glass. "The clock is ticking, *Mademoiselle,* slowly, slowly, ver-ry slowly. Tick—tock; tick—tock; you are ver-ry tired. You are so very weary you must sleep; sleep is the thing you most desire. Sleep and rest, rest and sleep. Tick—tock; tick—tock!"

The girl's eyes wavered back and

forth, following the gleaming arc the mirror marked, but as he droned his monody they became heavy-lidded, finally closed. "Sleep—sleep," he whispered. "Tick—tock; sleep—sleep!"

"Now what——" I began, but he silenced me with a fierce gesture and stood looking at the sleeping girl intently.

For perhaps two minutes he stood statue-still regarding her; then carefully, like one who tiptoes through a room where a restless sleeper lies, he bent down, took a length of silver wire in his right hand, and grabbed the thread attached to the hinged door above her mouth. *"Regardez, s'il vous plaît!"* he whispered almost soundlessly.

I started, but kept silent. From between her lightly parted lips a little thread of vapor issued. "Breath," I told myself. "It's cold today. . . ."

But it was not breath. Scarcely thick enough for liquid, it was yet too ponderable to be called vapor, and seemed to have a semi-solid, gelatinous consistency. Too, it flowed in quasi-liquid fashion across her lower lip, but with a quivering instability, like quicksilver. Then it seemed to lighten and assume a gaseous buoyancy and hover in mid-air above her. It was taking form, too, of a sort, not definite, but shifting, changing, seeming to flow and melt upon itself and, ameba-like, to put forth gastropodal extensions of its substance. Like an animalculum in tainted water it floated driftingly above the girl's lips, joined to her lightly opened mouth by a ligament of smoky-seeming semi-fluid; waxing larger every second. In the quarter light of the smoke house it gleamed and glistened with a putrid phosphorescent glow. Gradually, insensibly at first, but growing stronger every instant, the foul effluvium of its overpowering stench spread through the place, fulsome, nauseous, sickening.

"I think that is enough, me," de Grandin said, and gave the string he held a sharp pull. The hinged deadfall above the girl's face-covering dropped, shearing through the foggy wisp that issued from her lips. The inchoate, amorphous thing that floated over her suddenly contracted, bent its finger-like extensions in upon itself, like a spider curling up when sprayed with an insecticide. Then it bounced toward de Grandin as surely and purposefully as though it saw him and intended to attack him.

He raised his two-foot length of silver wire like a sword, but its protection was unneeded. The almost shapeless mass of foulness that rushed at him struck full against the silver cage that he had woven over Daisy, and, as if it struck a spring, bounced back again.

There was something fascinating, and revolting, in its antics. It was like one of those toys of the physical laboratory called Cartesian devils which, as the membranes of their bottles are pressed down or released, rise, sink or float according to the pressure. Up it surged until it struck the wire cage; then down again it recoiled till it touched the silver netting which he had wrapped round the girl. Then up it rushed again, only to be driven back by contact with the silver cage.

*"Dans les mâchoires de l'étau!* I have you in the vise, my most unpleasant one!" de Grandin cried triumphantly. "Take her up, Friend Trowbridge; help me with her, if you will."

Carefully we lifted the unconscious girl and bore her to the waiting car. As we came out into the light I noticed that the foul thing hovering over her became transparent, almost invisible.

But its overpowering stench remained to tell us it was there.

ELECTRIC drills worked furiously, dynamite was placed at proper intervals, and at a signal battery plungers were thrust down. There was a detonation and a rumbling roar, and walls and roofs of servants' quarters and smoke house came toppling down in ruins.

The wreckers worked with methodical speed. Load after load of shattered brick and timber was piled upon the trucks and hustled to the river, dumped into the turbid, frosty water, and replaced by other loads. By noon the wreckage had been cleared away, and only empty gaping cellars and a brash of broken bricks and mortar told where the structures had been.

"Stand back, my friends!" de Grandin ordered. "I am about to liberate him!"

Holding a lash of wire defensively, he bent and wrenched an opening in the cage above the sleeping girl.

"Begone, avaunt, aroint thee, naughty thing!" he commanded, switching vigorously at the almost invisible globular shape that hovered in midair above her body.

There was a flicker, as of unseen lightning, and a soughing *whish!* as if a sudden strong wind blew past us. In a moment the foul odor faded, growing fainter every instant. Before five minutes had elapsed it had disappeared.

"And that, my friends," he told us, "is indubitably that."

THE dinner had been perfect as only the inspired chef of the Reading Club could make it. Oysters and champagne, turtle soup with dry sherry, sole with chablis, partridge with Château Lafite . . . de Grandin passed a lotus-bud shaped brandy sniffer back and forth beneath his nose and turned his eyes up to the ceiling with a look of ecstasy. *"What is it that the vintners buy one-half so precious as the stuff they sell?"* he misquoted Omar Khayyám.

"Never mind the poetry," Thorowgood commanded. "How'd you do it? I know you put it over, but——"

"But it was so simple, *Monsieur,*" supplied Jules de Grandin. "Simple like the binomial theorem or the hypothesis of the Herr Professor Einstein. Yes." He warmed the glass between his cupped palms, inhaled again, then drank as if it were a solemn rite he practised.

"My friend Judge Pursuivant gave me the necessary hint," he added. "Granted silver would repulse this thing, we were enabled to confine it while we wrecked the buildings from which it emanated. So we put the Mullins girl in his way, enabled him to half-materialize, and then—*eh bien,* he was excessively annoyed when he found what we had done to him, *n'est-ce-pas?*

"It required but a brief investigation to find that these bricks and timbers came from an old house where evil had run riot. Evil thoughts, evil sentiments, evil instincts, despair and violent death had washed those bricks like ocean waves. They were saturated with it. They were very reservoirs of wicked power, waiting only for some mediumistic help to bring them into focus, just as sunlight needs a burning-glass to enable it to start a fire. This focussing-medium was supplied—all unconsciously—by the poor Mullins girl. The static power of evil became dynamic force by use of psychoplasm which it stole from her. You thwarted it when you removed her to the hospital, but it pursued her thither, renewed its strength, killed the stable boy and almost took

possession of the Bradley person's body. When we removed her from the hospital its source of energy was weakened, but it still had strength enough to fight the wreckers off.

"Then I took counsel with myself. We would bring the Mullins girl to it. We would place her in a deep, hypnotic sleep. There was its chance. It could not resist the opportunity of strengthening itself from her. Ha, but it did not take me into its calculations! I had made arrangements, me. Her I enclosed in silver netting, so it could not do her injury. Only her mouth did I leave unprotected, and as soon as it had partially materialized so we could see it, I dropped the trap across its source of energy, and left it high and dry, unable to retreat, unable to go forward, hemmed in on every side by silver. Then while we held him incommunicado we pulled down his nest about his ears. We robbed him of his power house, his source of potency.

"Experience has taught us that a poltergeist cannot operate without material limits, such as walls, and neither can he operate without an energizing medium. We may compare him to gunpowder. Drop it loose upon the earth and nothing happens. Touch fire to it and it goes up in harmless flame and smoke. But confine it in a twist of paper, and touch fire to it, and *pouf!* we have the grand Fourth of July explosion. So with the poltergeist. The walls are to him as the paper covering is to the squib, *le pétard*, the—how do you call him?—the cracker-of-fire? Very well. It needs then but the medium to set him off, and there he is. Unconfined, he is harmless. Remember how those bricks lay for ten years in Monsieur Blakeley's lumber yard and nothing untoward happened? That was because they lay in the open. But when you built them into solid walls——"

"D'ye think it'll be safe to have that Mullins girl around the house? She's been a faithful little thing, standing by me when the other servants ran out, but——"

"You need not distress yourself, *Monsieur*. The evil-saturated bricks have been dumped in the river. They are no longer a potential source of harm. Just as the poltergeist could not function without her, she cannot energize a power which is not present."

"Where do you suppose that poltergeist force went?" I put in.

"*Tenez*, who can say? Where does the flame go when one blows the candle out? He is obliterated, dispersed, swallowed up—*comme ça!*"

He raised the brandy sniffer to his lips and drained it at a gulp.

"None of the devils and phantoms could tell us ought concerning the tablet."

# The Double Shadow

By CLARK ASHTON SMITH

*A fascinating weird fantasy about strange shadows, and things that should creep rather than walk, by a master craftsman of fantastic fiction*

MY NAME is Pharpetron, among those who have known me in Poseidonis: but even I, the last and most forward pupil of the wise Avyctes, know not the name of that which I am fated to become ere to-morrow. Therefore, by the ebbing silver lamps, in my master's marble house above the loud sea, I write this tale with a hasty hand, scrawling an ink of wizard virtue on the gray, priceless, antique parchment of dragons. And having written, I shall enclose the pages in a sealed cylinder of orichalchum, and shall cast the cylinder from a high window into the sea, lest that which I am

doomed to become should haply destroy the writing. And it may be that mariners from Lephara, passing to Umb and Pneor in their tall triremes, will find the cylinder; or fishers will draw it from the wave in their seines; and having read my story, men will learn the truth and take warning; and no man's feet, henceforward, will approach the pale and demon-haunted house of Avyctes.

For six years I have dwelt apart with the aged master, forgetting youth and its wonted desires in the study of arcanic things. We have delved more deeply than all others before us in an interdicted lore; we have called up the dwellers in sealed crypts, in fearful abysses beyond space. Few are the sons of mankind who have cared to seek us out among the bare, wind-worn crags; and many, but nameless, are the visitants who have come to us from further bourns of place and time.

Stern and white as a tomb is the mansion wherein we dwell. Far below, on black, naked reefs, the northern sea climbs and roars indomitably, or ebbs with a ceaseless murmur as of armies of baffled demons; and the house is filled evermore, like a hollow-sounding sepulcher, with the drear echo of its tumultous voices; and the winds wail in dismal wrath around the high towers but shake them not. On the seaward side the mansion rises sheerly from the straight-falling cliff; but on the other sides there are narrow terraces, grown with dwarfish, crooked cedars that bow always beneath the gale. Giant marble monsters guard the landward portals; and huge marble women ward the strait porticos above the surf; and mighty statues and mummies stand everywhere in the chambers and along the halls. But, saving these, and the entities we have summoned, there is none to companion us; and liches and shadows have been the servitors of our daily needs.

Not without terror (since man is but mortal) did I, the neophyte, behold at first the abhorrent and tremendous faces of them that obeyed Avyctes. I shuddered at the black writhing of submundane things from the many-volumed smoke of the braziers; I cried in horror at the gray foulnesses, colossal, without form, that crowded malignly about the drawn circle of seven colors, threatening unspeakable trespass on us that stood at the center. Not without revulsion did I drink wine that was poured by cadavers, and eat bread that was purveyed by phantoms. But use and custom dulled the strangeness, destroyed the fear; and in time I believed implicitly that Avyctes was the lord of all incantations and exorcisms, with infallible power to dismiss the beings he evoked.

WELL had it been for Avyctes—and for me—if the master had contented himself with the lore preserved from Atlantis and Thule, or brought over from Mu. Surely this should have been enough: for in the ivory-sheeted books of Thule there were blood-writ runes that would call the demons of the fifth and seventh planets if spoken aloud at the hour of their ascent; and the sorcerers of Mu had left record of a process whereby the doors of far-future time could be unlocked; and our fathers, the Atlanteans, had known the road between the atoms and the path into far stars. But Avyctes thirsted for a darker knowledge, a deeper empery. . . . And into his hands, in the third year of my novitiate, there came the mirror-bright tablet of the lost serpent people.

At certain hours, when the tide had fallen from the steep rocks, we were wont to descend by cavern-hidden stairs to a cliff-walled crescent beach behind the promontory on which stood Avyctes' house. There, on the dun, wet sands, beyond the foamy tongues of the surf, would lie the worn and curious driftage of alien shores and trove the hurricanes had cast up from unsounded deeps. And there we had found the purple and sanguine volutes of great shells, and rude lumps of ambergris, and white flowers of perpetually blooming coral; and once, the barbaric idol of green brass that had been the figurehead of a galley from far hyperboreal isles. . . .

There had been a great storm, such as must have riven the sea to its last profound; but the tempest had gone by with morning, and the heavens were cloudless on that fatal day; and the demon winds were hushed among the black crags and chasms; and the sea lisped with a low whisper, like the rustle of gowns of samite trailed by fleeing maidens on the sand. And just beyond the ebbing wave, in a tangle of russet sea-weed, we descried a thing that glittered with blinding sun-like brillance.

And running forward, I plucked it from the wrack before the wave's return, and bore it to Avyctes.

THE tablet was wrought of some nameless metal, like never-rusting iron, but heavier. It had the form of a triangle and was broader at the widest than a man's heart. On one side it was wholly blank, like a mirror. On the other side many rows of small crooked ciphers were incised deeply in the metal, as if by the action of some mordant acid; and these ciphers were not the hieroglyphs or alphabetic characters of any language known to the master or to me.

Of the tablet's age and origin we could form no conjecture; and our erudition was wholly baffled. For many days thereafter we studied the writing and held argument that came to no issue. And night by night, in a high chamber closed against the perennial winds, we pondered over the dazzling triangle by the tall straight flames of silver lamps. For Avyctes deemed that knowledge of rare value, some secret of an alien or elder magic, was held by the clueless crooked ciphers. Then, since all our scholarship was in vain, the master sought another divination, and had recourse to wizardy and necromancy. But at first, among all the devils and phantoms that answered our interrogation, none could tell us aught concerning the tablet. And any other than Avyctes would have despaired in the end . . . and well would it have been if he had despaired, and had sought no longer to decipher the writing.

The months and years went by with a slow thundering of seas on the dark rocks, and a headlong clamor of winds around the white towers. Still we continued our delving and evocations; and farther, always farther we went into lampless realms of space and spirit; learning, perchance, to unlock the hithermost of the manifold infinities. And at whiles Avyctes would resume his pondering of the sea-found tablet, or would question some visitant regarding its interpretation.

At length, by the use of a chance formula, in idle experiment, he summoned up the dim, tenuous ghost of a sorcerer from prehistoric years; and the ghost in a thin whisper of uncouth, forgotten speech, informed us that the letters on the tablet were those of a language

of the serpent-men, whose primal continent had sunk eons before the lifting of Hyperborea from the ooze. But the ghost could tell us naught of their significance; for, even in his time, the serpent-people had become a dubious legend; and their deep, antehuman lore and sorcery were things irretrievable by man.

Now, in all the books of conjuration owned by Avyctes, there was no spell whereby we could call the lost serpent-men from their fabulous epoch. But there was an old Lemurian formula, recondite and uncertain, by which the shadow of a dead man could be sent into years posterior to those of his own lifetime, and could be recalled after an interim by the wizard. And the shade, being wholly insubstantial, would suffer no harm from the temporal transition, and would remember, for the information of the wizard, that which he had been instructed to learn during the journey.

So, having called again the ghost of the prehistoric sorcerer, whose name was Ybith, Avyctes made a singular use of several very ancient gums and combustible fragments of fossil wood; and he and I, reciting the responses of the formula, sent the thin spirit of Ybith into the far ages of the serpent-men.

And after a time which the master deemed sufficient, we performed the curious rites of incantation that would recall Ybith. And the rites were successful; and Ybith stood before us again, like a blown vapor that is nigh to vanishing. And in words faint as the last echo of perishing memories, the specter told us the key to the meaning of the letters, which he had learned in the prehuman past. And after this, we questioned Ybith no more but suffered him to return unto slumber and oblivion.

Then, knowing the import of the tiny, twisted ciphers, we read the tablet's writing and made thereof a transliteration, though not without labor and difficulty, since the very phonetics of the serpent tongue, and the symbols and ideas, were somewhat alien to those of mankind. And when we had mastered the inscription, we found that it contained the formula for a certain evocation which, no doubt, had been used by the serpent sorcerers. But the object of the evocation was not named; nor was there any clue to the nature or identity of that which would come in answer to the rites. And, moreover, there was no corresponding rite of exorcism nor spell of dismissal.

Great was Avyctes' jubilation, deeming that we had learned a lore beyond the memory or prevision of man. And though I sought to dissuade him, he resolved to employ the evocation, arguing that our discovery was no chance thing but was fatefully predestined from the beginning. And he seemed to think lightly of the menace that might be brought upon us by the conjuration of things whose nativity and attributes were wholly obscure. "For," said Avyctes, "I have called up, in all the years of my sorcery, no god or devil, no demon or lich or shadow which I could not control and dismiss at will. And I am loath to believe that any spirit or power beyond the subversion of my spells could have been summoned by a race of serpents, whatever their skill in necromancy and demonism."

So, seeing that he was obstinate, and acknowledging him for my master in all ways, I agreed to aid Avyctes in the experiment, though not without misgivings. And then we gathered to-

gether, in the chamber of conjuration, at the specified hour and configuration of the stars, the equivalents of sundry rare materials that the tablet had instructed us to use in the ritual.

Of much that we did, and of certain agents that we employed, it were better not to tell; nor shall I record the shrill, sibilant words, difficult for beings not born of serpents to articulate, whose intonation formed a signal part of the ceremony. Toward the last, we drew a triangle on the marble floor with the fresh blood of birds; and Avyctes stood at one angle, and I at another; and the gaunt umber mummy of an Atlantean warrior, whose name had been Oigos, was stationed at the third angle. And standing thus, Avyctes and I held tapers of corpse-tallow in our hands, till the tapers had burned down between our fingers as into a socket. And in the outstretched palms of the mummy of Oigos, as if in shallow thuribles, talc and asbestos burned, ignited by a strange fire whereof we knew the secret. At one side we had traced on the floor an infrangible ellipse, made by an endless linked repetition of the twelve unspeakable Signs of Oumor, to which we could retire if the visitant should prove inimical or rebellious. We waited while the pole-circling stars went over, as had been prescribed. Then, when the tapers had gone out between our seared fingers, and the talc and asbestos were wholly consumed in the mummy's eaten palms, Avyctes uttered a single word whose sense was obscure to us; and Oigos, being animated by sorcery and subject to our will, repeated the word after a given interval, in tones that were hollow as a tomb-born echo; and I, in my turn, also repeated it.

Now, in the chamber of evocation, before beginning the ritual, we had opened a small window giving upon the sea, and had likewise left open a high door on the hall to landward, lest that which came in answer to us should require a spatial mode of entrance. And during the ceremony, the sea became still and there was no wind, and it seemed that all things were hushed in expectation of the nameless visitor. But after all was done, and the last word had been repeated by Oigos and me, we stood and waited vainly for a visible sign or other manifestation. The lamps burned stilly; and no shadows fell, other than were cast by ourselves and Oigos and by the great marble women along the walls. And in the magic mirrors we had placed cunningly, to reflect those that were otherwise unseen, we beheld no breath or trace of any image.

At this, after a given interim, Avyctes was sorely disappointed, deeming that the evocation had failed of its purpose; and I, having the same thought, was secretly relieved. We questioned the mummy of Oigos, to learn if he had perceived in the room, with such senses as are peculiar to the dead, the sure token or doubtful proof of a presence undescribed by us the living. And the mummy gave a necromantic answer, saying that there was nothing.

"Verily," said Avyctes, "it were useless to wait longer. For surely in some way we have misunderstood the purport of the writing, or have failed to duplicate the matters used in the evocation, or the correct intonement of the words. Or it may be that in the lapse of so many eons, the thing that was formerly wont to respond has long ceased to exist, or has altered in its attributes, so that the spell is now void and valueless."

To this I assented readily, hoping that the matter was at an end. And

afterward we resumed our habitual studies, but made no mention to each other of the strange tablet or the vain formula.

EVEN as before, our days went on; and the sea climbed and roared in white fury on the cliffs; and the winds wailed by in their unseen, sullen wrath, bowing the dark cedars as witches are bowed by the breath of Taaran, god of Evil. Almost, in the marvel of new tests and cantraips, I forgot the ineffectual conjuration; and I deemed that Avyctes had forgotten it.

All things were as of yore, to our sorcerous perception; and there was naught to trouble us in our wisdom and power and serenity, which we deemed secure above the sovereignty of kings. Reading the horoscopic stars, we found no future ill in their aspect; nor was any shadow of bale foreshown to us through geomancy, or such other modes of divination as we employed. And our familiars, though grisly and dreadful to mortal gaze, were wholly obedient to us the masters.

Then, on a clear summer afternoon, we walked, as was often our custom, on the marble terrace behind the house. In robes of ocean-purple, we paced among the windy trees with their blown, crooked shadows; and there, following us, I saw the blue shadow of Avyctes and my own shadow on the marble; and between them, an adumbration that was not wrought by any of the cedars. And I was greatly startled, but spoke not of the matter to Avyctes, and observed the unknown shadow with covert care.

I saw that it followed closely the master's shadow, keeping ever the same distance. And it fluttered not in the wind, but moved with a flowing as of some heavy, thick and purulent liquid; and its color was not blue nor purple nor black, nor any other hue to which man's eyes are habituated, but a hue as of some darker putrescence than that of death; and its form was altogether monstrous, seeming to move as if cast by one that trod erect, but having the squat head and long, undulant body of things that should creep rather than walk.

Avyctes heeded not the shadow, and still I feared to speak, though I thought it an ill thing for the master to be companioned thus. And I moved closer to him, in order to detect by touch or other perception the invisible presence that had cast the adumbration. But the air was void to sunward of the shadow; and I found nothing opposite the sun nor in any oblique direction, though I searched closely, knowing that certain beings cast their shadows in such wise.

After a while, at the customary hour, we returned by the coiling stairs and monster-flanked portals into the house. And I saw that the strange adumbration moved ever behind the shadow of Avyctes, falling horrible and unbroken on the steps and passing clearly separate and distinct amid the long umbrage of the towering monsters. And in the dim halls beyond the sun, where shadows should not have been, I beheld with terror the loathly, distorted blot, having a pestilential hue without name, that followed Avyctes as if in lieu of his own extinguished shadow. And all that day, everywhere that we went, at the table served by specters, or in the mummy-warded room of volumes and books, the thing pursued Avyctes, clinging to him even as leprosy to the leper. And still the master had perceived it not; and still I forbore to warn him, hoping that the visitant would withdraw in its own time, going obscurely as it had come.

But at midnight, when we sat together by the silver lamps, pondering the blood-writ runes of Hyperborea, I saw that the shadow had drawn closer to the shadow of Avyctes, towering behind his chair on the wall. And the thing was a streaming ooze of charnel pollution, a foulness beyond the black leprosies of hell; and I could bear it no more; and I cried out in my fear and loathing, and informed the master of its presence.

BEHOLDING now the shadow, Avyctes considered it closely; and there was neither fear nor awe nor abhorrence in the deep-graven wrinkles of his visage. And he said to me at last: "This thing is a mystery beyond my lore: but never, in all the practise of my art, has any shadow come to me unbidden. And since all others of our evocations have found answer ere this, I must deem that the shadow is a very entity, or the shade or sign of an entity, that has come in belated response to the formula of the serpent-sorcerers, which we thought powerless and void. And I think it well that we should now repair to the chamber of conjuration, and interrogate the shadow in such manner as we may."

We went forthwith into the chamber of conjuration, and made such preparations as were both needful and possible. And when we were prepared to question it, the unknown shadow had drawn closer still to the shadow of Avyctes, so that the clear space between the two was no wider than the thickness of a necromancer's rod.

Now, in all feasible ways, we interrogated the shadow, speaking through our own lips and the lips of mummies and statues. But there was no answer; and calling certain of the devils and phantoms that were our familiars, we made question through the mouths of these, but without result. And all the while, our mirrors were void of any presence that might have cast the shadow; and they that had been our spokesmen could detect nothing in the room. And there was no spell, it seemed, that had power upon the visitant. So Avyctes became troubled; and drawing on the floor with blood and ashes the ellipse of Oumor, wherein no demon nor spirit may intrude, he retired to its center. But still, within the ellipse, like a flowing taint of liquid corruption, the shadow followed his shadow; and the space between the two was no wider than the thickness of a wizard's pen.

On the face of Avyctes, horror had graved new wrinkles; and his brow was beaded with a deathly sweat. For he knew, even as I, that this was a thing beyond all laws, and foreboding naught but untold disaster and evil. And he cried to me in a shaken voice, and said:

"I have no knowledge of this thing nor its intention toward me, and no power to stay its progress. Go forth and leave me now: for I would not that any man should witness the defeat of my sorcery and the doom that may follow thereupon. Also, it were well to depart while there is yet time, lest you too should become the quarry of the shadow. . . ."

Though terror had fastened upon my inmost soul, I was loath to leave Avyctes. But I had sworn to obey his will at all times and in every respect; and moreover I knew myself doubly powerless against the adumbration, since Avyctes himself was impotent.

So, bidding him farewell, I went forth with trembling limbs from the haunted chamber; and peering back from the threshold, I saw that the alien umbrage, creeping like a noisome blotch

on the floor, had touched the shadow of Avyctes. And at that moment the master shrieked aloud like one in nightmare; and his face was no longer the face of Avyctes but was convulsed and contorted like that of some helpless madman who wrestles with an unseen incubus. And I looked no more, but fled along the dim outer hall and through the portals giving upon the terrace.

A RED moon, ominous and gibbous, had declined above the crags; and the shadows of the cedars were elongated in the moon; and they wavered in the gale like the blown cloaks of enchanters. And stooping against the gale, I fled across the terrace toward the outer stairs that led to a steep path in the waste of rocks and chasms lying behind Avyctes' house. I neared the terrace-edge, running with the speed of fear; but I could not reach the topmost outer stair: for at every step the marble flowed beneath me, fleeing like a pale horizon before the seeker. And though I raced and panted without pause, I could draw no nearer to the terrace-edge.

At length I desisted, seeing that an unknown spell had altered the very space around the house of Avyctes, so that none could escape therefrom. So, resigning myself to whatever might befall, I returned toward the house. And climbing the white stairs in the low, level beams of the crag-caught moon, I saw a figure that awaited me in the portals. And I knew by the trailing robe of sea-purple, but by no other token, that the figure was Avyctes. For the face was no longer in its entirety the face of man, but was become a loathly fluid amalgam of human features with a thing not to be identified on earth. The transfiguration was ghastlier than death or decay; and the face was already hued with the nameless, corrupt and purulent color of the strange shadow; and its outlines had assumed a partial likeness to the squat profile of the shadow. The hands of the figure were not those of any terrene being; and the shape beneath the robe had lengthened with a nauseous undulant pliancy; and the face and fingers seemed to drip in the moonlight with a deliquescent corruption. And the pursuing umbrage, like a thickly flowing blight, had corroded and distorted the very shadow of Avyctes, which was now double in a manner not to be narrated here.

Fain would I have cried or spoken aloud: but horror had dried up the fount of speech. And the thing that had been Avyctes beckoned me in silence, uttering no word from its living and putrescent lips. And with eyes that were no longer eyes but an oozing abomination, it peered steadily upon me. And it clutched my shoulder closely with the soft leprosy of its fingers, and led me half swooning with revulsion along the hall, and into that room where the mummy of Oigos, who had assisted us in the threefold incantation of the serpent-men, was stationed with several of his fellows.

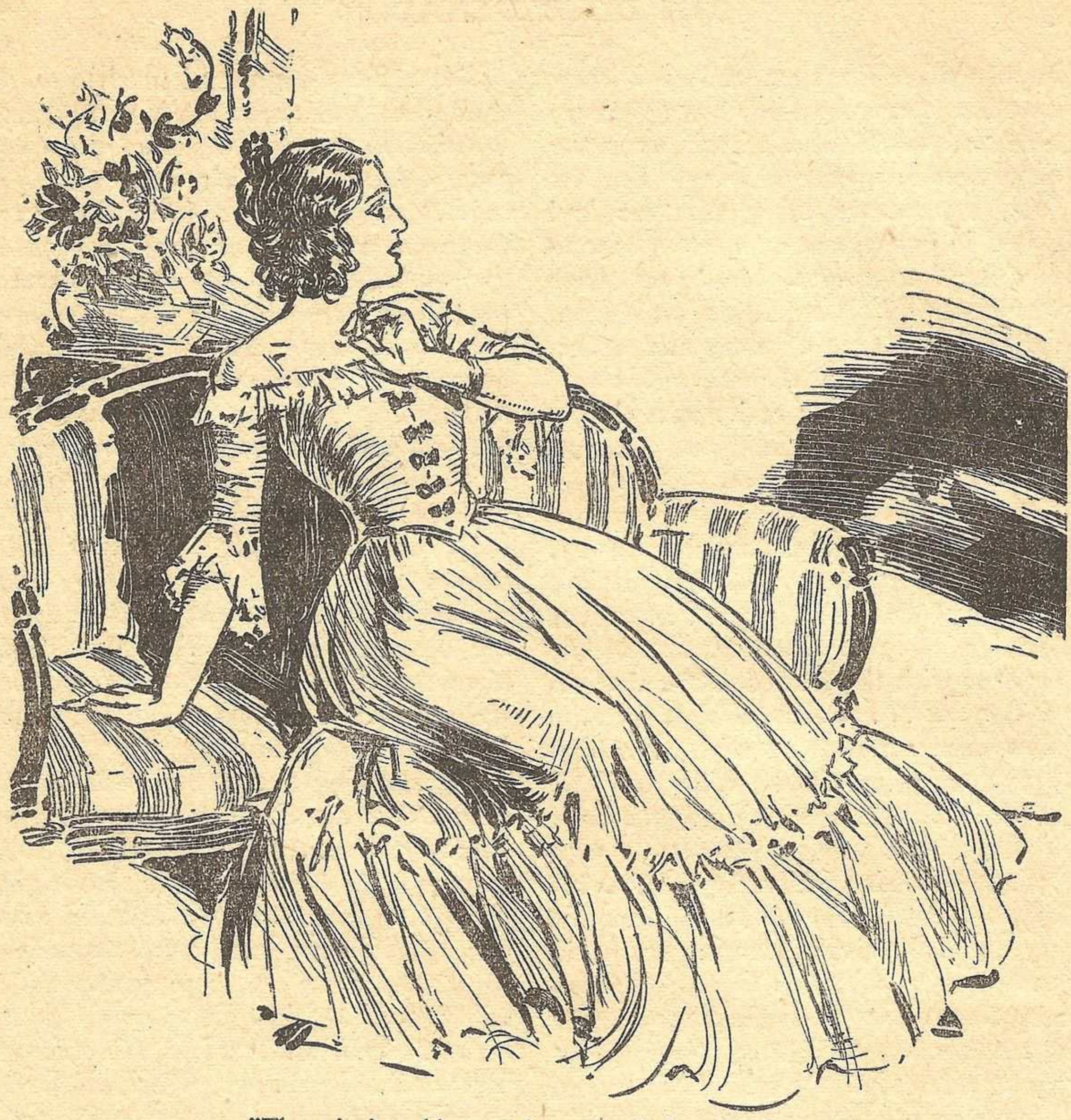
By the lamps which illumed the chamber, burning with pale, still, perpetual flames, I saw that the mummies stood erect along the wall in their exanimate repose, each in his wonted place, with his tall shadow beside him. But the great, gaunt shadow of Oigos on the wall was companioned by an adumbration similar in all respects to the evil thing that had followed the master and was now incorporate with him. I remembered that Oigos had performed his share of the ritual, and had repeated an unknown stated word

in turn after Avyctes; and so I knew that the horror had come to Oigos in turn and would wreak itself upon the dead even as upon the living. For the foul, anonymous thing that we had called in our presumption could manifest itself to mortal ken in no other way than this. We had drawn it from fathomless deeps of time and space, using ignorantly a dire formula; and the thing had come at its own chosen hour, to stamp itself in abomination uttermost on the evocators.

SINCE then, the night has ebbed away, and a second day has gone by like a sluggish ooze of horror. . . . I have seen the complete identification of the shadow with the flesh and the shadow of Avyctes . . . and also I have seen the slow encroachment of that other umbrage, mingling itself with the lank shadow and the sere, bituminous body of Oigos, and turning them to a similitude of the thing which Avyctes has become. And I have heard the mummy cry out like a living man in great pain and fear, as with the throes of a second dissolution, at the impingement of the shadow. And long since it has grown silent, like the other horror, and I know not its thoughts or its intent. . . . And verily I know not if the thing that has come to us be one or several; nor if its avatar will rest complete with the three that summoned it forth into time, or be extended to others.

But these things, and much else, I shall soon know: for now, in turn, there is a shadow that follows mine, drawing ever closer. The air congeals and curdles with unknown fear; and they that were our familiars have fled from the mansion; and the great marble women seem to tremble visibly where they stand along the walls. But the horror that was Avyctes, and the second horror that was Oigos, have left me not, and neither do they tremble. With eyes that are not eyes, they seem to brood and watch, waiting till I too shall become as they. And their stillness is more terrible than if they had rended me limb from limb. And there are strange voices in the wind, and alien roarings upon the sea; and the walls quiver like a thin veil in the black breath of remote abysses.

So, knowing that the time is brief, I have shut myself in the room of volumes and books and have written this account. And I have taken the bright triangular tablet, whose solution was our undoing, and have cast it from the window into the sea, hoping that none will find it after us. And now I must make an end, and enclose this writing in the sealed cylinder of orichalchum, and fling it forth to drift upon the sea-wave. For the space between my shadow and the shadow of the horror is straitened momently . . . and the space is no wider than the thickness of a wizard's pen.



"The swinging object was increasing in her sight."

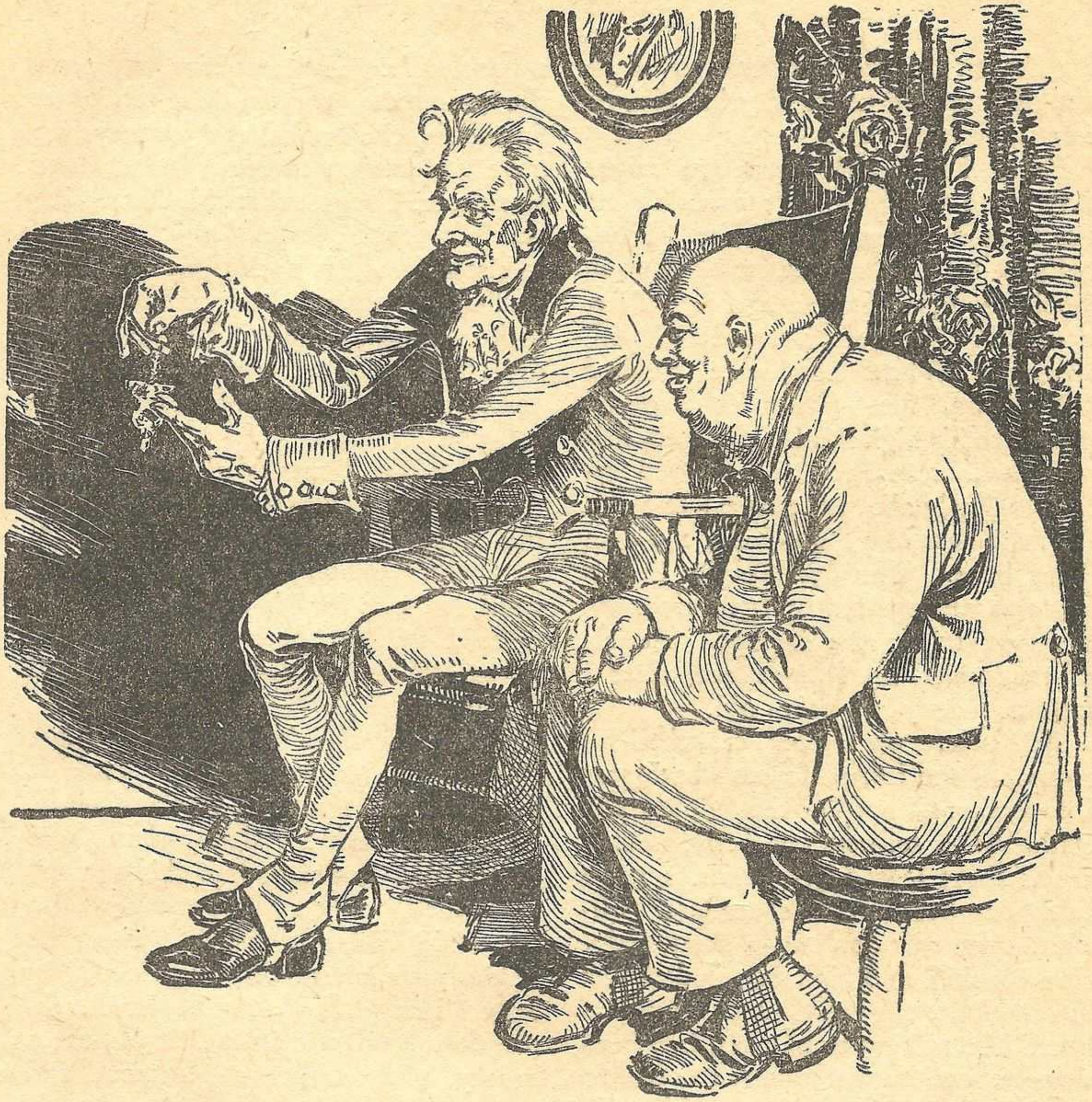
# Fearful Rock

## *1. The Sacrifice*

ENID MANDIFER tried to stand up under what she had just heard. She managed it, but her ears rang, her eyes misted. She felt as if she were drowning.

The voice of Persil Mandifer came through the fog, level and slow, with the hint of that foreign accent which nobody could identify:

"Now that you know that you are not really my daughter, perhaps you are curious as to why I adopted you."



By MANLY WADE WELLMAN

*An eery tale of the American Civil War, and the uncanny evil being who called himself Persil Mandifer, and his lovely daughter— a tale of dark powers and weird happenings*

Curious . . . was that the word to use? But this man who was not her father after all, he delighted in understatements. Enid's eyes had grown clearer now. She was able to move, to obey Persil Mandifer's invitation to seat herself. She saw him, half sprawling in his rocking-chair against the plastered wall of the parlor, under the painting of his ancient friend Aaron Burr. Was the rumor true, she mused, that Burr had not really died, that he still lived and planned ambitiously to make himself a throne in America?

But Aaron Burr would have to be an old, old man—a hundred years old, or more than a hundred.

Persil Mandifer's own age might have been anything, but probably he was nearer seventy than fifty. Physically he was the narrowest of men, in shoulders, hips, temples and legs alike, so that he appeared distorted and compressed. White hair, like combed thistledown, fitted itself in ordered streaks to his high skull. His eyes, dull and dark as musket-balls, peered expressionlessly above the nose like a stiletto, the chin like the pointed toe of a fancy boot. The fleshlessness of his legs was accentuated by tight trousers, strapped under the insteps. At his throat sprouted a frill of lace, after a fashion twenty-five years old.

At his left, on a stool, crouched his enormous son Larue. Larue's body was a collection of soft-looking globes and bladders—a tremendous belly, round-kneed short legs, puffy hands, a gross bald head between fat shoulders. His white linen suit was only a shade paler than his skin, and his loose, faded-pink lips moved incessantly. Once Enid had heard him talking to himself, had been close enough to distinguish the words. Over and over he had said: "I'll kill you. I'll kill you. I'll kill you."

These two men had reared her from babyhood, here in this low, spacious manor of brick and timber in the Ozark country. Sixteen or eighteen years ago there had been Indians hereabouts, but they were gone, and the few settlers were on remote farms. The Mandifers dwelt alone with their slaves, who were unusually solemn and taciturn for Negroes.

Persil Mandifer was continuing: "I have brought you up as a gentleman would bring up his real daughter—for the sole and simple end of making her a good wife. That explains, my dear, the governess, the finishing-school at St. Louis, the books, the journeys we have undertaken to New Orleans and elsewhere. I regret that this distressing war between the states," and he paused to draw from his pocket his enameled snuff-box, "should have made recent junkets impracticable. However, the time has come, and you are not to be despised. Your marriage is now to befall you."

"Marriage," mumbled Larue, in a voice that Enid was barely able to hear. His fingers interlaced, like fat white worms in a jumble. His eyes were for Enid, his ears for his father.

Enid saw that she must respond. She did so: "You have—chosen a husband for me?"

Persil Mandifer's lips crawled into a smile, very wide on his narrow blade of a face, and he took a pinch of snuff. "Your husband, my dear, was chosen before ever you came into this world," he replied. The smile grew broader, but Enid did not think it cheerful. "Does your mirror do you justice?" he teased her. "Enid, my foster-daughter, does it tell you truly that you are a beauty, with a face all lustrous and oval, eyes full of tender fire, a cascade of golden-brown curls to frame the whole?" His gaze wandered upon her body, and his eyelids drooped. "Does it convince you, Enid, that your figure combines rarely those traits of fragility and rondure that are never so desirable as when they occur together? Ah, Enid, had I myself met you, or one like you, thirty years ago——"

"Father!" growled Larue, as though at sacrilege. Persil Mandifer chuckled. His left hand, white and slender with a dark cameo upon the forefinger, extended and patted Larue's repellent bald pate, in superior affection.

"Never fear, son," crooned Persil Mandifer. "Enid shall go a pure bride to him who waits her." His other hand crept into the breast of his coat and drew forth something on a chain. It looked like a crucifix.

"Tell me," pleaded the girl, "tell me, fa——" She broke off, for she could not call him father. "What is the name of the one I am to marry?"

"His name?" said Larue, as though aghast at her ignorance.

"His name?" repeated the lean man in the rocking-chair. The crucifix-like object in his hands began to swing idly and rhythmically, while he paid out chain to make its pendulum motion wider and slower. "He has no name."

ENID felt her lips grow cold and dry. "He has no——"

"He is the Nameless One," said Persil Mandifer, and she could discern the capital letters in the last two words he spoke.

"Look," said Larue, out of the corner of his weak mouth that was nearest his father. "She thinks that she is getting ready to run."

"She will not run," assured Persil Mandifer. "She will sit and listen, and watch what I have here in my hand." The object on the chain seemed to be growing in size and clarity of outline. Enid felt that it might not be a crucifix, after all.

"The Nameless One is also ageless," continued Persil Mandifer. "My dear, I dislike telling you all about him, and it is not really necessary. All you need know is that we—my fathers and I—have served him here, and in Europe, since the days when France was Gaul. Yes, and before that."

The swinging object really was increasing in her sight. And the basic cross was no cross, but a three-armed thing like a capital T. Nor was the body-like figure spiked to it; it seemed to twine and clamber upon that T-shape, like a monkey on a bracket. Like a monkey, it was grotesque, disproportionate, a mockery. That climbing creature was made of gold, or of something gilded over. The T-shaped support was as black and bright as jet.

Enid thought that the golden creature was dull, as if tarnished, and that it appeared to move; an effect created, perhaps, by the rhythmic swinging on the chain.

"Our profits from the association have been great," Persil Mandifer droned. "Yet we have given greatly. Four times in each hundred years must a bride be offered."

Mist was gathering once more, in Enid's eyes and brain, a thicker mist than the one that had come from the shock of hearing that she was an adopted orphan. Yet through it all she saw the swinging device, the monkey-like climber upon the T. And through it all she heard Mandifer's voice:

"When my real daughter, the last female of my race, went to the Nameless One, I wondered where our next bride would come from. And so, twenty years ago, I took you from a foundling asylum at Nashville."

It was becoming plausible to her now. There was a power to be worshipped, to be feared, to be fed with young women. She must go—no, this sort of belief was wrong. It had no element of decency in it, it was only beaten into her by the spell of the pendulum-swinging charm. Yet she had heard certain directions, orders as to what to do.

"You will act in the manner I have described, and say the things I have repeated, tonight at sundown," Mandifer informed her, as though from a

great distance. "You will surrender yourself to the Nameless One, as it was ordained when first you came into my possession."

"No," she tried to say, but her lips would not even stir. Something had crept into her, a will not her own, which was forcing her to accept defeat. She knew she must go—where?

"To Fearful Rock," said the voice of Mandifer, as though he had heard and answered the question she had not spoken. "Go there, to that house where once my father lived and worshipped, that house which, upon the occasion of his rather mysterious death, I left. It is now our place of devotion and sacrifice. Go there, Enid, tonight at sundown, in the manner I have prescribed. . . ."

### *2. The Cavalry Patrol*

Lieutenant Kane Lanark was one of those strange and vicious heritage-anomalies of one of the most paradoxical of wars—a war where a great Virginian was high in Northern command, and a great Pennsylvanian stubbornly defended one of the South's principal strongholds; where the two presidents were both born in Kentucky, indeed within scant miles of each other; where father strove against son, and brother against brother, even more frequently and tragically than in all the jangly verses and fustian dramas of the day.

Lanark's birthplace was a Maryland farm, moderately prosperous. His education had been completed at the Virginia Military Institute, where he was one of a very few who were inspired by a quiet, bearded professor of mathematics who later became the Stonewall of the Confederacy, perhaps the continent's greatest tactician. The older Lanark was strongly for state's rights and mildly for slavery, though he possessed no Negro chattels. Kane, the younger of two sons, had carried those same attitudes with him as much as seven miles past the Kansas border, whither he had gone in 1861 to look for employment and adventure.

At that lonely point he met with Southern guerrillas, certain loose-shirted, weapon-laden gentry whose leader, a gaunt young man with large, worried eyes, bore the craggy name of Quantrill and was to be called by a later historian the bloodiest man in American history. Young Kane Lanark, surrounded by sudden leveled guns, protested his sympathy with the South by birth, education and personal preference. Quantrill replied, rather sententiously, that while this might be true, Lanark's horse and money-belt had a Yankee look to them, and would be taken as prisoners of war.

After the guerrillas had galloped away, with a derisive laugh hanging in the air behind them, Lanark trudged back to the border and a little settlement, where he begged a ride by freight wagon to St. Joseph, Missouri. There he enlisted with a Union cavalry regiment just then in the forming, and his starkness of manner, with evidences about him of military education and good sense, caused his fellow recruits to elect him a sergeant.

Late that year, Lanark rode with a patrol through southern Missouri, where fortune brought him and his comrades face to face with Quantrill's guerrillas, the same that had plundered Lanark. The lieutenant in charge of the Federal cavalry set a most hysterical example for flight, and died of six Southern bullets placed accurately between his shoulder blades; but Lanark, as ranking non-commissioned officer,

rallied the others, succeeded in withdrawing them in order before the superior force. As he rode last of the retreat, he had the fierce pleasure of engaging and sabering an over-zealous guerrilla, who had caught up with him. The patrol rejoined its regiment with only two lost, the colonel was pleased to voice congratulations and Sergeant Lanark became Lieutenant Lanark, vice the slain officer.

In April of 1862, General Curtis, recently the victor in the desperately fought battle of Pea Ridge, showed trust and understanding when he gave Lieutenant Lanark a scouting party of twenty picked riders, with orders to seek yet another encounter with the marauding Quantrill. Few Union officers wanted anything to do with Quantrill, but Lanark, remembering his harsh treatment at those avaricious hands, yearned to kill the guerrilla chieftain with his own proper sword. On the afternoon of April fifth, beneath a sun bright but none too warm, the scouting patrol rode down a trail at the bottom of a great, trough-like valley just south of the Missouri-Arkansas border. Two pairs of men, those with the surest-footed mounts, acted as flanking parties high on the opposite slopes, and a watchful corporal by the name of Googan walked his horse well in advance of the main body. The others rode two and two, with Lanark at the head and Sergeant Jager, heavy-set and morosely keen of eye, at the rear.

A photograph survives of Lieutenant Kane Lanark as he appeared that very spring—his breadth of shoulder and slimness of waist accentuated by the snug blue cavalry jacket that terminated at his sword-belt, his ruddy, beak-nosed face shaded by a wide black hat with a gold cord. He wore a mustache, trim but not gay, and his long chin alone of all his command went smooth-shaven. To these details be it added that he rode his bay gelding easily, with a light, sure hand on the reins, and that he had the air of one who knew his present business.

The valley opened at length upon a wide level platter of land among high, pine-tufted hills. The flat expanse was no more than half timbered, though clever enemies might advance unseen across it if they exercised caution and foresight enough to slip from one belt of clump of trees to the next. Almost at the center of the level, a good five miles from where Lanark now halted his command stood a single great chimney or finger of rock, its lean tip more than twice the height of the tallest tree within view.

To this geologic curiosity the eyes of Lieutenant Lanark snapped at once.

"Sergeant!" he called, and Jager sidled his horse close.

"We'll head for that rock, and stop there," Lanark announced. "It's a natural watch-tower, and from the top of it we can see everything, even better than we could if we rode clear across flat ground to those hills. And if Quantrill is west of us, which I'm sure he is, I'd like to see him coming a long way off, so as to know whether to fight or run."

"I agree with you, sir," said Jager. He peered through narrow, puffy lids at the pinnacle, and gnawed his shaggy lower lip. "I shall lift up mine eyes unto the rocks, from whence cometh my help," he misquoted reverently. The sergeant was full of garbled Scripture, and the men called him "Bible" Jager behind that wide back of his. This did not mean that he was soft, dreamy or easily fooled; Curtis had chosen him as sagely as he had chosen Lanark.

STAYING in the open as much as possible, the party advanced upon the rock. They found it standing above a soft, grassy hollow, which in turn ran eastward from the base of the rock to a considerable ravine, dark and full of timber. As they spread out to the approach, they found something else; a house stood in the hollow, shadowed by the great pinnacle.

"It looks deserted, sir," volunteered Jager, at Lanark's bridle-elbow. "No sign of life."

"Perhaps," said Lanark. "Deploy the men, and we'll close in from all sides. Then you, with one man, enter the back door. I'll take another and enter the front."

"Good, sir." The sergeant kneed his horse into a faster walk, passing from one to another of the three corporals with muttered orders. Within sixty seconds the patrol closed upon the house like a twenty-fingered hand. Lanark saw that the building had once been pretentious—two stories, stoutly made of good lumber that must have been carted from a distance, with shuttered windows and a high peaked roof. Now it was a paint-starved gray, with deep veins and traceries of dirty black upon its clapboards. He dismounted before the piazza with its four pillar-like posts, and threw his reins to a trooper.

"Suggs!" he called, and obediently his own personal orderly, a plump blond youth, dropped out of the saddle. Together they walked up on the resounding planks of the piazza. Lanark, his ungloved right hand swinging free beside his holster, knocked at the heavy front door with his left fist. There was no answer. He tried the knob, and after a moment of shoving, the hinges creaked and the door went open.

They walked into a dark front hall, then into a parlor with dust upon the rug and the fine furniture, and rectangles of pallor upon the walls where pictures had once hung for years. They could hear echoes of their every movement, as anyone will hear in a house to which he is not accustomed. Beyond the parlor, they came to an ornate chandelier with crystal pendants, and at the rear stood a sideboard of dark, hard wood. Its drawers all hung half open, as if the silver and linen had been hastily removed. Above it hung plate-racks, also empty.

Feet sounded in a room to the rear, and then Jager's voice, asking if his lieutenant were inside. Lanark met him in the kitchen, conferred; then together they mounted the stairs in the front hall.

Several musty bedrooms, darkened by closed shutters, occupied the second floor. The beds had dirty mattresses, but no sheets or blankets.

"All clear in the house," pronounced Lanark. "Jager, go and detail a squad to reconnoiter in that little ravine east of here—we want no rebel sharpshooters sneaking up on us from that point. Then leave a picket there, put a man on top of the rock, and guards at the front and rear of this house. And have some of the others police up the house itself. We may stay here for two days, even longer."

The sergeant saluted, then went to bellow his orders, and troopers dashed hither and thither to obey. In a moment the sound of sweeping arose from the parlor. Lanark, to whom it suggested spring cleaning, sneezed at thought of the dust, then gave Suggs directions about the care of his bay. Unbuckling his saber, he hung it upon the saddle, but his revolver he retained. "You're in charge, Jager," he called,

and sauntered away toward the wooded cleft.

His legs needed the exercise; he could feel them straightening by degrees after their long clamping to his saddle-flaps. He was uncomfortably dusty, too, and there must be water at the bottom of the ravine. Walking into the shade of the trees, he heard, or fancied he heard, a trickling sound. The slope was steep here, and he walked fast to maintain an easy balance upon it, for a minute and then two. There was water ahead, all right, for it gleamed through the leafage. And something else gleamed, something pink.

That pinkness was certainly flesh. His right hand dropped quickly to his revolver-butt, and he moved forward carefully. Stooping, he took advantage of the bushy cover, at the same time avoiding a touch that might snap or rustle the foliage. He could hear a voice now, soft and rhythmic. Lanark frowned. A woman's voice? His right hand still at his weapon, his left caught and carefully drew down a spray of willow. He gazed into an open space beyond.

It was a woman, all right, within twenty yards of him. She stood ankle-deep in a swift, narrow rush of brook-water, and her fine body was nude, every graceful curve of it, with a cascade of golden-brown hair falling and floating about her shoulders. She seemed to be praying, but her eyes were

"Are you the Nameless One?"

not lifted. They stared at a hand-mirror, that she held up to catch the last flash of the setting sun.

### *3. The Image in the Cellar*

LANARK, a young, serious-minded bachelor in an era when women swaddled themselves inches deep in fabric, had never seen such a sight before; and to his credit be it said that his first and strongest emotion was proper embarrassment for the girl in the stream. He had a momentary impulse to slip back and away. Then he remembered that he had ordered a patrol to explore this place; it would be here within moments.

Therefore he stepped into the open, wondering at the time, as well as later, if he did well.

"Miss," he said gently. "Miss, you'd better put on your things. My men——"

She stared, squeaked in fear, dropped the mirror and stood motionless. Then she seemed to gather herself for flight. Lanark realized that the trees beyond her were thick and might hide enemies, that she was probably a resident of this rebel-inclined region and might be a decoy for such as himself. He whipped out his revolver, holding it at the ready but not pointing it.

"Don't run," he warned her sharply. "Are those your clothes beside you? Put them on at once."

She caught up a dress of flowered calico and fairly flung it on over her head. His embarrassment subsided a little, and he came another pace or two into the open. She was pushing her feet—very small feet they were—into heelless shoes. Her hands quickly gathered up some underthings and wadded them into a bundle. She gazed at him apprehensively, questioningly. Her hastily-donned dress remained unfastened at the throat, and he could see the panicky stir of her heart in her half-bared bosom.

"I'm sorry," he went on, "but I think you'd better come up to the house with me."

"House?" she repeated fearfully, and her dark, wide eyes turned to look beyond him. Plainly she knew which house he meant. "You—live there?"

"I'm staying there at this time."

"You—came for me?" Apparently she had expected someone to come.

But instead of answering, he put a question of his own. "To whom were you talking just now? I could hear you."

"I—I said the words. The words my faith——" She broke off, wretchedly, and Lanark was forced to think how pretty she was in her confusion. "The words that Persil Mandifer told me to say." Her eyes on his, she continued softly: "I came to meet the Nameless One. Are you the—Nameless One?"

"I am certainly not nameless," he replied. "I am Lieutenant Lanark, of the Federal Army of the Frontier, at your service." He bowed slightly, which made it more formal. "Now, come along with me."

He took her by the wrist, which shook in his big left hand. Together they went back eastward through the ravine, in the direction of the house.

Before they reached it, she told him her name, and that the big natural pillar was called Fearful Rock. She also assured him that she knew nothing of Quantrill and his guerrillas; and a fourth item of news shook Lanark to his spurred heels, the first non-military matter that had impressed him in more than a year.

An hour later, Lanark and Jager finished an interview with her in the

parlor. They called Suggs, who conducted the young woman up to one of the bedrooms. Then lieutenant and sergeant faced each other. The light was dim, but each saw bafflement and uneasiness in the face of the other.

"Well?" challenged Lanark.

Jager produced a clasp-knife, opened it, and pared thoughtfully at a thumbnail. "I'll take my oath," he ventured, "that this Miss Enid Mandifer is telling the gospel truth."

"Truth!" exploded Lanark scornfully. "Mountain-folk ignorance, I call it. Nobody believes in those devil-things these days."

"Oh, yes, somebody does," said Jager, mildly but definitely. "I do." He put away his knife and fumbled within his blue army shirt. "Look here, Lieutenant."

It was a small book he held out, little more than a pamphlet in size and thickness. On its cover of gray paper appeared the smudged woodcut of an owl against a full moon, and the title:

John George Hohman's

POW-WOWS

or

LONG LOST FRIEND

"I got it when I was a young lad in Pennsylvania," explained Jager, almost reverently. "Lots of Pennsylvania people carry this book, as I do." He opened the little volume, and read from the back of the title page:

"'Whosoever carries this book with him is safe from all his enemies, visible or invisible; and whoever has this book with him cannot die without the holy corpse of Jesus Christ, nor drown in any water nor burn up in any fire, nor can any unjust sentence be passed upon him.'"

Lanark put out his hand for the book, and Jager surrendered it, somewhat hesitantly. "I've heard of supposed witches in Pennsylvania," said the officer. "Hexes, I believe they're called. Is this a witch book?"

"No, sir. Nothing about black magic. See the cross on that page? It's a protection against witches."

"I thought that only Catholics used the cross," said Lanark.

"No. Not only Catholics."

"Hmm." Lanark passed the thing back. "Superstition, I call it. Nevertheless, you speak this much truth: that girl is in earnest, she believes what she told us. Her father, or stepfather, or whoever he is, sent her up here on some ridiculous errand—perhaps a dangerous one." He paused. "Or I may be misjudging her. It may be a clever scheme, Jager—a scheme to get a spy in among us."

The sergeant's big bearded head wagged negation. "No, sir. If she was telling a lie, it'd be a more believable one, wouldn't it?" He opened his talisman book again. "If the lieutenant please, there's a charm in here, against being shot or stabbed. It might be a good thing, seeing there's a war going on—perhaps the lieutenant would like me to copy it out?"

"No, thanks." Lanark drew forth his own charm against evil and nervousness, a leather case that contained cheroots. Jager, who had convictions against the use of tobacco, turned away disapprovingly as his superior bit off the end of a fragrant brown cylinder and kindled a match.

"Let me look at that what-do-you-call-it book again," he requested, and for a second time Jager passed the little volume over, then saluted and retired.

Darkness was gathering early, what with the position of the house in the

grassy hollow, and the pinnacle of Fearful Rock standing between it and the sinking sun to westward. Lanark called for Suggs to bring a candle, and, when the orderly obeyed, directed him to take some kind of supper upstairs to Enid Mandifer. Left alone, the young officer seated himself in a newly dusted armchair of massive dark wood, emitted a cloud of blue tobacco smoke, and opened the *Long Lost Friend*.

It had no publication date, but John George Hohman, the author, dated his preface from Berks County, Pennsylvania, on July 31, 1819. In the secondary preface filled with testimonials as to the success of Hohman's miraculous cures, was included the pious ejaculation: "The Lord bless the beginning and the end of this little work, and be with us, that we may not misuse it, and thus commit a heavy sin!"

"Amen to that!" said Lanark to himself, quite soberly. Despite his assured remarks to Jager, he was somewhat repelled and nervous because of the things Enid Mandifer had told him.

Was there, then, potentiality for such supernatural evil in this enlightened Nineteenth Century, even in the pages of the book he held? He read further, and came upon a charm to be recited against violence and danger, perhaps the very one Jager had offered to copy for him. It began rather sonorously: "The peace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with me. Oh shot, stand still! In the name of the mighty prophets Agtion and Elias, and do not kill me. . . ."

Lanark remembered the name of Elias from his boyhood Sunday schooling, but Agtion's identity, as a prophet or otherwise, escaped him. He resolved to ask Jager; and, as though the thought had acted as a summons, Jager came almost running into the room.

"Lieutenant, sir! Lieutenant!" he said hoarsely.

"Yes, Sergeant Jager?" Lanark rose, stared questioningly, and held out the book. Jager took it automatically, and as automatically stowed it inside his shirt.

"I can prove, sir, that there's a real devil here," he mouthed unsteadily.

"What?" demanded Lanark. "Do you realize what you're saying, man? Explain yourself."

"Come, sir," Jager almost pleaded, and led the way into the kitchen. "It's down in the cellar."

From a little heap on a table he picked up a candle, and then opened a door full of darkness.

The stairs to the cellar were shaky to Lanark's feet, and beneath him was solid black shadow, smelling strongly of damp earth. Jager, stamping heavily ahead, looked back and upward. That broad, bearded face, that had not lost its full-blooded flush in the hottest fighting at Pea Ridge, had grown so pallid as almost to give off sickly light. Lanark began to wonder if all this theatrical approach would not make the promised devil seem ridiculous, anticlimactic—the flutter of an owl, the scamper of a rat, or something of that sort.

"You have the candle, sergeant," he reminded, and the echo of his voice momentarily startled him. "Strike a match, will you?"

"Yes, sir." Jager had raised a knee to tighten his stripe-sided trousers. A snapping scrape, a burst of flame, and the candle glow illuminated them both. It revealed, too, the cellar, walled with stones but floored with clay. As they finished the descent, Lanark could feel the soft grittiness of that clay under his bootsoles. All around them lay

rubbish—boxes, casks, stacks of broken pots and dishes, bundles of kindling.

"Here," Jager was saying, "here is what I found."

HE WALKED around the foot of the stairs. Beneath the slope of the flight lay a long, narrow case, made of plain, heavy boards. It was unpainted and appeared ancient. As Jager lowered the light in his hand, Lanark saw that the joinings were secured with huge nails, apparently forged by hand. Such nails had been used in building the older sheds on his father's Maryland estate. Now there was a creak of wooden protest as Jager pried up the loosened lid of the coffin-like box.

Inside lay something long and ruddy. Lanark saw a head and shoulders, and started violently. Jager spoke again:

"An image, sir. A heathen image." The light made grotesque the sergeant's face, one heavy half fully illumined, the other secret and lost in the black shadow. "Look at it."




"It's Satan's own image," Jager was mouthing deeply.

Lanark, too, stooped for a closer examination. The form was of human length, or rather more; but it was not finished, was neither divided into legs below nor extended into arms at the roughly shaped shoulders. The head, too, had been molded without features, though from either side, where the ears should have been it sprouted up-curved horns like a bison's. Lanark felt a chill creep upon him, whence he knew not.

"It's Satan's own image," Jager was mouthing deeply. "'Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image——'"

With one foot he turned the coffin-box upon its side. Lanark took a quick stride backward, just in time to prevent the ruddy form from dropping out upon his toes. A moment later, Jager had spurned the thing. It broke, with a crashing sound like crockery, and two more trampling kicks of the sergeant's heavy boots smashed it to bits.

"Stop!" cried Lanark, too late. "Why did you break it? I wanted to have a good look at the thing."

"But it is not good for men to look upon the devil's works," responded Jager, almost pontifically.

"Don't advise me, sergeant," said Lanark bleakly. "Remember that I am your officer, and that I don't need instruction as to what I may look at." He looked down at the fragments. "Hmm, the thing was hollow, and quite brittle. It seems to have been stuffed with straw—no, excelsior. Wood shavings, anyway." He investigated the fluffy inner mass with a toe. "Hullo, there's something inside of the stuff."

"I wouldn't touch it, sir," warned Jager, but this time it was he who spoke too late. Lanark's boot-toe had nudged the object into plain sight, and Lanark had put down his gauntleted left hand and picked it up.

"What is this?" he asked himself aloud. "Looks rather like some sort of strong-box—foreign, I'd say, and quite cold. Come on, Jager, we'll go upstairs."

In the kitchen, with a strong light from several candles, they examined the find quite closely. It was a dark oblong, like a small dispatch-case or, as Lanark had commented, a strong-box. Though as hard as iron, it was not iron, nor any metal either of them had ever known.

"How does it open?" was Lanark's next question, turning the case over in his hands. "It doesn't seem to have hinges on it. Is this the lid—or this?"

"I couldn't say." Jager peered, his eyes growing narrow with perplexity. "No hinges, as the lieutenant just said."

"None visible, nor yet a lock." Lanark thumped the box experimentally, and proved it hollow. Then he lifted it close to his ear and shook it. There was a faint rustle, as of papers loosely rolled or folded. "Perhaps," the officer went on, "this separate slice isn't a lid at all. There may be a spring to press, or something that slides back and lets another plate come loose."

But Suggs was entering from the front of the house. "Lieutenant, sir! Something's happened to Newton—he was watching on the rock. Will the lieutenant come? And Sergeant Jager, too."

The suggestion of duty brought back the color and self-control that Jager had lost. "What's happened to Newton?" he demanded at once, and hurried away with Suggs.

Lanark waited in the kitchen for only a moment. He wanted to leave the box, but did not want his troopers meddling with it. He spied, beside the heavy iron stove, a fireplace, and

in its side the metal door to an old brick oven. He pulled that door open, thrust the box in, closed the door again, and followed Suggs and Jager.

They had gone out upon the front porch. There, with Corporal Gray and a blank-faced trooper on guard, lay the silent form of Newton, its face covered with a newspaper.

Almost every man of the gathered patrol knew a corpse when he saw one, and it took no second glance to know that Newton was quite dead.

### *4. The Mandifers*

JAGER, bending, lifted the newspaper and then dropped it back. He said something that, for all his religiosity, might have been an oath.

"What's the matter, sergeant?" demanded Lanark.

Jager's brows were clamped in a tense frown, and his beard was actually trembling. "His face, sir. It's terrible."

"A wound?" asked Lanark, and lifted the paper in turn. He, too, let it fall back, and his exclamation of horror and amazement was unquestionably profane.

"There ain't no wound on him, Lieutenant Lanark," offered Suggs, pushing his wan, plump face to the forefront of the troopers. "We heard Newton yell—heard him from the top of the rock yonder."

All eyes turned gingerly toward the promontory.

"That's right, sir," added Corporal Gray. "I'd just sent Newton up, to relieve Josserand."

"You heard him yell," prompted Lanark. "Go on, what happened?"

"I hailed him back," said the corporal, "but he said nothing. So I climbed up—that north side's the easiest to climb. Newton was standing at the top, standing straight up with his carbine at the ready. He must have been dead right then."

"You mean, he was struck somehow as you watched?"

Gray shook his head. "No, sir. I think he was dead as he stood up. He didn't move or speak, and when I touched him he sort of coiled down—like an empty coat falling off a clothesline." Gray's hand made a downward-floating gesture in illustration. "When I turned him over I saw his face, all twisted and scared-looking, like—like what the lieutenant has seen. And I sung out for Suggs and McSween to come up and help me bring him down."

Lanark gazed at Newton's body. "He was looking which way?"

"Over yonder, eastward." Gray pointed unsteadily. "Like it might have been beyond the draw and them trees in it."

Lanark and Jager peered into the waning light, that was now dusk. Jager mumbled what Lanark had already been thinking—that Newton had died without wounds, at or near the moment when the horned image had been shattered upon the cellar floor.

Lanark nodded, and dismissed several vague but disturbing inspirations. "You say he died standing up, Gray. Was he leaning on his gun?"

"No, sir. He stood on his two feet, and held his carbine at the ready. Sounds impossible, a dead man standing up like that, but that's how it was."

"Bring his blanket and cover him up," said Lanark. "Put a guard over him, and we'll bury him tomorrow. Don't let any of the men look at his face. We've got to give him some kind of funeral." He turned to Jager. "Have you a prayer-book, sergeant?"

Jager had fished out the *Long Lost*

*Friend* volume. He was reading something aloud, as though it were a prayer: "... and be and remain with us on the water and upon the land," he pattered out. "May the Eternal Godhead also——"

"Stop that heathen nonsense," Lanark almost roared. "You're supposed to be an example to the men, sergeant. Put that book away."

Jager obeyed, his big face reproachful. "It was a spell against evil spirits," he explained, and for a moment Lanark wished that he had waited for the end. He shrugged and issued further orders.

"I want all the lamps lighted in the house, and perhaps a fire out here in the yard," he told the men. "We'll keep guard both here and in that gulley to the east. If there is a mystery, we'll solve it."

"Pardon me, sir," volunteered a well-bred voice, in which one felt rather than heard the tiny touch of foreign accent. "I can solve the mystery for you, though you may not thank me."

Two men had come into view, were drawing up beside the little knot of troopers. How had they approached? Through the patroled brush of the ravine? Around the corner of the house? Nobody had seen them coming, and Lanark, at least, started violently. He glowered at this new enigma.

THE man who had spoken paused at the foot of the porch steps, so that lamplight shone upon him through the open front door. He was skeleton-gaunt, in face and body, and even his bones were small. His eyes burned forth from deep pits in his narrow, high skull, and his clothing was that of a dandy of the forties. In his twig-like fingers he clasped bunches of herbs.

His companion stood to one side in the shadow, and could be seen only as a huge coarse lump of a man.

"I am Persil Mandifer," the thin creature introduced himself. "I came here to gather from the gardens," and he held out his handfuls of leaves and stalks. "You, sir, you are in command of these soldiers, are you not? Then know that you are trespassing."

"The expediencies of war," replied Lanark easily, for he had seen Suggs and Corporal Gray bring their carbines forward in their hands. "You'll have to forgive our intrusion."

A scornful mouth opened in the emaciated face, and a soft, superior chuckle made itself heard. "Oh, but this is not my estate. I am allowed here, yes—but it is not mine. The real Master——" The gaunt figure shrugged, and the voice paused for a moment. The bright eyes sought Newton's body. "From what I see and what I heard as I came up to you, there has been trouble. You have transgressed somehow, and have begun to suffer."

"To you Southerners, all Union soldiers are trespassers and transgressors," suggested Lanark, but the other laughed and shook his fleshless white head.

"You misunderstand, I fear. I care nothing about this war, except that I am amused to see so many people killed. I bear no part in it. Of course, when I came to pluck herbs, and saw your sentry at the top of Fearful Rock——" Persil Mandifer eyed again the corpse of Newton. "There he lies, eh? It was my privilege and power to project a vision up to him in his loneliness that, I think, put an end to his part of this puerile strife."

Lanark's own face grew hard. "Mr. Mandifer," he said bleakly, "you seem to be enjoying a quiet laugh at our expense. But I should point out that we

greatly outnumber you, and are armed. I'm greatly tempted to place you under arrest."

"Then resist that temptation," advised Mandifer urbanely. "It might be disastrous to you if we became enemies."

"Then be kind enough to explain what you're talking about," commanded Lanark. Something swam into the forefront of his consciousness. "You say that your name is Mandifer. We found a girl named Enid Mandifer in the gulley yonder. She told us a very strange story. Are you her stepfather? The one who mesmerized her and——"

"She talked to you?" Mandifer's soft voice suddenly shifted to a windy roar that broke Lanark's questioning abruptly in two. "She came, and did not make the sacrifice of herself? She shall expiate, sir, and you with her!"

Lanark had had enough of this high-handed civilian's airs. He made a motion with his left hand to Corporal Gray, whose carbine-barrel glinted in the light from the house as it leveled itself at Mandifer's skull-head.

"You're under arrest," Lanark informed the two men.

The bigger one growled, the first sound he had made. He threw his enormous body forward in a sudden leaping stride, his gross hands extended as though to clutch Lanark. Jager, at the lieutenant's side, quickly drew his revolver and fired from the hip. The enormous body fell, rolled over and subsided.

"You have killed my son!" shrieked Mandifer.

"Take hold of him, you two," ordered Lanark, and Suggs and Josserand obeyed.

The gaunt form of Mandifer achieved one explosive struggle, then fell tautly motionless with the big hands of the troopers upon his elbows.

"Thanks, Jager," continued Lanark. "That was done quickly and well. Some of you drag this body up on the porch and cover it. Gray, tumble upstairs and bring down that girl we found."

While waiting for the corporal to return, Lanark ordered further that a bonfire be built to banish a patch of the deepening darkness. It was beginning to shoot up its bright tongues as the corporal ushered Enid Mandifer out upon the porch.

She had arranged her disordered clothing, had even contrived to put up her hair somehow, loosely but attractively. The firelight brought out a certain strength of line and angle in her face, and made her eyes shine darkly. She was manifestly frightened at the sight of her stepfather and the blanket-covered corpses to one side; but she faced determinedly a flood of half-understandable invectives from the emaciated man. She answered him, too; Lanark did not know what she meant by most of the things she said, but gathered correctly that she was refusing, finally and completely, to do something.

"Then I shall say no more," gritted out the spidery Mandifer, and his bared teeth were of the flat, chalky white of long-dead bone. "I place this matter in the hands of the Nameless One. He will not forgive, will not forget."

ENID moved a step toward Lanark, who put out a hand and touched her arm reassuringly. The mounting flame of the bonfire lighted up all who watched and listened—the withered, glaring mummy that was Persil Mandifer, the frightened but defiant shapeliness of Enid in her flower-patterned

gown, Lanark in his sudden attitude of protection, the ring of troopers in their dusty blue blouses. With the half-lighted front of the weathered old house like a stage set behind them, and alternate red lights and sooty shadows playing over all, they might have been a tableau in some highly melodramatic opera.

"Silence," Lanark was grating. "For the last time, Mr. Mandifer, let me remind you that I have placed you under arrest. If you don't calm down immediately and speak only when you're spoken to, I'll have my men tie you flat to four stakes and put a gag in your mouth."

Mandifer subsided at once, just as he was on the point of hurling another harsh threat at Enid.

"That's much better," said Lanark. "Sergeant Jager, it strikes me that we'd better get our pickets out to guard this position."

Mandifer cleared his throat with actual diffidence. "Lieutenant Lanark —that is your name, I gather," he said in the soft voice which he had employed when he had first appeared. "Permit me, sir, to say but two words." He peered as though to be sure of consent. "I have it in my mind that it is too late, useless, to place any kind of guard against surprise."

"What do you mean?" asked Lanark.

"It is all of a piece with your offending of him who owns this house and the land which encompasses it," continued Mandifer. "I believe that a body of your enemies, mounted men of the Southern forces, are upon you. That man who died upon the brow of Fearful Rock might have seen them coming, but he was brought down sightless and voiceless, and nobody was assigned in his place."

He spoke truth. Gray, in his agitation, had not posted a fresh sentry. Lanark drew his lips tight beneath his mustache.

"Once more you feel that it is a time to joke with us, Mr. Mandifer," he growled. "I have already suggested gagging you and staking you out."

"But listen," Mandifer urged him.

Suddenly hoofs thundered, men yelled a double-noted defiance, high and savage—*"Yee-hee!"*

It was the rebel yell.

Quantrill's guerrillas rode out of the dark and upon them.

### *5. Blood in the Night*

NEITHER Lanark nor the others remembered that they began to fight for their lives; they only knew all at once that they were doing it. There was a prolonged harsh rattle of gunshots like a blast of hail upon hard wood; Lanark, by chance or unconscious choice, snatched at and drew his sword instead of his revolver.

A horse's flying shoulder struck him, throwing him backward but not down. As he reeled to save his footing, he saved also his own life; for the rider, a form all cascading black beard and slouch hat, thrust a pistol almost into the lieutenant's face and fired. The flash was blinding, the ball ripped Lanark's cheek like a whiplash, and then the saber in his hand swung, like a scythe reaping wheat. By luck rather than design, the edge bit the guerrilla's gun-wrist. Lanark saw the hand fly away as though on wings, its fingers still clutching the pistol, all agleam in the firelight. Blood gushed from the stump of the riders' right arm, like water from a fountain, and Lanark felt upon himself a spatter as of hot rain. He threw himself in, clutched

the man's legs with his free arm and, as the body sagged heavily from above upon his head and shoulder, he heaved it clear out of the saddle.

The horse was plunging and whinnying, but Lanark clutched its reins and got his foot into the stirrup. The bonfire seemed to be growing strangely brighter, and the mounted guerrillas were plainly discernible, raging and trampling among his disorganized men. Corporal Gray went down, dying almost under Lanark's feet. Amid the deafening drum-roll of shots, Sergeant Jager's bull-like voice could be heard: "Stop, thieves and horsemen, in the name of God!" It sounded like an exorcism, as though the Confederate raiders were devils.

Lanark had managed to climb into the saddle of his captured mount. He dropped the bridle upon his pommel, reached across his belly with his left hand, and dragged free his revolver. At a little distance, beyond the tossing heads of several horses, he thought he saw the visage of Quantrill, clean-shaven and fierce. He fired at it, but he had no faith in his own left-handed snap-shooting. He felt the horse frantic and unguided, shoving and striving against another horse. Quarters were too close for a saber-stroke, and he fired again with his revolver. The guerrilla spun out of the saddle. Lanark had a glimpse he would never forget, of great bulging eyes and a sharp-pointed mustache.

Again the rebel yell, flying from mouth to bearded mouth, and then an answering shout, deeper and more sustained; some troopers had run out of the house and, standing on the porch, were firing with their carbines. It was growing lighter, with a blue light. Lanark did not understand that.

Quantrill did not understand it, either. He and Lanark had come almost within striking distance of each other, but the guerrilla chief was gazing past his enemy, in the direction of the house. His mouth was open, with strain-lines around it. His eyes glowed. He feared what he saw.

"Remember me, you thieving swine!" yelled Lanark, and tried to thrust with his saber. But Quantrill had reined back and away, not from the sword but from the light that was growing stronger and bluer. He thundered an order, something that Lanark could not catch but which the guerrillas understood and obeyed. Then Quantrill was fleeing. Some guerrillas dashed between him and Lanark. They, too, were in flight. All the guerrillas were in flight. Somebody roared in triumph and fired with a carbine—it sounded like Sergeant Jager. The battle was over, within moments of its beginning.

Lanark managed to catch his reins, in the tips of the fingers that held his revolver, and brought the horse to a standstill before it followed Quantrill's men into the dark. One of his own party caught and held the bits, and Lanark dismounted. At last he had time to look at the house.

It was afire, every wall and sill and timber of it, burning all at once, and completely. And it burnt deep blue, as though seen through the glass of an old-fashioned bitters-bottle. It was falling to pieces with the consuming heat, and they had to draw back from it. Lanark stared around to reckon his losses.

Nearest the piazza lay three bodies, trampled and broken-looking. Some men ran in and dragged them out of danger; they were Persil Mandifer, badly battered by horses' feet, and the two who had held him, Josserand and Lanark's orderly, Suggs. Both the

troopers had been shot through the head, probably at the first volley from the guerrillas.

Corporal Gray was stone-dead, with five or six bullets in him, and three more troopers had been killed, while four were wounded, but not critically. Jager, examining them, pronounced that they could all ride if the lieutenant wished it.

"I wish it, all right," said Lanark ruefully. "We leave first thing in the morning. Hmm, six dead and four hurt, not counting poor Newton, who's there in the fire. Half my command—and, the way I forgot the first principles of military vigilance, I don't deserve as much luck as that. I think the burning house is what frightened the guerrillas. What began it?"

Nobody knew. They had all been fighting too desperately to have any idea. The three men who had been picketing the gulley, and who had dashed back to assault the guerrillas on the flank, had seen the blue flames burst out, as it were from a hundred places; that was the best view anybody had.

"All the killing wasn't done by Quantrill," Jager comforted his lieutenant. "Five dead guerrillas, sir—no, six. One was picked up a little way off, where he'd been dragged by his foot in the stirrup. Others got wounded, I'll be bound. Pretty even thing, all in all."

"And we still have one prisoner," supplemented Corporal Googan.

He jerked his head toward Enid Mandifer, who stood unhurt, unruffled almost, gazing raptly at the great geyser of blue flame that had been the house and temple of her stepfather's nameless deity.

IT WAS a gray morning, and from the first streaks of it Sergeant Jager had kept the unwounded troopers busy, making a trench-like grave halfway between the spot where the house had stood and the gulley to the east. When the bodies were counted again, there were only twelve; Persil Mandifer's was missing, and the only explanation was that it had been caught somehow in the flames. The ruins of the house, that still smoked with a choking vapor as of sulfur gas, gave up a few crisped bones that apparently had been Newton, the sentry who had died from unknown causes; but no giant skeleton was found to remind one of the passing of Persil Mandifer's son.

"No matter," said Lanark to Jager. "We know that they were both dead, and past our worrying about. Put the other bodies in—our men at this end, the guerrillas at the other."

The order was carried out. Once again Lanark asked about a prayer book. A lad by the name of Duckin said that he had owned one, but that it had been burned with the rest of his kit in the blue flame that destroyed the house.

"Then I'll have to do it from memory," decided Lanark.

He drew up the surviving ten men at the side of the trench. Jager took a position beside him, and, just behind the sergeant, Enid Mandifer stood.

Lanark self-consciously turned over his clutter of thoughts, searching for odds and ends of his youthful religious teachings. "'Man that is born of woman hath but short time to live, and is full of misery'," he managed to repeat. "'He cometh up, and is cut down, like a flower'." As he said the words "cut down," he remembered his saber-stroke of the night before, and how he had shorn away a man's hand. That man, with his heavy black beard, lay in this trench before them, with the severed hand under him. Lanark was

barely able to beat down a shudder. "'In the midst of life'," he went on, "'we are in death'."

There he was obliged to pause. Sergeant Jager, on inspiration, took one pace forward and threw into the trench a handful of gritty earth.

"'Ashes to ashes, dust to dust'," remembered Lanark. "'Unto Almighty God we commit these bodies'"—he was sure that that was a misquotation worthy of Jager himself, and made shift to finish with one more tag from his memory: "'. . . in sure and certain hope of the Resurrection unto eternal life'."

He faced toward the file of men. Four of them had been told to fall in under arms, and at his order they raised their carbines and fired a volley into the air. After that, the trench was filled in.

Jager then cleared his throat and began to give orders concerning horses, saddles and what possessions had been spared by the fire. Lanark walked aside, and found Enid Mandifer keeping pace with him.

"You are going back to your army?" she asked.

"Yes, at once. I was sent here to see if I could find and damage Quantrill's band. I found him, and gave at least as good as I got."

"Thank you," she said, "for everything you've done for me."

He smiled deprecatingly, and it hurt his bullet-burnt cheek.

"I did nothing," he protested, and both of them realized that it was the truth. "All that has happened—it just happened."

He drew his eyes into narrow gashes, as if brooding over the past twelve hours.

"I'm halfway inclined to believe what your stepfather said about a supernatural influence here. But what about you, Miss Mandifer?"

She tried to smile in turn, not very successfully.

"I can go back to my home. I'll be alone there."

"Alone?"

"I have a few servants."

"You'll be safe?"

"As safe as anywhere."

He clasped his hands behind him. "I don't know how to say it, but I have begun to feel responsible for you. I want to know that all will be well."

"Thank you," she said a second time. "You owe me nothing."

"Perhaps not. We do not know each other. We have spoken together only three or four times. Yet you will be in my mind. I want to make a promise."

"Yes?"

They had paused in their little stroll, almost beside the newly filled grave trench. Lanark was frowning, Enid Mandifer nervous and expectant.

"This war," he said weightily, "is going to last much longer than people thought at first. We—the Union—have done pretty well in the West here, but Lee is making fools of our generals back East. We may have to fight for years, and even then we may not win."

"I hope, Mr.—I mean, Lieutenant Lanark," stammered the girl, "I hope that you will live safely through it."

"I hope so, too. And if I am spared, if I am alive and well when peace comes, I swear that I shall return to this place. I shall make sure that you, too, are alive and well."

He finished, very certain that he could not have used stiffer, more stupid words; but Enid Mandifer smiled now, radiantly and gratefully.

"I shall pray for you, Lieutenant Lanark. Now, your men are ready to leave. Go, and I shall watch."

"No," he demurred. "Go yourself, get away from this dreadful place."

She bowed her head in assent, and walked quickly away. At some distance she paused, turned, and waved her hand above her head.

Lanark took off his broad, black hat and waved in answer. Then he faced about, strode smartly back into the yard beside the charred ruins. Mounting his bay gelding, he gave the order to depart.

*You will not want to miss the eery happenings in the next installment of this story, which tells of an open grave from which the bodies have mysteriously disappeared. To make sure of getting your copy, we suggest that you reserve the next issue of* WEIRD TALES *at your magazine dealer's now.*

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# Crazy Nell

BY EDGAR DANIEL KRAMER

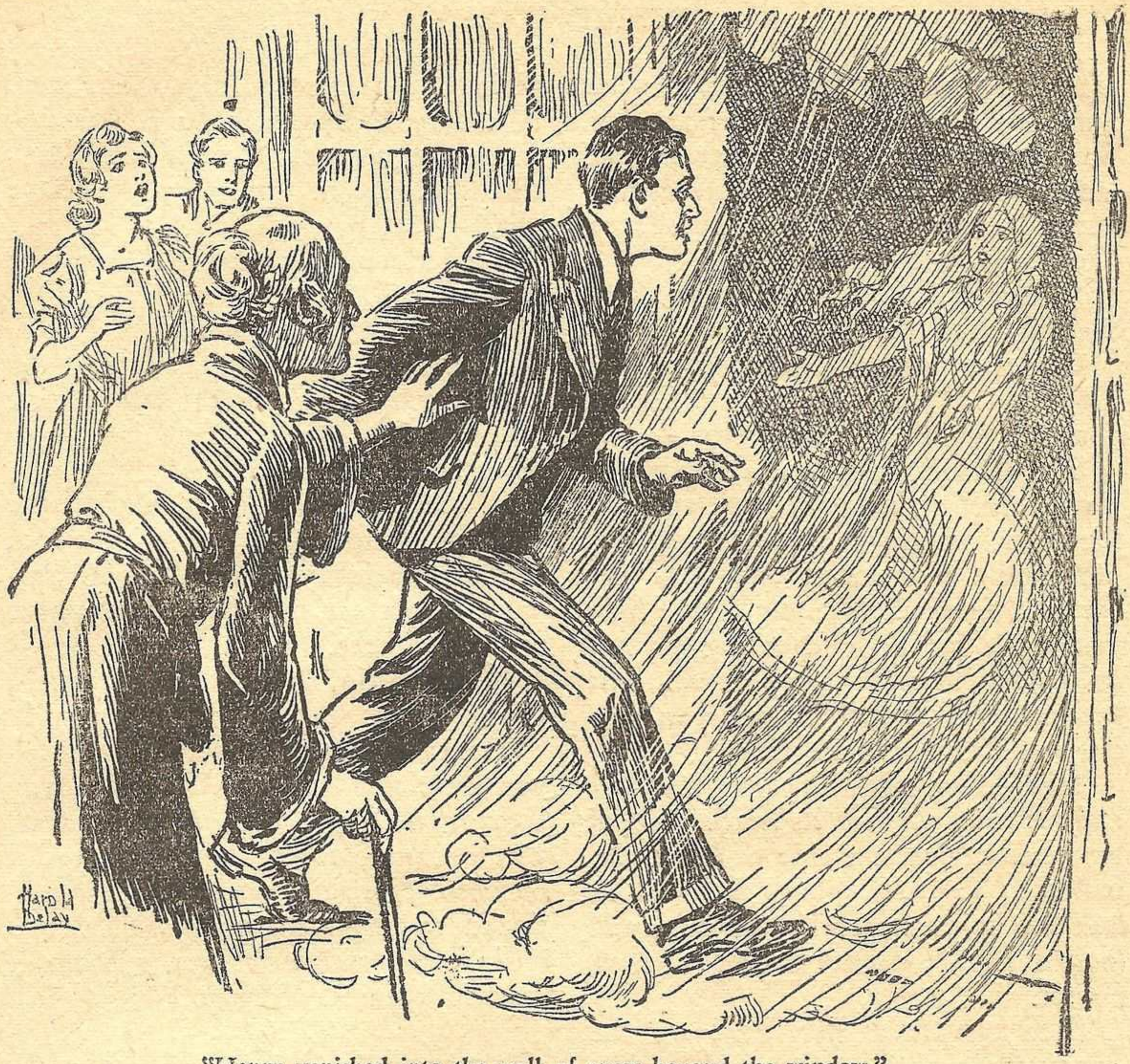
Crazy Nell goes flitting down
Through the wild and woodland ways
In a ragged, rusty gown,
Mumbling bits of broken lays.

On a day I heard her sing,
"Over bramble-stick and stone,
Like a bird with broken wing,
I must stumble on alone.

"Oh, my love is waiting me,
Weary, lonely till I come;
One and five and four are three,—
Harken to the bittern's drum!"

And I laughed to hear her go,
Like a breath upon the wind;
I was young and could not know
All the mystery behind.

Oh, I mocked her yesterday,
But today my heart can see,
For my love has fled away,—
Crazy Nell now comforts me.




"Henry vanished into the wall of snow beyond the window."

# The Drifting Snow

By AUGUST W. DERLETH

*Danger stalked the snow-drifts beyond the west windows, said the old lady —but who were the two who wandered there, one stormy night?*

AUNT MARY'S advancing footsteps halted suddenly, short of the table, and Clodetta turned to see what was keeping her. She was standing very rigidly, her eyes fixed upon the French windows just opposite the door through which she had entered, her cane held stiffly before her.

Clodetta shot a quick glance across the table toward her husband, whose

attention had also been drawn to his aunt; his face vouchsafed her nothing. She turned again to find that the old lady had transferred her gaze to her, regarding her stonily and in silence. Clodetta felt uncomfortable.

"Who withdrew the curtains from the west windows?"

Clodetta flushed, remembering. "I did, Aunt. I'm sorry. I forgot about your not wanting them drawn away."

The old lady made an odd, grunting sound, shifting her gaze once again to the French windows. She made a barely perceptible movement, and Lisa ran forward from the shadow of the hall, where she had been regarding the two at table with stern disapproval. The servant went directly to the west windows and drew the curtains.

Aunt Mary came slowly to the table and took her place at its head. She put her cane against the side of her chair, pulled at the chain about her neck so that her lorgnette lay in her lap, and looked from Clodetta to her nephew, Ernest.

Then she fixed her gaze on the empty chair at the foot of the table, and spoke without seeming to see the two beside her.

"I told both of you that none of the curtains over the west windows was to be withdrawn after sundown, and you must have noticed that none of those windows has been for one instant uncovered at night. I took especial care to put you in rooms facing east, and the sitting-room is also in the east."

"I'm sure Clodetta didn't mean to go against your wishes, Aunt Mary," said Ernest abruptly.

"No, of course not, Aunt."

The old lady raised her eyebrows, and went on impassively. "I didn't think it wise to explain why I made such a request. I'm not going to explain. But I do want to say that there is a very definite danger in drawing away the curtains. Ernest has heard that before, but you, Clodetta, have not."

Clodetta shot a startled glance at her husband.

The old lady caught it, and said, "It's all very well to believe that my mind's wandering or that I'm getting eccentric, but I shouldn't advise you to be satisfied with that."

A young man came suddenly into the room and made for the seat at the foot of the table, into which he flung himself with an almost inaudible greeting to the other three.

"Late again, Henry," said the old lady.

Henry mumbled something and began hurriedly to eat. The old lady sighed, and began presently to eat also, whereupon Clodetta and Ernest did likewise. The old servant, who had continued to linger behind Aunt Mary's chair, now withdrew, not without a scornful glance at Henry.

CLODETTA looked up after a while and ventured to speak, "You aren't as isolated as I thought you might be up here, Aunt Mary."

"We aren't, my dear, what with telephones and cars and all. But only twenty years ago it was quite a different thing, I can tell you." She smiled reminiscently and looked at Ernest. "Your grandfather was living then, and many's the time he was snowbound with no way to let anybody know."

"Down in Chicago when they speak of 'up north' or the 'Wisconsin woods' it seems very far away," said Clodetta.

"Well, it *is* far away," put in Henry, abruptly. "And, Aunt, I hope you've made some provision in case we're locked in here for a day or two. It

looks like snow outside, and the radio says a blizzard's coming."

The old lady grunted and looked at him. "Ha, Henry—you're overly concerned, it seems to me. I'm afraid you've been regretting this trip ever since you set foot in my house. If you're worrying about a snowstorm, I can have Sam drive you down to Wausau, and you can be in Chicago tomorrow."

"Of course not."

Silence fell, and presently the old lady called gently, "Lisa," and the servant came into the room to help her from her chair, though, as Clodetta had previously said to her husband, "She didn't need help."

From the doorway, Aunt Mary bade them all good-night, looking impressively formidable with her cane in one hand and her unopened lorgnette in the other, and vanished into the dusk of the hall, from which her receding footsteps sounded together with those of the servant, who was seldom seen away from her. These two were alone in the house most of the time, and only very brief periods when the old lady had up her nephew Ernest, "dear John's boy," or Henry, of whose father the old lady never spoke, helped to relieve the pleasant somnolence of their quiet lives. Sam, who usually slept in the garage, did not count.

Clodetta looked nervously at her husband, but it was Henry who said what was uppermost in their thoughts.

"I think she's losing her mind," he declared matter-of-factly. Cutting off Clodetta's protest on her lips, he got up and went into the sitting-room, from which came presently the strains of music from the radio.

Clodetta fingered her spoon idly and finally said, "I do think she is a little queer, Ernest."

Ernest smiled tolerantly. "No, I don't think so. I've an idea why she keeps the west windows covered. My grandfather died out there—he was overcome by the cold one night, and froze on the slope of the hill. I don't rightly know how it happened—I was away at the time. I suppose she doesn't like to be reminded of it."

"But where's the danger she spoke of, then?"

He shrugged. "Perhaps it lies in her—she might be affected and affect us in turn." He paused for an instant, and finally added, "I suppose she *does* seem a little strange to you—but she was like that as long as I can remember; next time you come, you'll be used to it."

Clodetta looked at her husband for a moment before replying. At last she said, "I don't think I like the house, Ernest."

"Oh, nonsense, darling." He started to get up, but Clodetta stopped him.

"Listen, Ernest. I remembered perfectly well Aunt Mary's not wanting those curtains drawn away—but I just felt I had to do it. I didn't want to, but—*something made me do it.*" Her voice was unsteady.

"Why, Clodetta," he said, faintly alarmed. "Why didn't you tell me before?"

She shrugged. "Aunt Mary might have thought I'd gone wool-gathering."

"Well, it's nothing serious, but you've let it bother you a little and that isn't good for you. Forget it; think of something else. Come and listen to the radio."

THEY rose and moved toward the sitting-room together. At the door Henry met them. He stepped aside a little, saying, "I might have known we'd be marooned up here," and adding, as Clodetta began to protest,

"We're going to be, all right. There's a wind coming up and it's beginning to snow, and I know what that means." He passed them and went into the deserted dining-room, where he stood a moment looking at the too long table. Then he turned aside and went over to the French windows, from which he drew away the curtains and stood there peering out into the darkness. Ernest saw him standing at the window, and protested from the sitting-room.

"Aunt Mary doesn't like those windows uncovered, Henry."

Henry half turned and replied, "Well, *she* may think it's dangerous, but I can risk it."

Clodetta, who had been staring beyond Henry into the night through the French windows, said suddenly, "Why, there's someone out there!"

Henry looked quickly through the glass and replied, "No, that's the snow; it's coming down heavily, and the wind's drifting it this way and that." He dropped the curtains and came away from the windows.

Clodetta said uncertainly, "Why, I could have sworn I saw someone out there, walking past the window."

"I suppose it does look that way from here," offered Henry, who had come back into the sitting-room. "But personally, I think you've let Aunt Mary's eccentricities impress you too much."

Ernest made an impatient gesture at this, and Clodetta did not answer. Henry sat down before the radio and began to move the dial slowly. Ernest had found himself a book, and was becoming interested, but Clodetta continued to sit with her eyes fixed upon the still slowly moving curtains cutting off the French windows. Presently she got up and left the room, going down the long hall into the east wing, where she tapped gently upon Aunt Mary's door.

"Come in," called the old lady.

Clodetta opened the door and stepped into the room where Aunt Mary sat in he dressing-robe, her dignity, in the shape of her lorgnette and cane, resting respectively on her bureau and in the corner. She looked surprisingly benign, as Clodetta at once confessed.

"Ha, thought I was an ogre in disguise, did you?" said the old lady, smiling in spite of herself. "I'm really not, you see, but I am a sort of bogy about the west windows, as you have seen."

"I wanted to tell you something about those windows, Aunt Mary," said Clodetta. She stopped suddenly. The expression on the old lady's face had given way to a curiously dismaying one. It was not anger, not distaste—it was a lurking suspense. Why, the old lady was afraid!

"What?" she asked Clodetta shortly.

"I was looking out—just for a moment or so—and I thought I saw someone out there."

"Of course, you didn't, Clodetta. Your imagination, perhaps, or the drifting snow."

"My imagination? Maybe. But there was no wind to drift the snow, though one has come up since."

"I've often been fooled that way, my dear. Sometimes I've gone out in the morning to look for footprints—there weren't any, ever. We're pretty far away from civilization in a snowstorm, despite our telephones and radios. Our nearest neighbor is at the foot of the long, sloping rise—over three miles away—and all wooded land between. There's no highway nearer than that."

"It was so clear. I could have sworn to it."

"Do you want to go out in the morning and look?" asked the old lady shortly.

"Of course not."

"Then you didn't see anything?"

It was half question, half demand. Clodetta said, "Oh, Aunt Mary, you're making an issue of it now."

"Did you or didn't you in your own mind see anything, Clodetta?"

"I guess I didn't, Aunt Mary."

"Very well. And now do you think we might talk about something more pleasant?"

"Why, I'm sure—I'm sorry, Aunt. I didn't know that Ernest's grandfather had died out there."

"Ha, he's told you that, has he? Well?"

"Yes, he said that was why you didn't like the slope after sunset—that you didn't like to be reminded of his death."

The old lady looked at Clodetta impassively. "Perhaps he'll never know how near right he was."

"What do you mean, Aunt Mary?"

"Nothing for you to know, my dear." She smiled again, her sternness dropping from her. "And now I think you'd better go, Clodetta; I'm tired.

Clodetta rose obediently and made for the door, where the old lady stopped her. "How's the weather?"

"It's snowing—hard, Henry says—and blowing."

The old lady's face showed her distaste at the news. "I don't like to hear that, not at all. Suppose someone should look down that slope tonight?" She was speaking to herself, having forgotten Clodetta at the door. Seeing her again abruptly, she said, "But you don't know, Clodetta. Good-night."

Clodetta stood with her back against the closed door, wondering what the old lady could have meant. *But you don't know, Clodetta.* That was curious. For a moment or two the old lady had completely forgotten her.

She moved away from the door, and came upon Ernest just turning into the east wing.

"Oh, there you are," he said. "I wondered where you had gone."

"I was talking a bit with Aunt Mary."

"Henry's been at the west windows again—and now *he* thinks there's someone out there."

Clodetta stopped short. "Does he really think so?"

Ernest nodded gravely. "But the snow's drifting frightfully, and I can imagine how that suggestion of yours worked on his mind."

Clodetta turned and went back along the hall. "I'm going to tell Aunt Mary."

He started to protest, but to no avail, for she was already tapping on the old lady's door, was indeed opening the door and entering the room before he could frame an adequate protest.

"Aunt Mary," she said, "I didn't want to disturb you again, but Henry's been at the French windows in the dining-room, and he says he's seen someone out there."

The effect on the old lady was magical. "He's seen them!" she exclaimed. Then she was on her feet, coming rapidly over to Clodetta. "How long ago?" she demanded, seizing her almost roughly by the arms. "Tell me, quickly. How long ago did he see them?"

Clodetta's amazement kept her silent for a moment, but at last she spoke, feeling the old lady's keen eyes staring at her. "It was some time ago, Aunt Mary, after supper."

The old lady's hands relaxed, and with it her tension. "Oh," she said, and

turned and went back slowly to her chair, taking her cane from the corner where she had put it for the night.

"Then there *is* someone out there?" challenged Clodetta, when the old lady had reached her chair.

For a long time, it seemed to Clodetta, there was no answer. Then presently the old lady began to nod gently, and a barely audible "Yes" escaped her lips.

"Then we had better take them in, Aunt Mary."

The old lady looked at Clodetta earnestly for a moment; then she replied, her voice firm and low, her eyes fixed upon the wall beyond. "We can't take them in, Clodetta—because they're not alive."

At once Henry's words came flashing into Clodetta's memory—"She's losing her mind"—and her involuntary start betrayed her thought.

"I'm afraid I'm not mad, my dear—I hoped at first I might be, but I wasn't. I'm not, now. There was only one of them out there at first—the girl; Father is the other. Quite long ago, when I was young, my father did something which he regretted all his days. He had a too strong temper, and it maddened him. One night he found out that one of my brothers—Henry's father—had been very familiar with one of the servants, a very pretty girl, older than I was. He thought she was to blame, though she wasn't, and he didn't find it out until too late. He drove her from the house, then and there. Winter had not yet set in, but it was quite cold, and she had some five miles to go to her home. We begged father not to send her away—though we didn't know what was wrong then—but he paid no attention to us. The girl had to go.

"Not long after she had gone, a biting wind came up, and close upon it a fierce storm. Father had already repented his hasty action, and sent some of the men to look for the girl. They didn't find her, but in the morning she was found frozen to death on the long slope of the hill to the west."

The old lady sighed, paused a moment, and went on. "Years later—she came back. She came in a snowstorm, as she went; but she had become a vampire. We all saw her. We were at supper table, and Father saw her first. The boys had already gone upstairs, and Father and the two of us girls, my sister and I, did not recognize her. She was just a dim shape floundering about in the drifting snow beyond the French windows. Father ran out to her, calling to us to send the boys after him. We never saw him alive again. In the morning we found him in the same spot where years before the girl had been found. He, too, had died of exposure.

"Then, a few years after—she returned with the snow, and she brought him along; he, too, had become vampire. They stayed until the last snow, always trying to lure someone out there. After that, I knew, and had the windows covered during the winter nights, from sunset to dawn, because they never went beyond the west slope.

"Now you know, Clodetta."

WHATEVER Clodetta was going to say was cut short by running footsteps in the hall, a hasty rap, and Ernest's head appearing suddenly in the open doorway.

"Come on, you two," he said, almost gayly, "there *are* people out on the west slope—a girl and an old man—and Henry's gone out to fetch them in!"

Then, triumphant, he was off. Clodetta came to her feet, but the old lady was before her, passing her and almost

running down the hall, calling loudly for Lisa, who presently appeared in nightcap and gown from her room.

"Call Sam, Lisa," said the old lady, "and send him to me in the dining-room."

She ran on into the dining-room, Clodetta close on her heels. The French windows were open, and Ernest stood on the snow-covered terrace beyond, calling his cousin. The old lady went directly over to him, even striding into the snow to his side, though the wind drove the snow against her with great force. The wooded western slope was lost in a snow-fog; the nearest trees were barely discernible.

"Where could they have gone?" Ernest said, turning to the old lady, whom he had thought to be Clodetta. Then, seeing that it was the old lady, he said, "Why, Aunt Mary—and so little on, too! You'll catch your death of cold."

"Never mind, Ernest," said the old lady. "I'm all right. I've had Sam get up to help you look for Henry —but I'm afraid you won't find him."

"He can't be far; he just now went out."

"He went before you saw where; he's far enough gone."

Sam came running into the blowing snow from the dining-room, muffled in a greatcoat. He was considerably older than Ernest, almost the old lady's age. He shot a questioning glance at her and asked, "Have they come again?"

Aunt Mary nodded. "You'll have to look for Henry. Ernest will help you. And remember, don't separate. And don't go far from the house."

Clodetta came with Ernest's overcoat, and together the two women stood there, watching them until they were swallowed up in the wall of driven snow. Then they turned slowly and went back into the house.

THE old lady sank into a chair facing the windows. She was pale and drawn, and looked, as Clodetta said afterward, "as if she'd fallen together." For a long time she said nothing. Then, with a gentle little sigh, she turned to Clodetta and spoke.

"Now there'll be three of them out there."

Then, so suddenly that no one knew how it happened, Ernest and Sam appeared beyond the windows, and between them they dragged Henry. The old lady flew to open the windows, and the three of them, cloaked in snow, came into the room.

"We found him—but the cold's hit him pretty hard, I'm afraid," said Ernest.

The old lady sent Lisa for cold water, and Ernest ran to get himself other clothes. Clodetta went with him, and in their rooms told him what the old lady had related to her.

Ernest laughed. "I think you believed that, didn't you, Clodetta? Sam and Lisa do, I know, because Sam told me the story long ago. I think the shock of Grandfather's death was too much for all three of them."

"But the story of the girl, and then——"

"That part's true, I'm afraid. A nasty story, but it did happen."

"But those people Henry and I saw!" protested Clodetta weakly.

Ernest stood without movement. "That's so," he said, "I saw them, too. Then they're out there yet, and we'll have to find them!" He took up his overcoat again, and went from the room, Clodetta protesting in a shrill unnatural voice. The old lady met him at the door of the dining-room, having

overheard Clodetta pleading with him.

"No, Ernest—you can't go out there again," she said. "There's no one there."

He pushed gently into the room and called to Sam, "Coming, Sam? There're still two of them out there—we almost forgot them."

Sam looked at him strangely. "What do you mean?" he demanded roughly. He looked challengingly at the old lady, who shook her head.

"The girl and the old man, Sam. We've got to get them, too."

"Oh, *them,*" said Sam. "They're dead!"

"Then I'll go out alone," said Ernest.

Henry came to his feet suddenly, looking dazed. He walked forward a few steps, his eyes traveling from one to the other of them, yet apparently not seeing them. He began to speak abruptly, in an unnatural child-like voice.

*"The snow,"* he murmured, *"the snow—the beautiful hands, so little, so lovely—her beautiful hands—and the snow, the beautiful, lovely snow, drifting and falling about her. . . ."*

He turned slowly and looked toward the French windows, the others following his gaze. Beyond was a wall of white, where the snow was drifting against the house. For a moment Henry stood quietly watching; then suddenly a white figure came forward from the snow—a young girl, cloaked in long snow-whips, her glistening eyes strangely fascinating.

The old lady flung herself forward, her arms outstretched to cling to Henry, but she was too late. Henry had run toward the windows, had opened them, and even as Clodetta cried out, had vanished into the wall of snow beyond.

Then Ernest ran forward, but the old lady threw her arms around him and held him tightly, murmuring, "You shall not go! Henry is gone beyond our help!"

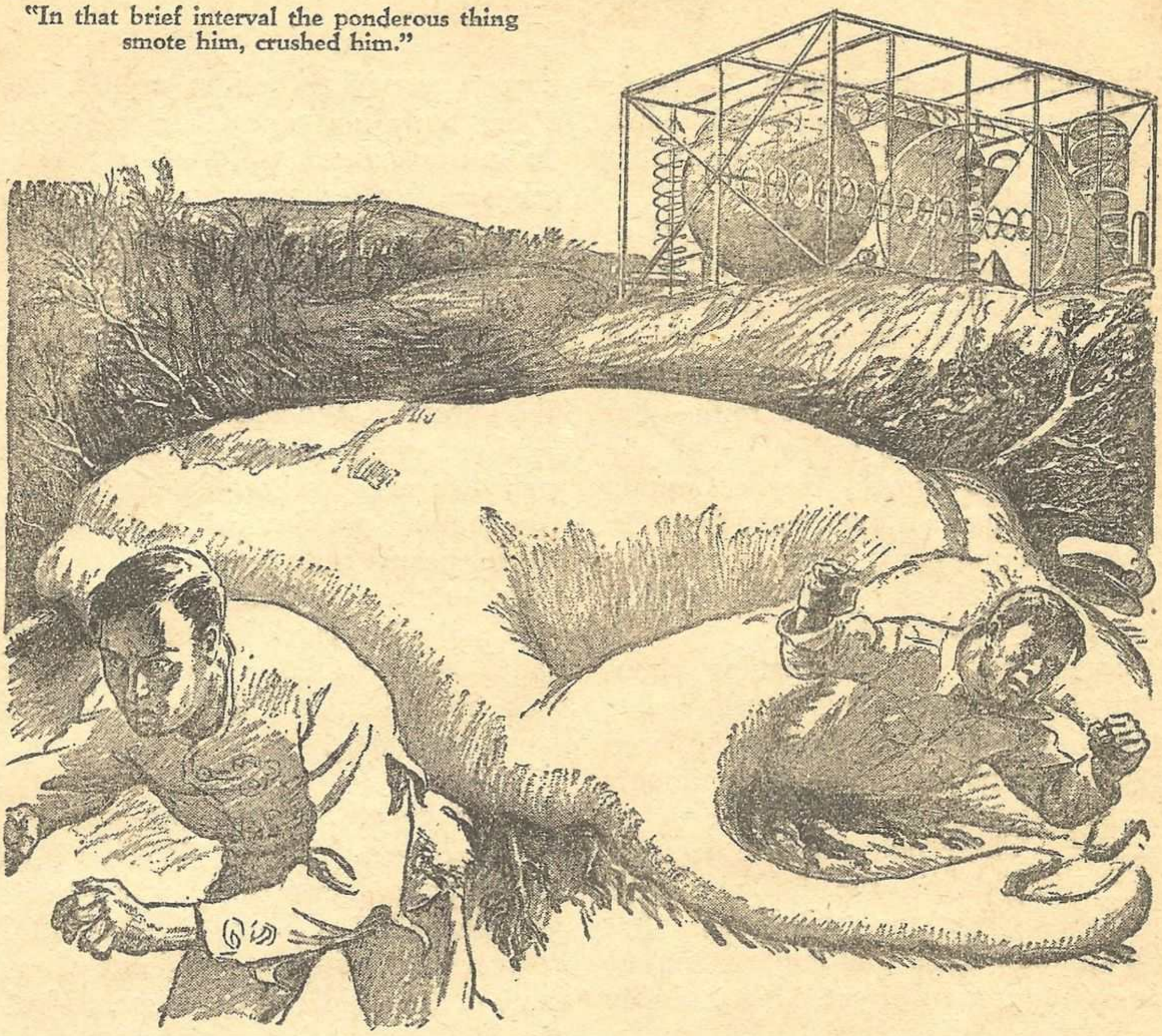
Clodetta came to help her, and Sam stood menacingly at the French windows, now closed against the wind and the sinister snow. So they held him, and would not let him go.

"And tomorrow," said the old lady in a harsh whisper, "we must go to their graves and stake them down. We should have gone before."

IN THE morning they found Henry's body crouched against the bole of an ancient oak, where two others had been found years before. There were almost obliterated marks of where something had dragged him, a long, uneven swath in the snow, and yet no footprints, only strange, hollowed places along the way, as if the wind had whirled the snow away, and only the wind.

But on his skin were signs of the snow vampire — the delicate small prints of a young girl's hands.

"In that brief interval the ponderous thing smote him, crushed him."



# Giant-Plasm

By DONALD WANDREI

*A strange story of an earthquake-spawned island in the Pacific, and the fate of five castaways at the hands of fearsome beings from another star*

## *1. The Seaquake*

TODAY was the eighth in the open dory. We doled out the last of our water and provisions this noon. The sun continues to flame across an absolutely frightful sky. It is useless to seek protection under the tarp. The heat comes through, bounces off the bottom, and makes an oven between the canvas and the planks. The only thing to do is sit up. Then we can roast in what comfort there is from the breath of wind created by our slow progress.

There must be a breeze on the Pa-

cific, but God knows where. Certainly not here, for the ocean is a blinding blue mirror except for faint swells that are hardly noticeable.

Eight days gone, and only six of us left out of the eleven who started when the *Reva* sank. Three or four weeks more before we can reach the nearest land. We'll never make it. If there had been time to use the radio—but there wasn't. And we're far off the regular cargo lanes. Maybe Captain Bligh *did* steer an open boat for over forty days and reach shore safely after the mutiny on the *Bounty,* but I'm damned if I can see how.

Santos has started croaking about land again. I'm glad his voice is nearly gone. The first few days he hollered every time he saw a cloud, or thought he saw something. He drove us all frantic. There does seem to be some sort of blob on the horizon. It's straight against the setting sun. But we all know there's no land within five or six hundred miles yet. It's probably a cloud or just an illusion. Or maybe a ship. If it's a ship it'll pass on in the night without seeing us, so we may as well forget it.

The only way to forget all this hell is to keep on writing, Diary. You're getting to be my best friend, a good substitute for the travel articles I was going to do at the end of this ill-fated trip. I wish you could talk back to me instead of this bunch of scum. Pablo Santos, a stoker, is short, thick, and oily, with the long arms of an ape. The *Reva's* second mate, Sam Glenk, is a fat lunkhead. Anybody with a name like that would be. Pete Lapous, the cook, is a scrawny, dour duck who looks as if he had a nest of mice in his tummy. He'd likely pitch me overboard if he could read.

Dave Anderson, one of the two passengers surviving besides myself, has a big body and a small head. He doesn't talk much. The other passenger saved when that tramp steamer nose-dived is a woman who goes by the name of Wanda Hall.

I don't know what her real name is but I'm sure that isn't. She looks a little like an adventuress, talks a little like a trouper, and acts as if she'd been in tight spots before. I can't quite make her out. I rather like her, though you couldn't possibly call her a knockout for beauty right now. At that she's easier on the eyes than the rest of these lugs. She has black hair that glistens and a dark complexion that makes her look Spanish, but I know she comes from the States.

It's a queer business, the way the *Reva* went down. We've been talking about it ever since. We haven't yet been able to figure it out. All I remember is being slammed out of my bunk in the middle of the night. I had the devil's own job getting to the deck. It was like bouncing around in a plane that went through loops, side-rolls, and tail-spins.

The sudden lurches threw me half a dozen times, but I managed to stagger out. Somewhere along the way I took the Hall dame in tow. I don't remember where; anyway we reached the starboard rail just as the first boat was launched. Right then the *Reva* stuck her nose down, and slid out of sight, and that was the end of her, along with the rest of the passengers and crew.

The sea boiled and stewed in huge bulges of waves. I've never seen anything like it before. I didn't notice any wind, and yet by the dim light of the waning crescent moon the Pacific looked as if somebody down below had lighted a whopping big fire and the

whole ocean was beginning to boil. But the water didn't feel any too warm when I got dunked. I came up beside the Hall woman, and somebody hauled both of us into the dory after we yelled awhile.

So that's all I'll ever know about it, except the stink—phooey, what a stink! Enormous bubbles kept floating up to the surface and going *plop!* Then we'd get a whiff of what smelled like a mixture of sulfur fumes and rotten eggs.

I suppose Glenk's guess is as good as anybody's. He thinks a submarine explosion of some sort created a tidal wave or a series of conflicting tidal waves that caught the *Reva* in the heart of the disturbance. The first push was the one that tossed me out of my bunk. Then the others rocked the ship, stood her on end so that the cargo shifted, and started her down. Probably the boilers blew at that stage and finished her.

The dory bobbed for an hour on walls and avalanches and whirlpools of crazy water, the air filled with the stench of gaseous fumes, and down below, far down, the glow of murky fires. We kept bumping into things. Dead sharks, dead tuna, dead tarpon, thousands of dead fish floated up to the surface. They helped out on the food stores the first couple of days.

Santos is still mumbling about land. The sun will pop out of sight in a minute or two, suddenly, the way it always does in these latitudes. I felt a thrill now when I took another look in the direction that Santos was jabbering toward, because I almost believe there *is* land ahead. But that's impossible unless the marine earthquake threw up an island. It can't be a ship, for there isn't any smoke.

Santos and Dave Anderson have been handling the oars this shift. Santos continues to poke his head around to look at his imaginary island.

"Hey, you!" He just squawked at me. "Why don't you look? It's land, land! We're saved!"

It got under my skin. I stopped writing. "Why should I look? I'll believe it's land when we reach it. Anyway, the sun's going down. In the morning we'll probably find it was only a cloud. Then it'll be my turn at the oars and you can spend all your time squinting for land."

As I started to go on with my notes, I had a premonition. I raised my head, attempted to get up and dodge. Santos, fever-mad, had yanked the oar out. I saw the blade smash toward my head. I saw Dave Anderson rise and lunge, his hands clawing to bring Santos down. I saw the cankers that the sun and thirst and exposure had raised on Santos's face. They made him look like a gargoyle, a leering ogre, in that wilderness of smooth waters, heat, torment, and loneliness.

I felt sorry for him. The sun vanished, stars rioted, and suffocating blackness swallowed me up when the oar bounced off my skull. I remember how utterly absurd it all seemed, Santos in a rage and trying to kill me merely because I didn't happen to agree with him that there was land ahead.

### *2. For the Benefit of Sharks*

THE coolness of night surrounded me when I regained consciousness. The process took time, a half-hour, or an hour, I don't know how long. The blackness would grow soupy, and start swimming, and out of it would emerge the stars, the dory, the sound of oars dipping. My head felt wet. Somebody was holding it. I guessed that Wanda had washed the cut with salt

water. The cut hurt like fire. When I tried to sit up, a blasting headache and waves of pain washed me away again into that blackness of darkness.

"Easy. You took a nasty blow," I heard her murmur the last time I came out of fog. Her voice sounded sweet and husky, but that must have been the softening effect of night on the moonless, vast undulation of water. I knew well enough that her throat was as parched as mine.

The advice was good. I followed it. I didn't try to get up. I lay there staring at the stars in the sky, millions and millions of them, clusters and hordes and torrents flaming coldly out there in the far gulfs of space. For some reason, I didn't feel small or insignificant, the way I was supposed to be impressed according to all the stories I'd read. The dory was bobbing around on an ocean that seemed just as limitless as space, and the feeling I really got was one of friendliness toward the stars.

I raised my right arm to wave at the stars. My hand hit a soft substance. Wanda gasped, "What's the big idea trying to knock me out?"

"Sorry. I didn't mean to. I was just waving at the stars." That time I managed to sit up and stay up, though the stars went through some wild loops that would have brought cheers from an astronomer.

"Waving at the stars? You're still raving," I heard her mutter.

"No, I'm not," I insisted. She stopped rubbing her chin where I had unintentionally slapped her. From what I could see of her face, she didn't look any too convinced.

I changed the subject. "I'm all right now. Who pulled Santos off? Did Anderson manage to get him calmed down?"

She didn't answer.

"What's the matter?"

She shuddered. I could feel her shake for a brief second, but when she spoke, her voice sounded perfectly normal. "Santos isn't with us any more. He and Dave Anderson went overboard."

That gave me a jolt. "How did it happen?"

"After Santos crowned you with the oar, Dave jumped up and grabbed him. It threw them both off balance. When they pitched overboard the boat rocked so badly I thought we'd all go in. Glenk headed the dory around, but only Anderson came up. They were pulling him back when I thought I saw Santos rise, but it must have been an illusion. He never did come up."

"People don't simply go down once —sharks!" I blurted.

She didn't say anything.

Suddenly I was tired, bitter. "What a rotten excuse for dying! We're going to die anyway, toasted black by the sun, or tortured by sight of water we can't drink, or famished for food we haven't got. But for a man to feed the sharks just because somebody else disagreed with him about land being in sight—it sounds as insane as the idiotic things that wars are fought over."

"It wasn't your fault. We're all on the ragged edge. Santos simply went berserk. He thought there was land ahead, he wanted to be saved, and he couldn't bear the thought of anyone to the contrary."

"Is land in sight?"

"We don't know. Pete says there isn't even a speck of land for five hundred miles yet. Easter Island is closest, whatever that is. I never heard of it before."

"Easter Island?" The name puzzled me—then I remembered. "That's an island several square miles in area

lying a couple of thousand miles west-northwest of Chile. It has some volcanic peaks and a lot of big stone images. We'll never make it."

"Glenk claims that maybe we won't need to. He says islands have been known to appear and disappear in the South Pacific and elsewhere. He says that the same submarine earthquake that sank the *Reva* might have tossed a mountain peak above the surface. Santos could have been right about sighting an island."

"Sure he could, and a lot of good it will do him now. Or us. A nice big peak fresh from the sea-bottom. Covered with lovely grade A mud and slime. Some sea-weeds—try and eat them. Probably a few puddles of salt water—have a drink." I might have gone on with the sarcasm but a voice bellowed, "Shut up, you, or take the oars!"

Curious, how you get used to things so that they don't register even when they're only a few feet away. Glenk and Pete had been rowing while we talked.

So there were only five of us left—one less mouth to feed, if there had been anything to feed it. Four men and a girl—a tough enough combination in an open boat, but at least we were bound by a common ordeal. I wasn't sure that I wanted us to land. Of course, I didn't have anything but a casual interest for Wanda's safety, but I'd expect anything from those other three cutthroats. I saw only trouble ahead whether dawn broke upon a deserted ocean or upon a forgotton or newly risen island.

### *3. Perilous Land*

A SHOUT wakened me before the sun came up. My eyes felt coated with sand.

I heard excited voices. Truth to tell, I hadn't slept much or soundly. I kept dozing, on and off, becoming drowsily aware of Wanda or the canopy of brilliant stars, then dropping back into nausea and a nightmare-ridden half-sleep. I don't dream much as a rule, but the ones I had that night would have scared hell out of a brass monkey.

I pushed myself up. I wondered how a man could live with so many aches—swollen tongue, long hunger, sun-baked skin, sun-blinded eyes, the steel-hard ribs and planks of the dory, and a splitting headache. Then I saw Wanda again, and it irked me to think that she could take it better than I. Maybe she couldn't, but she didn't let it show.

There was a pale immensity of dawn from the tinge of rose above the eastern horizon to the fleeing wall of night toward the west. The sea remained almost glassily calm. Just a low gurgle of water, and the creak and dip of oars, told me that we moved. It was already sultry, with no breeze. Another frantic day crawled on.

I couldn't believe it when I saw the shadowy hump of land ahead. I stroked my sore eyes, but that only made them feel worse. They smarted like acid burns. When I looked again, I saw the island still there, a dark mass coming into sharper focus as the sun rose.

The jabber of voices brought me really awake. Sam Glenk was croaking, "Look! Look! I told you so! I said the same quake might toss an island up! It did; there it is!"

Pete Lapous asked, "How'd it grow trees overnight?"

"Shut up, you half-baked scum of a cook. *Some* earthquake threw that land up. What difference does it make

if it came up last week or last century? It's here——"

"Oh, stop your everlasting gab!" Wanda said tartly. "You make me sicker than I am. This man is injured. He——"

"Who, that guy? He's only another passenger and a rotten one at that," Glenk rumbled. "Any time he could help, he sits and scribbles in that damn notebook. Who's going to read it? What use is it? You can't eat it. You know what's in it. The sap—lugging a notebook of all things out of his cabin——"

"What of it? He instinctively got what meant most to him when the ship went down. You're a bully and a would-be Napoleon, so you grabbed a gun and a pocketful of bullets. Pete is a cook. He swept up as much food as he could. If it wasn't for that, we wouldn't be here now. As for me, I brought my handbag and a bunch of press clippings. Now go ahead and land; that's what *you* are supposed to be good for."

I gave a silent cheer. Dave Anderson looked off across the waters. The other two men glowered at Wanda and me, then went ahead beaching the dory. I thought then that Wanda looked like an angel, but there was too much excitement the next few hours for further thought along those lines.

AN HOUR after sunrise, we ran ashore on a sandy ledge. The island is of volcanic origin, rising straight out of the sea, with only a few short stretches of beach. In most places the cliffs drop precipitously. It advances by a series of terraces and slopes toward a central peak or crater. I wouldn't be surprized if it is part of a chain of mountains that extends under the sea.

This island where no island should be, is a queer one. It is the queerest I ever saw. It is a ghost island. I got a spooky feeling when I first saw it by daylight, and the feeling grew after we landed and explored it a little.

It is a dark island, a black island, with rocks and hard, clayey silt underfoot. There is a good deal of grass, fairly thick underbrush, and a sprinkling of young trees. They include some coconuts, mangoes, bananas, wild raspberries, oranges—a medley of stuff from seeds blown by the wind or washed ashore from the refuse of distant steamers, I suppose. There are also a couple of small, barely adequate springs. We could subsist here for a few weeks.

This island can't have been here for more than a few years, five or ten at most, to judge by the vegetation. And yet——

Dead trees cover it, the trunks of trees that grew God alone knows how long ago. Beyond all doubt, this island existed at some past time, perhaps a couple of hundred years ago, perhaps much farther back in the dawn of time. I remember reading once about an old Dutch navigator who claimed to have seen a considerable stretch of land a thousand miles off the coast of Chile back in the Seventeenth or Eighteenth Century. Maybe this is part of that lost land, maybe it isn't.

An earthquake sent it down, an earthquake brought it back. And here the old stumps stand, naked, stripped of leaves and bark, now dried out and rotting, amid the new growths. Those old trunks loom like dead giants, fifty feet high and more. It is impossible to describe the sinister effect that they have, rising in such striking but desolate array far above even the tallest of the young vegetation.

It is a silent island, save for the sea washing against the cliffs. There are a few gulls that have sought it out, but no other birds, no insects, no animals whatsoever. And there are mysteries upon it—like the mystery of the great stone statue.

The statue faces west, its back to the sea. It stands a hundred yards beyond the inlet where we landed.

The inlet is under the handle of the cup. By this I mean that the whole island is roughly two miles long and a mile wide, shaped very much like a cup lying sidewise. A lagoon at one end, surrounded by a curving rim of land, is similar to the handle of the cup. Under the handle, where it joins the cup or main body of the island, is the ledge where we landed. Beyond that ledge, left toward the mainland, towers the colossal fragment of statuary. We noticed it when we first landed, but we didn't go back to examine it closely until after we had scouted for food and water.

The part of the statue still erect is at least forty feet tall. Originally it must have stood a hundred feet high. The head and upper torso toppled during one of those older earthquakes, leaving the legs and trunk. The shattered fragments that lie partly buried have weathered. The whole must have been a weird colossus. I can not imagine what it is supposed to represent. It bears some human resemblance, but looks more like a grotesque, immense suit of armor or encasement for a faceless robot. When first erected hundreds or thousands of years ago, it must have dominated all else upon the island, and even now it overshadows the vestiges of the ancient forest.

"It's an ugly thing! Let's leave it alone," Wanda exclaimed as we looked at the fallen monarch.

"Sure, we'll find out what else is on the island," Glenk rumbled. "We got to climb the peak and name it and take possession anyway."

Dave Anderson, who had a curiously small voice for so big a frame, objected mildly. "That's easy for you to say. What about the rest of us who don't have shoes? We aren't fit for tramping around."

It was true. I realized again how strangely dressed a group we were—Dave Anderson and I barefoot, in the pajamas we wore when tumbled out of our bunks. Pete Lapous looked ridiculous in a suit of atrocious flannel underwear. Wanda, awake reading at the time of the disaster, came out with a scarlet blouse, white slacks, and scarlet sandals. She flaunted a good figure. Only Sam Glenk, who had been strolling idly around the deck, was fully dressed.

Glenk grinned. "Stay here then. Wanda and I'll name the island."

"The name is Miss Hall," she retorted. "Go climb a peak yourself. I'll loaf around with the others."

"Let's all go," I suggested. "Shoes or no shoes, I'm puzzled, though I don't care a hoot about claiming the island. I'd like to know if it has any more mysteries like the dead forest and this mammoth of a statue. We could make the climb in easy stages."

IN THE end we all went. Glenk swaggered ahead, but Wanda dropped back with us who walked barefoot. Glenk didn't like that, and finally lagged until we caught up with him. He gave me a mean scowl, since Wanda happened to be strolling alongside me at that moment.

I asked the second mate, "How long do you expect to stop here?"

"A day or two. Long enough for

the bunch of you to get in better shape."

"Then what?"

"What do *you* think? We can't stay here and rot. There ain't any too much ground water. Maybe we'll have to hang around for a week before we can stock enough water for the next lap. All the fruit on the island wouldn't last us a month. Our best bet is to collect all the stuff we can and get away as soon as possible. We could make Easter Island in a fortnight with good weather."

Wanda turned up her nose. "I'd rather stay here than spend two more weeks in an open boat. One taste of hell was plenty."

"Well, we can't just go off and leave you!" I exclaimed.

Glenk nodded. "You're right about that. And I'm damned if we'll squat here waiting for *you* to make up your mind."

Wanda said obstinately, "Just the same I'll take my chances on the island while you men get to civilization and send help back. Maybe five people couldn't last long, but there's certainly enough food for one person to stay alive a month or two."

The argument halted because we needed our breath to climb a short but steep hill.

At the top, we found something else to think about.

The center of the island was a circular plateau about a quarter of a mile in diameter. The usual young growths and stark trunks of the ancient forest covered parts of it. We now had a good view of the peak, or rather, what we had assumed to be the cone of an extinct volcano. At this close range it suddenly became another thing entirely: the ruins of a great building or temple of some sort, ill defined because buried under a gray-white mound. Scattered off to one side were a number of smaller mounds.

We straggled toward our find. I knew without a word being said that Glenk's greedy soul was driven by visions of loot—I could see the dream of golden sacrificial goblets firing his hot eyes. The island had once been inhabited. The race had reached a stage of culture that made them build statues and structures. Any treasure that they owned in the way of gold, precious metals, gems, or art objects would center around their place of worship or their burial sites, as with most of the earlier civilizations. I knew that such hopes drove Glenk on so strongly that he outdistanced the rest of us.

A restless feeling began to grow on me. It made me uneasy. I didn't know why. The peculiar silence of the island's interior, with the sound of the sea muted by distance, may have had something to do with my worry. The blow on my head plus the let-down after eight days of exposure probably contributed to my state of mind. But most of all, I think it was really the sight of that strange, gray-white mound covering the outlines of the building underneath. I was wondering why a gray-white deposit happened to coat a particular building while it lay sunk under the sea, and why sediment didn't distribute itself evenly over the whole island. It is strange stuff indeed that picks out its own site to fall on.

### *4. Shining Armor*

GLENK was prowling around with a glum expression by the time we caught up with him at the gray-white mound. Seen close by, it lost some of the definite outlines of a building that it had suggested from a distance. Gone was the second mate's dream of wealth,

for not the slightest trace of an opening showed, if a temple lay buried beneath the stuff.

Whatever it was, it possessed a most extraordinary shape. It somewhat resembled a vast boulder, a solid block about sixty feet long, forty wide, and thirty high, roughly rectangular. There were several indentations that suggested doors and windows. On one side a ledge projected much like a porch or altar. The resemblance to a building was uncanny. So was the gray-white stuff, which presented something new in my experience.

Glenk kicked it viciously, in disgust I suppose at not finding gold. Nothing happened. And that scared me, because something *should* have happened.

If you kick a rock, you hear an audible grate or a dull, stony sound. Kick metal and you get a ring or a clang. Kick rubber and it gives to the pressure. But none of these results came about. The only idea I could think of was that it seemed as if he had kicked steel-hard dough, whatever that means.

I felt the wall. It startled me to find it cold and *dry* though sunshine flooded it. Cold and clammy would have been natural—a cold surface sweats to hot air. Or hot and dry would have been all right. But cold and dry under a tropic sun——

"What's the matter?" Glenk asked.

"This stuff—what is it? There's something all wrong about it."

"Bosh. You're seeing things. It's just a big hunk of sunbaked clay or mud."

"It's hard, tough, and cold, yet I think it would give if we hit it with enough strength," I insisted. "Have you ever seen anything like it before?"

Glenk scoffed. "There has to be a first time for anything you see that's queer. Otherwise it wouldn't *be* queer."

"It's more than that. Why does the stuff cling here? It's almost as if a —skin—had developed around a building——"

"Haw—haw—haw!" His booming laughter rolled back at me. I didn't see anything funny, not with that immense mass of strange, pallid stuff in front of me. But Glenk laughed so hard that he gasped, and then laughed some more, while I hoped he choked.

His voice grated on my ears the same way that the touch of the mass had grated on my nerves. It didn't feel right, because it didn't feel like anything familiar, and again a curious thought sprang into my mind. It felt like a dry, frozen jellyfish.

I walked all around the block. When I got back to the starting-point, I was more convinced than ever that a temple *did* lie underneath the gray-white deposit.

*But what was the gray-white deposit?*

I picked up a flat stone with a sharp edge, intending to see if I could chip away part of the surface. Then I saw something that made my hair bristle. I know my eyes bulged. I heard the blood pound like monstrous trip-hammers at my temples.

"Look—look!" I gulped. I wouldn't have recognized my voice as my own. Standing there in broad daylight, I was almost petrified with fear. I admit it. But so were the others. For the impression of the toe of a shoe had formed where Glenk had kicked the surface a few minutes ago. None of us had seen it form. But there it was. And it most certainly had *not* been there when or immediately after Glenk kicked the stuff.

We must have stood for five minutes in dead silence, our eyes absolutely hypnotized by that indentation. I stared until I began seeing spots all

over. I don't know whether I saw the hole close up or not, my eyes ached so from the intensity of staring. But at the end of five minutes, not a trace of the hole remained.

Wanda let out a deep sigh. I turned. I thought she was going to faint. She had the whitest face I've ever seen. I dropped the rock I was still foolishly holding and sprang over to help her. That broke the spell. The others swarmed around us.

Wanda said, "Thanks, I'm all right. It's been such a strain all these days—my eyes were playing tricks"—she snickered a little hysterically—"why, would you believe it, I actually thought I saw that wall move!" She stared up at us with pleading eyes.

"Just an optical illusion," I stated as calmly as I could. "Shadows are apt to play tricks."

"Sure, I saw it too," the thick-headed Glenk muttered.

"That's how group errors get started. That's the way rumors about bleeding images and angel hosts over battlefields are born," I tossed off lightly.

But it all went for naught, because Pete Lapous turned at that moment and let out a sort of squawk or bleat. We all jumped.

Where Glenk had kicked the mass, and where the impression of a toe had subsequently developed, there was now a projecting knob, shaped like the tip of a shoe.

PETE LAPOUS, grotesque and ridiculous in his long flannels, went legging off as hard as he could, but stopped after a dozen yards when he found nothing at his heels. We yelled at him, got him quieted down. And when we turned our attention on the gray-white surface again, the knob, like the hole before it, was gone. Only the smooth wall met our gaze.

"Take me away from here—back to the shore," Wanda begged.

I felt a good deal better myself as she hooked her arm in mine. The good old protective instinct did me a favor then, by exactly counterbalancing the fear that had started growing inside of me.

And I considered it a healthy fear, since it put me on guard against an unknown foe.

It upset me to find myself thinking of that gray-white mound as a living enemy. My thoughts were a crazy jumble. I remembered stories I'd read about protoplasm, about fungoid growths, about scaly formations on wrecks, and even about the rust that oxidation produces on iron. I kept seeing the crust of a pie, and every now and then I had an impulse to laugh. If we took the gray-white crust off, what would we find—a temple, or a heap of dried apples? Out of such giddy visions, my perspective slipped back into focus.

"You're very silent," Wanda complained.

"I was thinking that you never can guess what lies under a shell. A pea or a walnut or an egg—or even gunpowder."

She looked puzzled. "That doesn't make sense."

"What does? We get shipwrecked in fair weather in deep water hundreds of miles from land. We can't radio for help. We save ourselves when we should have drowned. We live for eight days in an open dory with raw fish and not enough water and reach an island that isn't on the maps. Nightmare Island—that's what Glenk should have named it if he hadn't forgotten. Or Phœnix Island—down she goes and

up she comes. Or Chance Island—you never know what comes next."

I was glad to see her smile. "How about Magic Island? Now you see something, now you don't."

An answer of some sort died on my lips, for I *did* see something then and there. My stride slackened for a couple of steps, before I got hold of myself.

Wanda felt the lag, asked, "Did you stub your toe?"

"Not enough to matter," I lied.

I heard the pat and scuffle of the feet that followed us, bare soles, and Glenk's shoes. I didn't hear them falter. The others missed what I saw.

"Magic Island—not a bad name. Now you see something, now you don't," I repeated Wanda's words.

She was quick to suspect. "The mounds we're passing — what did I overlook?"

"Nothing. Some mounds cover bones, and some don't."

She dropped the subject. The smaller mounds lying away from the central block were at least twenty feet long. I've heard of Indian burial mounds much larger than those in the States. But it wasn't a bone that caught my eye.

We slid down the hills, threaded our way past the ancient, dead trunks, skirted or plunged through the tangle of green growths. By the time we reached the dory, I hadn't found a way to solve the query in my mind.

Dave Anderson solved it for me. He remarked in his small, quiet voice, "If we're going to stay here overnight, we ought to collect food and firewood. There might be shellfish along the shore."

The second mate growled, "That's what I said when we landed here. You and Lapous scout along the shore. Wanda can watch the dory. I'll hunt for fruit, food, and whatnot. *You,*" he added to me as an afterthought, "can get the makings of a fire."

By tacit understanding, we avoided reference to what we had seen at the gray-white mound. Lapous started poking along the shore northward. Dave Anderson went off in the opposite direction. I didn't think either of them would have much luck, because of the steep cliffs surrounding most of the island. Still, there were a few stretches of beach, and it might be possible to clamber down the bluffs in a couple of places.

Glenk was watching both me and Wanda. I asked her if she felt better, and when she said yes, I struck inland. I looked back once. I didn't trust that Glenk mutt. But he had left Wanda and was pressing into the tangle of vegetation, presumably to locate more nut and fruit trees.

As soon as he was out of sight, I circled around to head off Dave Anderson. I picked him because he talked less than anybody else, and I figured he would have sense enough to keep his mouth shut.

He was climbing up along the top of a drop-off when I caught sight of him. I beckoned with my hand. He plodded over, looking neither surprised nor curious, as though it was all part of the day's work.

"Come along with me," I said. "I made a find that's worth investigating. It'll take two to do the job."

He didn't ask questions. He simply followed in my tracks. I began to wonder if he talked so little because he had nothing to say, and was just plain stupid, or whether he knew more than he indicated. Whatever the reason, I never met a more phlegmatic, non-communicative man.

I HEADED for the mounds around the big rectangle. There were three of the mounds about twenty feet long, and another that was several hundred feet over all, much larger than the gray-white rectangle. The mounds had irregular shapes. Grass covered them. I suppose that the rest of our party considered them so many hills or slopes without further significance. They hadn't seen what I saw.

I led Anderson around one of the small mounds. In back of it, unnoticeable from the path we had followed a while ago except in one spot where the glint of sunlight betrayed it to my eyes, I showed him a chunk of shining, milky metal. It extended into the mound.

We dropped to our knees and looked at the metal. I had expected it to be silver, but it wasn't. It had a thin, bluish tinge, resembled milk glass, and glistened with virginal brilliance. Dave Anderson fingered it without a trace of emotion. For some obscure reason, his placid tolerance nettled me. Excitement was swelling inside of me. I couldn't identify the metal that looked like glass any more than I could identify the gray-white structure a few hundred yards away.

"Get a piece of stone, anything to scoop the surface dirt off. Let's see what's underneath," I told him, and hunted for a sharp-edged rock to use.

There was, we discovered, approximately two inches of clayey silt and sediment covering the mound. Grass bound it together and prevented the rains from washing it away. It had evidently settled on the object during the centuries it lay submerged under the sea. In some places, of course, the deposit was much thicker. Perhaps the caking had been a good deal heavier when the island rose again, but grass seeds had taken root and spread before rains could remove all the encrustation.

At the end of a half hour of hard work that made us sweat aplenty, we had exposed many parts of one mound, and tapped the other two sufficiently to learn that they duplicated the contents of the first.

That first mound concealed a colossal, crumpled mass of shining armor. It had never been designed for a human form. We guessed that in its original shape it stood twenty or twenty-five feet in height, with a cylindrical body, a turret top, no arms, but three conical lower limbs or appendages that ended in sharp points without trace of a foot.

The body cylinder had been smashed. Inside lay the accumulated sediment of centuries. God knows what once walked around in that gigantic suit of armor. I couldn't imagine what it looked like, whatever it was, and wherever it came from. I realized that it didn't originate on earth. Neither Dave Anderson nor I could make the slightest scratch on that stainless, eternal metal.

### *5. Strange Death*

WHILE we worked, I had an eery sensation of being watched. Several times I looked around, but saw nothing. I half expected the second mate to waddle along, but no one showed up. Finally I hooked my uneasiness to the presence of the gray-white mass off to one side and let it go at that.

"What giants they must have been that wore these suits!" I exclaimed after we had tested the third mound.

Anderson merely twitched his shoulders in a shrug.

I suggested, "Let's try the big one now. Maybe we'll find something to

shed a little more light, though I don't see what. I'm baffled already. The remains that turn up only seem to add new mysteries. How did this metal stuff get here? Who made it? What was inside? Where did it come from?"

"Can't say," said my all but silent partner.

We moved over to the main hill, and encircled it to get a better idea of our task. Like the gray-white mass and the metallic formations of armor, the large hill also had an odd shape. It resembled a tear-drop, broad at one end with a beautifully curved nose, so to speak, and a more gradually tapered point at the other end. As in the case of the three smaller mounds, it was covered with grass.

One side contained an irregularity, a bulge, a dozen feet out and a dozen high. We tried gouging the grass and clods of soil off. It took us a long time to penetrate a few feet into the bulge. So far as results indicated, we could tunnel through the whole hill, given opportunity enough, without finding anything.

I abandoned that task and asked Anderson, "How about one more try higher up or farther along?"

"Sure."

He scrambled to his feet, wiped some of the dirt off his hands, and followed me away from the bulge. I picked a spot at random—and a few inches in struck the same milky, glistening metal which composed the armor.

We climbed on top of the bulge—and about two inches down struck the metal again.

Dismay and sick disappointment took possession of me then. I dropped the rock I had used for digging. There never was a more heartfelt curse of defeat than the one I uttered.

"What's wrong?" my companion asked in his slow, soft voice.

"Nothing—nothing at all. Just that we'll have to give this up. It's too big for us to tackle alone."

"Sure," said Dave Anderson, and we started back. He ambled toward the sea, obediently going ahead with his previous instructions to hunt sea-food.

I flung a last malevolent glance at the gray-white rectangle, where it bulked ominously against the westering sun. On my way down, I loitered, selecting such firewood as was suitable. It didn't matter now if the rest of the party investigated the mounds. We'd only be here another day or two. I was bitter with disappointment, tantalized by a riddle none of us could solve or would have any chance to solve.

I knew in my heart what lay under the great hill. It concealed a half-buried ship, or ark, or cruiser of some sort. It was the vessel the giants came in. Maybe it had wrecked in landing. I don't know. Maybe the bulge was the open door to its interior. Maybe the bulge is a gap that burst open in landing and spilled the occupants out where *they* also smashed on the ground rocks. I don't know that either.

What I do know, and hate to know, is that while this island lay on the sea bottom, sediment drifted in through the opening and filled the interior at least to the height of the rent. Without proper tools, it would take us all working together a week to clear out even a small part of the silt. It would take a month to clear the whole inside even if we had spades and shovels.

There wasn't the ghost of a chance for me to find out the secret of the hill. I believed that it contained the wreck of a cruiser, a space-ship. I believed that its interior would disclose

fantastic machinery, engines, equipment, foodstuffs maybe, perhaps maps and plans and documents, records of an amazing cosmic voyage—I don't know what all. My imagination was reeling. The thing lay at my fingertips—and I couldn't get at it. The vessel—the queer armor — the gray-white stuff, they all linked up somehow.

I was beginning to get a picture, the picture of a thriving community here at some time in the past, a branch of the Polynesians. I saw a meteor from the skies plunge into their midst. But this meteor was a dazzling silvery streak that smote the ground and burst and spewed out a trio of dead or dying giants from the wrecked starplane. Maybe it spewed other things, too, such as a test-tube full of—what? Maybe the natives had a temple, and maybe they built a temple after the cruiser piled up. And maybe the test-tubeful spilled out and took over the temple.

That sequence would explain the huge, alien statue that stands by the lagoon and faces the rectangle on top of the isle. I could imagine the superstitious natives worshipping the intruder from the skies, and revering it as a deity, the statue erected in the image of the remembered dying giants in armor—until the day of that older earthquake which plunged the whole island to the sea bottom.

Right there my thoughts became a hopeless jumble again, because of the gray-white growth upon the temple. I had been nursing the idea that it was alive in a dim, rudimentary way. The manner in which the impression of a shoe-tip had formed a long while after Glenk kicked the wall, and how the stuff had still later thrust out to form a knob like a shoe-tip, proved in my mind that it had about the lowly instincts of a worm. I regarded it as an overgrown blob with just a glimmer of life far back in the scale of evolution.

But if it grew on the temple when the pilgrims from afar landed—how could it have survived those centuries under the sea? And if it developed down on the sea beds, a product of earth's deep marine life, how could it have gone on living and growing when the island sprang above the waves again? How could it live in air one moment and go on living in the sea the next? Was it alive at all, for that matter, and if so, what did it live on? Or was it a vegetable, fungus growth rooted to the soil, a hybrid midway between land life and sea life, so primitive in its nature that it could exist equally well under both conditions?

My brain was looping by the time I got back to the dory. My ideas turned wilder and wilder. I found great vistas opening up to me that I'd never thought much about before.

In my thirty odd years, I had knocked around a good deal. I had done my share of miscellaneous reading. I had seen queer sights, and had met plenty of tramps no better and no worse than the ones I was marooned with. But we were all up against something new. Right then I'd have traded the kit and kaboodle of my companions for an hour's talk with a professor who had the imagination of H. G. Wells, the brain of Einstein, and talked words I could understand with the assurance of Roosevelt.

THE sun had slid far down when I reached the dory. I dumped my load of wood. Nobody paid attention to my soiled hands and tattered pajamas. I suppose we were all worn out from the ordeal and our day-long labors on the island, preoccupied with our own special thoughts. We had a

silent dinner on some shellfish that Lapous brought back, along with bananas, coconuts, and oranges that the second mate produced.

I wanted to talk to Wanda afterward, but couldn't think of anything to say. The discoveries that Anderson and I had made dominated my thoughts. Dave and I hadn't tried to cover up the objects we exposed. Wanda, Sam Glenk, and Pete might stumble on those same relics if we held the island for several days. Then we could talk, but until then I saw no point in pouring a stream of extra worries into Wanda's pretty head.

We turned the dory over at sunset as shelter for her.

The rest of us slept under the stars.

I watched Dave Anderson lower his big frame and spread out. I wondered what went on in his brain. At no time since returning to our makeshift camp had he given an inkling of unusual occurrences, or of being troubled.

I rolled over on my back and stared up at the stars. They didn't look so friendly as the night before. They blazed infinitely afar with riddles and mysteries beyond them. I fancied other starplanes plummeting those gulfs upon tremendous voyages that would dwarf all the Odysseys and explorations of mankind. I speculated on the possibility of earthmen one day launching rockets to the moon, or landing on the planets, or hurling starships into the depths of space.

A dream of giddy swoops and plunges through infinity beset me. I found myself on a teeter-totter. A roller-coaster miles high shot me at bullet speed up to its crest, then flung me into sheer, vertical drops.

I wakened suddenly. It was very dark, and I had the feeling that it was very late at night.

The island vibrated, trembled with a rumble like thunder.

"Get up! Earthquake!" a voice bellowed through the blackness.

I scrambled to my feet. Shadowy forms materialized around me. I swayed, confused, and the island shook again. I was vaguely conscious of the calm sea, the lapping slur of waves against the cliffs. It couldn't be an earth temblor, and yet I distinctly felt the ground sway.

A scream split the air in the distance. I couldn't tell what direction it came from. It sounded too shrill to be human. It screeched again, continuously, higher and louder.

A grotesque figure in flannels plunged by me.

"Pete! Pete Lapous! We can't do anything in this blackness! Somebody's got to stay by Wanda!" I yelled.

His teeth chattered. "What the hell, what the hell, I can't let him get killed, I got to help. I'm scared to death, I tell you, but I got to help!"

It was a pathetic and at the same time a brave person that pattered away from me. I sprang after him, grabbed him by the arm.

"Who is it? Who's missing? Quiet, all of you! Keep your heads!" roared Glenk.

We babbled in chorus—all except Dave Anderson.

"It's Anderson hollering. Shut up and try to get his direction!" the second mate boomed command.

The scream broke off abruptly, completely. The isle stopped vibrating. We listened hard in the dark, straining our ears, but not another sound came. I grew aware of Wanda's tense breathing beside me, caught a whiff of her hair.

I heard restless, uneasy movements around me, while the slow minutes

crawled by. We waited in vain for that terror-born scream to rise again, and I for one was glad to be spared another such agonized, frantic, wordless cry. Glenk blew on the almost dead embers, nursed the coals into a comforting flame. Thus we waited, our nerves raw, until the pale light of dawn glimmered above the horizon after what seemed interminable ages.

"The voice came from the peak of the island. You've got the only gun among us. Let's all strike for there first," I demanded of Glenk.

"Bunk!" snorted the second mate. "I'll bet an eye-tooth the yelling came from across the lagoon."

"I don't know where it came from. It just filled the air on all sides," Wanda contributed.

"No, no, up there, up there along the cliffs!" Pete insisted excitedly. He pointed toward the route that Anderson had taken hunting for shellfish the previous afternoon.

GLENK waved his hands. "This island covers two square miles. We'd need all day to cover it traveling in a group. We'll have to split up——"

"So that whatever got Anderson, meaning the gray-white stuff, can pick us off one at a time——" I began.

"Forget that nightmare of yours!" he shouted. "For God's sake, can't you think of anything else? Maybe he was just restless and went walking around. Maybe a tree fell on him. Maybe he fell off a cliff. Maybe we missed an animal that scared him. How do we know what happened till we find out? How can we find out unless we cover the ground as fast as possible? Maybe he's only knocked out. We've got to find him first before we do anything else. Now scatter, all of you. I'm going across the lagoon. Pete, follow the route that Anderson went yesterday. Wanda can watch here same as before in case he turns up. And *you* go take a look at your damned bogy and if you don't like that, stick around the lagoon while *I* hunt up your pet brainstorm."

I was mad enough to have taken a punch at him but it was no time to fight among ourselves. It would have served no purpose for me to try to explain all that Dave and I had learned the day before. From the mulish temper Glenk was in, he wouldn't listen to reason. I suppressed my feelings and headed straight for the heart of the island.

Scared? The germ of panic dwelt in me. The silent bushes around me, the growing, ghostly light of dawn, the gaunt, forbidding boles of dead trees, and the half-knowledge, half-mystery of what lay ahead all preyed on my thoughts. But I was angry, too, which helped. Angry, because I suspected that Glenk had deliberately given me the dangerous assignment in the hope I wouldn't come back. That would leave him a clear field with Wanda, not counting Pete, who didn't count anyway.

My feet, already sore from previous activity, collected a few more scratches as I plodded inland and upward. I kept my eyes open. Two questions bothered me.

First, why was Glenk in such an evil humor? I figured a lot of reasons before the answer came, so simple that I cursed myself for a dimwit. Anderson had risen in the night and gone away without the rest of us realizing it. Therefore we all, including Sam Glenk, must have been sound asleep. Therefore Dave Anderson could have calmly proceeded to take the gun away from Glenk if he thought of it. Had he? I didn't believe so. True, Glenk hadn't

flourished the pistol, but then Dave Anderson, if he possessed it, would certainly have fired in the face of danger. I kissed good-bye to a lost opportunity. I could be sure that there wouldn't be another chance to relieve the second mate of the gun.

This line of speculation brought up the second query. Why had Dave Anderson stolen away from us? The answer eluded me, since I knew very little about his character. I finally decided that he was as devoid of fear as is humanly possible. His big body had survived the shipwreck even better than Glenk's.

He woke in the night. Perhaps he had seen something at one of the mounds that escaped my attention. His reticent soul had decided to investigate it at his own leisure.

I felt a sense of guilt. I was reasonably sure that I had reconstructed the events accurately. But I couldn't get away from the fact that on my shoulders lay the responsibility. I had brought him along to share my find. Whatever the bent of his secretive personality, I had whetted it by admitting him to my knowledge. If only I hadn't —one man alone could not have uncovered those tantalizing objects—we might have left the isle in safety and little the wiser.

The voices died out behind me. The only one I wanted to hear didn't come at all. I supposed Wanda was puttering around the dory, or getting water from one of the inadequate springs.

Going up the last slope to the middle plateau, with the sun now flaming above the far rim of the sea, I imagined many weird prospects ahead. The sight of the gray-white oblong cheated my hopes and my fears. That peak, those mounds were the same.

I paused. The features of the landscape seemed as I remembered them, but with a wrong note somewhere.

The gray-white mass, the enormous hill, the mounds.

There were only two small mounds instead of three.

### *6. Red Carpet*

I STARED incredulously. There was not a trace of the third mound, the one that Dave and I had examined first. I could scarce believe my eyes. Not even on this crazy island did a hill walk away and disappear overnight.

Advancing warily, I kept an eye on the gray-white rectangle. I didn't expect anything definite, but it wouldn't have surprised me much if the whole mass jumped at me. With every passing minute my inner turmoil increased and my nerves grew more edgy.

I made my way toward the site of the missing mound. When still at a distance, I caught the glint of sunlight on metal lying on the level ground. I hurried my pace then, in the hope that the metallic shards might offer a clue to Dave Anderson's fate and what had happened to the vanished hill.

They did. The ground, where the hill had stood, bore the powdery outline, immensely broadened and completely flattened, of the shining suit of armor. Some force of inconceivable power had erased the mound, leveled it, hammered it to ground level. I recalled the way the island had shaken in the night, the rumble of thunder like an earthquake—but no tremor in history caused a hill or a building to collapse to paper thinness. This was rather as if the mound had been caught between solid rock, which in fact lay a couple of feet down under the top soil, and the application of titanic pressure.

I suppose the scene registered in-

stantly on my brain. I couldn't have had time to reason it out in detail, because I found Dave Anderson at almost the same moment that I reached the remains of the mound. Behind it, or more accurately, at the point where we had noticed the fragment of protruding metal on the day preceding, there now lay a red carpet.

My skin crawled while I stared at that horrible splotch on the ground, vaguely human in shape, an inextricable mixture of blood, soil, flesh, giving off the unmistakable odor of human pulp. I couldn't bring myself to go close to the red smear. By a handful of yellow strands I made the identification—Anderson was the only one of us with such blond hair.

I turned toward the gray-white rectangular mass with hatred pounding through me, and blind horror. In no way did that huge block differ from its appearance the day before, yet I sensed it as a far more positive entity, a more dangerous and deadly menace. I backed away from it, watching for the slightest motion of the mass, but it stood there squat and ominous in the morning light, as rigid and lifeless as stone.

Well separated from it, I began hurrying back to the shore. I shouted once or twice to Pete Lapous, who ought to be nearer than anyone else, but after that saved my breath. What could possibly be gained by haste? I was reluctant to admit that I ran simply to put distance between me and that monstrous, pallid-hued, rectangular block. In spite of fear, I forced myself to set a slower pace.

I didn't find the others around the dory, not even Wanda. I trotted up the ridge of ground that enclosed the lagoon—and then forgot the horror on the peak. All my resentment against Sam Glenk flared up. I started racing as fast and as silently as I could in the reckless hope of getting him before he saw me.

Why? It didn't stretch my imagination one iota to visualize the whole picture at first glance. Wanda, abandoned by the rest of us, had gone for a morning dip and swim in the lagoon. Glenk's course had taken him around to the far side of the lagoon. When he found no trace of Anderson, he must have noticed the girl, and decided to obtain a little of his malodorous brand of fun while the rest of us rambled over the island.

Wanda was raging, but she couldn't do much against brute power as that massive pig clumsily pawed her and tried to kiss her when she came out of the water.

I ALMOST made it. I would have made it if Wanda's eyes hadn't lighted when she saw me. Glenk was so deep in his own desires that he didn't have time for other thoughts. But her expression warned him, and he swung around to meet me charging in. With a sweep of his arm, he shook her off while she tried to hang on and hamper him. He didn't go for the gun, though I now saw its bulge in a pocket.

I landed one solid blow. I hit him with everything I had, right on the chin, and it wasn't enough. I might as well have smashed at a stone wall. It staggered him, but he took it, and wrapped those ape-like arms of his around me.

That, I thought, as the pressure began, was the end of all this mad adventure for me. Glenk squeezed with an iron grip, stuck his head down, and butted against my chin. I could hear Wanda clawing and beating him from behind, but he ignored her. My head tilted back, back, back, and wrenches

of pain stabbed my throat. The sky was darkening, reeling with giddy flashes. I listened for the sound of my own neck cracking.

I caught a blurred vision, wondered if I had already entered the realm of phantoms. And then the sharp *thunk*.

But I was miraculously relaxing, and Sam Glenk tottered, slumped like a pole-axed steer. I heaved a deep breath, on the verge of collapse myself, and managed to croak, "Thanks!"

"A pleasure, a pleasure, I want to do it again," crowed Pete Lapous. "I heard you yell, five, ten minutes ago. I come a-running. I see no one, try the lagoon. Hah! What a man! Yell a mile, hold on till I come. So then I grab the rock and *clunk* goes the skull. Ah, so you still wiggle, you great swine? I fix that. I break your skull good this time."

I really believe he would have finished Glenk if Wanda and I hadn't restrained him. Pete yanked the revolver out of the second mate's pocket, and danced away.

There was murder in Glenk's eyes as he came back to life. And paraxodically, his sullen fury seemed directed entirely toward Pete, because Pete had the revolver. If the gun had been lost, Glenk would still have dominated the group. He didn't need the weapon for that. But we needed it, if only to control him. The gun was his symbol of authority. And Pete had it. From then on, I could discount Glenk. Recapturing the weapon from Lapous would be his dominant purpose.

My breath returning, I panted, "We've got to leave the island. Today. Now."

"Can't make it. Not enough water for the trip yet," grunted the second mate.

"We'll have to chance it. I located Anderson—what was left of him." I started recounting the story of my gruesome discovery. A shocked expression came over Wanda, a puzzled look dawned in Pete Lapous' eyes, and Sam Glenk's face mirrored utter skepticism. They couldn't or wouldn't believe. My extra knowledge proved a boomerang. In order to drive home the truth, I told what Dave Anderson and I had uncovered on our private exploration.

I wound up with, "That's why we've got to leave. It's too damned plain that the gray-white monster killed Anderson. I don't know how. I don't want to know. Dump whatever food and water there is into the dory. It's our only chance. Here we're doomed."

The second mate's eyes lighted. The dream of loot again, I thought. He saw the shining armor only as precious metal to be carted off. He turned around, with, "Before I make up my mind I'll have to go up there and see for myself."

"I shoot! I shoot!" the cook volubly promised.

"Shoot and be damned. Part of the story sounds okay, part of it doesn't. If there's anything on this island with a cash value, I'll be a son of a gun if I'll go off and leave the secret behind. Anderson got trapped by night, if he *is* dead. This is broad daylight. I can look out for myself."

He swaggered inland toward the peak of the island. Pete flourished the revolver. If he wanted to take a few potshots at Glenk, that was all right with me, but I didn't think he would.

He didn't.

### 7. *The Super-Structure*

"FOLLOW me!" I told the cook and Wanda.

I raced for the dory an eighth of a

mile away, with them at my heels, and cursed Glenk. He was a brave man, a fool, and scum, all rolled up in a barrel of meat. I hated him, but it wasn't in me to push off and leave him to the deadly surprises of the island.

Lapous and I turned the dory over. Wanda pitched in to help. We slid it out far enough so that a good push would launch it.

I gave Wanda her orders. "You stay here, put what fruit and water there is aboard, then climb in yourself and wait. Keep an oar handy. Shove off if you see anything you wouldn't want to see."

I started running with Pete toward the heart of the island. She shouted some questions that didn't even register on me.

It was bad going for both of us, barefoot. The bushes ripped at our legs, the rocks bruised and cut our already sore soles. My headache resumed its throbbing from the blow that Santos had swung at me with an oar a couple of nights ago in the boat. Glenk's loving workout on my throat hadn't made me feel better. It was all a mad business—why the devil should I run my legs off to help that stupid ox? But I knew the answer to that one too. The rest of us owned not the ghost of a chance of reaching safety across five hundred miles of ocean without Glenk to pilot us and drive us by his tough will.

Where was Glenk? I estimated that he would reach the summit of the island at the same time that we did. He had the advantage of a five-minute start on us, which he would lose because he made his way through more or less new terrain.

It turned out much as I expected. When we emerged on the central plateau, we saw Glenk off to our right halfway toward the closest of the two remaining small mounds. Beyond loomed the long hill, and on top of the island stood that solid block of gray-white stuff.

Nothing had changed on the scene, yet I went forward filled with nervous apprehensions. I looked in Glenk's direction, but actually from the corners of my eyes I kept my gaze on the huge oblong mass, the greatest enigma on the island. I was beginning to crystallize a theory out of the jumbled images that floated around under the surface of my imagination.

I said to Pete, "Stay away from Glenk. Then you won't need to worry about his diving for the gun. Watch the gray stuff—it's the real danger."

Glenk went to one of the spots where Anderson and I had dug into the mounds. He discovered the giant armor, excitedly tried to break off a chunk, and when his efforts failed, attempted to drag a whole section out of the hill. Not even his prodigious strength could do the feat.

He worked like a madman for several minutes. He must have believed the metal an alloy of silver or platinum, which it couldn't possibly have been. At the end he straightened up and scowled savagely at the buried, unyielding armor. Sweat streaked his face that had already sprouted a ten-day stubble of beard.

I called to him, "Now that you've seen for yourself, admit it's hopeless and let's shove off."

"Not till I get a hunk of this stuff. I'm gonna work on it all day if I have to."

"Go ahead. Anderson tried. Take a look at what happened to him. Then stay around as long as you like. It's your private funeral." I pointed to the flattened mound.

Glenk walked over to it. The sight

gave him a jolt. I could tell by the way he stared down at the red carpet, and jerked his head up for a hard appraisal of the gray-white oblong. His ruthless, fearless nature lost its moorings for once.

I think that the first fear he had known must have fleeted into his life —and out. Glenk's make-up rested on the sort of obstinacy which wouldn't let him admit that he had met his match.

He turned his back squarely on the great mass and strode to the shining armor with a jaunty step. "The hell with your bugaboos! There was an earthquake last night. It woke us all up. Anderson got caught. That's all. The hill smashed down. It finished him, and another quake might finish me. I'll take the chance."

"Listen, you damned idiot!" I shouted. "You're getting us all into trouble just because of your infernal pig-headedness. The stuff isn't worth a nickel a ton except as a freak! You can't——"

"Freaks are worth cold cash. Shut up with that 'I can't' business."

"It's sure death to stay on the island. We can't wait till doomsday for you to shove off with us. Are you coming or aren't you?"

He didn't answer. He made a beeline for the armor under the ground. Judging by his devil-may-care attitude, nothing I could say would influence him. I don't think that anything mattered in his life except his own utterly selfish lusts and motives.

Boiling inside, I called it quits. I was through with Glenk. Back to the dory——

THE explosion of the revolver startled me. I jumped in a half-turn at the sound of the shot. Glenk whirled around with the speed of a cat for all his bulk.

Pete Lapous had dropped out of my mind while I argued with Glenk. That scrawny scarecrow, for God knows what reason, had taken a pot-shot at the gray-white stuff. Maybe he had seen movement, or imagined it, or simply possessed a nervous trigger-finger.

He didn't miss. He couldn't have missed at a range of fifty yards.

The picture that registered stunned me. Pete Lapous and Sam Glenk froze with the same paralysis of shock. It must have lasted for many long, precious seconds, and it seemed eternity. My time-sense went awry. I have the memory of a series of separate episodes, each complete in itself, each lasting for a protracted interval. Yet the developments came swift as the wind, caught us unprepared by their almost simultaneous speed.

While we three stood like statues, the outlines of that great mass of pallidly white stuff wavered and rippled. It was like watching a hill flow down to the sea. And yet "wavered" is not the word—the stuff collapsed, billowed out in a pool, flung itself to the ground.

I cannot express the phenomenal velocity that it developed from inertia, hurling itself in a second or less to the ground, and resting there in inertia once more. I sometimes think that it responded in exact tempo with the stimulus that prodded it. When Glenk kicked it, it leisurely formed a depression. When Pete Lapous shot it, it instantly struck back.

And so the building that it concealed was uncovered to our gaze, and I looked with awe at that super-structure, that skeletonic, gigantic framework of black metallic rods and filaments.

The interlacing network was infi-

nitely complex. The vertical rods at the four corners of the rectangle, thirty feet tall, as slender as pencils, rested on similar horizontal rods, and supported others—forty feet long for the width of the structure, sixty feet for its length.

From that outer framework, a veritable maze, a labyrinth, a honeycomb of slimmer filaments and rods crisscrossed the interior of the structure. They presented absolutely perfect geometric forms—an outer rectangle, then an inner cube, then a sphere farther in, and a little farther still a pyramid, and beyond the pyramid a cone, and inside the cone other figures, stranger forms, until my vision blurred trying to follow the tracery of that astounding mechanism to its protected core.

Strange as it loomed, terrifying because of its immense size and the wetly glistening sheen, the brilliant luster of those black rods and filaments, it became a thing of far more evil beauty and power, for it seemed to possess a life of its own.

Along each of the outer rods, starting at the corners of the structure, traveled a band of frosty light. Those sixteen rings of silvery black radiance shot along the whole elaborate course of the internal framework and vanished toward the innermost heart, all in an instant.

Then, an instant later, the sixteen bands came streaking out at lesser velocity, to slide for a momentary pause against the outer corners. And from there they shot again, as if catapulted, at dazzling speed along their regulated paths.

It was like the ebb and flow of some unimaginable life-force, the pulse and beat of a perfectly functioning organism, a tireless, effortless, unvarying motion. Perpetual motion—how long had it been going on? Hundreds of years—thousands? Ever since the giants landed in their shining armor and set it up—dying they must have been from the crushing impact of their starplane, but one of the three lived long enough to fulfill his mission. And here the thing worked still, without motors or engines or driving apparatus of any sort that I could see, unless the principle lay hidden inside the rods or filaments. The frosty rings of light hurtled on their complete circuit, fading inward, bouncing outward, as they would do till the end of earth in the far future, I felt with prophetic surety.

What was that living nightmare? That monstrous entity of grayly white stuff and rigid framework? A single organism whose body could detach itself from the skeleton? A dual being—the one an incubator or rather a restrainer, and the other a spore, an egg, a plasmic seed, the one controlling the other until the day of expansion and growth when conditions were favorable in the declining cycles of earth-life?

The death of the races of man millions of years hence—and then the flowering of the giant-plasm in an environment akin to the conditions on the star-world from which it came.

And what would the giant-plasm hatch? A counterpart of whatever creatures occupied those three shining suits of armor? Or some wholly unpredictable growth that thrived progressively upon a dying planet?

So much registered in the first of those crowded seconds—the collapse of the gray stuff, the revelation of the super-structure.

Then the earthquake, the ground shaking, while my bewildered senses told me that the gray stuff alone caused it—the giant-plasm—it must have weighed thousands of tons, millions of

pounds—enormous density squeezed into a fluid solid.

### *8. Flight*

THE earth tremors continued. I felt them as a continuous shaking underfoot. Even they didn't break the trance that held us all rigid. I realized vaguely that the island trembled upon its foundations. The ground would quaver so long as the pool plowed ahead with its terrific weight.

The pallid substance had begun to move after the moment of inertia following its collapse in front of the black framework that had supported it. It forged ahead with quick giant strides.

The puddle had formed a foot thick, a perfect disk. The disk put forth two pincers like the claws of a crab. Those arms curved far forward, inward, and met, at the feet of Pete Lapous. The main body of the pool sloughed up to close the gap to the pincer-like arms.

The ground shuddered and rumbled.

Galvanized into action, Pete turned and sprinted with a yell of frenzied horror.

Again the plasmic mold issued the pincers—and those arching tentacles closed around Pete, lapped near the mound where Glenk and I were rooted. The main mass surged up, closed the intervening space. As it swept across the spot where Pete raced, the foot-thick mass hit his heels with the force of a pile-driver, spurted him high into the air.

The revolver, jolted from his grip, flew off to one side. Pete curved through the air, his arms and legs sprawling, came down head first. I heard the sharp *crack* as his neck broke.

"Run—the dory!" I shouted at Glenk.

Electrified into action as violent as my previous immobility had been complete, I was off and away faster than I ever thought I could run. Even so, I saw the next swift climax, by keeping my eyes turned only a trifle from the diagonal course that I trekked toward the dory.

Sam Glenk sprang for the pistol. In the face of that colossal, amorphous hulk that thundered across the ground, he still must have placed a frenzied faith in the weapon. His hand closed on it.

Again the flat, circular disk of the entity put forward the long hooks that united at the very feet of Glenk. The main body swept forward, over the corpse of Pete Lapous.

The revolver exploded in a burst of rapid fire, and when the shots ended, the pincer-arms had closed with Glenk inside the fatal circle. Then he ran, and on his white face I saw implanted the hope of leaping across the advance tentacles. But while he sprinted desperately, the mass caught up with him and bowled him over. The mass kept driving on, across his legs, across his torso. Blood leaped in a torrent from his mouth, eyes, nostrils, ears. His shriek pierced the air for the fraction of a second. In that brief interval, the ponderous thing smote him, crushed him, splashed him into another thin red carpet.

I plunged downhill toward the beach. As I stumbled and dropped out of sight of the central plateau, I saw that avid plasm sweep after me. On the edges of the path that it took, the earth furrowed up in long waves, driven, forced aside like mush by the inconceivable density and weight of that gray-white entity.

My heart hammered, and my lungs burned as I ran madly for the boat. Now, behind me, swelled the crash of

vegetation mowed down, and grinding, roaring concussions as the tall dead trees toppled, sheared off and pulverized by the irresistible progress of that juggernaut. Bushes, trees, hills, rocks —nothing could halt or alter the flow of the gray-white tide.

It lapped so close behind me that pure fright preevnted me from turning my head to see how close it was when I broke out on the beach. I saw Wanda upright in the dory, holding an oar ready to push off. Behind me thunderous crashes swept across the sand. I thought Wanda would faint, but she pushed, floated the dory, got it moving out as I pounded across the strip of sand. The fatal tentacles slid forward around me, dipped into the sea.

And then I had splashed out in a convulsive spurt and hurled myself over the side of the dory. There came the sound of a booming impact, and a wall of water swept seaward carrying the dory upon its crest as the main mass of the entity hit the ocean.

The giant-plasm, partly on shore, partly on the sea-bed, halted its advance, with long twin banks of earth gouged up on the sides of its path. That mighty trench ran backward with undeviating straightness to the peak of the island. And while we watched, the thing drew back from the water. It reversed its direction, began its journey back to the incubator, flowing uphill as easily as it had slid down.

THAT was the last I saw of it. I must have cracked my skull again when I dived into the dory headlong. The island suddenly reeled away, and upon a vertigo of sickening pain, I floated out to an ocean of blackness.

A constant drone filled my ears when I regained consciousness. I opened my eyes to unfamiliar confines, felt a sense of lightness and motion. Wanda was sitting beside me. I wondered where the chair came from.

"What the heck!" I exclaimed.

"Don't talk," said Wanda. "You'll have to yell to make yourself heard. If you must talk, don't try to talk sense. You're the proud possessor of a couple of brain concussions. You've been out for a good ten hours."

"But where——"

"In a seaplane—amphibian I guess they're called. Simple enough. The owners of the *Reva* grew worried when the daily radio report stopped coming in. After a week of silence, they chartered a plane to search a wide area. It seems the *Reva* carried a valuable cargo. The plane was just getting ready to abandon the search when the pilot sighted that unchartered island, and us. He came down, picked us up, and took off again. That was this afternoon. It's almost dark now. We'll reach the continent tonight."

I craned my neck to peer out the window. I fancied that behind us, far down on the western horizon, on the rim of the Pacific, against the huge red ball of the setting sun, I saw a speck of lonely land. Back there were the suits of shining armor, the relics of colossal beings, the fallen stone statue, the starplane, the black, skeletonic framework, and the riddle of the giant-plasm. Those things, and Dave Anderson, Pete Lapous, Sam Glenk ground into clay.

Some day I will return—or will I? I wish I could be present to watch what the giant-plasm becomes in whatever cycle of remote future time is set the hour of its emergence—and yet, would my maddest dreams give me preparation enough?

I was content with the darkness that fell.

"Cruel fingers, half the thickness of a human body, clutched De Costa."

# I Found Cleopatra

By THOMAS P. KELLEY

*A glamorous weird tale of romance and mystery, of the almost incredible fate that befell a young American who sought the tomb of the famous Egyptian Queen—by the author of "The Last Pharaoh"*

*The Story Thus Far*

BRIAN O'HARA, powerful young American lawyer, has earned the hatred of Manuel De Costa, when he sells both his services and an ancient Egyptian scroll to a glamorous mystery woman known only as the Midnight Lady—a scroll that tells where Cleopatra is supposed to lie, "not dead, but sleeping," deep in the heart of the great Sahara. Despite every effort of De Costa and his henchmen to thwart them, the two eventually find the tomb, where the surprised American learns that the beautiful Midnight Lady is none other than Cleopatra herself!

Later O'Hara learns the history of the slender young girl they find in the tomb; that she is Na-Ela, a Princess of

This story began in WEIRD TALES for November

Lothar, an age-old underwater city; that she alone knows the location of the Tree of Life, the fruit of which grants two thousand years of life, less thirty-six. He also learns that Cleopatra, who ate of the fruit, never knew death; how her cunning adviser, Baltarus, drugged and disguised Na-Ela to resemble Egypt's Queen, then later had her body carried far inland so that none might discover the great subterfuge. A counteracting serum has awakened the slender princess.

Cleopatra, knowing that if she does not soon eat again from the Tree of Life, she will crumble to the dust that should have claimed her centuries ago, repeatedly demands its whereabouts from Na-Ela. The latter refuses to tell her.

Later, in the underwater city of Lothar—now ruled by Cleopatra—O'Hara, realizing his love for Na-Ela, prevails upon her to accompany him in flight. They are successful in escaping from Lothar, but a few days later are captured by De Costa and a handful of Arabs. De Costa promises them their liberty if O'Hara will vanquish his stoutest henchman in a hand-to-hand combat. After a savage struggle the American kills Zu-Tag, a weird, beast-like human.

The horsemen of Cleopatra, searching for the fugitives, suddenly appear, and De Costa's followers are massacred and their leader captured, together with Na-Ela and O'Hara. The three are taken to Lothar, where Na-Ela, to save O'Hara from death and torture, tells where the Tree of Life stands. O'Hara, together with De Costa, is sentenced to the Dungeon of Terror, a dank, subterranean vault, from whose far end a weird, slimy creature—the Thing from the Darkness—comes at intervals to claim the dungeon's inmates. O'Hara sleeps, but awakes to hear his companion screaming:

"It's coming—the Thing from the Darkness! It's coming to crush us to a gory mass!"

There comes a loud flapping, as though powerful flippers were hurrying a huge wet body toward them.

The story continues:

## Part IV

### *18. When Hell Broke Loose*

MANY are the attainments attributed to those in the throes of terror. I will only say that if it is humanly possible to sweat blood, I must have sweat it at that moment, as the thing from the darkness flapped toward me, while I strained at the great chain which held me to the wall of that gloomy dungeon, far below the submerged and long-forgotten city of Lothar.

What might have happened in the next few minutes, had not an unforeseen event come to our aid, is difficult to say; but come it did, and at the one moment above all others when its intrusion was most welcome. Without the slightest warning the door that led from the dungeon was suddenly flung open, and four of the almost naked warriors of Lothar rushed in upon us, their torches casting dim vistas into the surrounding gloom.

At the same instant there came a loud flapping of a huge bulk in hasty retreat. Just beyond the torchlight I had a fleeting glimpse of a great, walrus-like body, hurrying toward the black hole at the far end of the dungeon.

"It's the thing!" cried the leading warrior. "The thing from the darkness! Legend has it that it fears light alone, and whatever foul creature it in-

deed is, our flaming torches have put it to flight!

"Arise, captives!" he turned to us, holding aloft a bronze key. "Arise! We come to release the prisoners of Cleopatra, that they may strike a blow against the Egyptian. We are the rebel soldiers of Jurgo, who would return a true Tarkamite to the throne of Lothar. Even now our brethren battle against the soldiery of the Queen, and before another two hours have passed the Princess Na-Ela shall be returned to her rightful throne."

A moment later the Spaniard and I had been freed, and were following the others up the great series of steps that led to the halls above, to come at last to the corridor from which I had been taken to the dungeons, some thirty hours ago. Here prevailed a wild disorder.

Running forms and shouting voices were everywhere, while from the distance came the clash of arms. Near by, a dozen or more Tarkamites were listening to the sounds of the struggle and talking. Among them I recognized Jurgo.

"Hail, stranger!" he shouted. "So you did manage to cheat the dungeons! Glad am I to have you with us, for we have risen against the Queen, and every man is needed. For long I have served Cleopatra faithfully, but her defiance of our laws and the theft she plans upon the treasure vault have proven her unworthy of the throne of Lothar. We fight to restore a true Tarkamite to power."

"Suppose you fail?" I asked him.

"We dare not fail," he answered. "The future of our very race depends upon the outcome. Already the Queen's soldiers are being forced back to the throne room, and each moment brings victory nearer. Another hour and Na-Ela shall mount the throne of her fathers. Are you with us?"

"To the end," I told him.

"Then arm them!" he ordered the others.

In a moment the Spaniard and I each carried a long, wicked-looking knife, in our loin-cloths, as well as the slender spear, without which no Tarkamite warrior is complete. I might mention that De Costa was now clothed in the same apparel as myself—loin-cloth and soft sandals—so that with these weapons to complete our primitive raiment, we might well have passed as soldiers of sunken Lothar.

"Ready?" asked Jurgo. "Then let us away to the throne room to assist our brethren who fight there. Slowly they drive the Queen's warriors back, and our added strength should change that retreat to a wild flight and victory. On then, that——"

The sudden sound of running footsteps halted him. The next instant a man came flying down the corridor, in the wild rush that ended in a sharp stop before us.

"The Princess!" he cried. "The Princess Na-Ela!" He stood gasping and unable to find his words. Then he broke out again. "They have taken her! The daughter of the great Na-Harus has vanished! I searched her quarters, and the Princess is not there!"

"Taken her!" roared Jurgo. "Then by the hundred deaths, I know where to! Follow me, strangers. She may yet be saved, or at least avenged. The rest of you to the throne room, to aid the others. Your actions in the next hour must decide the fate of Lothar!"

At a mad dash De Costa and I followed the rebel leader down a long hallway, and on through a seemingly endless maze of deserted corridors. The wild shouting and clash of arms

gradually faded behind, with no sound other than our flying feet to break the silence ahead. Presently a door was before us. Making no attempt to halt his rush, Jurgo dashed it aside, and we sprang into the room beyond.

It was a small, dimly lit chamber, whose sole furniture consisted of two stools and a tiny couch. A warrior of Cleopatra sat on each of the stools. A bound figure lay on the couch. Na-Ela!

Terror leaped to the faces of the two men, and they sought to defend themselves. We gave them no chance. Jurgo's spear tore into the breast of one before he had half risen, and my own stout lance found the other's heart. Then we released the Tarkamite Princess.

"The Queen!" cried Na-Ela, springing to her feet. "She has gone to the jewel room. We must stop her. She plans to flee from Lothar, and take with her its great treasures."

"But how?" asked Jurgo. "How can we stop her? Even at this minute the loyal troops of the Queen retreat before my followers, but none other than Cleopatra knows the whereabouts of the hidden treasure room."

"Except the Princess of Lothar," spoke Na-Ela. She strode to the wall at the end of the room. "Our united strength should be able to force this well-concealed door. Haste, then, for even now we may be too late."

FOLLOWING her example we threw ourselves against what appeared to be a solid wall. Slowly it gave before us, and then, one end swinging in, revealed a narrow passage. Into its blackness we entered, and hugging its side, began a groping advance. Of the four of us, Na-Ela alone had any idea as to our destination, but we continued on without pause, and at the end of ten minutes a sharp turn changed our course, to show a flickering light ahead. Nor was it long till we entered the room from which those dancing beams emanated—the famous and half-fabulous treasure vault of Lothar!

Two flaming torches that protruded from the numerous holes bored in the wall told of its recent occupancy. At the far end of that long, low-ceilinged room, were three huge stone idols, around whose massive necks and wrists hung clusters of sparkling gems.

But it was not the sight of these alone that held us spellbound. Lying along the walls and down the length of the floor was the loot of a thousand caravans and a hundred ravished cities—golden bullion, golden ingots, three thick pillars of the precious metal itself. Countless urns and gilded vases, overturned and upright, showed their contents of ancient coins. Ten thousand pearls of priceless value were strewn on the thick dust of the floor. Glittering rings and jewel-encrusted bracelets were heaped in jumbled and fantastic mounds, while from beneath their grayish masses of filmy cobwebs, five stout chests flashed with the radiance of emeralds, diamonds and other precious stones. The plunder of seven thousand years lay before us!

Yes, there it lay, the world's greatest treasure, glowing with weird brilliance in the torchlight. Amazement stilled the tongues of both De Costa and myself, while the staring eyes of Jurgo plainly showed the awe of the Tarkamite.

"Gods of the Ancients!" he gasped at length. "It is indeed the hidden treasure vault of Lothar!"

"But those torches," I asked. "Who put them there? It is plain that someone besides ourselves has recently been here."

"Cleopatra!" ejaculated Na-Ela.

"Yes, the Queen!" shouted Jurgo. "It is indeed the Queen who has been here. We must find her before she flees from Lothar and reaches the world above the waves. We must stop her! We must seize the Queen and——"

"And what is it you would do to Cleopatra?" came softly from behind.

We wheeled at the sound of that musical voice. There, emerging from the shadow of a golden pillar, was the glorious, dark-eyed Queen, whose incomparable beauty has been a legend of the ages. Golden breast-plates and a filmy four-slit skirt but half concealed her shapely body. A cobra-ensigned headband encircled a luxurious mass of black hair. A jewel-encrusted bracelet shone in dazzling radiance from her wrist. But in the slender hand she held before her was that which was more sinister, and so strangely out of place in this ancient vault of riches—a modern automatic pistol.

"Yes, tell me, Jurgo," that soft voice insisted. "Tell me what it is that you would do to Cleopatra?"

But awe and fear were strong in the breast of the Tarkamite warrior. Though willing and anxious to lead his men against her own still loyal followers, the fearless Jurgo could not meet the steady gaze of those long-lashed eyes, or bring himself to answer. Then, at his continued silence:

"And what of the others?" she went on. "What of the others who have found the hidden passage to the treasure vault of Lothar? You, Na-Ela—do you come to seek the death of Cleopatra? Have you enlisted the help of the rebel Jurgo and these two men from the outside world, and now seek to regain the throne I have held for twenty centuries? Would you send your rebel troops against my guards, to win the jewel-inlaid seat from which I have ruled for so many millions of hours?

"Not that I would have you think it was for the love of power alone that I remained hidden in this sunken city from the great outside world, since that far distant night when I ate of the fruit from the Tree of Life, and fled from the tower of Isis Lochias. No; it is the outside world itself that has for so long kept Cleopatra from it. Man at best is a stupid creature. Even a semblance of civilization has taken many weary centuries. Who would have believed had I returned to tell that I was the last Ptolemaic Queen, and the wondrous fruit from the world's first tree had given me centuries of youth and life? In the dark ages of barbarism I would have been lashed or burned on some great faggot pile. The Middle Ages would have found me a target for ridicule and laughter, or else another victim for the dreaded Inquisition. In the days of Roman conquest, of course, I dared not show myself.

"Only recently has the world reached a height that will enable it to understand. At least I shall be comparatively safe, if I reveal my secret. And so I go again to that great outside world which I have visited so many times in the past centuries, but which has yet to learn my secret. This time I shall not return. This time I will tell them."

For a fleeting instant a sad half-smile played at the corner of that perfect mouth.

"And it is even possible that you envy me, also, that you may consider eternal youth indeed a rare gift from the gods. Ah, foolish mortals, if you but knew what a blessing death can sometimes be! To many it may appear as that great and final horror, but I warn you perpetual life is infinitely

more so. To know generations that come and perish, to be ever present at history's making, and then watch it fade and vanish till you alone are left behind, is surely a horror greater than that world beyond the veil.

"And yet the urge to live still surges strong within me, for I now hasten to the Island of Death to find the Tree of Life, before the sun rays of the coming dawn strike me and crumble me to dust. Yes, I go to renew my youth and life for another twenty centuries, and then for ever I shall depart from the sunken halls of Lothar. But I willingly surrender the throne to its rightful heir, Na-Ela. I leave with but these few gems I have chosen to take with me."

And she patted a leather pouch hanging from her side. It held the ransom of a score of kings.

We stared at her in the flickering torchlight. And then came that startling interruption. For the past few minutes I had been aware of the dim but ever increasing sound above us. Steadily it grew louder till those within the treasure vault cast inquiring glances overhead. Then followed a rattle of arms, the murmur of voices and the tread of many feet. It was Na-Ela who first guessed its meaning.

"My people!" she exclaimed. "It is my people! They fight in the throne room above us! They kill each other!" She looked wildly around her. "We must stop them!"

"We shall stop them," thundered Jurgo. "Lead on, Princess. Wherever Na-Ela leads I follow!"

"Wait!"

The word snapped out like the angry crack of a whip.

"Who are you who would do other than my commands?" demanded Cleopatra. "Yes, it is indeed your people that fight and die above us, Na-Ela," she went on, "Your people and my still loyal guards. If you would save them and stop that needless bloodshed, heed me."

"I listen, oh Queen."

The royal Egyptian went on: "I wish only to depart from Lothar. Do you promise, then, that I and my remaining guards will be allowed to leave its portals unmolested, and to continue on to the Island of Death?"

"I do. On the honor of my father I swear it."

"Then follow me," she answered, and led the way through the gloom, till we came to a series of age-old concrete steps. Up there we hurried, and at their far end came out into the heart of the great throne room and the wild mêlée that reigned there, through a cleverly concealed door in the rear of the huge throne.

Around that massive seat the remaining guards of Cleopatra stood shoulder to shoulder in a desperate last stand.

In all that little company there was scarcely one of them who did not bleed from a dozen wounds. Before them the superior rebel horde was slowly forcing the tired men backward. Screams and curses mingled with the thud of falling bodies. Clashing knives and hurtling spears found naked, quivering flesh. And although the trained soldiers of the Queen were by far the better fighters, in the face of those terrible odds the end was inevitable.

Even as we rose among them, I was conscious of another terrible fact. At the far end of the room a huge black cloud had risen, and was slowly moving forward. Beyond it came the roar and crackling of great flames. Whether by accident or intention, I know not, but whatever the reason, the rioters

had fired the throne room and the corridors beyond.

At our sudden appearance a shout arose from the rebel ranks.

"It's the Queen!" cried one. "It's the Queen!" And then, in a furious roar of voices: "Down with Cleopatra! Death to the Egyptian!"

In a frenzy they surged forward, throwing their weight and numbers against the single line of guards who sought to halt them. Na-Ela screamed a command to stop, but she might as well have ordered time itself to halt. Rage had blinded loyalty and reason. Then as the Tarkamite Princess continued her entreaties, with wild pleas to save the Queen, with the characteristic fickleness of a hate-crazed mob the rioters turned against the very one they had acclaimed.

"Na-Ela betrays us!" rose the cry. "Na-Ela has betrayed us!"

Then as the words were taken up by the others in an increasing, thunderous roar: "She would save the Queen! She is false to Lothar! Kill her, then! Kill her also! Kill them all!"

With renewed fury the howling horde threw their weight upon the crumbling line before us, with fists and wicked spear-thrusts, with knives that dripped bright crimson.

"Kill them! Kill them all!"

## *19. The Sea-Gorilla*

AS THE infuriated Tarkamites thrust and slashed toward us, their savage shouts and wild-eyed faces might well have daunted the stoutest heart.

"Kill them! Kill them all!"

But they met no weak resistance from the little party they sought to reach and slaughter. With the fury of desperation we threw ourselves against that barbaric horde. The guard before me sank to the floor in a crimson mass, but with ready spear I sprang forward to fill the gap, and lashing out to left and right sent my heavy metal lance crashing into the faces before me. Jurgo was quick to follow my example, for cries against his own life had also risen, and the next instant a rapid series of shots rang out behind—sharp, angry roars that sent a sweep of hot lead flying into the ranks before us.

The deadly aim of the dark-eyed Queen had been turned against her former subjects.

For a moment the Tarkamites fell back before that onslaught which raised such havoc among their ranks, for though death was not unknown to them, the sounds of gun-shots were. During that brief interval our little party found time to reach the corridor without, through a small door at the far end of the throne room.

Once in the corridor, four men could meet any attack; so slowly retreating, we drew near to the entrance chamber at the far end of the passage. The Tarkamites followed at a distance, but seemed content with hurling taunts and veiled threats at us. Jurgo guessed the meaning of the latter.

"They plan to wait till we have reached the lake's floor beyond the city. Then they will follow and slay us all."

But the Tarkamites seemed blinded to the danger of their own position. All this while the flames had been steadily gaining. During the fierce fighting in the throne room they had gone unnoticed, and now when at last an effort was made to check them, it was too late. Frightened screams and terrible shrieking reached us through the blackness of the ever-increasing smoke clouds. Yells of agony, the agony of those who see no hope, rose

above the crackling and fury of the flames. The crashing of falling beams and ceilings, dim forms flittering through the smoke clouds, all told of the terror, and of that one awful truth.

Lothar flamed to her destruction!

Just before the massive door that led to the entrance chamber, we halted. Besides the Egyptian Queen and Na-Ela, there still remained De Costa and Jurgo, as well as four of the loyal guards and myself, nine of us all told; but of that nine only Jurgo, the guards and myself, would be able to meet the rebels in a hand-to-hand encounter when next they rushed us.

The former rebel leader must have realized this, for he now spoke: "I and the guards remain here," said Jurgo. "Someone must hold them off till Cleopatra and the Princess reach the waters beyond. Go you with them, stranger, that they may not be unguarded in the world above the waves."

"And you?" I yelled above the wild din.

"I remain to cover up the retreat of my Princess, and hold off her enemies. No; you must go with them. If they are left unguarded, or taken, my own death will have been in vain."

Running forms were now appearing from the smoke clouds in the distance, some snarling and defiant, others seeking only an escape from the flames behind them.

"Haste!" cried Jurgo. "They are almost upon us!"

The next instant he had swung the heavy door shut, and Na-Ela, De Costa and I were in the temporary safety of the entrance chamber with Cleopatra, while without the clash of arms told that Jurgo and his little party had met the wild attack of the frantic Tarkamites.

"Quick! We must make for the great wall." Cleopatra was speaking in a calm, even tone, entirely devoid of fear. "They will not follow us beyond it. They would not dare! Yes, yes"—for Na-Ela would have protested—"I know well the legends of what is supposed to be on the other side of that wall, but it is a risk that must be taken. Once we have passed beyond the great barrier, we shall be in a forbidden world no human has entered for centuries, and can but hope that the gods will protect and guide us to the Island of Death. Haste, then, for in two hours it will be dawn, and already the guards without have fallen!"

A loud crashing on the door behind us told that. I had shot the heavy bar in place, but I knew it could not hold for long against the number and efforts of those without. There was not a minute to lose. Quickly we donned the water helmets hanging on the pegs around us, and then with the others holding tightly to the rings that ran around the room, I worked the great crank that drew back the sliding partition before I too grasped the strong supports. In poured the water with its terrible force, gurgling and foaming, and at the same instant the door behind us gave way before the onslaught against it, and the leading Tarkamites broke into the room.

NEVER will I forget the surprise, the stark terror that sprang to their faces as that great wall of water shot toward them. In their panic to escape the flames they had been unmindful as to what we might do. For an instant I had a glimpse of surging forms behind the others, and a flash of smoke and flame. And then the entire lot of them went down like tenpins, swept away before the terrible force of the water that entered the broken doorway, rushed

on through the great halls that for seven thousand years had withstood it.

The Enchanted Lake had at last claimed Lothar.

We hurried on, glad to escape that horror behind us. Once without, we turned toward that forbidden sweep to the left. All around us was the same misty light I had known before, like the radiance of a cold winter's morn. It had always been a mystery to me, that weird, spectral light, a half-mile below the surface. I recalled what old Ecarg, the royal adviser, had once said on the matter.

"We are puzzled," he had admitted. "Of course it could come from the ooze that is associated with luminosity through the decay of the millions of creatures that have lain on the bottom of the lake through the ages. Then again there is the theory that a mile below the muck of the lake is a great mine of some strange, luminous metal. Some have suggested that its reflection penetrates through the ooze, to light the waters dimly for a radius of several hundred feet."

Presently a gigantic wall loomed before us, a stupendous, age-old structure that towered a hundred feet or more above us, and disappeared into the misty whiteness on either side. Soon we were at its base. In some places it had fallen, but nowhere, as far as I could see, had more than twenty feet crumbled away. It was still a mighty defense. Clouds of tiny fish whisked among the tall weeds at its base.

FOR half a mile or so we marched along the base of the wall. Then we came to a narrow cleft, twenty or more inches wide. Into this we wormed our way, and passing through its great thickness, reached at length the far side of that mighty barrier, and the edge of the forbidden land beyond. Just ahead were the high weeds and thick vegetation of a subterranean jungle. Dimly in the distance rose the dark outlines of a great mountain.

There was no hesitancy on the part of the Queen. Pushing through the resistance of the water, we slowly advanced.

The slender weeds were easily brushed aside, nor were they of such thickness as to cause delay. There was no trail, to be sure, but the way was less arduous than I had expected, the ooze underfoot being firmer than that beyond the wall. Presently we emerged from that jungle of weeds to a narrow pass between two small hills.

Once in the little valley our progress was rapid, nor was it long till we were halting before the great heights of the mountain that had been our goal.

As far as the luminosity would allow our vision to penetrate, it rose to disappear into the heights overhead. Its many peaks and jagged formations were weird and grotesque, with the steep base making climbing an almost impossible task. It was evident that the peak of this great mountain was the much-feared Island of Death, but how to reach it was a problem. Yet the dauntless Egyptian must have conceived some plan, for she beckoned us on, and presently we were following along the base of the mountain. To the right stretched a drab and desolate plain.

A weird pall hung over the waters around us. I was conscious, too, of the sudden disappearance of the larger fish and other creatures that so thickly inhabit the bottom of the Enchanted Lake; and once a long line of strange formations appeared in the ooze far to the right—odd, enormous markings,

that I might have taken for footprints, were it not for their gigantic size.

For a good mile we traversed the plain along the base of the mountain. Presently we reached another tiny valley between two low hills, at the far end of which rose lofty weeds, waving gracefully. Here Cleopatra halted, nor were we long in discovering the reason. High up the mountainside, a good sixty feet at least from its base, was the blackened mouth of a small opening. Whether a cave or but a narrow ingress, we had no means of telling from our distance, but that it merited some importance was evident by the stopping of our leader.

The Queen of Egypt turned and faced us, and while she pointed upward her lips moved slowly. Of course no sound could issue from the transparent diving-helmets, but in the clearness of the water we were able to understand her words.

"Up! We will ascend to the opening. It may be the beginning of a pass that leads through the mountain, to the Island of Death above."

A few minutes later we were climbing the almost perpendicular crags. To scale the slippery sides of the mountain was no easy task. The entire formation was shaped in numerous tier-like elevations at five-foot intervals, Up these De Costa and I would assist the Queen and Na-Ela, then scramble up beside them, and then so on to the next tier. It was a slow, tiring task.

The Spaniard and I had discarded our spears, the better to free our hands.

Now as we forced our slow way upward, I could not but wonder at the rocks we scaled. The base of the great cliff was draped in weeds and other vegetation, of course, but the mountain itself was as shining as on that far-distant day when it had first shot out of the bowels of the earth.

With but ten feet separating us from the cave we sought, I suddenly felt the Spaniard, who had been last in the ascent, tug madly at my arm as I scrambled over the ledge on which the others stood. De Costa's eyes were glaring in horror, and I raised my head to follow the gesticulating of his arm.

God in heaven!

Coming up the valley in that pale, shimmering greenness was a creature of gigantic proportions. For an instant I thought that by some weird coincidence it was the shadow of the cliff we saw. But this thought was quickly dispelled by the waddling, man-like advance of that two-legged mountain of flesh and hair.

Towering a good sixty feet above the slimy ooze, two red-inflamed eyes —each fully the size of a man's head— glared like angry meteors from a savage, hairy face, made the more horrible by its suggestion of human characteristics. Close beside me stood Na-Ela. Already her sharp eyes had seen it, and now as her lips moved in a startled, gasping manner, the words were easily decipherable:

"The Sea-Gorilla! The legendary creature that is said to have come from the inner world by some great opening! The creature that is said to be older than Adam!"

I felt her body go limp. "Then all those tales—gods of my fathers, they are true!"

Straining madly, we scrambled up the slippery mountain with a speed only possible when terror is the pacemaker. With frantic energy we mounted to the rocky tier between us and the tiny opening that, could we but reach it, might be our haven.

Reaching the top, I cast a hurried

glance at the awful thing behind. It was almost upon us! The huge beast had advanced with appalling speed, and now, as our sixty-foot elevation brought us to an equal height with those red-inflamed eyes, its long arms suddenly stretched toward us, the great hands opening and shutting menacingly.

As I dashed into the cave I saw De Costa top the edge and start after me. I watched the Spaniard gain his feet and break into a mad run, as he sought to reach the opening but a few short steps beyond. Then, even as he stooped to enter the low-ceilinged cavern, into whose farthest corner we three others had retreated, powerless to aid, I beheld that gruesome and greatest of horrors.

A giant palm shot forward. Cruel, hairy fingers, half the thickness of a human body, clutched "The Wolf of the Sahara." There was a horrid clutching of that massive hand, a grim, relentless closing, and then Manuel De Costa disappeared with the same quickness that a ripe plum is squashed in the palm of a schoolboy.

SICKENED with horror, we three survivors crouched at the far end of the thirty-foot cavern, while without, the great gorilla tried to reach us. Again and again would his long arm stretch into the entrance. But flattened against the wall we were safe, as those terrible fingers, despite the struggles of their savage owner, fell some twelve inches short of their mark.

For a long half-hour that awful beast sought to gain entrance. At times the giant hand would withdraw from sight, only to come plunging down the narrow passage again, and at a moment when we might have forsaken the far wall and be within his grasp. Often the rocky walls around us trembled as the creature beat his fist against the cave that held his prey. Time after time he would strike his giant chest in fury, and once a black shadow fell before the cavern, to be followed by a red-inflamed eye that filled the tiny opening—a blazing, lashless eye, that glared its rage and disappointment.

And then, suddenly, it had gone, disappeared with a quickness that aroused suspicion. The past actions of the Sea-Gorilla had taught us to be wary of these temporary retreats, but at length, after several dragging minutes, my companions and I looked questioningly at each other in the dim light of the cave; then, as though by mutual consent, crept cautiously toward the opening to behold the sight that held us in amazement.

Once more up the valley it was making its waddling, rapid advance. But this time the great beast carried a slimy, jagged rock, a black, gigantic boulder, weighing all of twenty tons.

For a moment we were puzzled, but there was no hesitancy on the part of the shaggy one. Upon the ledge before the cave he slammed his mighty burden, an ooze-covered barrier a dozen men could not have pushed aside, that filled the small opening and plunged the interior into utter darkness.

And at the same moment I realized the life-giving oxygen supply strapped to our shoulders was fast running low.

### *20. What I Saw*

I HAVE small regard for one who laughs at prayer with danger far away, but falls to his knees when he finds himself in peril. And yet as I stood beside the great Cleopatra and

the Tarkamite Princess, in that dreary cavern a half-mile below the surface of the Enchanted Lake, I could not help a prayer, rising from the heart rather than the lips, that in some miraculous manner we might yet be saved.

Around us was the awful blackness of the tomb. Cautiously I moved forward till my outstretched hand touched the wall of our prison. The few glimpses I had of it before the giant ape closed the entrance were enough to show its length to be some thirty feet. The width could not have been over forty inches, with the rocky ceiling perhaps that much again above our heads.

Groping through the blackness I reached the boulder that was holding us to our doom. It had been hurled against the mountain with such force that several large pieces had broken off, and I could feel their hard outlines strewn along the floor. That alone was evidence of the titanic strength of the great beast which roamed the dreary plains of this forbidden watery world.

Despite its futility, I could not resist an attempt to dislodge the tons before me. Placing my shoulders against the hard sides, I threw every ounce of my strength into a wild effort that scarcely rocked it. Strangely enough, it was not till then that I realized the utter hopelessness of our position. We were doomed!

For a moment I stood in silent despair. Had three humans ever been placed in a predicament the equal of this one? Here we were in the depths of the Enchanted Lake, entrapped in a rocky cavern with our oxygen supply fast waning. Before us was the giant boulder, which even if I had been able to dislodge it, would but send us to the crushing hands and maw of the Sea-Gorilla. And suppose by some miracle we were able to escape both the rock and the monster without, could we hope to reach the mountain summit above the waves before our air supply failed us?

In the darkness I shrugged my shoulders. Well, there was no use worrying about it. I would continue my efforts, no matter how feeble, till death claimed me. If I must die, I preferred dying while making some effort to escape it. I had taken only a few steps when my eyes fell on a faint glow.

From the far end of the cave there came a feeble brightness, so faint that at first I had not noticed it. Quickly I moved forward, nor was it long till I had crossed the intervening space to make another welcome discovery—a tiny opening just wide enough to permit the passing of a human body.

With extended hand I pushed cautiously into a narrow tunnel. As far as my arm could reach I encountered nothing. Just what lay beyond, or what dangers the pass itself contained, I could not know. Of course it might prove to be but a continuance of the cave, and shortly end against a wall. Worse, it could be the den of some crawling, slimy thing, and to venture forward might be to hurry a horrible death. But it could hardly be worse than the fate that would shortly be ours were we to remain here, and I resolved to risk everything on this one forlorn hope.

In a moment I had found the others. There was no way of making them understand my intentions, other than taking them by the hand and pointing to the glow of the opening. But both were quick to understand, and as I led the way up the narrow tunnel, and its jagged ceiling closed over my head,

both the Queen and Na-Ela followed close behind.

On all sides hung a death-like silence. Of course no sound could reach us through our stout water helmets. From the moment they had been adjusted we were deaf to all noise. In the hazy light of the lake's bottom I had not minded this, being too engrossed by its many wonders to miss din and vibration. But now all was different. Here in the blackness of the narrow pass was a silence that could be felt rather than heard.

Slowly we groped along a narrow, jagged world of water, rock and blackness. Time after time we would pause, panting and helpless, while each instant brought our oxygen supply lower. Then at last our progress was stopped by a huge boulder standing upright in the center of the pass. Here, however, the tunnel suddenly widened. At first I thought it meant the end of the passage, and that all our efforts had been for nothing. But a venture to the far side of the rock soon showed my error.

Hugging the wall, we passed to the left of the boulder, to enter a large, cavernous compartment. Feeling about, we found ourselves in a great subterranean room of high walls, whose bottom consisted of a hard, gravel-like substance. Along the floor were strewn what appeared to be countless bones and skeletons of the fish and other creatures that had known this hidden place since time immemorial. Here and there were innumerable small rocks, piled in strange mounds.

A sudden fear now seized me. Could this be the cave of the very monster we sought to escape, one of the many, or perhaps the only den of the great beast? The numerous bones around us tended to substantiate this hypothesis—monstrous fish he could have killed and dragged here to devour. If so, might he not be making for his hidden den at this very moment?

At the far end of the cave a rocky path led upward. Along its slippery course we ascended, and on through long, intersecting corridors. Of course there was no telling in what direction, or as to where it might lead, but now the gloom was rapidly changing, with each step bringing us to greater brightness.

With increasing hope we forged ahead as rapidly as our bulky helmets would allow, toward the ever-increasing light, until at the end of a quarter of an hour we broke through the water to the floor of a small cave, whose single exit was a continuance of the trail we followed. Here we discarded our water helmets, then hurrying up the solid path, at its far end came out from the base of a rocky cliff, to a weird and mystic valley.

All around us towering, jagged peaks shot upward to the sky, to encompass completely that tiny valley in their center—a silent, lonely valley, but a good stone's throw from end to end, and half of that in width. And in the center of that little valley, dim and ghostly in the eery light that precedes the dawn, was a lone, low-limbed tree, a solitary, gnarled tree, from whose well-leafed branches hung what appeared to be numerous small apples of a hue almost golden.

Close beside it were the crumbling, ivy-covered ruins of what once might have been a tiny temple.

Even as we watched, as though to lend an added touch of the bizarre, a large, brilliantly plumed bird arose from the silent ruins, and with frightened cries and a dismal flapping of huge wings soared away to disappear

over the jagged heights above, like a lonely, flying rainbow.

Everything around us bore an uncanny, unearthly aspect, a hoary age almost terrifying. It was as though we had suddenly been transplanted to some far-off dead world from which all life had passed away a hundred million years before the creation of our planet.

THERE we stood, we three, wet and dripping, with wide and staring eyes. I, Brian O'Hara, and Na-Ela, the Tarkamite. Standing beside us in that cold, ghostly light, the filmy wet material clinging to her rounded limbs making no pretense at concealment, the water drops falling from that wavy black hair to her shoulders and breastplates like tiny, sparkling diamonds, was she who had come through antiquity's fogs, from the hieroglyphic-carved halls of the Pharaohs, she of the dark eyes and ethereal beauty.

Cleopatra of Egypt! The Enchantress of the Nile!

Then: "The Tree of Life," she murmured. "Yes—it is the Tree of Life!" And for the first and only time there was the faintest tremor in that wonderful voice.

"That ruin," and she pointed to the crumbling pile, and its two still-standing pillars; "I have heard of it a hundred times in the legends of Lothar. From the hour the Tarkamites stole the Tree of Life from the First Garden, a continuous series of misfortunes and tragedies fell upon them—tragedies they soon recognized as punishment for that awful theft. So when at last they came to these jagged heights and the little valley within, they planted and left the Tree that had brought them such misfortune, the tree whose fruit none dared eat. And close beside it they built a tiny temple, so that the angry spirit who had so long pursued them might dwell within and rest. That alone is what remains of the little temple, a ruin that was erected by men who once knew Adam!

"Here, then, on this lonely little isle, long forgotten by the outside world, is that which man has sought for since the dawning—immunity from time. That which I too dreamed of, since those long-gone nights when as a young girl I floated down the Nile, beneath the low-hanging moon of old Egypt; hearing the whistling of the cool winds in the sails, the splashing of the waves against the oars, the faint murmur of a love-song, amid strains of a lyre, sung to some dark-eyed maid on the distant shore. Or else the song of my own voice, as I poured out the secrets, the longings and dreams of my young heart, to a million gleaming stars above me."

There was a note of weariness as she concluded: "And so at last I have come to the end of my searching."

Na-Ela said nothing. There was nothing that either of us could say, as we stood watching, fascinated. Yet all the while she spoke, a dull golden color in the far eastern skies was rapidly changing to a brighter hue, a clear, fiery brilliance, whose first warming rays would be glowing upon us in a very few seconds.

It was the great Queen herself who first noticed its coming. A wild fear leaped to her eyes.

"Gods of the Ancients!" she screamed. "It is almost dawn, the time-limit of the fruit! Quick! We must reach the tree before the first sun rays strike me!"

Up the little valley we ran at a mad dash, and never had there been such a strangely assorted trio: a princess from

a sunken city, a Queen from the past, an American of the Twentieth Century. All around us the skies were lightening with the swiftness of a Sahara dawn. Each instant brought a hideous death nearer to Cleopatra. Once a frightened jackal dashed directly across our path, and the Queen of Egypt drew up with a little startled cry. Again, in our mad haste, Na-Ela tripped and stumbled, and this but added to an already dangerous delay. But no sun rays had yet quite touched us as we gained that low-limbed tree, and Cleopatra reached for a small, light-hued apple, hanging from its boughs.

"Only a—moment!" she gasped, panting. "Oh Khonsu, God of Time, only hold back the sun rays a moment!"

There was that brief pause while her reaching hand sought and found the apple. And then another, surprising delay, at the unwillingness of the fruit to leave its branch. It was as though some invisible force sought to hold it back.

But in her wild desperation there was nothing impossible to Egypt's Queen, and a crackling, then a loud snap at last told her victory.

And then the first sun rays shot up over the surrounding peaks in a golden fury, but at the same instant the white teeth of Cleopatra sank deep into the fruit from the Tree of Life!

As THE rising Sahara sun cast its golden brilliance over the jagged heights that guard the Tree of Life, the lovely Queen who for twenty centuries had sought that same tree, stepped slowly backward from its shade, and then, with arms outflung and head thrown back, brought her shapely body to rest against a still-standing, massive column among the ruins behind her.

Ah, that I had but the pen of a genius to tell that scene! If only the eyes of some great master could have seen what mine saw then! There before me rose a pillar that was the world's oldest erection. And there against it, waiting, hoping, stood Earth's most beautiful woman. Her long-lashed eyes were closed. A smile of indescribable relief was slowly lighting her features. A moment passed, another followed while she stood in that early light. And then those red lips slowly parted, like the petals of a wild rose opening to the dawn.

"Shine upon me, Golden Fury!" she murmured. "Come, drown me in thy warm rays, oh flaming Ra! At each morning, in each dawning, during the ages that are to come, may I know and feel thy light touch, and splendor of thy warmth. For again I have eaten of the Tree of Life, and for twenty long centuries more must know its lasting youth. Continue then to bathe me in thy soft rays each and every morning. Continue to be with me as I lightly laugh at time. For I alone of all humans——"

But what—what was that?

It was as though an invisible hand had suddenly lashed out and struck Cleopatra—a giant, invisible hand, both powerful and cruel. The Queen of Egypt reeled before that unseen force, reeled and staggered back with arms raised, her face showing a sudden terror and agony. And then from those red lips arose the most horrible scream it has ever been my misfortune to hear—a hideous, wailing scream, I would have thought incapable of issuing from a human throat. Higher and higher it rose, blood-chilling, unearthly.

Even now, though three years have passed, I wake at night with its terrible echo in my ears.

And then she—how can I even begin to tell what happened? What words can I use to describe the indescribable? I must not. I dare not! Even an attempt to tell of that slow fall would but awaken those awful memories I seek only to forget. I will but say that the doom Na-Ela had foretold, in the event the Queen did not again eat from the Tree of Life—happened! Yes, it happened despite the fact that only a moment earlier she had known its sweetness.

Shrieking, frantic, her hands clawing madly at the air before her, her eyes glaring as if at some invisible horror, her glorious features crumbling in front of our very eyes, Cleopatra sank slowly to the dust that should have claimed her centuries ago!

WE BURIED her—Na-Ela and I. Yes, we buried her in the valley she had thought was her salvation. Boulders, large and small, abounded in the surrounding peaks. We had only our hands, of course, to dig into that hard-baked clay, though the two flat, sharp-edged rocks we found did help us in the digging. Slow, tiring work it was, with the Sahara sun glaring angrily upon us. But hour after hour we continued doggedly at our task, and today, just at the foot of the southern slope of the strange little valley that is the Island of Death, and close beside the crumbling ruins of that once ancient temple, is the cairn that hides her lonely grave.

The last and final resting-place of the great Queen, Cleopatra!

The first shades of evening were stealing across the sky when we arose —our work complete. In halting sentences, punctuated by numerous long periods of silence that were broken only by the sound of our steady digging, Na-Ela had told me much of those distant days she had known in sunken Lothar, as well as the elixir that had held her immune to time in a strange, death-like coma.

"But now all that has passed," she concluded. "The counteracting serum that awakened me again to life, also made me normal in every other way. From now on I shall be the same as others. I shall grow old like those around me."

"But I cannot understand it," I repeated for the twentieth time. "We saw Cleopatra eat the fruit. We saw her with our own eyes! Why, then, did she crumble? Why was she not strengthened for another twenty centuries?"

Across that little mound of stones the hands of Na-Ela reached for mine. She looked at me before she spoke.

"I know, Brian. I know why," she answered softly. "And it but proved how true were the words my father told me, ages ago. When Cleopatra forced me to tell the great secret—where stood the Tree of Life—I did it only to save you. But I did not tell the other words, the rest of that great secret—that he who eats twice of the Tree of Life shall not find youth, but death!"

Moments passed. Then hand in hand we walked slowly across the face of that terrible valley, to the one break in the cliffs around us. It was some moments before we reached its top. On all sides the jagged peaks rose hundreds of feet skyward. Forty feet below us were the waters of the Enchanted Lake. A mile or so away was the lonely, silent shore.

In the gathering dusk we stood and

talked upon that tiny ledge. Through the gloom from the valley below came the occasional howl of a jackal. Overhead the stars were growing brighter and more numerous. The jewel-pouch of Cleopatra that now hung at my side represented fabulous riches. And yet the tree we were leaving behind us represented something far greater than earthly wealth. In the approaching darkness its outlines were barely visible.

"Life!" I murmured. "Two thousand years of youth and life, and we are leaving it! The greatest treasure that can be given to man, and we are turning away from it!"

I looked at the girl. "But—but should we?"

A sudden fear leaped to her eyes.

"No!" she cried. "No, Brian! You must not! You dare not even think of it! No; we will leave this awful place for the outside world of which you have told me—your home. There we can be as other humans. There we can forget this terrible island, and the forbidden Tree of Life."

Her voice lowered. "There we can be together, Brian, you and I, can be together, can laugh together, can love together. And then when at last that time comes, and our youth has passed, we can know the peace of growing old together."

There was nothing further to be said; a shrug told my surrender. For a moment I stood looking over that strange, strange valley we were leaving—a valley of unthinkable age, that well guarded its great secret, a valley that had known the tread of men who once knew Adam, a long-forgotten valley, unsuspected by the outside world.

I turned to find the eyes of Na-Ela looking into mine with that wonderful light that needs no interpretation. Slowly my arms went around her, and then our lips met in that long kiss that made us one. Out from the gloom came the lonely wail of a jackal.

And then with the spirit of the dauntless, we turned and dove to the distant waters below, our bodies shooting through the starlight, to begin our swim to the distant shore, and that long, long journey back to civilization —and home.

Far beyond the last outpost, deep in the heart of the great Sahara, surrounded by those towering peaks, there lies the weird and terrible valley that guards the Tree of Life. No man knows the hidden vale that burns as the sun hangs high. No man hears its sobbing winds, or sees the forms that howl to the stars in those eery hours of darkness.

Just at the base of the southern slope is the cairn that hides the lonely grave. Close beside it stands the ruins of a long-forgotten temple, erected in those distant days when the world itself was young.

# The Transgressor

By HENRY KUTTNER

*A curious tale of time-travel*

THE night was oven-hot. Thor, my Great Dane, was panting in a corner, and occasionally growling to himself. I was alone in the house.

So I thought. Thus, when I heard a tentative cough from near by I looked up in surprise—and my jaw dropped. I stared unbelievingly at the face before me.

For, feature for feature, it was my own!

"Well," said the intruder. "So it worked. I've conquered time!"

The dog barked.

I sprang to my feet, overturning the chair. Involuntarily my gaze went past the man to the door he had closed behind him. I knew what was behind that panel. And therefore—I guessed.

I said, "Who are you?"

"Jim Harline."

My own name. Something of fear—dread of the unknown—must have crept into my eyes, for the man said, "Don't be frightened——" And the voice was my own! "Surely you're not afraid of the result of your own experiment."

"What do you know about that?" I asked.

"You're all ready for it, aren't you? In about half an hour you're planning on the final test. But—sit down." As I dropped back into the chair Thor got quickly to his feet. His eyes were hard and brilliant. He padded to the drinking-pan by the table, but did not drink.

"My experiments have dealt with the possibility of moving about in time," I said. "I've completed a model—but this—visitation!" I made a vague gesture.

"Naturally my coming surprises you." He hesitated. "It's difficult to explain. Our identities are confused, I think. We are the same person—and yet we're different, because I've lived a half-hour longer than you have."

"How did you get in this house?"

Indirectly he answered, "You're ready to give your time machine the final test. It will work. You'll project yourself half an hour backward in time. You'll see yourself sitting there reading—as I saw you. You'll speak—as I did."

I snatched at an obvious straw. "How do you know this?"

"I experienced it. Just half an hour ago I was sitting where you're sitting now, talking to a mysterious visitor who looked like my double." Suddenly the man glanced aside at Thor. The huge dog was pacing nervously about, little flecks of foam on his jaws. "It's hot," he said, irrelevantly.

I looked at my visitor carefully. His body was apparently as solid and real as my own. There was only one distinguishing feature between us: a fresh cut had peeled away half an inch of skin from his forehead.

Observing my glance, the man touched the wound with his handkerchief. "Hit my head on the control lever," he explained. "The damned machine gives you a nasty jolt when it

starts. Watch out for it." He grinned crookedly. "I forgot. You can't. The cycle has to repeat itself."

My thoughts were chaotic. I could not understand. Gropingly I said, "But the cycle must start some place. It started with you? You say you've already lived through the period of time I'm now experiencing?"

He nodded.

"Then you sat in this chair"—I patted its arm—"reading, but didn't get interrupted by a visitor, for nobody 'went through' before you."

"Hold on. I *did* get interrupted."

"But you couldn't have. Didn't you start the time cycle?"

"Lord, no! I'd already traveled around the loop. Look here." He reached for a convenient magazine and drew a figure on it—a line that intersected itself, like the letter P.

"Thus. The straight line—the vertical one—is our normal progress in time. We're both existing, right now, at the point where the lines intersect. But you've reached that point normally; I haven't. I've lived a half-hour longer, traveled backward in time, and moved along the loop back to the point of intersection."

Suddenly the dog howled. I said sharply, "Quiet, Thor!"

My visitor went on after a moment, "It isn't a paradox, really. If you were to travel back through time for thirty years, you'd see yourself as a baby. But that baby would also see you, the man who's thirty-two years old, if just as you're seeing me, the man who's half an hour older than you are." His eyes changed. "But there's something"—he paused, staring again at the dog—"something I can't remember—a blank space in my memory. And I've a feeling it's—very important. A memory that has been eradicated . . . why should that happen?" He came close, gripping my arm with hard fingers. "It isn't logical. There's no reason for it."

I stared at him. "Perhaps if you explain what you did——"

"Well, I went into the laboratory when the clock struck eight. I can remember that, but just before it is the blank spot in my memory—the part I can't remember. I went into the lab and got into the time machine. I pulled over the lever and felt a jerking shock. I said that was how I got this cut on my head, didn't I? Yes . . . well, then—the machine had stopped. At first I thought I'd failed. But I looked at the clock on the wall, and it showed seven-thirty instead of eight. As easy as that! I got out of the machine and came in here. You were sitting reading. . . ."

He was silent. It was very strange to see my own face set in lines of wonder and triumph and apprehension.

"Then the experiment was—will be—a success," I said, and he grinned wryly.

"A success—yes." He was looking at me, but far beyond. His gaze dwelt beyond earth. It looked into the unknown. And he said, "I have gone too far. I know that, now. There are laws which must not be transgressed. We may think there are ways of overcoming them, but we forget one thing. Beyond those laws we know there are others—and they may be very terrible. I think there is no room for rebels in this universe."

BRIEFLY the tension held us; then it snapped, and he said, "Give me a drink—a cold one. It's damned hot."

I mixed a highball—two of them. We looked at each other over the glasses. I noticed that the fingers of his

right hand were blood-stained. The dog paced the floor, panting. Foam flecked his mouth.

My visitor drank deeply and sank into a chair. Thor paused to stare at him. The two, man and dog, gazed, and I heard a little growl rumble in the Great Dane's shaggy throat. And suddenly the most dreadful look came over the man's throat.

He shouted something—I don't know what. He sprang to his feet. At the sudden movement Thor crouched. The dog's eyes were glaring, and as I saw the foam-frosted, lolling tongue I realized the truth. The heat—Thor's refusal to drink water. . . .

Well, it was over soon. I killed Thor with a chair that splintered as it crushed his skull. But my double was gripping the table's edge, blood bubbling from a throat torn open by the dog's fangs.

He looked at me, and there was horror unspeakable in his eyes—a terror beyond life and beyond death. Then he came down, his outflung arms sending papers fluttering to the floor. Very slowly he slid from the table and crumpled into a quiet heap.

His wrist was pulseless. I looked down at his still face, and glanced at the dog, and finally at the door of my laboratory. I did not look away. For in that split second as I stared at the panel a brief, inexplicable shock racked me. Something seemed to move within my brain. I found myself quietly walking into the laboratory.

A little voice whispered within my head. It said, "Stop. You've forgotten something—something important." I did not heed it. I did not know what I had forgotten.

In the laboratory was a high, box-shaped framework, the time machine I had created. It stood there, its bright metal gleaming in the light, and I paused to run a caressing hand over its surface. Then I climbed inside and seated myself before the control board.

The voice in my head grew fainter. I scarcely heard it. Far away it whispered urgently, "You've forgotten! You've forgotten!"

My hand went out; I pulled the control lever toward me. I felt a grinding shock, and my head jerked forward. A white-hot pain burned along my forehead. I touched it with my hand, and my fingers came away smeared with blood.

I couldn't believe the machine had worked, but I turned to look at the clock. The hands pointed to seven-thirty. I had been hurled a half-hour backward in time.

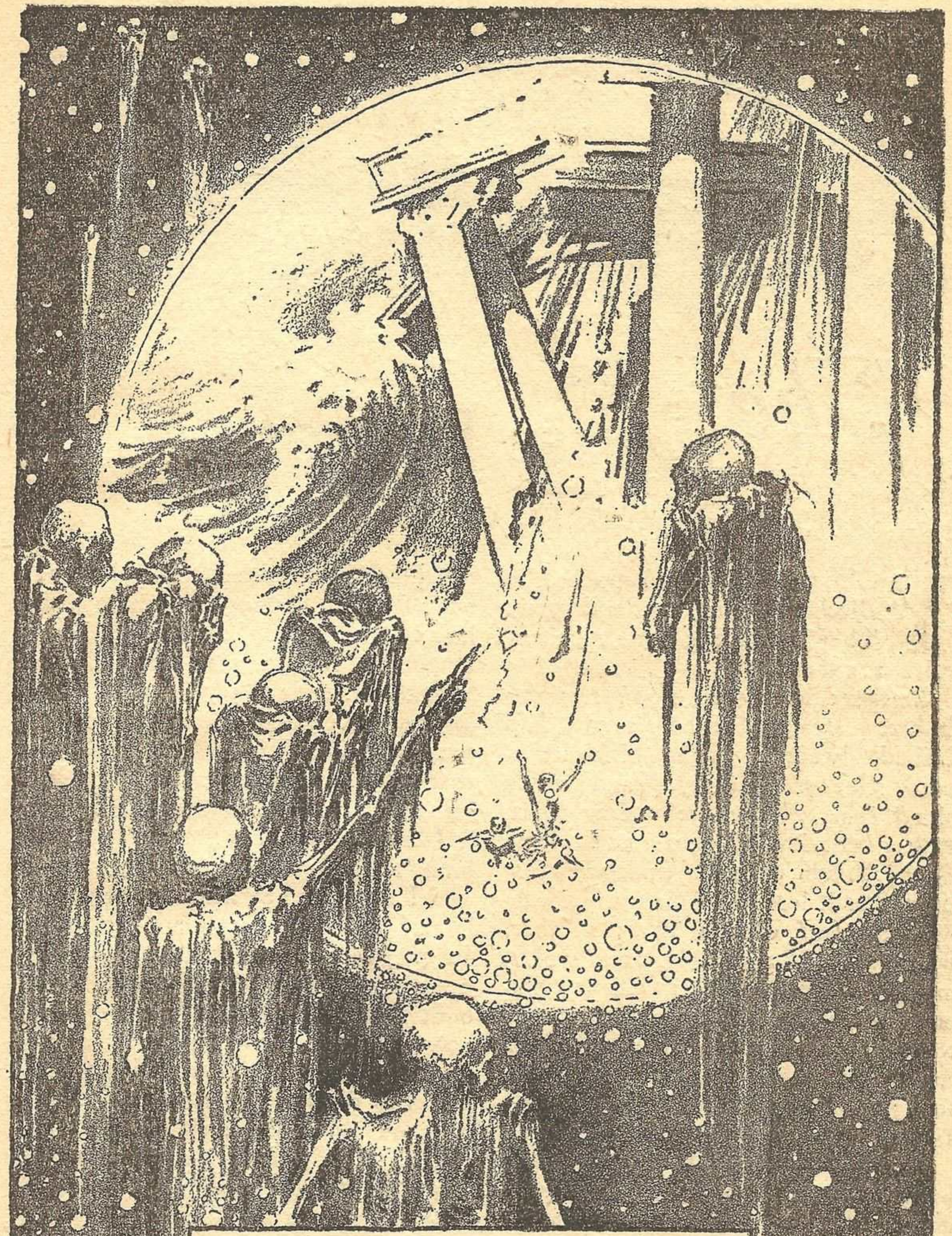
Triumph intoxicated me. Yet somehow, far in the back of my mind, was a queer, small foreboding, knowledge of the fact that I had forgotten something—something that had happened just before I had entered the laboratory—something vitally important. . . .

I opened the door.

A man was sitting at the table reading. When I coughed he looked up. Feature for feature, the face was my own.

"Well," I said. "So it worked. I've conquered time!"

The dog barked.



Shapes of men that were
Point, weeping, at tremendous dooms to be,
When pillared pomps and thrones supreme shall stir,
Unstable as the foam-dreams of the sea.
—Sterling: *A Wine of Wizardry.*

# The Last Horror

By ELI COLTER

YOU wonder what happened to Bleeker? And to Remington? They *aren't* the same men any more, are they?

Bleeker: who once stood straight-limbed, straight-backed and full-fleshed, walked with high-carried head, clear-glowing eyes and ruddy blond skin; Bleeker, who now walks with a bent shuffle, whose cuticle is so tightly drawn over his emaciated features that it looks like dirty white rubber stretched over a skull; Bleeker, whose eyes have gone blank and sunken in their sockets, whose mouth is tightened in the middle and loose at the corners, whose nose is pinched, whose hands tremble when he isn't taking care to hold himself in. I could tell you, something terrible happened to Bleeker.

And Remington: tall and compactly built, extremely fine-looking in rugged, chiseled fashion; Remington with the gift of tongues, with his ready capacity for eloquent speech that might have made of him a top-notch orator; Remington, whose dark skin is now pasty, whose black eyes brood over some inner thing he must see eternally, but does not wish to; Remington, whose black hair is turning gray, whose magnificent tongue is frozen into stark silence. Something terrible happened to Remington, too. Remington saw a man's soul, dragged it out to light and made that man himself look at it. And it is something none of us may ever forget.

I don't know what you think of me. I don't care. Bleeker and Remington and I are bound by a tie that won't allow of our being away from each other long. We all saw something too hideous to believe. But I'd like to have you understand—if you can. Then perhaps you won't fret me any more by asking that harassing question, "What happened to Bleeker and Remington?"

It started in the most prosaic manner. The two of them came up to my cabin, built in the edge of the foothills to give me privacy for my work, and told me I was going on a fishing trip with them back in the mountains. They didn't *ask* me to accompany them, just told me I was going and wouldn't take no for an answer. I didn't demur too much. I'd been applying myself

* From WEIRD TALES for January, 1927.

pretty steadily and was rather glad of an opportunity to lay off work and rest. So I said sure, I'd go. We didn't take any guns. I suggested it and Remington laughed at me.

"What do we want of guns, Crickett?" he asked. "None of us cares much about hunting, and there aren't any dangerous animals back in these mountains—nothing bigger than a few lone deer. Besides, the guns would be too much trouble to pack. We're off for a rest. Let's get going."

Strange, perhaps. But even then, in broad daylight, as I followed them out of my cabin with a pack of grub rolled up in a blanket and strung over my shoulder, I felt an uncanny sense of premonition. I didn't speak of it. Remington would have laughed. Overhead the pine-trees gibbered in the wind.

A few feet away the creek chattered insolently at the white moon wheeling across the sky behind the sun. All around us rose the casual everyday sounds that continually kept me company as I worked in my cabin. Yet I felt the prescience of that unnamable thing of mystery which is always just around the corner in the most ordinary surroundings. I shrugged it off and swung into step with Bleeker and Remington as they struck off for the mountains beyond.

We lazed along, casting our flies in the creeks, taking our time for four or five days, before we at last found our ideal camping place. We had got into a distant, very isolated region, but we had come upon a made-to-order spot. It was a good-sized bench on the side of a mountain, well up toward the summit, on the bank of a fine cold creek. We pitched our tent, built a fire and got a hearty meal, congratulating ourselves on such a bully find, settling down to have a high old time fishing and doing nothing.

ALONG about midnight I was awakened by something yowling and screeching hideously up the mountain above us. I sat erect on my blanket and listened.

"What in thunder is that?" Bleeker asked from across the tent.

"Aw, it's a cougar strayed down from somewhere. When he sees our fire he'll give us a wide berth. Maybe you'd better get up and pile another log on the coals." Remington's voice was sleepy and half scoffing, and Bleeker answered him with the sharpness of suddenly rasped nerves.

"Cougar! No such thing! You know better—and so do I. That ghastly howl was *human*."

Neither of us answered him. We knew he was right. Remington lay still, rolled up in his blanket, and I knew he was listening, even as I. The yowl came again once or twice, like the scream of a man in torment. Then it choked off with a queer gurgle and we didn't hear it any more.

We didn't any of us sleep well that night, and in the morning the first thing after breakfast Remington suggested that we take a stroll up the mountain and see if we couldn't locate that cougar. Bleeker and I assented without hesitation—as a matter of fact he'd only beaten us to it by a breath with his idea. We were curious as the very devil over the awful racket we'd heard the night before. So we all set off to investigate it.

Noon came before we reached the summit, and a funny-looking summit it was. Instead of going up to a peak, the mountain chopped off into a kind of table-land or plateau containing perhaps five square acres. The table-land,

at some remote time, had been slashed off, and was now covered only by a thin stand of small second-growth trees, fallen logs and stumps, save for one spot off to the extreme left. There lay a dense copse of first-stand trees occupying at least an acre, so covered with some vining stuff that the whole looked like an immense green block set on the very edge of the plateau, so perilously close to the edge that it seemed the lightest touch would send it toppling down the mountainside.

"There," Remington pointed to the odd acre-thicket, "there's where that infernal screeching came from. Let's give it the once over."

He swung off at a rapid stride, Bleeker and I at his heels. At the edge of the thicket we paused to inspect it closely. The trees themselves were anywhere from eighty to a hundred and fifty feet in height. The vining stuff was plain English ivy. Nothing so terribly suspicious in that, was there? But there was something menacing, ugly, in the air.

We had the devil's own time getting through, but we persisted and finally came out into a cleared space occupying about a quarter-acre in the center of the thicket. Remington stopped short, whistling in amazement, and Bleeker and I stared.

Right in the middle of the cleared space was a low brick building, square as a box, all on one floor, flat-topped like those old adobe houses in the South. The small strip of yard surrounding it was absolutely bare—not a shrub, bush or sapling; hardly any grass. There was an iron fence around the yard at least ten feet high and a row of sharp spikes ran along the top. At the rear of the building a short chimney stuck up, and from it rose a thin thread of smoke.

But the queerest thing about that brick box was the utter absence of any windows. A huge steel door broke the blank face of the wall next us, and there was a big iron gate in the fence directly opposite the door. We stood there speculating on what the place could be, and Bleeker suggested that it might serve as some weird kind of vault. I pointed to the smoke rising from the chimney and shook my head. Driven on by overwhelming curiosity I stepped to the gate and tried it. To my surprise it wasn't even latched, but swung right open.

Remington strode eagerly into the yard and we after him. We walked all around the building, but there wasn't a sign of a window and not another door appeared. I decided I'd had enough of it. Evil shrouded it. I told Remington I was ready to go any time he was. He looked at me in astonishment and said he was going to see what was inside if he could open that door, said he hadn't followed that ghastly yell up there merely to turn around and go back without learning a solitary thing about it. So he went around to the door and tried it. It wasn't locked, either, but swung in as easily as had the gate. We all walked through, leaving it standing wide-open behind us.

Before we were eight feet beyond it, the steel door swung shut almost noiselessly. I leaped and grabbed it, tugging with all my might. I might as well have tried to move a tank. It wouldn't budge. I turned to Remington with an involuntary shiver. Something alien and sinister caused me to strain my ears for the least sound. In plain English, I was scared stiff.

"We're trapped!" I ejaculated in consternation.

"Ah, it's just stuck or something." Remington had paused to look back as

I leaped for the door, and I saw something in his eyes that was uneasy, apprehensive, as he answered me; something that belied the lightness of his words. "Come on, let's see what's in here."

I nodded, walked on to join him and Bleeker, and tried to throw off that sense of premonition.

THE interior of the brick building encompassed but one huge room, lighted by four enormous gasoline lamps suspended from the ceiling, one in each corner. They gave out a clear white glow that made the room bright as day. Against the far wall stood a great cage built of close-set steel bars. The floor was cement. On one side of the cage enclosure was a sunken tank almost full of water. Across from the tank an open tunnel led into the mountain at a steep angle. There was no detectable opening into the cage, and so far as we could see, it lacked an occupant. Otherwise the cement-floored room was empty.

We walked up to the cage and looked through the bars. We brought up short, stared, glanced at each other aghast, and stared again. There, scattered all over the floor inside, was a litter of bones. Human bones! Human skulls scattered among them! Most of them were old and dry; but some, enough to accommodate one body, were still green, with small particles of flesh adhering to them and marrow showing where they had been cracked and chewed in two. Remington went white and sprang back, grabbing my arm and letting out a startled curse.

"For the love of Christ, what kind of a place is this?"

Bleeker and I were too shocked and nauseated to move. But we knew we'd found the source of that ghastly yowl. For a full minute we three stood there staring at that mess, revolted at the sight and the foul stench that rose from it. Then we wheeled with one accord and started for the steel door. But the start was as far as we got. We made that, and there we stopped.

A man (I guess you would call it a man—God knows) stood between us and that door. He was of huge stature—six feet and seven inches, we found out later. He towered above us like a mighty Adonis. Were looks to serve, he was no ogre. He wore a dark gray business suit of excellent material, and ordinary English walking shoes. Around his throat was draped a thick silk muffler of dull blue. His hands were encased in kid gloves. On his head he wore a tight-fitting skull cap, silk also, that reached almost down to his brows and completely covered his ears. His features were finely formed, symmetrical, really handsome to a striking degree. And his face was as black as the ace of spades.

"How do you do, gentlemen?" he greeted us, showing perfectly matched teeth in a flashing smile. "I'm very glad to see you. Callers drop in here all too seldom."

I shivered involuntarily. In spite of his really splendid appearance something emanated from him that was sinister, foul, unholy. Bleeker glared at him and fell back a step, but Remington eyed him up and down and asked coolly, "Where in thunder did *you* come from?"

"I was here when you entered," the black informed us quietly. "Down in my private apartment. The entrance is rather unnoticeable. Come along. I'll show you."

He turned back toward the door, swung to his left and walked to the wall, pausing before a small white but-

ton set into the brick. The cement floor was laid off in squares about treble the size of those in a concrete sidewalk. The black pushed the button and the square nearest the wall raised noiselessly; a cleverly concealed and operated trap-door that lifted to reveal a flight of stone steps descending through a tunnel into the mountain. Glad to get away from that grisly pile of stinking bones, we had followed him partway to the wall. As the trap-door rose and came to rest against the brick, Remington stepped forward a pace or two and glanced down into the tunnel.

"You see," the big black explained, "the trap makes no sound. I heard you come in, and when you passed up to inspect the boneyard I came out, dropped the trap behind me and approached you. That's all there is to it. If you gentlemen will be so kind as to come down into my apartment I should like to talk business to you."

Well, what could *we* do? I ask you! Bleeker and I glanced at Remington, instinctively waiting for him to make the first move. Remington is that kind of man. He glanced back at the steel door, then at Bleeker and me, and I knew he was thinking of the fact that we were completely unarmed. The black smiled and went on with mild persuasiveness.

"You might as well come peaceably, gentlemen. You can't possibly get out, you know. No more than you could have got in if I hadn't wanted you to, and set the levers to loosen both gate and door. And if you don't come without objection I shall be forced to have you carried down."

He shoved back his coat suggestively, and we saw that he carried a heavy-bore automatic strapped around his waist. "I shouldn't want to use the gun, you understand. Nor should I need to. I could manage all three of you single-handed." Which was no lie!

Remington shrugged, gestured toward the trap with a flick of his fingers, beckoned with his head and started down the stairway. We weren't far behind him.

As we descended we examined the tunnel minutely. Gasoline lamps were strung along the roof at short intervals and the cement walls had been painted and frescoed artistically. Bleeker and I looked at Remington's straight back, and at each other. Obviously we were to find ourselves compelled to rely on our wits in getting us out of that place.

At the foot of the stairs, which proceeded for some fifty feet or more, we came to another huge steel door. Remington reached out and shoved it lightly. It opened into a cavernous underground chamber hewn out of the solid rock. Animal skins, velvet and silk scarfs and brilliant cushions were strewn about over the numerous pieces of modern furniture dotting the thick carpet. Gas lamps of intricate design were hung from the vaulted roof. In one corner stood a phonograph, and a finely carved upright piano stood in another. Curtains of exquisite fabric covered what I judged to be two openings into the room. On the smoothly chiseled and finely decorated walls hung two great paintings of genuine beauty. A large coal-burner at one side answered for the warmth and dryness of the underground chamber, and also for the smoke rising from the chimney in the brick building upstairs.

It really looked bright, cheerful and inviting down there. But something ghastly and horrible hung over the place: something hideous and sinister breathed a foul breath into every cranny and spoiled the sumptuous appearance of luxurious elegance.

WE THREE paused just inside the door and scrutinized the room, waiting to see what was coming next. The black walked on to a broad oak table littered with books of the most meticulous choice, stopped, turned and faced us.

"Gentlemen," he said courteously, "as I told you upstairs, I am glad to see you. And I am very glad you were so wise as to make no resistance when I proposed your coming down to my apartment. Only I can let you out of here. Whether or not you *ever* go depends solely upon yourselves. At the least I must ask you to remain for some time. I have a proposition to make you, and if you see my position coolly and sanely, accede to my request reasonably, and give me your word to forget what takes place here, in a few weeks I shall send you on your way with a hearty Godspeed. If you allow yourselves to be swayed by any prejudice and silly sentimentality, I fear you will have to pay the price of the small-souled. But be seated. Make yourselves comfortable, and I will outline my history and elucidate what it is I have to ask."

Bleeker and I looked at each other again, struck by the black's excellent use of English. Remington promptly seated himself in a comfortable leather chair. We took seats not too far from him. With a smile of gratified approval, the black stepped to a big brass gong suspended from the wall near the piano, picked up a wooden mallet lying by it on a small tabouret, and again turned to face us.

"First I shall introduce you to my household. I have eight men down here with me. No women. Women talk."

He raised the mallet and struck four quick blows on the gong. It reverberated, a deep, hollow tone that seemed to fill the room and creep down into the earth. Before it had died away the curtains beyond the piano opened and seven huge Negroes entered and bowed respectfully to the man with the gloves. Not one of them was under six feet two inches. The black pointed at us, nodding to his men.

"Boys, these gentlemen have just dropped in via the box upstairs. I fancy we are about to see the end of our experiment. May I ask your names, gentlemen?"

"Remington," Remington said succinctly, nodding at us in turn; "Bleeker, Crickett."

"Thank you, Mr. Remington. Boys, Mr. Remington, Mr. Bleeker, Mr. Crickett. Gentlemen, these boys are my friends and co-workers. Their names will not interest you. Their stature, their strength and their loyalty to me—will. You may go, boys. But hurry dinner along, will you? Thanks."

The seven herculean blacks turned and disappeared, and the man with the gloves struck the gong again, once. The curtains at the other entrance swayed apart, and a small white man entered the room, pausing at sight of us, and the black master introduced him with an air that held something of pride: "Mr. Remington, Mr. Bleeker and Mr. Crickett—I should like you to know Dr. Straub."

Bleeker and I gasped simultaneously, and Remington sat up in his chair to stare sharply at the man who had just appeared before us. Dr. Straub! We all knew him, by name. Straub, the crack surgeon who had disappeared shortly after the war and was never heard of again. Well, there he was! I remembered his face from a number of pictures exploited by the press at the time he dropped out of sight. He had

undergone a radical change. He still wore his pointed gray beard and close-cropped grizzled mustache, and he peered at us through thick glasses as he came forward, taking us in swiftly.

At the time of his disappearance his pictures had shown him to be a man still young, vigorous and in his prime. Now he was old, stooped, thin and haggard, and he looked as though he had seen seventeen different kinds of hell. But he came forward, poised and at ease, spoke our names precisely, tabulating our faces in his mind, and shook hands as casually as though we stood in the king's ballroom. He didn't, however, say he was glad to see us, and the expression of his sharp gray eyes seemed to declare that nothing mattered much so far as he was concerned.

"Sit down and join the company, doctor," the black invited, leaving the gong, approaching us and sinking into a chair with arresting grace for so huge a man. "I am about to make clear to these gentlemen what I wish of them."

Straub shrugged, sighed slightly, and sat down half facing us, his weary eyes playing alertly among us three. He did not look at the black, and not again did he speak.

"Well, we may as well begin at the beginning. But first, let's be comfortable. Will you smoke, gentlemen?"

The black leaned over to get a box of cigars from the table, opened it and offered it to us. Bleeker and I refused, I couldn't say why, but Remington chose a cigar, lit it from the same match with the black, and leaned back in his chair with the air of a man perfectly at home. I envied him his nerve!

THE black looked at each of us, slowly, then went on. "My name is Richard Ballymair—Rick for short. And this is the beginning."

Holding his cigar firmly in one corner of his mouth, he raised his hands, stripped off his gloves, tossed them to the table, and held both hands extended toward us, fingers slightly spread, watching us intently as he did so. He had a love of the dramatic, that devil! Remington never turned a hair, but Bleeker and I sat up in astonishment and caught our breaths. *His hands were as white as ours!*

"Yes," he answered our dumfounded stare, taking his cigar in his well-formed fingers, "from the neck down I am white. From the neck up—well, you see how it is. I must be so quick as not to weary you with any tedious explanation. By a strange freak of pre-natal influence, a fright visited upon my mother, I was born with white hands. I dare say you have never heard of a parallel case. Neither have I, but that is what happened to me. As I grew up it was both a curse and an incentive to me. The curse of being born black, and the incentive to become white.

"I realized early that I was favored with a high intelligence—an intelligence that placed me far above the level of my people. I determined to make the most of it and do something worthwhile with my life. I studied hard, and came off with top grades both in public and high school. My teachers predicted that I would go far. I determined not to fail their belief in my capacity. I decided that I would become a genuinely great man, one who should give something of value to the world.

"But by the time I was twenty-one I realized how insurmountable a barrier lay between me and the fulfilment of my dreams. I was a Negro. No matter what respect I might command from white men because of my intelligence and abilities, no matter to what heights

I might rise, the wall of race reared between. It drove me frantic. I wanted to meet other great men on a common level, to be one of them. And I could not.

"Then came the war. I enlisted and went overseas as orderly to a white captain who was one of the finest men I have ever known. Overseas I had the privilege of being given opportunity to save his life. He was grateful for my act. When the armistice was signed and we were transported home, he insisted on rewarding me. He owned forty acres of land in Oklahoma's best oil section. He gave me ten acres of that land, had it duly deeded and the deed executed. The day we went to the courthouse to have the deed recorded, we came out to the street and ran into Dr. Straub, here.

"The captain and the doctor were the best of friends, they'd been through the thick of it together over there. They shook hands, as I stepped back respectfully, and began cursing the awful restlessness that was the aftermath of the war.

"'By God, I've got to get away somewhere for a while and push it out of my mind,' the captain told Dr. Straub. 'Let's go down to Papua and shoot a lion.'

"'Ass!' the doctor retorted with rather a wan grin, 'there are no lions in Papua. Nothing bigger than pigs and crocodiles. If you want to shoot a lion you'd better go to the Congo Basin. Yes, I'll go with you. When?'

"'All right, we'll go to the Congo and shoot a lion,' the captain agreed cheerfully. 'Then we'll go to Papua and catch a wild pig. We start next week. Want to come along, Rick? I could use you on a trip like that.'

"Of course, I went. Over there in the forests of the Congo I was impressed with the idea that had taken root in my brain years before. I compared myself to those negroids over there. Cannibals! Living in crude rectangular houses, tattooed in weird designs with scars, carrying bows with cane strings and packing wooden shields, wearing bark-cloth—or nothing—believing in their fetishism and witchcraft, chipping their teeth and letting the women do all the work. Was I like them? Was I of that race? Only in color! Outside I was black, but inside I was as purely Caucasian as either the captain or Dr. Straub. I lived, talked, thought and dreamed like the white men in my own land. I cursed all the gods who had wished a black hide on me and raved because I couldn't be white. Inwardly, of course. The doctor and the captain never knew of that.

"Then the captain shot his lion, but didn't kill it. Again I was privileged to save his life, killed the beast and got pretty badly torn up. One of my legs was ripped to shreds. Dr. Straub fixed me in pretty good shape, but said he'd have to graft some skin on that mauled leg. With all the Negro people around us, there was no place we could beg, buy or steal a patch of black skin. The captain came forward like a prince, said he'd give me a piece himself, jollied me and suggested that I shouldn't mind a patch on my thigh to match my hands.

"I *didn't* mind, of course. That at least, I told him, would be out of sight. And I jollied back, and told the doctor it would soon turn dark to match the rest of me.

"Soberly, he assured me it wouldn't. I stared, and he went on to explain in detail that the skin is composed of two main layers, the scarf skin or *epidermis*, and under that the true skin, technically the *dermis* or *corium*. The *epidermis* or outer skin consists of five layers: i.e.

—the *stratum corneum*, made up of layers of scale-like cells—the *stratum lucidum*, another layer of scale-like cells—the *stratum granulosum*, containing granules and less flattened cells—the *stratum mucosum* or *stratum Malphighii*, with polygonal cells connected by fine prickle-like processes—and the *stratum germinativum* which lies next to the second, or true, skin.

"Now: he went on to impress me with the fact that it is deep in the cells of the *stratum Malphighii*, the fourth layer of the *epidermis*, that the pigment is found which makes the color of the Negro's skin. Under that stratum I was like all other human beings. In other words, *I was black only from the second skin out!*

"From then on I could think of nothing but the blinding fact that the doctor had told me. I would sit and stare at that patch of white on my healing thigh, and think wild thoughts. Those wild thoughts focused down, ultimately, to one inevitable conclusion. *If I could be skinned, literally, bit by bit, and the removed pieces replaced by white skin, I should become a white man!* Unable to contain myself, I approached the doctor with the idea, cautiously, making a half-jest of it. Always deeply interested in the progress attained by experimentation, like all skilled, advanced and highly scientific men, he took me seriously and talked it over at length. He said he had no doubt it could be done, and he fancied it might be accomplished in six or seven years—if one could procure the white skin.

"WE CAME back to America shortly after that, and I, still half-stunned by the monumental possibilities within my grasp, set to work formulating ways and means. I was determined to become a white man before I should pass my thirty-fifth birthday. I had ten years in which to accomplish it.

"I went straight to Oklahoma and looked over that ten acres of land the captain had given me. All around it were spouting wells, pouring out liquid gold for other men. I needed gold. I went to another part of the state, hunted up a lawyer of the type to suit my purpose, and told him what I wanted.

"I proposed leasing my land to an oil syndicate for drilling purposes. I wanted it done through this lawyer, and I did not want the syndicate to know I was a colored man. I guaranteed the lawyer half of the cash bonus I would receive from the syndicate and ten cents on every barrel of oil taken from the ground. I would go away, and communicate with him twice a year. His duty was to keep my identity a secret, receive my income and pile it up in the bank at four percent interest, keep his mouth shut and ask no questions. He agreed readily, and I knew he would keep his word, for I know men. The syndicate paid me a cash bonus of twenty thousand. I divided it with my lawyer and set out to find a suitable place to work out my plan in seclusion.

"Well, we struck a gusher right off the bat. A big one. Out of flush production in the first three months I netted around a half-million and the lawyer was fifty thousand to the good. (I might add that that was six years ago. I had a few more wells drilled, and now have something like eight million dollars piled up waiting for me. My lawyer, including a bonus I give him every year for honest service, has two million. Pretty good price for keeping his mouth shut, isn't it?)

"But that's aside from the point. I found up here in this mountain an old abandoned mine. It had never amounted

to much; the pay streak pinched out and it was closed years ago. But it suited my purpose perfectly. Quietly, through my lawyer, I purchased twenty acres covering the site of the old mine, timbered up all the entrances to the tunnels and filled them in with earth. Then I cut a new tunnel down from the summit to connect with the stopes inside the mountain. This is an old stope in which we now sit, gentlemen. Over the opening to my new tunnel I built that brick building, which we call the box.

"Of course, before I set to work I accrued a company of men, selected from my own race, selected for their physical strength, loyalty and reliability. I gave my word to be fair to them, considerate, and pay well for good work. I kept my word. Money will do much, you understand. Inside of a year I had finished this place, and made certain that it was done so expertly, so secretly, that none outside even dreamed of its existence.

"Then I kidnapped Dr. Straub. I brought him here and explained that he was to stay till he had made me a white man. At first he was furious with what he was pleased to term my impertinence. But after much talking and arguing over the matter, he became impressed with my understanding of what could be done, my insatiable ambition and my determination to succeed. Also, he himself was avidly curious, from the scientist's angle, to see how the experiment would mature. Then again, I promised him a quiet, orderly life of considerate treatment and a cool million when the thing was done. It is astonishing what money can accomplish, isn't it?

"Of course, I *did* show Dr. Straub the fierce young puma I keep penned in an adjoining stope with the freedom of that cage you saw. I figured I might need some powerful persuasion to aid me as I went along. And of course, the doctor knew he could never leave this place unless he acceded to my request. But I give him the credit to suppose that such things had nothing to do with his decision. He agreed to give me the benefit of his utmost skill. The next thing was to find the white skin we needed.

"We watched events closely—outside events. One of my men, at my instructions, had a daily paper mailed to an isolated rural box—a year's subscription paid in advance. He went to the box three times a week and got the papers. One man killed another and, as we saw by the press, hid out in the hills near here. My men trailed him, captured him and brought him here. He was a good type—tall, very blond, with fine yellow hair and pink-white skin. We explained to him what was wanted. We gave him the choice of exchanging his skin with me, patch by patch, or being turned over to the authorities and electrocuted for murder. He concluded he had rather go back to the world a few years hence wearing a good disguise than not to go at all.

"Dr. Straub first transferred his fine blond scalp and ears to my head. You see, gentlemen?"

Ballymair raised his hand and whipped off the skull cap. Under it, thick blond hair, straight and sleek, and well-formed white ears stood out grotesquely from his black face. Bleeker and I could only stare, but Remington whistled, and Dr. Straub sat back in his chair eyeing us with a peculiarly jaded disinterest. Ballymair went on evenly.

"Then we started to work upon the body. Bit by bit the doctor transferred white skin to me and my black skin to the murderer. But he was much smaller than I, and of course there wasn't half

enough skin available, since there were only certain portions we could use. By that time I was mad over the sureness of our ultimate success, and Dr. Straub was wild with excited interest. We knew we had to find more white skin.

"I sent my men out to capture and kidnap unattached men from the lower walks of life. I counseled them to choose wasters, ne'er-do-wells, derelicts who were in good condition and still youthful, and yet who would not be missed by other men. I had little trouble in persuading them to be reasonable. Most men, even the least intelligent, would rather live with a few black patches on their bodies, serving me here, than be fed to a panther. By that time I was so certain of my ultimate success that nothing could have stopped me. What were the lives of a few derelicts in the face of a monumental plan like mine? One's intelligence is insulted by refusal to recognize the relativity of values.

"Well, let us finish quickly. Six years have passed, as I said before. And again as I have said before, I am white from the neck down. I left my face to the last purposely. I haven't looked in a mirror for six years. When I do look again I shall look into the face of a white man. I have lain awake nights dreaming of that thing. To look into my own face again, and know I am white. See how little I lack!"

Ballymair pulled from his throat the blue silk muffler. From ears and hairline down, his neck was white. Only the face from the ears outward, from the blond hair down, was black. He looked weirdly like a white man wearing a black mask. He smiled at the expressions he saw on our features.

"So now we come to the end. The five fellows I picked up haven't been too amenable to persuasion. Two of them died of fever. One killed himself. The others I had to put out of the way for my own safety. But they were of different status from you three. I know I shall have no argument with either of you gentlemen. I fancy you won't mind a few black stripes down your legs? After we have finished our task I shall blow this place to kingdom come. I have three hundred pounds of dynamite cached at a safe distance for the purpose. Right now the question is: which one of you gentlemen shall I find most suitable for my purpose? I am anxious to be done and out of here. Hmmm—which one of you, now?"

"By God, none of us!" Remington exploded, and Bleeker and I gripped ourselves rigid in our chairs. "Of all the damned fiendishness! We'll get out of here in some way, and I'll turn you over to——"

"Pardon," Ballymair interrupted mildly. "You cannot possibly get out of here. If you ever hope to go at all, I warn you for the last time to make no resistance. You are a pretty healthy-looking specimen, Mr. Remington, but you are much too dark. Mr. Crickett is too old. But I quite fancy Mr. Bleeker's fine blond skin. He will not suffer at all, and neither of you other two will have anything to do but sit around and wait till the job is finished. You may as well grant my request gracefully, since you will have to submit anyhow."

BLEEKER went ghastly white, and I clenched my teeth, but Remington had got hold of himself again, and he never moved a muscle. He turned his head and looked Bleeker straight in the eye.

"Bleeker, we're caught fair. We've got to rely on our wits. We'll have to submit to what this Ballymair de-

mands—but only so long as we fail to find any way of retaliation or escape. And now it's I warning you, Ballymair"—he turned to face the black and half rose in his chair—"that we shall not rest one moment in striving to find some way of besting you. We have as much intelligence as you, and there is a way, don't forget that fact. There's always a way."

"Not in this case. I will not be thwarted at the eleventh hour." Ballymair rose, shaking his head and smiling deprecatingly. "I signaled the boys when they stood right here before you, to destroy utterly the levers and buttons working the steel door and gate above—to destroy even the small electric plant that drove the levers and buttons. I don't need it any more. None of us can possibly get out that way now, not even I. There is but one passage of exit, an underground passage, and only four of us know where it is—two of my most trusted men, Dr. Straub, and myself. There is no way out, and no way for you to escape or frustrate me. Mr. Bleeker, will you come this way, please?"

"No! Damned if I will! None of my skin is going on your hell-begotten face!" Bleeker spat out defiantly, leaping to his feet and seizing a heavy straight-backed chair. Remington and I sprang to abet him, but the black only smiled, drew his gun and backed to the gong. Straub did not move. Ballymair struck the gong three times, and five of the big Negroes rushed into the room.

"Kindly take Mr. Bleeker to the surgery, boys." Ballymair waved a hand at Bleeker. "Leave the other two gentlemen here, and see that they stay. I am sorry you saw fit to make trouble for yourselves, gentlemen."

The blacks crossed the room in a wild rush, and though we fought with all our strength to protect Bleeker, we might as well have tried to stop a steam train. In ten seconds they had collared all of us. Three of them picked up Bleeker, and carried him, kicking, squirming and cursing, toward the curtained entrance, while the other two held Remington and me with our hands gripped cross-wristed behind us.

"Come, doctor." Ballymair beckoned to Straub, and the surgeon rose without a backward glance to follow him out behind the three blacks carrying Bleeker. We saw then that another steel door stood behind the curtains, for Ballymair paused, waited till Straub had passed, then went on, closing the door after himself.

"You may as well take it easy." The black who had been holding Remington released him and stepped away, motioning the other to release me. "It'll be a lot better for all concerned if you don't pull any more of this stuff. Come on, Brace, let's go see to the eats."

The two of them hurried out through the doorway through which Straub had entered, and before the curtains had stopped swaying behind them Remington and I made a rush for the opening. There was no door behind the curtains at this entrance, and we went on through into a long, wide hall. But at the other end of the hall there was a steel door, and it clanged to as we appeared, and the laugh of the Negro Brace came back to us. We hurried down and tried the door, foolishly, since we knew before we touched it that we would find it locked.

We turned back and examined the hall. Two doors opening from it led into a large, well-appointed bathroom and into a bedroom containing two full-sized beds. There was no other opening off the hall, and no other rooms.

Remington and I looked at each other, shook our heads in resignation and returned to the room to which Ballymair had first taken us, sat down, and tried to think sanely.

"It's no use fighting, Crickett." Remington's voice was cool and level. He leaned back in his chair, his hands clasped behind his head, staring at the ceiling.

"We've got to keep quiet and use our heads. We can't save Bleeker, but we *can* get out of here. I tell you, man, there's always a way out. Always a way out of everything, if we just stand pat long enough and give our brains time to work."

I didn't answer. So far as coherent thought was concerned, I was down and out, for the time being at least. In my mind's eye I could see poor old Bleeker strapped to a table, the skin being sliced from his thighs to mold that Negro's face.

I hadn't the least idea how skin-grafting was done, didn't know how long it might take, or to what extent Bleeker would suffer. But the very thought of it gave me a grisly nausea.

Remington and I sat there in helpless silence, striving furiously to think, and, like everybody else, finding ourselves powerless to think when we most needed to do so, when the black named Brace returned bearing a tray that held an appetizing dinner. Remington and I hardly touched it, and Brace started to carry it away again. Just as he reached the door Remington called to him.

"Say, Brace: what are those men doing out there?"

"They are operating," Brace answered shortly, slipping quickly through the smallest opening he dared allow himself with the tray and slamming the self-locking door behind him.

THERE'S absolutely no good going over the hell of the next six weeks. After the first few days of horror we two began to feel somewhat resigned and strove to accustom ourselves to the business of waiting. Penned up in that room, with access to the bath and beds, of course, but never even allowed to go upstairs again to the box (not that we wanted to!), we thought and talked till we were dizzy, trying to formulate some possible method of escape. But in spite of Remington's doggedly reiterated assertion that there was always a way, we failed to find one. We saw nothing of Bleeker, Ballymair or Straub again in all that time. We saw no one but Brace, who came in every day to bring us our meals and to furnish us with clean linen, or to attend to our personal wants. Remington tried to draw the Negro into conversation once or twice, but Brace refused to talk and advised us to mind our own business. We nearly went insane with the awful suspense of knowing nothing. Worse still, no sound of any kind came to us from the rooms outside of the ones where we were imprisoned.

Then, at the end of the six weeks, Ballymair walked into the room and bowed to us with pompous courtesy. Remington and I stared at him incredulously. His face was white and smooth, save for the odd patchwork of thin, rapidly fading scars. The transformation was startling. He made a magnificent figure with that white skin molded over his finely chiseled features.

"Good God!" Remington said under his breath. "That damned Straub's a wonder! I've got to admit it."

"Yes, indeed," Ballymair agreed pleasantly. "Mr. Bleeker and the doctor will be in presently, and we shall come to a settlement of this little affair. I have some important work to do im-

mediately, but we will talk afterward. Ah—Dr. Straub! Come in, Mr. Bleeker."

I sprang to my feet and gripped my hands behind me at sight of Bleeker, but Remington sat coolly in his chair, his black eyes straining toward the face of the man forcefully separated from us six weeks before. As Bleeker stepped into the room Remington cursed sharply, but I was tongue-tied. It was the Bleeker you see now that came slowly across the room toward us. White as an animated ghost he was, his eyes blank with the horror of what he had undergone, heard and seen, his once straight body bent, his swinging walk turned into a shuffle. He came toward us without a pause, then stopped within two feet of Remington.

"See what those devils did," he said roughly, throwing back the lounging robe that covered his nude body. "You've got to get 'em some way. You've got to! I can't. I'm done."

Up and down his thighs ran ugly patches of black skin, and raw red scars widened where the insufficient covering from the black's face had not yet grown together with the white. I shivered and dropped back into my chair, sick to the spine. Remington turned his head.

"Cover it up," he said curtly. "Cover it up and sit down here. I'm going to get him." He made no attempt to lower his voice, and Ballymair glanced at Straub, smiled and shrugged his massive shoulders.

"Well, we'll excuse a little excitement, gentlemen. Naturally you feel a bit upset. Now the doctor and I must attend to some important business, and I will leave you for the present. Come, doctor."

"The fiends!" Bleeker sat down on the edge of a chair and a spark of wild anger blazed in his blank, horror-ridden eyes as the door clanged after Ballymair and Straub. Bleeker lowered his voice and went on in a mad rush of words, leaning toward Remington and me. "The hell-begotten fiends! You know what their important business is, Remington? No, of course you don't know. You can't hear a thing out here. But I know. I've heard enough to send me mad, for that surgery is right under the stope where they have that panther penned."

"Yes? What do you mean?" Remington's black eyes narrowed.

"One by one Ballymair's been feeding the blacks to it. He poisoned them through their food. They'd just get sick and take cramps and kick out. Then the others got suspicious and he did for 'em all at once. Brace was the last to go. He didn't associate much with the others and had no way of knowing they were all gone. He kicked in this morning just after he brought your breakfast —about an hour ago. Their important business is to throw him into the den. God—I've heard that damned brute growling and chewing and cracking bones——"

"Pull up!" Remington cut in sharply. "Cut it! I've told you I was going to get him, and I am—or I never read a man in my life!"

His declaration was so confident, so positive in its assurance of achievement, that Bleeker and I turned our heads to scrutinize him in amazement. I'd long ago given up hope of any kind.

I guess I hadn't realized the kind of man Remington was. And when he said that, I remembered that of all the fellows in our set nobody was so accurate a judge of other men as Remington. He could read a fellow like a book, take him to pieces, tell you just what he'd do in a given situation and call the turn every time.

I felt a sudden returning surge of crazy hope, and asked eagerly. "What are you going to do?"

"Get him." Remington's eyes traveled over Bleeker, and they went hard as black flint. "I've been thinking night and day for six weeks, Bleeker, and I've found the one way to hit him where he lives. I've got one weapon he can't stand up to: one weapon he doesn't know exists: one sure shot he can't escape. You two keep still and watch. I'll get him, as surely as God made little apples."

HE HAD hardly ceased speaking when the door opened and Straub and Ballymair strode in briskly. For the first time Straub gave some evidence of an interest in life. Ballymair waved him to a chair, dropped into one himself, and faced us, fairly shining in exultation.

"Well, gentlemen, the deed is done. I come to talk business. I am so delighted with the excellent work Dr. Straub has done that I have decided to give him a bonus of another million. That leaves me six, and thousands pouring out of my wells every day. Now, the doctor and I have arranged that charge of dynamite so nicely set that it will blow this place to atoms and leave nothing to tell the tale. Three hundred pounds is a whaling charge. It will shave off the whole side of the mountain. If you three men had considered my proposition sanely and reasonably, I should be glad to take you out with us. But you were so foolish as to fight and make a nuisance of yourselves, and I dare not trust you. The doctor and I will go out and leave you locked in here. We have arranged a very long fuse, one that will give us at least twenty minutes to attain a safe distance. I shall be sorry to leave you gentlemen to such an untimely demise, but I cannot endanger my future out of any silly sentimentality."

He paused, waiting for a comeback evidently, but none of us spoke. We were so numbed that nothing could jar us further; not even the pleasant prospect of being blown to pieces. If Ballymair sensed the status of our feelings, he gave no sign, but went on speaking rapidly, too much on fire with the exultance of his triumph to remain calm.

"I have spent a great deal of money and effort. I have suffered almost continually for six years: suffered a hundred horrors, horrors of suspense and delay. The last horror would have been to fail. I have gone to extreme lengths, but the magnificent end justified the means. Think of what it means to me, and you may not blame me utterly. Think!" Ballymair leaned toward us, and his eyes flamed under his smooth blond hair. "How would you like it if you were doomed to walk among other men, set aside and held at arm's length because you were black—black from the second skin out?

"White the rest of the way in. White in brain, white in heart, white in ideals, ambitions, loves and desires. I tell you the skin doesn't matter one little bit. It's what's inside a man. Trite truism, yes. And yet the world judges by the veneer. Well, I changed my veneer!

"I'm going out into the world, take my place as a respected white man in a respected community, and live a full life, with wealth to back me and intelligence to carry me forward. I'm going to show the world how little the veneer counts. I've fulfilled my life's dream. Success! Success! Think of it! I'm thirty-one years old, I have six million dollars, and I'm *white!*"

*"Where?"* Remington's voice cut into the heat of his exultation as cold

as the North Pole and as sharp as a two-edged sword.

Ballymair quivered, caught himself and shrank back in his chair as though Remington had struck him in the face. And Remington's voice went on, as cool, as steady, as merciless as destiny.

"White? *Where?* You may change your skin, Ballymair, but you can't change your heart. You're quite right. The skin does not matter. One of the best friends I have is a Negro—a man with a clear brain and a fine soul, satisfied to hold his place in the world. Look at your hands, Ballymair."

"My *hands?*" Ballymair's eyes leaped to them involuntarily, and he frowned, mystified by Remington's tone. "My hands were always white."

"Exactly!" Remington's voice rose, full, resonant, flowing out like the tones of an organ. "Why didn't you keep them that way? What a fine symbol that would have been, Ballymair, to go on through life forever with your hands white! What an incentive to your boasted intellect! But now they're red, and you can't ever wash them clean again.

And your heart's black, and you can't ever change it at all. It's a foul, black, stinking hole, filled with rotten memories and dead men's bones. Use your vaunted intelligence, Ballymair, and your white skin will be dust and ashes in your mouth."

Ballymair stared at him like a man hypnotized. And then I knew what Remington meant by his one weapon. He meant his tongue. He was using his mighty gift of speech, shooting straight at the intelligent brain that really lay within Ballymair's skull. He did not raise a finger or move in his chair. He was straight and immobile, his face set and stern, his black eyes intent on Ballymair's face, and his marvelous voice rolled out like the tones of a denouncing god.

"So—to fail would be the last horror for you, Ballymair? Well, look your last horror in the face. You have failed. You sit there and tell me the skin doesn't matter one single bit, you sneer at the world for considering the veneer, and you are a living example of a man who has existed solely to prove that nothing mattered to him *but* the veneer. The lives of twelve men have gone to perfect your fiendish plan. It doesn't matter who or what they were: derelicts, down-and-outers, they were still human and they had a right to their lives. Even a dog has a right to his life—unless he goes mad. You went mad, Ballymair. You became a monomaniac. One-pointed as any insane inmate of a madhouse. You thought of nothing on earth but acquiring that white veneer.

"There's something else to reckon with. You wanted to become great, to give something of value to the world. You had a mighty opportunity to do just that. Think what a man of your intelligence, power and personality could have done for his race. Look, Ballymair! Look!"

Remington rose to his feet like a released spring, leaned toward Ballymair and pointed to the smooth expanse of the wall. Ballymair rose, half crouching, and stared where Remington pointed. All our eyes followed, riveted on the wall—but the wall did not remain blank. In the compelling flow of Remington's words things and people grew, stood and walked before our eyes.

"Look! There's a silver sheet! The big movie of life is on it. The life of a race. The Negro! Look! There's Harlem. Sixty million dollars worth of property owned by the Negro there today. A Negro capital, man,

just so surely as you stand there. Some day it will be a center where culture, intelligence and high achievement will gather and spread an influence over the earth. There's proof for you of how the Negro has risen in the last twenty-five years. On every hand he is rising to better things, attaining a higher stature of manhood. He is giving something to the world, lifting his race to the place where men shall some day see that, regardless of the outer superficialities, real men are brothers under the skin—that the veneer is not!

"Yesterday we saw the Negro performer much in the same light as we saw the trick dancing bear. Even at his best we accorded him only the recognition of a flash-in-the-pan risen to freak eminence, incapable of sustained effort, unequal to the intelligent creative ability which produces group coherence. But he refused to remain one with a race of standardized dummies. He exhibited a determined passion for individual expression, he found his own art, his own music, he reached an eminence of achievement that has commanded the admiration of the whole white world.

"Look, Ballymair, look! There stands Roland Hayes. Do you realize that he is the greatest American lyric tenor? Do you realize that he has bound the whole world with the spell of his silver voice? There stands Charles Gilpin. Do you realize he reached a pinnacle of artistic ability, when he brought to life with rare histrionic skill the tragic figure of the Emperor Jones? There stands Countee Cullen. Do you realize his poetry is real, fine, drawn from his heartstrings —as he has drawn tears from mine? Do you realize that these men are *great?* And that there are a dozen more like them?

"Not too many, perhaps. One in a million, maybe. But do you realize that they are the splendid vanguard blazing the way for the dark race into high places? Do you realize that they have razed racial obstacles and don't propose to be told where they shall stop?

"Do you realize that they haven't even scratched the surface of their incalculable potentialities?

"And look — look now! There stands Abraham Lincoln! The man who made all this possible for you and your race. He's staring straight at you!

"And what does he see? You, who could have been one of that glorious vanguard! You, who could have been one in a million! You, who could have carried your race a step farther! You, who lost sight of something truly great in the lure of a treacherous mirage!

"You perverted that fine intelligence of yours, you lost your stride, you wasted the opportunity of a hundred years!

"Lincoln! Lincoln, whom your race reveres. See in his face the loathing, the horror, the real sorrow. For you! You, who could have been a man. You, who are nothing. An anomaly. You're not white, fool! You may be white from the second skin out, but your blood runs true to form. Whatever pigment lies in the cells of that first skin to make the Negro black still flows in your veins! Go ahead and marry! Find out how white you are. Look—there you are ! A white man, having taken his place in the world, wealthy; perhaps respected for his brain and his polish, in social intercourse with his seeming kind—with black children around his knees. There you stand, the broken victim of your

own folly, of ostracism, suspicion and disgrace! Look!"

REMINGTON swayed toward Ballymair, his face white, exalted in the flow of his thundering thoughts made vocal, his eyes blazing like twin comets. Ballymair drooped, backing from the picture Remington had brought to terrible life, shrinking, his gaze wide and stark, swinging to meet Remington's eyes. Remington half raised his hands, clenched into fists, and he stood tense and rigid as his rolling voice flamed on:

"Go ahead! Go on out into the world! Anomaly! Neither black nor white. Once you were an honest black, and at least you could have been a man, an example of high incentive to all your race. Why didn't you go on and *prove* to the world that the color of the skin doesn't matter? You can't now! You're only a sham white man with black blood in your veins. You'll have to live in celibate bachelorhood to save your face. And even that won't do it. You're riding to a fall, Ballymair! God pity you, you're riding to an awful fall!

"Lincoln! See—he has covered his face! He knows what a terrible mess you've stirred up for yourself. He knows you've got to pay. You've exacted the lives of a dozen men—your hands are dripping red. You'll never be able to forget it. It will be with you night and day. And you'll never be able to forget what you accomplished, hideous and warped as it was. You'll grow proud of it! You'll tell! Your brain can't carry the load! You'll tell! And they'll put you in a madhouse—for no man would believe such a thing had he not seen. In a madhouse!

"And then what kind of an example will you be for your race? *They'll* believe! They'll be afraid not to. They'll be ashamed of you. They'll disown you. No race will own you at all. Neither black nor white. And the whole world that was beginning to recognize and honor your race will shun them and be afraid to trust them for fear another fiend might rise like you! For when you come face to face with a real *white* man, Ballymair, white dominance will show! A black man, honest and clean of heart, could shake hands with a white brother. But you've got to bow your head and sink into oblivion. Pervert, fiend, fool, sham! White? *Where?*"

Remington's voice filled the great rocky chamber and held us in a trance of stupefied wonder. Ballymair slumped before him like a beaten dog carved in stone. The weapon had gone home. Remington had read him true, shot true, and hit him in his one vulnerable spot—his undeniable super-intellect. As the magnificent voice died away in the last stark, one-worded question, a stillness settled over the room that turned me cold and pinched the breath from my lungs.

For a long time no one moved a muscle, and Remington stood straight and rigid, his head high, his black eyes piercing to Ballymair's naked soul. Then slowly the huge man raised his head, straightened his shoulders and drew himself to his enormous height. He looked levelly into Remington's eyes, and Remington never flinched, though I hope to God I never again see the look on any man's face that was written on Ballymair's. He was looking his last horror in the eye. He was looking into hell. He had followed Remington every foot of the way. He had been stunned by the revelation Remington had spread in a blinding light before his sight. Then for the first time something fine emanated from

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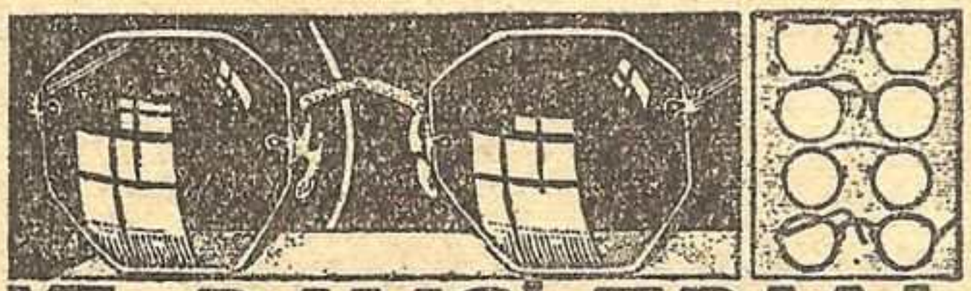
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him, and settled over his features. With it there settled a calm dignity and the man stood like a statue.

"White!" Remington repeated, his voice like a harp under a fathom of water. "Where?"

With a movement quick as light Ballymair whipped out his automatic and raised it, pointing straight at Remington. Bleeker and I caught our breaths as his long forefinger curved over the trigger. But Remington never turned a hair, and his black eyes held the other's in an unwinking stare.

*"White!"* Ballymair said, gently, and he turned to the wall, half turned, his eyes swerving from Remington's face. We all knew, instinctively, that he was seeing clearly the tall, gaunt form of Abraham Lincoln, ghostly in his sight, staring at him. Then he spoke again, raising his left hand in a stiff military salute and his voice was clear—proud.

*"White—through!"* With the words he whipped the gun around, turned it squarely to his own heart and jerked the trigger. For a moment he swayed, his head high, as we others crouched motionless in our seats; then he fell forward on his face.

"By God—I don't know! He was white somewhere!" Remington dropped into his chair like a wet rag and covered his face with his hands.

GOD knows how long we all sat tense and still, yet under the spell of Remington's rolling voice, stunned by the reaction it had worked upon Ballymair—knowing that was exactly what Remington had planned. Then Straub rose slowly to his feet, meticulously keeping his eyes from the dead Ballymair, and spoke in a queerly hushed tone:

"My God, man, but you can talk!

Come on, let's get out of here! Let's make time, light the fuse and get away as fast as God'll let us!" He turned toward the steel door, took a key from his pocket and opened it, and we three rose and forced our legs to follow him. In the hall beyond he took some candles from a box in a cupboard and handed one to each of us. "Here, light these. It's dark as a pocket in these tunnels."

Stumbling, because our muscles were not yet co-ordinated to our wills, we walked at his heels, down a long labyrinth of tunnels, and swerved off sharply at last in one that turned to the right. It ended at last in a big slab of stone laid against a queer-looking lever. The doctor seized the lever, thrust a key in a lock at the base of it, turned the key and jerked the lever down. The slab swung aside and we all stepped out into the clean air, and the sunshine of broad day.

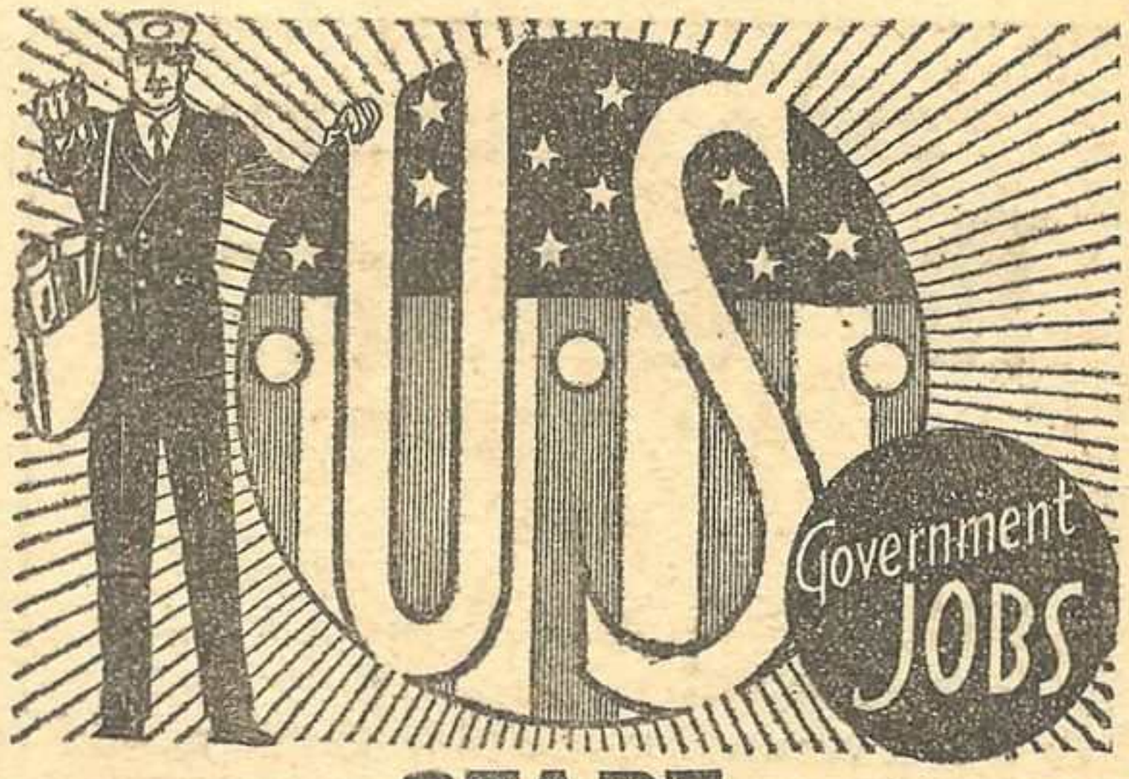
"Now I'll light the fuse, and we'll hustle." Straub walked off a few feet to where the black length of a thick fuse protruded from under a rock. "It runs through another old tunnel, a narrow one. I had to crawl on my belly to pull it through. Ballymair couldn't get in at all. Well, here goes."

He knelt and applied his candle flame to the fuse. It caught, sputtered and hissed like a snake.

As one man we turned and began a rapid trot down and across the mountainside.

Fifty feet away Straub gave a yell and leaped back toward the tunnel through which we had emerged.

"My check! That check for two million! He's got it in his pocket with a letter waiving identification! You three go ahead. I know the way perfectly. I can beat that fuse before it reaches the dynamite. We can't get to it to cut it. I'll be right out!"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"Come back here!" Remington yelled after him. "It't too late! Come back here!"

But Straub ignored him, mad with the thought of the check in Ballymair's pocket. He sped across the intervening space and darted into the mouth of the hole in the mountainside.

"Come on," Remington commanded. "He'll have to take care of himself. He was nearly as bad as Ballymair, anyway. Shall I give you a lift, Bleeker?"

Bleeker shook his head and broke into a shambling run. Now and then we glanced back to see if Straub was coming, but he didn't again appear. Then suddenly the mountain seemed to shake and heave beneath our feet, and the whole side of it broke off and slithered down. The earth pitched and boiled, and the huge green block of trees and ivy surrounding the "box" pitched in and disappeared, like a head of cabbage swirling to the bottom in a kettle of boiling water. The concussion threw us all flat, earth and rocks falling around in a dusty shower, and when we again struggled to our feet there was left only a great raw wound in the mountain, and the trees about us stood straight to the sky as though nothing had happened beyond the orderly course of every day.

And you wonder why Remington and Bleeker and I are "queer!" You wonder why we always stick together, and why we've grown so silent. Well, I could show you a big scar on a mountainside that looks more like the remains of a landslide than anything else. And Remington could show you where to dig to find a pile of human bones. And Bleeker could show you some patches of black skin on his thighs. And we could tell you the whole thing over and over again—but you wouldn't believe. So we don't say anything.

# The Lamp

By H. P. LOVECRAFT

We found the lamp inside those hollow cliffs
Whose chiseled sign no priest in Thebes could read,
And from whose caverns frightened hieroglyphs
Warned every living creature of earth's breed.
No more was there—just that one brazen bowl
With traces of a curious oil within;
Fretted with some obscurely patterned scroll,
And symbols hinting vaguely of strange sin.

Little the fears of forty centuries meant
To us as we bore off our slender spoil,
And when we scanned it in our darkened tent
We struck a match to test the ancient oil.
It blazed—great God!—but the vast shapes we saw
In that mad flash have seared our lives with awe.

---

# Zaman's Hill

By H. P. LOVECRAFT

The great hill hung close over the old town,
A precipice against the main street's end;
Green, tall and wooded, looking darkly down
Upon the steeple at the highway bend.
Two hundred years the whispers had been heard
About what happened on the man-shunned slope:
Tales of an oddly mangled deer or bird,
Or of lost boys whose kin had ceased to hope.

One day the mail-man found no village there,
Nor were its folk or houses seen again;
People came out from Aylesbury to stare . . .
Yet they all told the mail-man it was plain
That he was mad for saying he had spied
The great hill's gluttonous eyes, and jaws stretched wide.

IT IS with great satisfaction that we are increasing the size of WEIRD TALES to 160 pages, beginning with this issue. Think of it, 160 pages of the best weird stories written today! And there will be no let-down in the high quality that has made WEIRD TALES the foremost magazine of eery and fantastic fiction in the world.

### Invasion from Mars

Howard B. MacDonald writes from Yonkers, New York: "The amazing wave of mass hysteria which swept over the nation last night following the broadcast by Orson Welles of H. G. Wells' story *The War of the Worlds* reads like a story from WEIRD TALES. Many times we have had stories in your magazine describing just such a supposed invasion, with accounts of the reactions of individuals everywhere to the imagined doom of civilization. Many readers have dismissed these stories as sheer fantasy; but last night the thing actually happened and people all over the United States acted and reacted in precisely the same panicky manner as some of your writers have predicted and described in detail. To me the whole fantastic occurrence is not only a complete vindication of the prophesies made by several WEIRD TALES contributors but also a tribute to their intimate knowledge of human nature and psychology. The November issue has some fine stories. Here is my vote: First place to Seabury Quinn for *Lynne Foster Is Dead*. That was a real weird story, with an unusual plot and some very sound psychology. Second place to Paul Ernst for his remarkable bit of horror writing, *The Thing in the Trunk*. This tale shows a perfect knowledge of the workings of a guilty conscience, and at the same time is a fine piece of writing in that it builds up the terror so logically and strongly. Third place to young Robert Bloch for *The Hound of Pedro*—another well-built horror story with a strong plot. I liked the locale of this, and the character drawings. Incidentally, I would rank *Lynne Foster is Dead* among Seabury Quinn's best works."

### Kelley's Egyptian Stories

Ralph Eadmer Clarry writes from Toronto: "The return of that singular realist, that incalculable fantasist, Thomas P. Kelley, of *The Last Pharaoh,* brings gladness to my heart. Never had I been so completely captured by any story as this, until now, once again he gives us *I Found Cleopatra.* Talk about Abraham Merritt, he has nothing on Kelley. And so far you have kept him as an exclusive scoop for your great magazine. How has he eluded the clutches of other fantastic-fiction seekers? I think you should pat yourself on the back for snaring a comparative newcomer with such promise. As to the story itself: Again Kelley takes us to old Egypt for the setting and once more reveals an intimacy with his scenes of ancient days that is wondrous in a contemporary. Again his facile pen paints the characters that one likes to read about. Brian O'Hara, afraid of nothing, capable of meeting anything, is great stuff. I hope he isn't finished in the end as

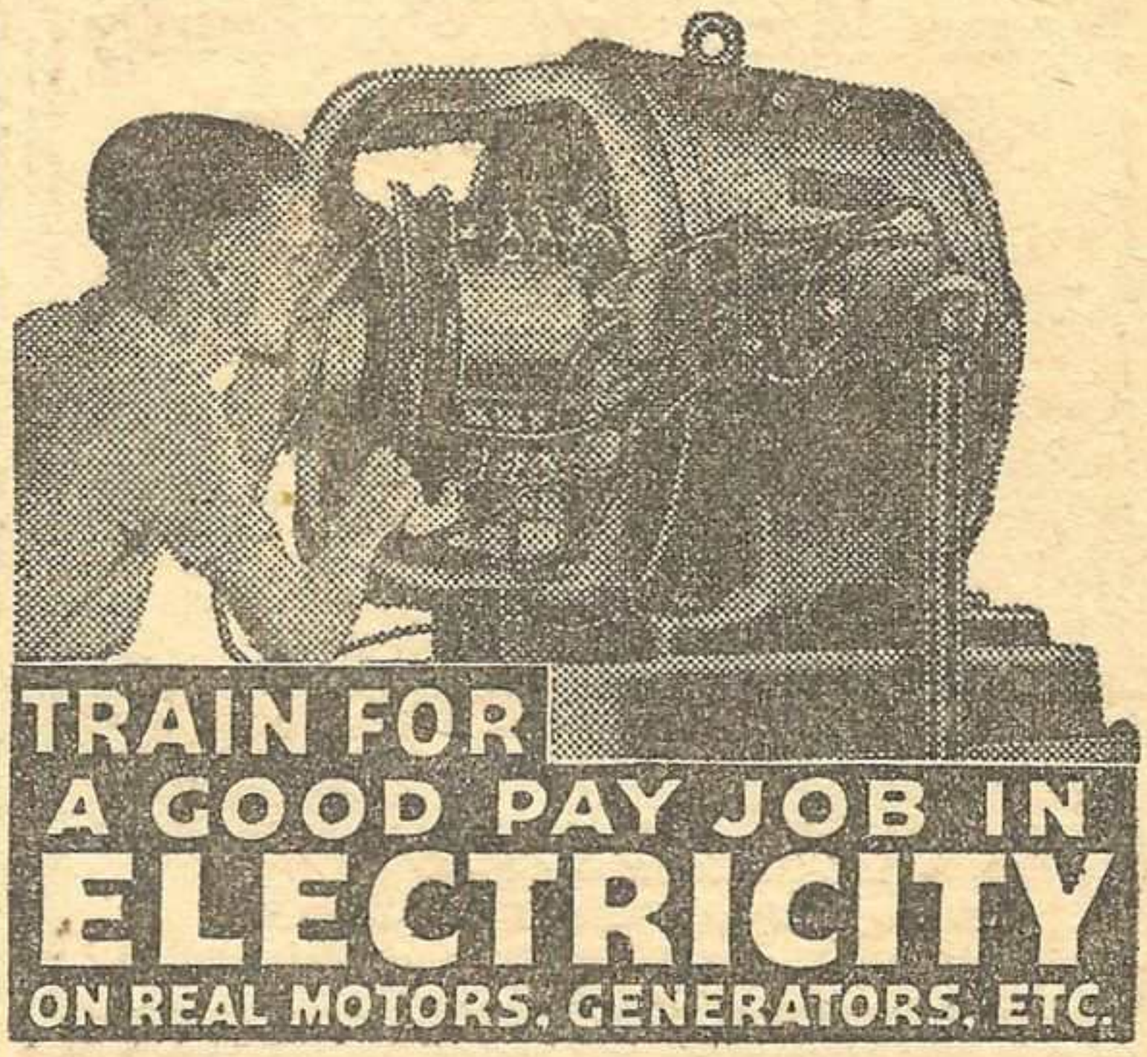
was the hero of *The Last Pharaoh*. Not that I would have had this terminate differently. Sometimes, for the sake of originality mainly, one doesn't mind having an ending where someone likable in the story is unfortunately removed. Gruesome, maybe, but all in keeping with the weird tradition. . . . In winding up this letter, I want to give you a lot of credit for keeping your magazine weird. Just that one word, Weird. It must have been a temptation to accept stories that were good, but didn't fulfill the duty of the stuff you do print. I am certainly glad you have avoided the smutty literature some of your so-called opposition are resorting to. This tripe doesn't deserve a place alongside WEIRD TALES."

## I Found Cleopatra

B. M. Reynolds writes from North Adams, Massachusetts: "I am writing this month primarily to compliment you on your current serial-novel, *I Found Cleopatra*. That story, I believe, would take first prize in any current publication. When Mr. Kelley first appeared in WT some months ago with *The Last Pharaoh* I predicted a brilliant future for him, and his second novel has certainly proved my prediction to be true. He has in this novel a rare combination of fantasy, romance, adventure and mystery woven together with ancient legends older than history itself, and spun into a glowing web of imaginative glamour. His work compares favorably with that of Merritt, Williamson and Hamilton. My hat is off to you, Mr. Kelley! May you appear often and exclusively in WT."

## A Few Suggestions

Harry Warner, Jr., writes from Hagerstown, Maryland: 'The best things in the last few issues have been, it seems, the shorts; and it seems that the shorter they are the better they are. Wellman's *Up Under the Roof* is up to the usual standard of this versatile author, for it certainly created in me a greater sensation of suspense and anxiety than I have had in many a day, one of the few yarns that you actually seem to live. Also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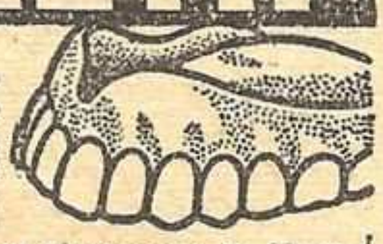

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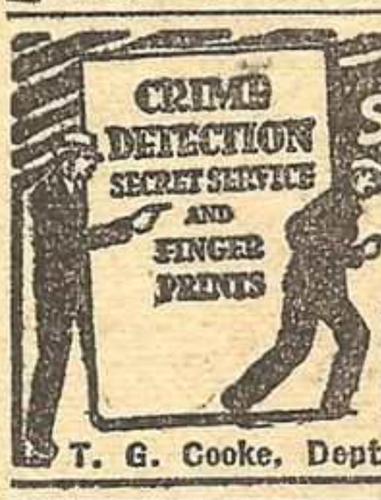


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fine was the Ernst tale, *The Thing in the Trunk.* Get more by this author, for he gets better as he goes along, it seems. I'll never forget his *Escape* about eight months ago. Quinn keeps up to his standards also, though *Black Moon* didn't seem to belong in WT for some reason—not the type of weirdness that I like. Keep on reprinting Lovecraft, by all means, together with as much unpublished material of his as you can get also. I often wonder what his earliest efforts, which he destroyed, were like, and what we may be missing by not having them. Also, please use more poetry, but only new verse, no more Shakespeare, no matter how weird. In your reprints try to use Lovecraft and Howard almost exclusively—what is there to prevent reprinting the entire Conan series? Surely none of the readers would object; or, for that matter, you could issue a reprint quarterly and devote it entirely to this author's work, though not entirely the Conan yarns, for variety would be lacking."

## Versatile Author

Joan Parks writes from Miami, Florida: "Of your present crop of authors, my favorite is Seabury Quinn. The man is versatile! Whether writing lovely fantasies such as *Roads* and the more recent *More Lives Than One,* or his charming tales of the ingratiating Jules de Grandin, he is always smooth, gripping and believable. Robert Bloch and Thomas P. Kelley, both, do admirable jobs of writing about that most mysterious and fascinating subject—Egypt. However, I feel that Mr. Kelley might make a few small concessions to authenticity. After all, everyone knows that Cleopatra was a petite redhead, and not the tall, stately (albeit luscious) brunette of his description. But, on the whole, *I Found Cleopatra* has my hearty approval. The first two installments were definitely intriguing. *Beetles* had that eery quality that sends your loyal readers (including me) back for more. *The Sin-Eater* somehow missed fire with me. I prefer my fiends to be of the subtle, rather than the obvious type.

"This one left me with the odd feeling that a rather mild little man had walked up to me, and whispered confidentially,

'Don't look now, but I'm a fiend.' Unconvincing."

### Komments

Caroline Ferber writes from Chicago: "Mighty happy to see Finlay's drawings again—his backgrounds are incomparable. Hm!—our dapper li'l Frenchman was missing from the Quinn tale this month, but his *More Lives Than One* compensated for the lack of the de Grandin. Fustest, I like anything Dutch—twicest, I like anything on reincarnation — thricest, Seabury Quinn wields a fascinating pen. *I Found Cleopatra* becomes more absorbing and amazing. Naturally, I anxiously await the next issue to learn whether the beauteous Cleo eventually crumbles to the dust we have believed her to be these many centuries. Horrors! What a colorful tale, of such a wicked man! He's about one of the shudderiest I've read since gramaw wore pigtails—G. G. Pendarves wrote a good 'un when writing *The Sin-Eater*. Sorry to read of her passing—truly so—as the mention of some of her yarns brot back some vivid memories—outstanding being *The Eighth Green Man*. Goody goody—Finlay's full-page illustration appears again—will we have them regularly now? Loretta Burrough's *Snowman* was tense—and plenty bewildering. Goo-oogle—Bloch went to Egypt and brot back some sacred scarabs in the woogiest tale! Could I feel Beetles crawling up and down my esophagus!—pardon me while I have a spell of the jitters. Back to the Eyrie—thanks to Mr. Phillips of Portland, Oregon, for the tip on lamas. Well, well—'twas good to see Jack Darrow's name—haven't run across his letters in a long while. . . . By the by— is friend Quinn going to give us another treat this Christmas? His *Roads* is unsurpassed—why not have another touchingly beautiful story?"

### Challenge to a Duel

Paul L. M'Cleave writes from Nantucket, Massachusetts: "Have a few most humble comments to make on your December issue. First, I'd relish a duel (sabers at dawn?) with Jack Darrow of Chicago, who suggests


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the superiority of Henry Kuttner's Elak series over that of my all-time favorite, Conan, the Cimmerian (may Set guard his bones)! Next, let me proffer my congratulations to you and to Seabury Quinn for his most charming weird novel, *More Lives Than One.* Though I've read many of his superb tales, I've yet to find one that I relish more heartily. Really it almost brought about a radical change in my philosophy of life—and death. Have nothing much more of importance to say except that I rather disliked Loretta Burrough's *The Snowman*—and enjoyed as always the Eyrie, certainly an indispensable feature."

### His Favorite Writer

Roy Wray writes from Fieldale, Virginia: "The number-one story in the December WT is *More Lives Than One,* by that master of weird tales, Seabury Quinn. Incidentally he is my favorite writer. The current serial, *I Found Cleopatra,* is plenty good. I can hardly wait for the next issue to come out."

### It Happened One Night

Marcella Jordan writes from Columbus, Ohio: "In reading the Eyrie in the December issue of WEIRD TALES, I discovered a letter from Bryce E. Walton which describes the sentiments of my mother and myself exactly. We have formed a prodigious appetite for WEIRD TALES which cannot be completely satisfied by one copy a month. We haunt the newsdealer's until it comes and then argue for possession of it first. Mother almost always wins out. Perhaps we should buy two, but I shall try to control myself until she finishes. One night last summer, we had inadvertently let the first of the month pass without noticing it. It was eleven o'clock; it was raining; and I was lying awake thinking of nothing when, like a bolt out of the blue, I cried, 'Mother, today's the second of July!' She awoke, startled by my vehemence, then realizing its cause, she also cried out, 'For heaven's sake, the WEIRD TALES!' The first thing I knew, I was hurrying through the rain and the dark to the

dealer's. I rushed in, gave a gasp of relief on seeing it was still there and flew home triumphantly.

"So you see how we feel about your publication. Like everyone else who writes to the Eyrie, we think that Seabury Quinn's *Roads* is a truly marvelous story. But we have been a little disappointed lately in his Jules de Grandin stories. Somehow we feel something lacking, a true weirdness, perhaps."

## Virgil Finlay's Art

Charles H. Chandler writes from Wooster, Ohio: "I was delighted to see Finlay in the December WEIRD TALES. His non-appearance in the preceding issue made it a very disappointing one. Finlay is, in my opinion (and several others), the only artist who is capable of giving his drawings the *atmosphere* which is necessary to an effective illustration, especially for such stories as appear in WEIRD. His distinguished work is one of the most important features which make WEIRD TALES a truly unique magazine."

## Concise Comments

Helen Hand, of Chicago, writes: "Congratulations to the only 'different' magazine on the market, and you continue to astonish by keeping up the same breathless pace year after year. Who helps you, the Genii?"

Christopher Porter, of San Diego, California, writes: "May I submit a word of thanks for Edmond Hamilton's tale, *He That Hath Wings,* that appeared in WEIRD TALES awhile ago? It made me wish that I might have written it—if I could have written it as well! *The Black Drama* also pleased me immensely. There was a darned good tale!"

Joseph Gaviani, of Dorchester, Massachusetts, writes: "Your reprint department has been one of the best features of your magazine, except for a few lapses in reprinting Poe tales which we could easily read elsewhere. I side with the majority in preferring stories from old WT issues. How about reprinting some of Robert E. Howard's King Kull stories?" [Shall do.—THE EDITOR.]

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Vivian Anderson writes from Los Angeles: "About five years ago I bought a WEIRD TALES and haven't been able to wait each month for a new issue. I certainly wish they would come out every week."

I. O. Evans writes from Tadworth, England: "Renewed congratulations on your excellent magazine, which is read with great pleasure on this side of the Atlantic."

Richard H. Jamison writes from Valley Park, Missouri: "Don't sell short-shorts short, as you did in November and December. When tempted remember *The Three Marked Pennies.*" [That was a great story, in spite of its brevity.—THE EDITOR.]

## Escape

Jack Snow of Dayton, Ohio, writes: "WEIRD TALES and weird literature are still my favorite means of escape after a day of writing blurbs for everything from automatic coal stokers to ladies' negligee. Seabury Quinn's *Roads* is by far the outstanding story of 1937 and I have given it a permanent place among my favorite Christmas works: *The Ballad of the Harp Weaver* and *A Christmas Carol. Black Drama* was unusually good for a serial. It is almost impossible to sustain a weird atmosphere through a long story and then to spread it out over a period of months adds to the task. Weirdity comes in flashes that are no sooner realized than they are gone. That is part of its charm. Hence your very short stories are generally the most weird. In the current issue Lovecraft's *The Nameless City* takes top honors. Next I like Robert Bloch's *The Hound of Pedro.*"

## Your Favorite Story

Readers, what is your favorite story in this issue?

Let us know what you think of the magazine, as we need your criticism to keep it as you like it. Address your letters to the Eyrie, WEIRD TALES, 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York City. Seabury Quinn's strange tale of reincaration, *More Lives Than One,* was your first choice of all the stories in the December issue, as shown by your votes and letters to the Eyrie.

# COMING NEXT MONTH

ETHAN DREW'S rifle was hot in his hands, not from the scorching desert sun but from desperate firing. There were just two of them left, just two of this patrol of the Foreign Legion that had been ambushed here deep in the Sahara.

As he crouched in the scant shelter of the sandy gully, firing at the white-burnoosed riders out there in front of him, he laughed harshly. His browned, aquiline young face was taut, his nostrils flaring, gray eyes icy, as he called to his single companion.

"They're going to charge, Emil! Looks as if we won't be seeing the cafés at Sidi again."

"We're going to die!" wailed the other legionnaire, a swarthy, stocky Swiss, terror on his features. "We're going to——"

*Thuck!* The Swiss tumbled sidewise with a hole in his face, and lay sprawled half across the bodies of the other dead men. And the Tuaregs were now riding forward in their charge, white-garbed, veiled demons, flourishing their rifles and sabers and yelling like fiends as they came on.

Ethan Drew savagely aimed and pulled trigger. At the first shot, a horse and rider crashed. The second time he squeezed the trigger, there was only a click. The Lebel was empty. He grabbed a sword from a dead officer and stood up, his blond head bare in the blazing sunlight as he yelled recklessly:

"Come on, damn you!"

"*Muhammad rasul Allah!*" screamed the Tuaregs, racing each other for the honor of cutting down this last survivor.

Ethan Drew had a momentary vision of them thundering down on him, horses' eyes rolling wildly, upraised sabers glinting, veiled riders leaning forward. Then the whole world seemed suddenly to explode in blinding light, and he knew nothing more. . . .

What strange adventures Ethan Drew experienced on his waking up make a marvelously fascinating tale—a story of fighting men from different ages drawn into the far-distant future by the master-science of a scholar who lives millions of years in the future. This utterly strange novelette will be printed complete in the March issue of WEIRD TALES:

# COMRADES OF TIME

## By Edmond Hamilton

——Also——

### THE SWINE OF AEAEA

*By* CLIFFORD BALL

A bizarre and fantastic sea-tale about an island that was not charted on any maps, and the strange doom that befell the sailors who landed on it.

### THE RETURN OF HASTUR

*By* AUGUST W. DERLETH

An eldritch tale about the Ancient Ones and the incredible horror that terrified a peaceful New England countryside.

### THE HOUSE WHERE TIME STOOD STILL

*By* SEABURY QUINN

An utterly strange tale is this, of a brilliant surgeon gone mad, and the weird house where he performed his fantastic experiments on living human beings—a tale of Jules de Grandin.

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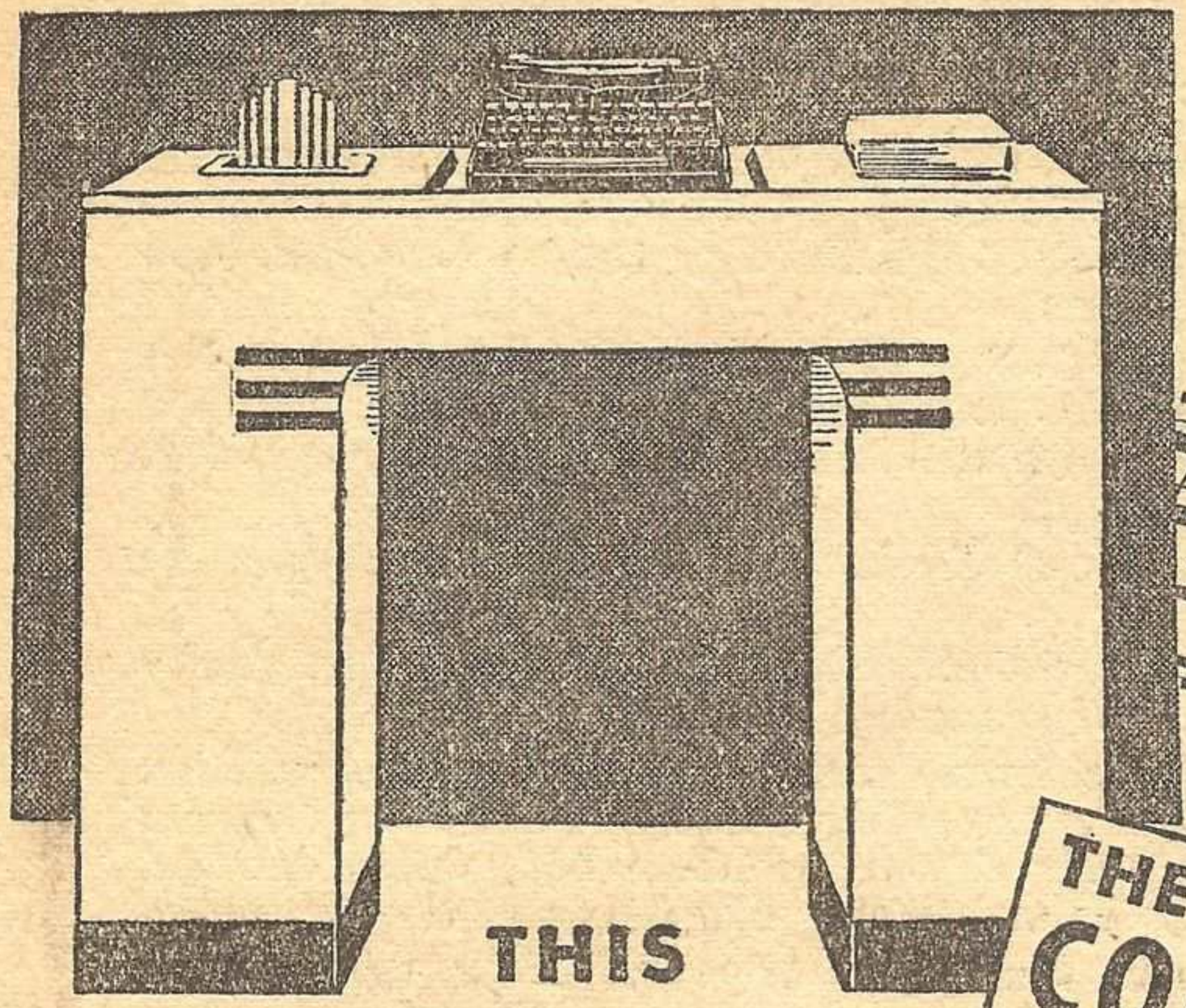
March Issue of Weird Tales . . . . Out February 1



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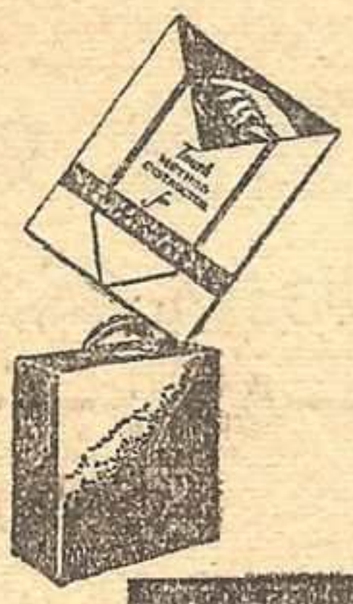

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