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two million years in the future
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THE RED SWIMMER
piracy and the Spanish Main
By ROBERT BLOCH

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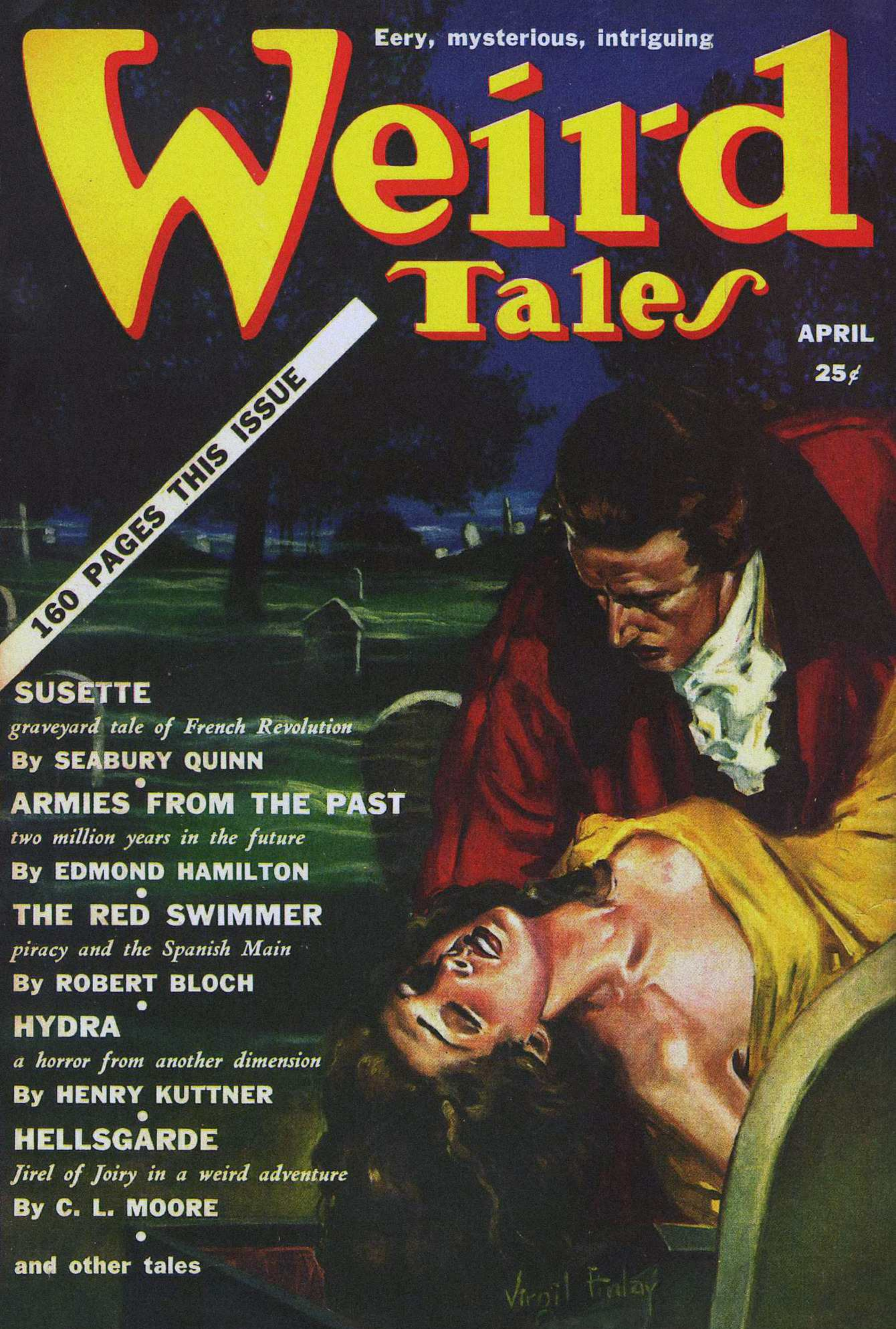
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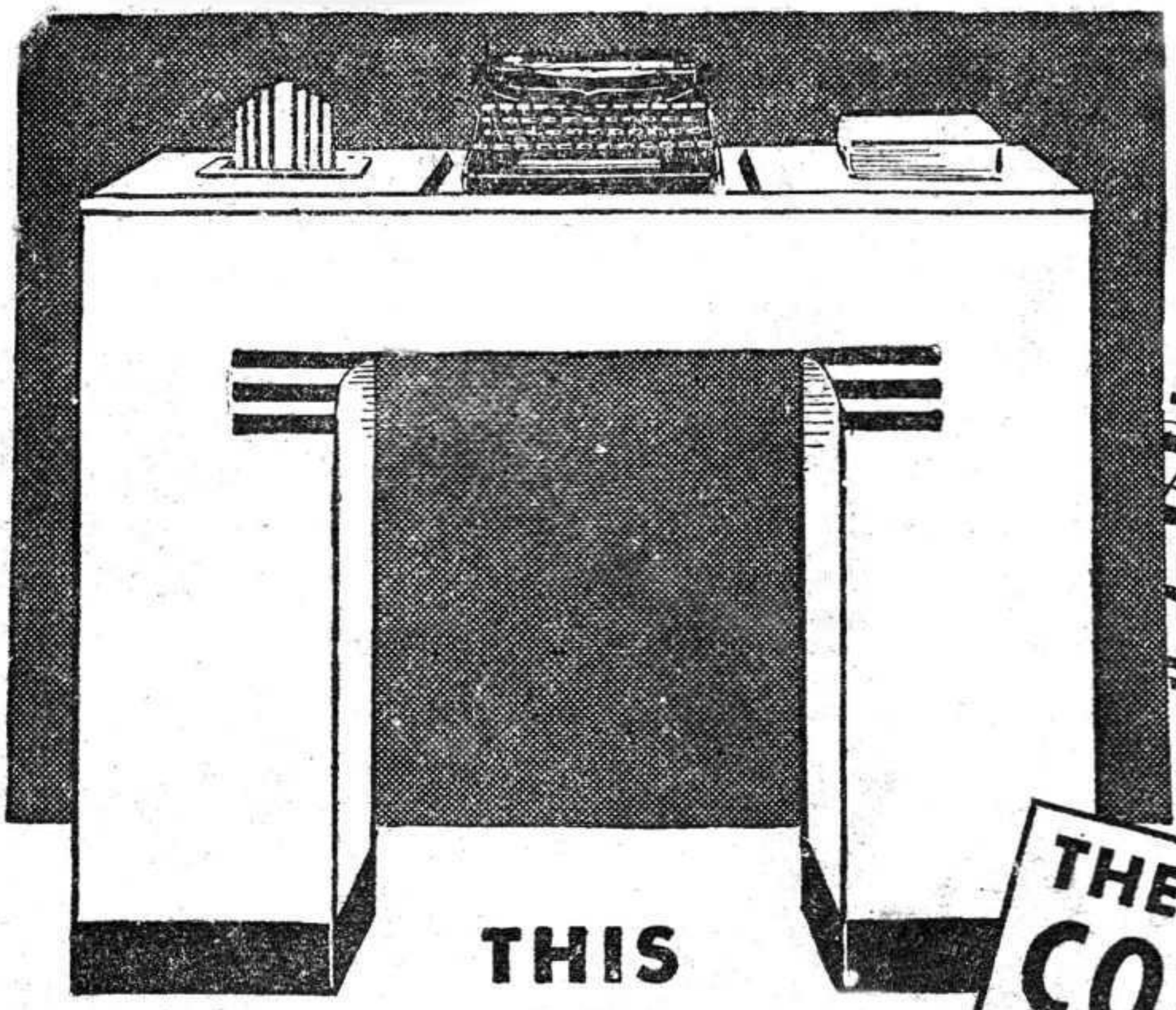
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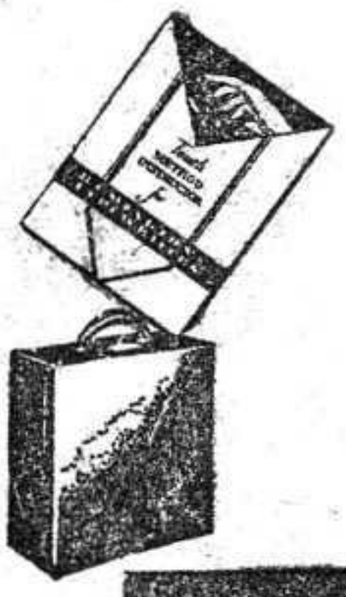
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Weird Tales

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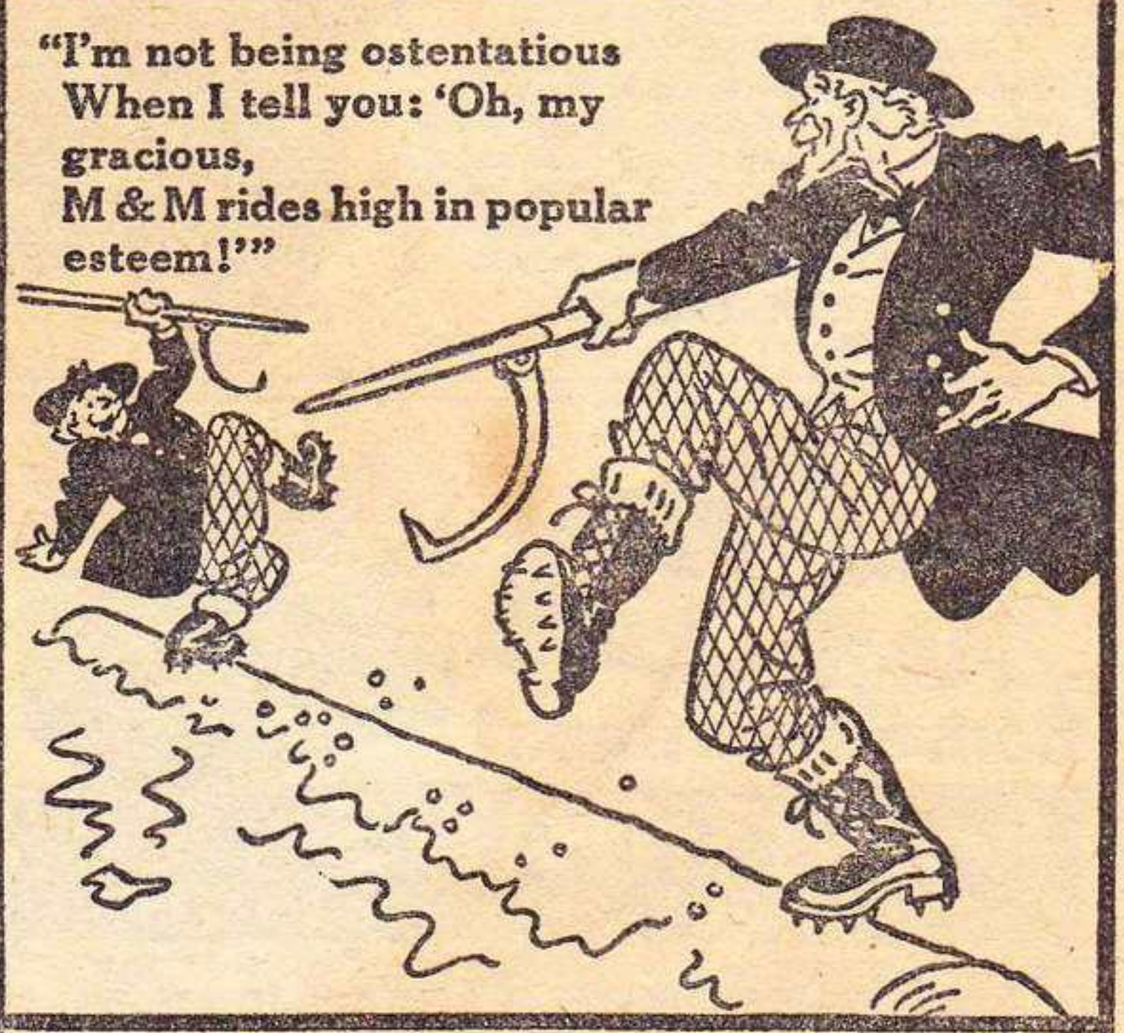
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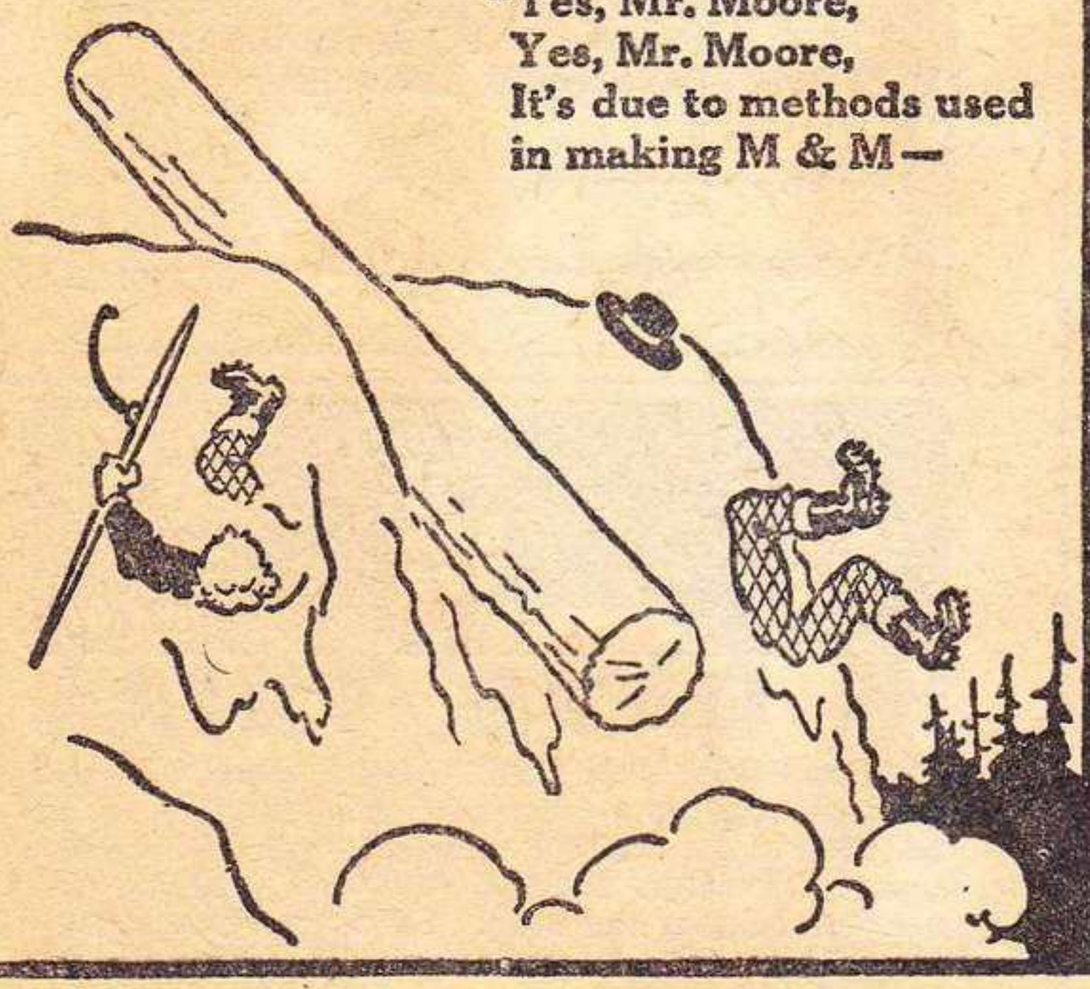
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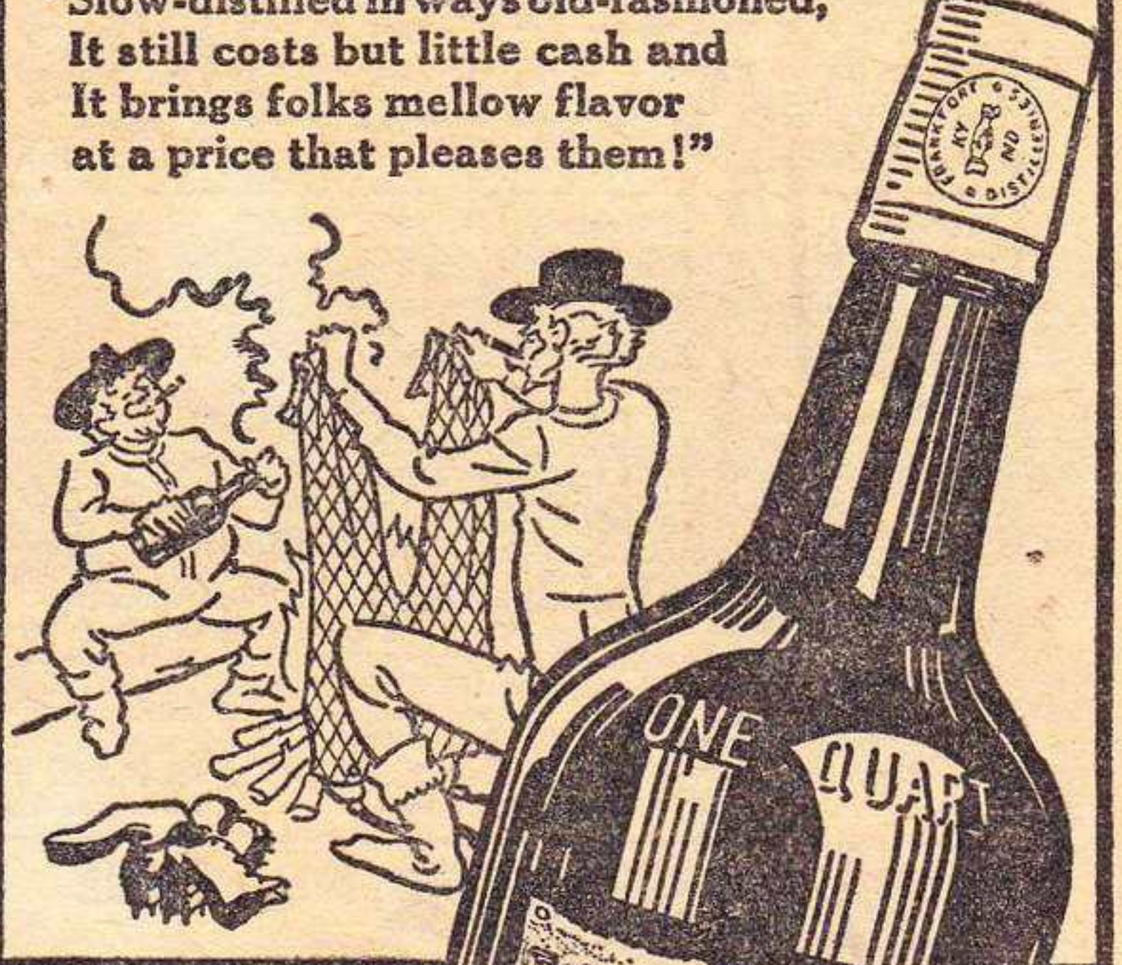
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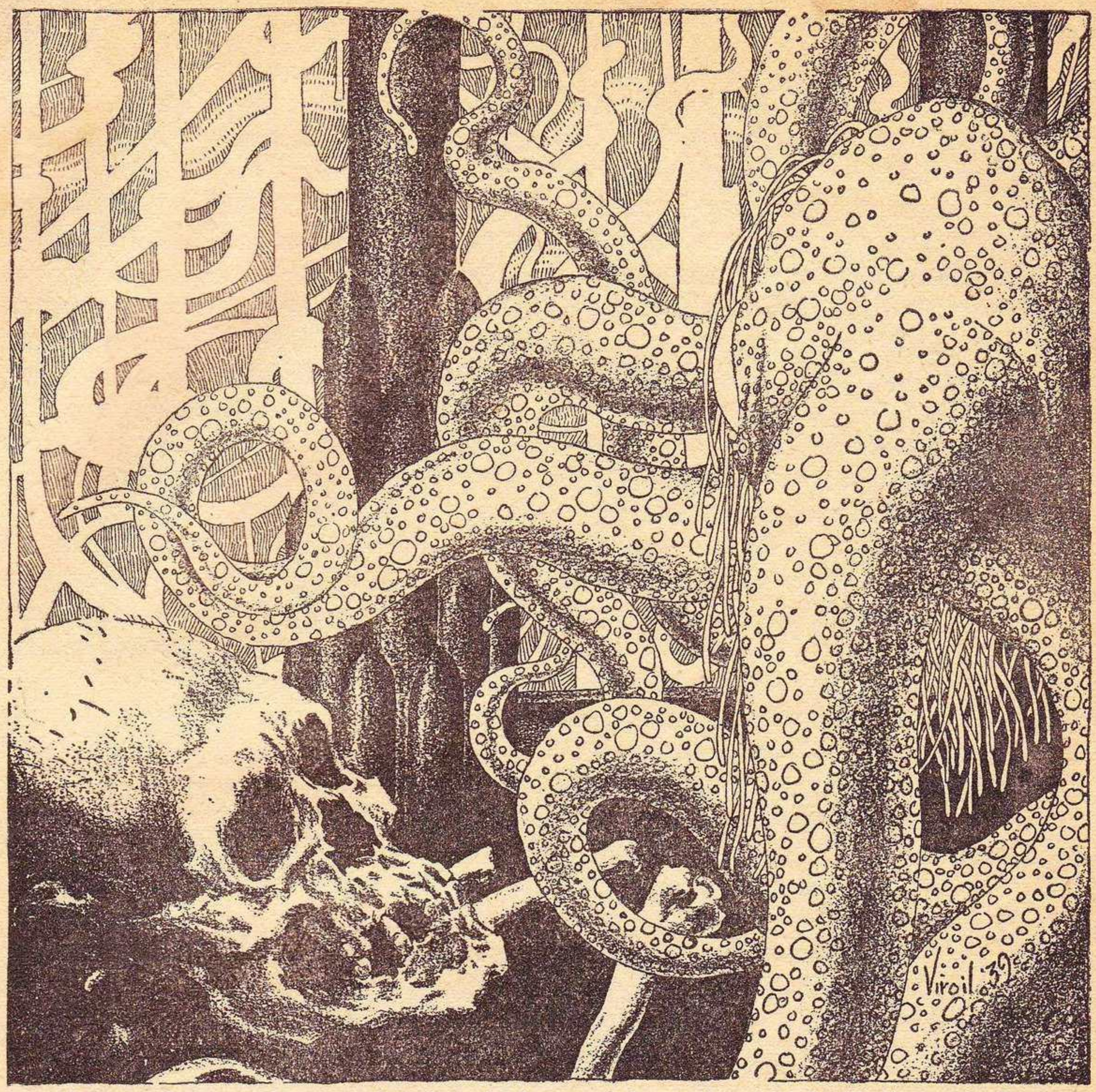
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"It was obvious to him now that these dead were of the species which had built the city."

The Red God Laughed

By THORP McCLUSKY

A strange tale about the end of human life on Earth

THE city was dead. Nu Yok, the greatest monument mankind ever reared upon the face of Earth, was dead. No creature of flesh and blood moved along her thousands of miles of multiple-tiered streets, glanced appreciatively and pridefully outward and downward through dizzying azure depths from the gleaming pinnacles of her four-thousand-foot towers, strolled or lounged in her unkempt and silent parks. No silvery air-

craft or fish-shaped strato-ships hurtled purposely above her Himalayan sky-line, no birds or insects sang or buzzed in her wondrous hanging gardens. Grass and weeds grew in crevices in her disintegrating pedestrian walks, and fat angle worms crawled unafraid through their lush and fecund tangle.

Dry and chalk-white skeletons littered the streets—the skeletons of men and women and children and birds and domestic beasts. They strewed the dust-carpeted corridors of great buildings; they were even to be found—had any sentient creature been there to search for them—in the huge and hermetically sealed gas shelters beneath the city. The gas had lingered longer than the men who had designed and built those tremendous caverns had believed possible; thirst and oxygen starvation had snuffed out lives the gas had not been able to touch.

It was not only that way in Nu Yok and in the Americas; it was the same all over Earth. Even the yellow men, big and little, who had first perfected the gas and immediately deluged the Americas with it in that last decade of the Twenty-first Century, had also perished. For the gas had been easy to analyze, and easier to manufacture. Dying, the Americas had struck back at the yellow men with their own weapon, and gasping doom had encircled the globe. All races of mankind, all air-breathing creatures, save only the deep-sea fishes and the worms that chanced to be far underground—and, perhaps, a few toads and frogs, encapsulated and dormant in dry lake or river beds—had perished.

The last human creature had been dead for over three years, and the last bird or beast or insect for perhaps an additional six months, when, at approximately eleven o'clock in the morning on June eighth, in the year—according to occidental reckoning—two thousand and ninety-seven, Thvall the Seeker brought his fourteen-million ton neutronium-hulled space-ship into Earth's atmosphere and, having already observed Nu Yok's towers and minarets from half-way around the globe, set her down as lightly as a drifting feather in a cradle of granite rocks near the southern boundary of that rectangular stretch of greenery men knew as Central Park. And, as he set his ship down gently, careful to avoid crushing the green vegetation, in Thvall the Seeker's curious soul there was a great gladness. For Thvall knew that his quest was ended.

IT HAD been a long and a lonely search, spanning reaches of space that light will not cross in twenty thousand years. It had begun beyond the hub of our stellar galaxy, and the years of Thvall's journeying were to the life of a man as the age of the Pyramids is to a single day.

Spawn of the innermost planet of a blue-white dwarf sun deep hidden in the globular cluster in Messier II, Thvall resembled in no way save one any of the diversified forms of life which have evolved upon Earth down the millenniums since the red heat died from her surface rocks and permitted her seas to form. Because of that single resemblance Thvall had begun his search; only because of it had he finally arrived upon Earth.

Water! Thvall, like a man, required water. The mechanical processes of his existence, and of the existence of his kind, depended upon an unfailing supply of water. And upon Thvall's home world the water was almost gone. . . .

Thvall well knew, when he began his

quest, the odds against his succeeding. To every hundred thousand suns there was but one, and perhaps not even one, with planets. To every thousand planets perhaps, *perhaps* there was one sufficiently supplied with water—*and* suitable for colonization by his kind. There were a hundred million chances to one of Thvall's finding, anywhere in the galaxy, that which he sought. And the other galaxies, even the big, near one in Andromeda, were too far away. . . .

And now the quest was ended.

Thvall's selection of Sol as a star worthy of investigation had not been haphazard. While still beyond the white star Alpha in the constellation of the Centaur he had noted that this modest yellow-white sun was slightly unstable, slightly variable, a star that fluctuated, though to only a minor degree, through a regularly recurrent cycle.

That periodicity might mean almost anything; it might mean that the star was on the verge of blowing up, it might be caused by the resultant of the gravitational attraction of attendant planets, or it might be merely the subsiding spasms of some ancient solar malaise. From Alpha Centauri, Thvall set his course for Sol.

He was fifteen billions of miles beyond the orbit of that planet men have named Pluto when the steadily increasing intensity of Sol's illumination, actuating certain mechanisms, awakened him from the state of completely suspended animation in which he voyaged from star to star. He awoke instantly, feeling neither refreshed nor enervated, and lacking any recollection whatsoever of the passage of time. His first, and almost automatic activity, was to reduce the velocity of his space-craft from a hyper-Einsteinian, interstellar speed to a pace more suitable to interplanetary cruising.

During those first brief, waking moments his ship traveled Solward a billion miles.

Immediately he had slowed the rush of his ship toward the yellow sun, he applied himself to his instruments, and saw at once that the slightly nervous star was plagued with a swarm of planets. The outermost planets were too cold to support life; their atmospheres were raging seas of ammonia and methane. The planet nearest the luminary was without atmosphere; the next was heavily blanketed with an atmosphere, which was, however, full of carbon dioxide; the third planet—the one with the pear-shaped moon—had an atmosphere dripping with water-vapor.

Thvall, looking upon Earth, knew that his quest was ended.

His ship safely landed on Sol's third planet, Thvall began a series of routine tasks. He analyzed the luminary's radiation and the planet's atmosphere with highly encouraging results; his kind could adapt themselves to life on Earth. Next he attempted communication with the green growing life, but, although he quickly learned that Earth's vegetation possessed a dim, vague consciousness, it was obvious that its intelligence was too meager, too instinctive for the development of original thought. Obviously Earth's vegetation could not have constructed the aimless sprawling city in the midst of which Thvall's space-ship lay. It was probable therefore that the city's creators were temporarily absent. Perhaps they were nocturnal creatures, who lived during the day in underground recesses and came to the surface of the planet only at night. Perhaps they

were migratory. There were any number of plausible explanations of their absence.

His preliminary scrutiny of the immediate environment satisfactorily concluded—and no motile form of Earth-life having yet appeared to inspect his ship, attempt communication with him or perhaps dispute his peaceful invasion of the planet—Thvall determined to inspect one of the buildings which towered skyward only a quarter of a mile away, to the southward. Prudently burdening himself with a variety of apparatus and weapons, which he distributed among several of his smaller tentacles, he emerged through the airlock in his ship's hull and crawled rapidly and with a slight tingling of anticipation toward the nearest of the buildings.

He had proceeded only a short distance when he came upon a bleached mass of human bones, half hidden in the rank grass. Examining them, he realized at once that they had lived, but—as his own amorphous race lacked rigid skeletal structure of any sort, and any conception of motile life being hampered by rigidity was alien to him—he had difficulty in imagining what the creature had been like in life. He concluded that it had been nowhere near as motile as himself—perhaps little more motile than the vegetation.

He also noted, however, and with considerable approval, a number of fat gray earthworms, and he paused and attempted to communicate with them, quickly discovering, however, that, though they knew fear and hunger, they were incapable of abstract thought.

Continuing onward, he ascended a long ramp which debouched upon a broad street. On the opposite side of the street the buildings began. The street was littered with a large number of small, egg-shaped wheeled mechanisms. Examining one of these through its windows of fused silica and metallic oxides, Thvall saw that it contained two skeletons.

It was obvious to him now that these dead were of the species which had built the city. Why were they dead? And had all of their kind throughout the city perished? Or were some left alive?

Uneasily Thvall, who realized only too well that the unknown doom which had snuffed out this bony form of Earth-life might also be inimical to himself, paused and made additional tests. Reassurance of a sort returned to him as he determined that Earth's atmosphere was remarkably stable and that there were no electrical or atomic mechanisms operating within the field of his apparatus. Nevertheless, he determined to proceed with extreme wariness.

Crossing the broad street, Thvall approached the base of the nearest building and examined as much of the interior as he could see through the dusty though still partly transparent windows. The structure was internally subdivided into many small cubicles profusely equipped with furnishings which were, for the most part, incomprehensible to Thvall; he would have to see those objects in use before he could understand their purpose.

His bulk was too great to permit him to enter through any of the windows, but there were large doors which, after a brief examination, he easily opened. Entering the building, he found himself in a chamber of considerable size, which, like the smaller cells, was luxuriously furnished. The walls of this room were profusely paneled with mirrors, which created the illusion of a

chamber twice as large as actuality; why this illusion should be necessary or even desirable was utterly beyond Thvall's comprehension. Reflecting surfaces in utter dissociation with any recognizable form of apparatus whatsoever were a complete enigma to him.

THE floor of this chamber was littered with no less than twenty skeletons. Some were still partly clothed in garments of vegetable, mineral and animal fiber; some wore loose-fitting circlets of metallic alloys around their tinier appendages; many of the circlets held geometrically carved bits of crystallized carbon in claw-like sockets. Lifting and examining a small, glass-dialed mechanism which lay beside one of the skeletons, Thvall discovered that it was operated by an internal spring which had, however, lost its tension; he rewound the spring by turning a ratcheted pin provided for the purpose, and discovered that the mechanism produced a regular pulsation, while three small indicators beneath a transparent portion of the mechanism's shell revolved at proportionate though greatly dissimilar velocities. Correctly assuming that the mechanism was a device for measuring the passage of time, Thvall replaced the watch beside the skeleton of its owner and glided toward the deeper recesses of the chamber.

Here he discovered a number of doors arranged in an orderly row, and, investigating one which was not fully closed and which slid open easily, he found that it opened upon a chimney-like well. Within the well were a number of taut steel cables, which supported a square metal cage at a level slightly beneath the door. Thvall had opened the cage, Thvall saw at once, was designed to be raised and lowered from level to level of the building. Far above, a tiny pinpoint of brilliant light told Thvall that the well extended to the top of the building; he instantly determined to ascend the shaft and view the city from that vantage-point.

He squirmed up the elevator shaft like a gargantuan knot of writhing serpents, and, reaching the elevator motors, squeezed upward past them and into a small, many-windowed chamber. Here an iron door provided egress to the roof of the building. Thvall opened the door and squirmed through.

On the roof of the building, in the clean, sharp sunlight, Thvall put down his instruments and weapons and sedately capered. This world was so fair, so bountiful—and, as yet, so undeveloped! There was no doubt now that its ruling race were exceedingly primitive, but they possessed intelligence of a sort, too; if they proved peaceable and friendly Thvall's people could teach them so much—so much! —in return for a bit of the planet's desert land and a single lake of water. Probably the first boon Thvall's kind would confer upon this world's people would be conquest of the plague which had slain this city's inhabitants. Yes, that would certainly be done first. . . .

The roof on which Thvall stood was flat, and surrounded by a low parapet. It was encumbered by only two objects, the small structure which housed the elevator motors and a huge torpedo-shaped, steel cylinder which lay near a corner of the parapet. Some of the parapet bricks were broken, and there was a long, dull scar on the roof. Obviously the cylinder had been dropped from a low altitude, had struck the parapet a glancing blow, and had then slithered across the roof.

What was the thing, and why had it been dropped on this roof?

THVALL slowly circled the object, scrutinizing it intently. He saw that, except for a short stubby rod protruding from its pear-shaped nose, it was utterly without external moving parts of any kind. But the rod looked like a control of some sort. Thvall first rotated the rod; then, when nothing happened, he tugged on it, and finally pressed on it. That brought results. The rod moved inward easily, and instantly four small valves opened in the cylinder's circumference and a thick gray gas poured forth and mingled with the atmosphere.

For an instant Thvall hunched there motionless, watching the gas ooze viscidly from the metal cylinder and vanish in the clean, still air. Then, in a lightning-flash of utter comprehension, he understood the whole cryptic pattern—the silent city, the dead everywhere, the significance of the gas-bomb that was now pouring its lethal fumes into the surrounding atmosphere. Instantly he darted for the open door and the elevator shaft. . . .

He never reached that gaping well. He detected no odor; there was no warning pain, but abruptly the flat roof was heaving and billowing like a swirling sea.

Vertigo danced in his alien brain, an intense blackness deepened before his single, thousand-faceted eye, and strength and life went swiftly together from his boneless tentacles.

Thus Thvall the Seeker died, and the knowledge that on Earth — the third planet of a minor sun deep sunk in the thinning haze of stars twenty thousand light-years beyond the galaxy's axis — were the environmental conditions and the water his people required so desperately, died with him. And on Earth the frogs and fishes were now the highest remaining forms of sentient life.

But Mars, the Red God, laughed—for though on Earth the men who had deified him and honored him with a name no longer lived to speak that name, he had just claimed his last and perhaps his most significant, sacrifice.

Trinities

By EDGAR DANIEL KRAMER

Three goldfishes in a bowl,
Three goldfinches in a cage,
Three lonely women with their dreams,
Afraid of Death and limping Age.

A broken bowl, an open cage,
Some feathers and a bit of bone,
An empty house and three new graves
Marked with three slabs of ghostly stone.



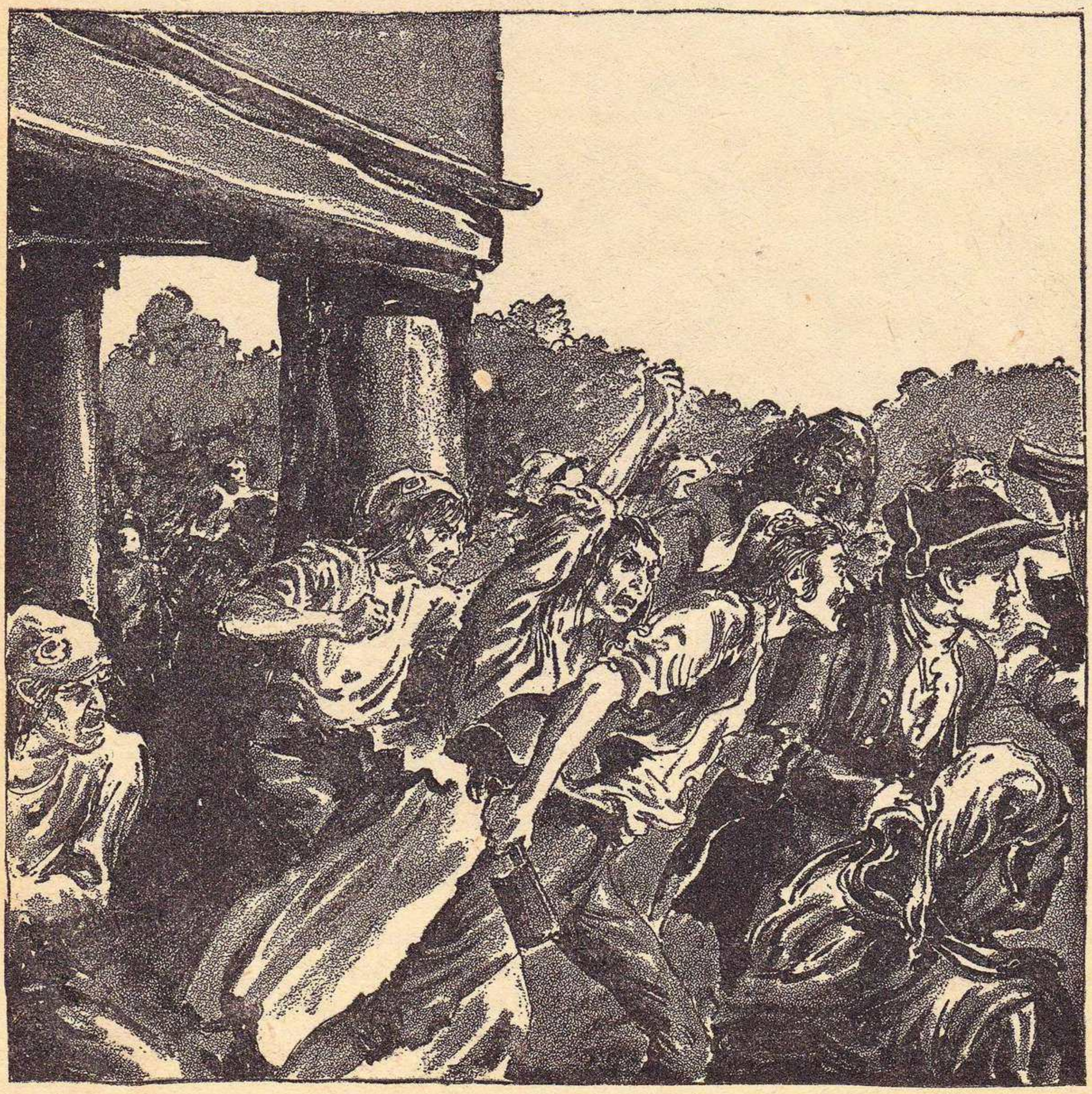
Their eyes upturned and begged and burned
In brimstone lakes, and a Hand above
Beat back the hands that upward yearned.

—*Sidney Lanier.*

Susette

By SEABURY QUINN

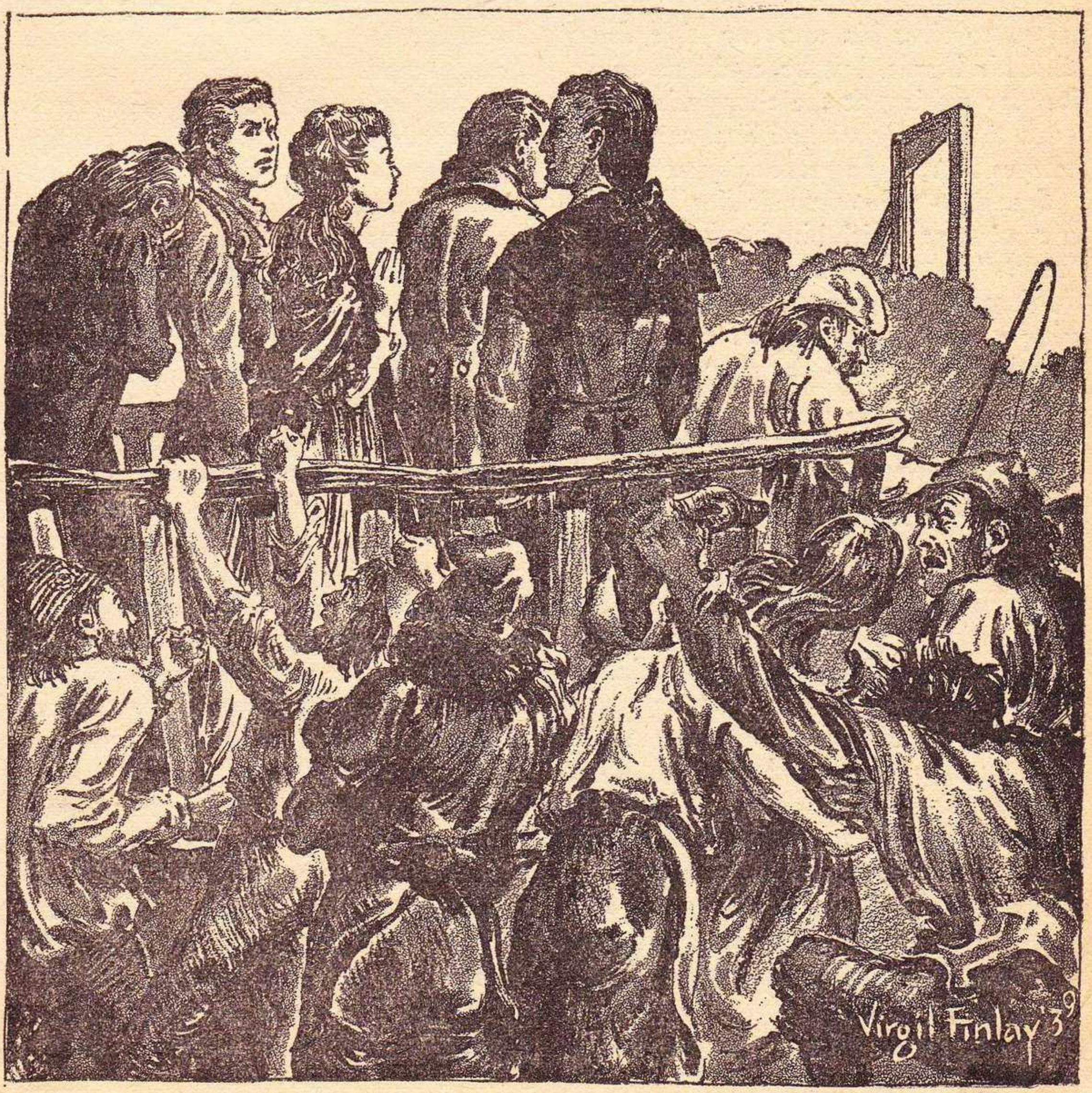
An intriguing weird tale of the French Revolution—a romantic and appealing story that begins under the shadow of the guillotine, by the author of "Roads" and "The Phantom Farmhouse"



1. Rain Falls in the Rue des Fenêtres

A SUDDEN spattering splash of rain came sifting through the almost naked branches of the old horse-chestnut trees as Mordecai Westhorne turned from the boulevard into the Rue des Fenêtres. He bent his head against the coming storm and hurried toward his lodgings, eager for their warmth and quiet, for a chance to rest, eager for the sight of things which would remind him of America and sanity.

He needed reassurance that the world had not gone utterly insane, that there were places where men lived and went about their business with the fear of God before their eyes but with no fear of men gnawing their brains like canker-worms in festering fruit. For this was Paris in October—*Vendémiaire,* according to the Revolutionary calendar—and the guillotine—the



dreaded "chopper"—had been busy all day long.

On his way back from his *bureau* by the waterfront he had passed the tumbrils, eight of them, bumping heavily across the filthy flints on their way to the scaffold set in the Place de la Revolution, and the milling, jostling, screaming, cursing, bestial-throated crowd had caught him up and borne him like a chip dropped in the brook right to the line of civil guards that ringed the place of execution. The sight was sickening, but fascinating. He wished to look away, to shut his eyes, or hide them with his hands, but he could no more forbear staring at the chopper's grisly work than the charmed bird can avert its eyes from the approaching serpent.

Sanson—*"Monsieur de Paris"*—was in charge, and with him his full crew of *"valets"* in their crimson smocks, and the three knocks sounded swiftly, rhythmically, like the ticking of some monster clock of doom—the slapping knock of the long plank to which the *valets* strapped the victim prone, the clack of wood on wood as the neckpiece was adjusted, then the thud that sounded as the chopper fell. Two—four—a score—two score and ten and six victims strapped face-downward to the plank, their necks latched in the pillory, then the thumping of the dropping blade. A pile of twitching corpses, gaping necks cascading blood, fifty-six heads in the baskets; the scaffold and the plank, even the side-posts with the grooves in which the chopper slid, reeking, splashed and steamed with gore. And accompanying the carnival of death the yells and howls of obscene laughter from the mob that gathered around the scaffold like patrons at a comedy.

Mordecai was almost fainting when the orgy finally ended, and fought his way through the dispersing crowd with desperate roughness. Even now the memory of the grisly spectacle struck at his stomach like an ice-cold blade, and despite the rising storm he stopped to lean against the wall and drink the cold air in with shuddering gasps. He was sick of Paris, sick of France, eager with a longing almost past endurance for the cleanness of New England and the freedom of America.

The spell of nauseating weakness passed and he bent his shoulders to the rain which now came down in almost drowning torrents. As he plodded through the storm his resolution strengthened. He had a job of work to do, and he would do it. England's cruisers had swept the French ships from the seas and, desperate for imports, France had opened her West Indian ports to neutral traders. New England skippers and shipowners were not backward in response, and a bridge of Yankee clippers carried cinnamon and coffee, sugar, rum, vanilla and tobacco from Martinique and Haiti to the ports of France, returning to their home docks with choice wines, louisine and kindred luxuries. Foremost in the fleet of carriers were the ships of Westhorne & Sons, shipowners of Boston, and while old Ezekiel Westhorne supervised the trade, and his sons Hezekiah, Obadiah and Micah sailed the clippers, Mordecai, the youngest, was in Paris as their representative, bargaining with shippers, supervising return loads, seeing that prompt payments were made in good hard *louis* and not in paper *assignats*. The Westhorne fortune increased steadily, and he was here to help it grow. He hated Paris, loathed the Frenchmen and longed for home until the longing hurt, but the family must be represented. French frugality—to use no harsher term—must be met with Yankee

shrewdness, again to use no harsher term. Even as he swore to pack his boxes and set sail for Boston when the *Mary Piper* next heaved anchor from the harbor of Bordeaux, he knew that he would stay till need for him in France was passed.

Through the drumming of the rain drops and the skirling of the storm wind came a cry, sharp and shrill as pain, quavering as mortal terror: *"Au secours, pour l'amour de Dieu——"* The screamed appeal rose secant as a naked knife-blade, then stopped quite abruptly, held for eternity at its top note, as if the screamer had been throttled in mid-scream.

MORDECAI looked up, eyes narrowed to the rain. A hundred feet away two figures, blurred in the driving storm, struggled with a third, and even as he sighted them he saw them drop a cloak or blanket over it and raise it between them as if it were a sack of meal or bale of merchandise.

Like everyone in Paris who was not armed with sword or knife or pistol, Mordecai bore an "executive authority"—a loaded blackthorn stick two inches thick and three feet long, secured to his wrist by a thong of rawhide. *"Halte-là!"* he shouted as he charged against the leveled lances of the rain. "What goes on here?"

They met his onslaught with a countercharge. Dropping their quarry to the walk unceremoniously, they separated, one to the right, one left, and rushed at him, one with a cutlas, the other with a nine-inch dirk.

The sworded ruffian hacked a chopping blow at Mordecai. Had he used his cudgel as a guard the steel would have cleft through it, but he was no amateur with either quarterstaff or sword, and as the cutlas descended he dodged, swung back his stick and struck down savagely. The loaded bludgeon caught the poorly tempered blade midway between the point and hilt and snapped it short, as if it were an icicle.

"Pardi", the devil's in his elbow!" swore the disarmed footpad. "Upon him, Jacques! Give him the *coup de Père François!"* The loaded stick swung again and he dropped to the brick footwalk, blood streaming from his ears and nostrils.

The other bravo was not idle. Even as he struck the swordsman with his cudgel Mordecai felt himself seized from behind. An arm was round his neck, a dagger flashed, he felt a blow above his heart that all but drove the breath from him.

Had it not been for the great care which Aunt Deborah Hastings took for all her nephews' souls' welfare, he would have felt nothing, for the dagger had a needle-point and was driven by the hand of one skilled in assassination. But before he left for Paris Aunt Deborah presented him with a small volume of religious exercises, "Gems of Devotional Poetry for Occasional and Daily Use by the Rev. Japheth Higginbotham, M.A.," and made him promise he would keep it always with him while he stayed in the Gomorrah of the modern world. Mordecai's New England conscience would not let him break his promise; so into the breast pocket of his coat the Reverend Master Higginbotham's compilation of atrocious verse was thrust each morning when he set out for the office. It contained a hundred and twelve pages and was bound in full morocco and—as wickedness had aforetime met its master in the hard, uncompromising faith of old New England, so was the murderous dagger-point stopped by Master Higginbotham's poetry tonight.

With a quick bend Mordecai lunged forward, put his hands behind his neck and grappled with the rascal straddling his back. One who'd tussled with the toughest of the young roughs Boston's waterfront produced knew every hold, fair and unfair, the wrestler's art could boast, and the would-be assassin catapulted to the pavement with a force that sent him slithering across the wet bricks, brought him up against a house-wall with a thud, and left him lying as inert as was his broken-headed companion.

"Citizen, are you unhurt?" asked Mordecai as he turned toward the person in the blanket.

The square of sopping cloth moved like an alligator wakening to sluggish life, and a face peered at him from an upraised corner. "They are gone, Citizen?" asked a girl's voice; then, as she saw him standing alone over her: "Do not make yourself anxious for me. I am of the good health." The blanket slipped away and she rose nimbly, unassisted, and looked at him through dripping light-brown curls.

"La, la," her laughter trilled deliciously, "we be a sorry-looking pair of mortals, you and I. Mon—Citizen. You are as wet as any drowned rat, and I must look like some old beldame ducked for scolding! Will not you come with me and dry yourself? My house is not so far away."

Mordecai bowed stiffly, with such dignity as he could muster while rivulets of water ran from sleeves and boots and collar. To be laughed at when one has saved a damsel in distress! "I shall take no illness from my wetting, Citizeness," he answered, "but perhaps it were as well I walked with you. You may meet with other rascals in the street, and find help less conveniently near."

She made a little growling noise deep in her throat, as one who mocks a harmless puppy's show of fierceness; then, as he offered no response, she tucked her small hand in the crook of his elbow and fell in step with him as demurely as a Boston maid upon her way to Sabbath worship.

THEY came to halt before the wicket gate of a walled garden, and she fished a little key from the reticule dangling at her wrist. *"Entrez vous, s'il vous plait, et soyez le bienvenu."* She took her dripping skirts between her thumbs and forefingers, lifted them an inch or so and bobbed him a small curtsy.

He hesitated for a moment, then bowed acknowlegdment of her invitation.

Three times she rapped upon the white door of the little house, waited for a breath, then rapped twice more. A shuffling step came from behind the portal and a candle's glow quickened in the side-lights by the door as the handle turned and the panels swung a scant six inches back to reveal a pair of bright, black, mouse-small eyes in an incredibly wrinkled face.

"Ma chérie, ma pauvre, ma petite!" croaked the aged portress. *"Grace à Dieu,* you have returned! I thought you had been lost, drowned in the rain, or, worse, that *they* had come upon you!"

"S-s-sh, Marjotte, not so loud!" the girl bade softly. "Let us in, and quickly, then light the fire and brew some chocolate for the Citizen. He is wet unto the skin——"

"How of yourself, my little one; you too are doused," the old woman protested. "Let Marjotte get you dry clothing——"

"Zut! I can attend my own wants.

Do you light the fire and set the chocolate pot to boiling."

"B'en, Mam'selle," the servant answered, and preceded Mordecai into the tiny drawing-room, where she knelt before the logs piled ready in the fireplace, set the tinder glowing and blew upon the kindling till the little orange flames curled upward cheerily. With a taper she set candles flickering in wall sconces and on the table, then with the merest intimation of a curtsy left him to his own devices.

The smoke steamed from his garments as he stood before the blaze, turning slowly round and round to dry himself on all sides, and as he felt the cheerful glow draw out the wetness from his clothes he took stock of the room. It was not large, but it was very elegant. The floor was spread with Bruxelles carpet, light-taupe in shade; the walls were pale cream, set with cameo-like plaques of delft-blue with white figures imposed on them. At the windows hung long drapes of gold and chamois-colored velvet. The mantelpiece was white marble, the little clock upon it ormolu. There was a sofa in Etruscan style, mahogany inlaid with bronze, chairs in Roman design. A gilded harpsichord stood near the center of the room. Books, too: Homer's *Odyssey,* Virgil's *Aeneid,* the plays of Aristophanes and the witty comedies of Beaumarchais, all bound in carved and gilded leather.

"Pardonnez-moi, Monsieur — Citizen—I hope I have not kept you waiting overlong," he heard her voice from the doorway. He had formed no estimate of her in soaking bonnet and rain-bedraggled dress; now, as she stood framed in the door, her skin aglow with vigorous toweling, he took a half-step forward and involuntarily drew in his breath. Unlike most French women he had seen, she was fair, with very fine and silky hair the color of a frosted chestnut-burr. She wore it rather long, parted in the middle and draped in little curls each side her face, piled in a small Psyche-knot at back, and he knew her ringlets owed no debt to crimping-irons. Ten minutes earlier they had been wet as if dipped in the Seine, and there had been no time to curl them. Her little face was as arresting as an interrogation point, triangular, with high cheek-bones and generous mouth and eyes a pale and smoky gray. Unusual eyes he thought them, large, heavy-fringed, languishing and passionate, a little frightened-seeming, rather pleading in expression even when she smiled. And she was smiling now as with a noiseless tread she crossed the pale-taupe carpet and extended a slim hand.

"Mon sauveur," she told him in a softly husky voice. *"Bienfaiteur.* To you I owe a debt I cannot ever pay, no, not even with the eyes of the head!"

He took the little hand in his and, a trifle self-consciously, raised it to his lips, then as he stepped back, made quick appraisal of her. Her gown was china silk, loosely draped from a high waist, and so sheer and clinging that it seemed to follow every curve of her slight figure. The sash that bound it just below the bosom was a three-yard length of pale-rose ribbon tied *"en coquette"* below the shoulders and trailing in fringed ends almost to her dress hem at the back. Save for the small gold rings that scintillated in her ears she wore no jewelry. As he straightened from his bow he saw her feet were stockingless and shod with sandals fastened with cross-straps of purple grosgrain laced about her ankles. Bible-trained from infancy, Mordecai's mind echoed with a stanza from the *Song of*

Songs: "How beautiful are thy feet with shoes, O Prince's daughter!" Truly, they were beautiful; slim, high-arched, narrow-heeled, with long toes straight and slender as the fingers of a well-kept hand.

THE subdued rattle of limoge cups on a silver tray called his attention as the old servant entered with a pot of steaming chocolate and a plate of biscuit.

The girl faced him across the orange points that flickered at the candle-tips, chocolate pitcher poised above a cup. "You are not Parisian, Citizen?" she hazarded. "Your accent——"

"No, *Mademoiselle*——"

"We do not say *'Monsieur,' 'Madame,'* or *'Mademoiselle'* now, Citizen. The Convention has decreed that we are citizens and citizenesses, no more."

"I am American, *Mademoiselle,*" he answered, ignoring the rebuke.

"Ah? One understands, then. I had thought perhaps you were a *ci-devant*——" She stopped abruptly, as if frightened at the boldness of her own words, and flashed a bright, hard look at him. Then she smiled again, and the hardness melted. "But no, one need not fear; did not you rescue me from *them?*"

He drew his brows down in a thoughtful frown. "Them?" he wondered. "Who were *they?*" Twice tonight he'd heard references to mysterious "them." The old servant had feared the girl had fallen into "their" hands; he had rescued her from "them," it seemed.

"You mean the robbers who accosted you——"

"They were no robbers, *Monsieur.*" She dropped the masquerade of Revolutionary nomenclature and spoke with the polite formality of the old regime. "They were agents of General Security." There was challenging defiance in her tone, as if the simple statement implied: "And aren't you sorry that you interfered, now? Don't you want to run away, before they come again and find you with me?"

"Oh, so they were Robespierre's bullies? Well, I think one of them will never trouble you or anyone again; too bad I didn't know, I could have finished both of them——"

Thunderingly, the knocking at the door broke through his words. "Open —open in the name of the Republic!"

Her face drained white as if she had been dead an hour. He saw her palsied fingers crawling up her throat, clamping suddenly against her lips to stifle back a cry. "They—they have traced me——"

"Quiet, *Mademoiselle!*" Mordecai was on his feet and blowing out the candles. The heavy draperies at the windows masked them from the outside, he was sure, but there must be no glow behind him when he went to the door.

"*Monsieur,* you must not go; you must flee, and quickly! They will take you to the conciergerie, to the Tribunal, the chopper——"

He laughed, low, harshly. "Remain here, if you please, *Mademoiselle.* I will outface them."

Stamping angrily, he crossed the little entrance hall. "Well?" he challenged as he flung the portal open. "What is this annoyance, Citizens? Cannot a man sleep quietly in his house——"

The tattered little *commissaire* of police and his ragged pikemen gaped as Mordecai glared at them. This tall, wide-shouldered man with the tan of sun and sea on him, cold, dominant blue

eyes and uncompromising manner was not what they expected.

"Your pardon, Citizen, but we are looking for the Citizeness Susanne Louvegny, *ci-devant* comtesse d'Aules——"

"And you expect to find her here—in *my* house? Imagine yourself that!" He laughed, one short, impatient, chiding note. "I am Mordecai Westhorne, Paris representative of Westhorne et Fils of Boston. You seek for cocottes here?"

The guardsmen drew aside a little. "*Un Américain—un bas bleu*—an American blue-stocking!" one whispered to the other.

"The Citizen has his passport?" The *commissaire* was ill at ease. One did not quite know how to take these savages from across the sea. Some of them were worldly men—*oui-da,* fellows most decidedly in the know—others were chill and cold as Calvinists, and all were very ready with the fist. Besides, their ships were needed for commerce. . . .

Mordecai drew his *laissez-passer* from his pocket and held it out in his left hand, tapping his boot impatiently with the blackthorn in his right. A very little light flowed past him through the door, the paper rattled in the wind, making reading difficult. "Come, come, man, don't be all night about it! I have been wet to the skin, and want to dry myself before the fire——"

"Your pardon, Citizen," the *commissaire* returned the passport unread. "Your papers seem in order. Naturally, there is no such person as the *ci-devant* comtesse here——"

"Naturally," Mordecai agreed. His mouth became a straight line, then curved in a slight smile. "There is no woman here but my old servant and Madame"—deliberately he flung the aristocratic title in their faces—"Madame Westhorne." And thereupon he slammed the door on the Republic's authority.

HER face was very white, her lovely eyes shadowed and tragic, when he rejoined her. "They are gone, *Mademoiselle,*" he told her soothingly. But still she looked at him with fear-filled, almost inattentive eyes, hardly seeming to perceive the meaning of his words.

Gently he repeated: "They are gone; I sent them off."

"Ah, but they will return, *Monsieur!* They will never give up searching, especially with Henriot to urge them on——"

She paused a long breath-space; then: "Do you truly think you killed him?"

"Killed him? Whom do you mean?"

"Macrin Henriot, the man from whom you rescued me; the one who bore the sword."

Mordecai laughed grimly. "I think I did, and if I did not, he will surely suffer from a headache for a long time——"

"Ah, but if he is not dead I am undone, and so are you. He has followed—hounded me, since I left Pont l'Evêque. He was my father's hostler——"

"Eh, a hostler——"

"But yes. We are Normans, we Louvegnies; my father was the Comte d'Aules, a poor but very honorable gentleman.

"He farmed our estate, not disdaining to take part in manual labor in the field himself, and believed as firmly in the Social Contract of Rousseau as he believed in heaven. When the States General were convoked he came to Paris as a delegate, and as a

member of the National Assembly helped draw the Constitution.

"One of the workers on our farm was Macrin Henriot, a farrier and stableman. He was about my age, and as children we were playmates, for social distinctions were not tightly drawn at Aules. He was handsome and high-spirited, but given to long periods of black melancholy. When these were on him he would neither speak nor eat. Once he tried to drown himself, and would have done so if I had not screamed until some laborers in the field heard me and ran to pull him from the river. May the good God pardon me that scream!

"Macrin's father was a farrier and wanted him to learn the trade, but he considered it beneath him; so when he was fourteen and I twelve, and I was sent for schooling to a convent, my father in the goodness of his noble heart sent Macrin to a notary at Caen to study for the law, paying all of his expenses.

"I was a pupil at the convent for three years, and when I came back to Aules I found Macrin in his father's place at our stables, doctoring and shoeing horses. He had made a wretched failure as a notary's apprentice, and had come back to the only work he knew.

"No one else would hire him, no one wanted him, for when he was not sullen he was drunk, and when he was not drunk he was inciting laborers and peasants to revolt.

"I was sorry for my old playfellow, and tried to comfort him, but he mistook my pity for a warmer, tenderer feeling, and had the audacity to demand my hand in marriage.

"Gentlewomen do not wed with stableboys, however long they may have known them, and when my father tried to make him understand, Macrin flew into a rage and stormed out of the château, vowing that we'd live to see the day when I should beg him on my knees to marry me, and he would spurn me.

"You know the recent history of this so unhappy country, *Monsieur* — how the Jacobins assumed authority, how they drove the patriot LaFayette to exile, slew the king and decreed all former nobles, even moderate Republicans, were traitors to the Revolution.

"Macrin Henriot had come to Paris and become an agent of General Security. It was he denounced my father to the Tribunal, and sent him to the chopper without trial. I did not even know that he had been arrested until I heard the urchins bawl the names of those who had 'drawn prizes in the lottery of Madame Guillotine.'

"What was one to do, *Monsieur?* To go home to Aules was to go to certain death, for in the North the peasants had revolted, our château had been burned to ashes; I should be recognized and denounced if I dared show my face in the vicinity. Besides, how could I make the journey? How could I obtain a *laissez-passer,* traveling without which meant sure death? I should be safer if I stayed in Paris and kept within-doors than in any other part of France. We had this little house in the Street of the Windows, and to it I and old Marjotte came for a refuge. She does the marketing; I stay indoors all day, and go out only in the evening when the sun has set. Tonight I took my customary *promenade de santé* and had not walked a hundred feet when I heard steps behind me. I walked more slowly; so did they. At last I became frightened and began to run, but before I had gone twenty paces they were on me, and when I turned to face them in

the rain I saw it was Macrin Henriot and another.

"'*Bon soir, Mademoiselle la Comtesse,*' he accosted me, taking off his hat and bowing very low, as if he were a gentleman; 'it has been a long time since we met, but met again we have. Whom do you choose for husband now, milady, the poor despised Macrin the farrier's son, or the chopper?'

"I was so terrified I could not answer, and my silence seemed to drive him to a frenzy.

"'What are we waiting for?' he asked his companion, and they unfolded a horse-blanket and attempted to envelop me in it. Then I screamed for help, and—thanks to God and you, I am still here."

THERE was stark, abysmal terror in her eyes and voice as she continued: "But now I can no longer stay here. They will hunt me out, run me to earth as though I were a rabbit. I must find some other place to hide, but where can one whose life is forfeit find a refuge?"

"I do not think you need distress yourself, *Mademoiselle,*" he comforted. "The fact that Henriot accosted you while you were walking in the street would indicate he did not know which house you lived in, and the thump I gave him on the head will lay him up for a long time, even if he does not die. His companion probably returned to General Security to report that you had been seen in the neighborhood, and the *commissaire* who came here was engaged in routine canvass of the houses in this street. I assured him that I lived here, and——"

He paused so long she prompted him with a half-whispered, breathless: "Yes, *Monsieur?*"

"Knowing Marjotte must have been seen in the neighborhood and that perhaps you had been observed when you came out for your walks, I told the *commissaire* there were two women here, my aged servant and my wife."

"But, *Monsieur,* your artifice will be discovered——"

Mordecai's New England conscience troubled him a little as he broke in: "It need not be, *Mademoiselle.* I can pack a few belongings in pormanteaux and move them here in a short time. My lodgings are not far away, and I'll retain them for a time, but I can live here, thereby giving the illusion that this house is mine, Marjotte my servant, and you——"

He stopped, his sentence half completed, at the stricken look in her eyes. She had not moved, nor had her expression altered, but, oddly, her soul seemed retreating — racing in sheer panic-footed terror—behind her corneas. Before she had seemed merely frightened. Now she was horrified.

"What——" he began, but halted as she drew a deep, shuddering breath, then expelled it in a pitifully weary sigh.

She was like a victim led to sacrifice, and a mute appeal for pity mingled with the tears that dewed her lashes as she bent her head submissively and whispered brokenly: "You have saved my life, *Monsieur.* It is yours to do with as you please. I accept your proposition."

"What?" His cheeks flushed red as hers were pale. "You mean—you thought that I would be so base——"

"What else was there to think, *Monsieur?*"

"Woman"—the sternness of his Puritan forebears rose in his voice, making his words hard and brittle—"I am offering you protection; not asking an exchange——"

"Ohé, Monsieur, you mean"—the sudden light of relief flooding through her face was like a sunrise breaking through the piled-up black clouds of a stormy night — "you mean that you would live here in this house of mine as if you were my *frère de lait*—my foster-brother—like children playing house?"

"Precisely, *Mademoiselle.* 'Like children playing house'."

"La, la!" It was incredible how quickly her smile chased the look of desolation from her face. "But that will be the fun!

"Hurry, hasten, fly, *Monsieur!* Make haste to bring your things to this playhouse of ours.

"Marjotte," she called up the stairway, "make ready the guest room all quickly! *Monsieur* our rescuer will come to live with us!"

She swept him a deep curtsy as he paused upon the threshold. "Return all soon, *Monsieur—ohé,* shame on me for a thoughtless jade—I do not even know your name!"

"Westhorne," he answered. "Mordecai Westhorne."

"Mardochée," she pronounced, rendering the English into French, then with more difficulty, "Voestone?"

THE rain had stopped and the little garden was brown and still under its canopy of unshed October leaves as Mordecai set out for his lodgings. As he stepped into the Street of the Windows his heart rose. Aunt Deborah surely would have understood and approved what he was doing. What was the little French girl's name—Susanne? Susanne—Susette. He liked the name Susette, liked it better each time he repeated it, and he repeated it more times than one. Susette—Susette, its cadence kept time with the scuffing of the rain-soaked leaves beneath his heels as he walked.

2. *"Like Children Playing House"*

THEY dined in the small *salle à manger* beside the latticed window. Two candles lighted them; old Marjotte served them, silent-footed, austere, handling dish and salver with a dignity that made the simple meal a rite: consommé—trust a woman peasant-bred to get the last fine bit of nourishment from a four-inch length of beef shinbone!—smelts fried a crisp gold-brown in olive oil, steamed *escargots* in sauce Bercy—Mordecai was doubtful of the snails, but became enthusiastic with a convert's ardor after the first taste—a chicory salad, finally cheese and toasted biscuit with black, bitter coffee. The wine, a white *vin ordinaire,* was tart almost to acidness, but Susette would not be depressed. "This year's vintage is a bitter one for France," she told him as they clinked glasses, "but there will be other years and other vintages. Danton is gone, Marat is killed—the good God rest the martyred Charlotte Corday's soul — Robespierre cannot last for ever. The sun must shine again, surely!"

Mordecai had lived in the small villa for a month, and life with Susette—"like children playing house"—had been most pleasant. She was a gay, mercurial little creature, oddly mature sometimes, more often childishly artless. For a few days it had been *"bon jour, Monsieur,"* when he left for the office, and *"enchantée de vous revoir"* when he came back at night. But that was only for a few days. Now it was a gay *"à bientot"* when he left, and an even gayer *"bienvenu!"* at his return. Before they had been housemates for a week she turned her face up to be

kissed when he came home, naturally and unaffectedly as an affectionate child. Now the rite was performed three times daily: when he left for his *bureau,* when he returned at night, just before she bade him *"bonne nuit,"* and he saw the flicker of her little feet upon the stairs as she went up to bed.

Tonight she was in high spirits, for it was their "anniversary"; she had been "Madame Voestone" a whole month. In honor of the occasion she had put on "her best—her very finest," and the result was ravishing.

Her bright fair hair was waved up from the neck and temples with curls massed high on top and filleted with violet ribbon in the Grecian mode which had swept Paris and all France with the revival of classicism. In her little ears were hung two beautifully matched cameos outlined in gold and seed-pearls and almost large as Spanish "pillar dollars." A necklace of antique matte gold hung round her throat and its pendant was a duplicate of her ear-ornaments. A bracelet of gold set with a fourth matched cameo was clasped about her left arm just above the elbow. Her gown of sheer white muslin would have been revelatory as a wisp of veiling if it had not been gathered in close knife-pleats running vertically from bosom to hem. It was cut with a round neck-line, low in front and back, with tiny puff-sleeves at the shoulders, fitted tightly at the bust, but flaring sharply from the high-set waist which was defined by a long, sweeping sash of violet ribbon tied at the back in a coquettish bow whose ends draped nearly to the floor. Her sandals were gilt leather, heelless as a ballet dancer's shoes, and laced with violet ribbons, and through the meshes of their silken lattice her white feet gleamed seductively.

The firelight played about them as they sat upon the sofa after dinner. Streaming out across the hearth it reddened walls and floor; shadows advanced and retreated as the ever-restless flames rose, wavered, and then flickered down again. Like sportive wavelets of a serene sea the glowing tide advanced across the blue tiles of the hearth, highlighting the satin house-pumps Mordecai was wearing, flashing on the golden soles and violet ribbons of Susette's little sandals.

"It has been pretty, this month, has it not, my Mardochée?" she asked in a small, almost voiceless whisper as she tucked one foot up under her and swung the other to and fro as if to tease the flickering firelight with the little white and gold and violet thing. Instinctively as a bird finds its nest her small hand stole into his big one. "It has been a garden filled with fragrant flowers; the memory of it will perfume all life hereafter. But yes, my Mardochée, although the blood-drinkers are raging through the land and the chopper takes the heads of all the good and brave and just who still remain, it is not hard to trust the future. There is no doubt of God's great goodness when I think of this time we have had together——" She broke off with a little sigh, half of contentment, half of melancholy.

"Why do you sigh, Susette?"

"I did but think."

"Of what?"

"Of how sweet it must be to be truly wed to one like thee, my Mardochée."

Mordecai's breath came so fast that it nearly stifled him. A quick throbbing, half pain, half ecstasy, seemed beating with insistent hammer-rhythm in his breast.

"Susette," he whispered, and the effort it cost him to speak was almost

more than he could bear, "you love me, Susette?"

She turned her face to him, lips moist and dewy with the yearnings of youth, a rich, ripe look of promise in her eyes. "More than I can tell, *mon adoré!*"

Warm and tender, her slim arms were tight about his neck, he could feel the tears from her eyes on his cheek, her voice was full of gentleness and love as she repeated murmuringly: *"Mon adoré, mon amoureux, mon precieux! O, Mardochée, je t'aime, je t'aime!"*

He drew her to him, kissed her slowly, bending her head back against the sofa-arm, pillowing her neck in his bent arm. She whimpered softly, almost as in pain, became limp and yielding, then tightened her arms round his neck again, drawing him down to the lusciousness of satin-smooth red lips.

Afterwhiles they sat upon the sofa, hand in hand and waist in arm, and gazed into the alternately leaping and curtsying flames as if they could foreread the future in their flickering brightness. "We must be married very soon, my dear," said Mordecai. "Tomorrow, if possible. I will go to the *mairie* on my way to the *bureau*——"

"Mon Dieu!" The hand Susette had raised to rearrange her misty, glowing hair was checked at her forehead. "We cannot—dare not marry, Mardochée!"

"Why not, my love? It will be simple——"

"Non, non! Consider, if you please. I am Susanne Louvegny, *ci-devant* comtesse d'Aules. My father was beheaded on the guillotine, I myself am *hors la loi*—outside the law. To be recognized is to be arrested, to be arrested is to be condemned to death. They give us *ci-devants* no trial at the Tribunal, only sentence to the chopper. You see, *m'ami,* it is not possible. There is no birth certificate or baptismal record for me that you can give them, you dare not even tell them who I am!"

"But when we're married you will be a citizen of the United States. They will not dare——"

"But certainly—*when* we are married! Until that time I am a citizeness of France, and subject to her laws, however savage they may be. Think you they would let you snatch me from them, cheat the chopper——"

"By Jupiter!" The impact of his hand against his knee broke off her half-hysterical recital.

"What is it that you have, *mon cher?*"

"Our ship the *Deborah,* commanded by my brother Hezekiah, will be at Le Havre within the week. I'll send a message to him, asking him to bring her up the Seine. We can go in a closed coach to the piers, and once you are aboard her we'll defy the whole *garde nationale* to take you off again. When we are out of cannon-shot of land my brother as the master of the ship will marry us. You shall go home with me, *petite* Susette, home to America, and be 'Madame Voestone' in fact as well as reputation!"

Then for a long space they sat looking in the fire and held each other tightly. Words were superfluous. Two have no need of words when they are deeply, tremulously, wonderingly in love.

3. Macrin Henriot Again

ALL day the city quailed before a storm which threatened but forbore to strike. There were occasional grumblings of thunder, now and then a livid cicatrix of lightning scarred the sky, but the air hung heavy, breathless-still, as if in mute expectancy; the dry

dead leaves were quiet on the trees, a menacing twilight, brassy-yellow and unreal, filled the streets. But Susette was indifferent to the threat of rain and tempest, her brain and heart were too filled with anticipation to give heed to such-like unimportant things. Returning from the notion shop where she had made a few purchases—soap, a flacon of perfume, a spool of silk and a small box of rice-powder—she walked with a sort of lilting, questing eagerness. The *Deborah* had come up the Seine that afternoon; tonight she and Marjotte and Mordecai would board her; tomorrow morning with the turning of the tide they'd set sail for America and love and freedom. No more to be a fugitive, hunted like a brute beast; no more to live in constant dread with the weight of never-ceasing fear upon her nerves and terror gnawing at her heart! One could not but be very happy in such circumstances. *Le bon Dieu* was very good indeed, life was very good, Mardochée, especially, was good. Unbidden and spontaneously a snatch from Mozart's *Marriage of Figaro* welled up to her lips:

> What is this feeling makes me so sad?
> What is this feeling makes me so glad?
> Pain that delights me—how can it be?
> Pleasure that pains me,
> Fetter'd though free . . .

The song died in a little gasp, and up her back a tiny chill of apprehension rippled. There was no breeze—the leaves upon the street-side trees hung motionless as if they had been painted on the scenery of a theatre—but somewhere in the street behind her, or in the alley which let into it, there was a dry, harsh, crackling rustle. Not a footstep, but a scuffing, as of stealthy feet among the fallen leaves that strewed the gutters.

She quickened her pace almost to a run; the rustle ceased, and she relaxed her haste. She was nervous, like a silly child that starts at nothing. Too long living in the shadow of the chopper, too much longing for tomorrow—"Thou little foolish one!" she chid herself. "It was a sparrow scratching in the leaves in hope of food, perhaps a dog or cat." But reason abdicates when terror comes. However sensible her explanation was, it did not satisfy her. Once more she quickened pace; her little sandaled feet were fairly twinkling as she turned into the Street of the Windows. Yonder was her home, there lay sanctuary. . . .

The live coals of the smoldering sunset died beneath the ashes of the twilight, and suddenly the street was filled with shadows. And something more! Ahead of her, obscure in the unlighted highway, a vague, half-visible, half guessed-at umbrose something flitted from one tree trunk to another, and this time she heard unmistakably the scuffing of a boot-heel on the bricks.

WHAT was that behind her? At first it was so faint she could not tell if she heard or imagined it; now it approached, and she knew it was no figment of disordered fancy. *Step—shuffle—step,* she heard it limping nearer with a dreadful, dragging hobble, a sort of terrifying dot-and-carry-one, as though some obscene wounded thing were slithering toward her. Terror, stark, unreasoning, chilling terror, took her by the throat, and she broke into a run, the awkward, knock-kneed run of a woman, unmindful of what lay before her if only she could leave this shambling, dragging, stealthy pursuer behind.

"Your pardon, Citiziness, we would have a word with you!" from the darkness of the angle of a wall a form

emerged, and with it came another, and another. The street seemed filled to overflowing with vague shapes, shapes almost without outline or faces, only eyes.

She could not know — her terror would not let her realize—that they were men enveloped in long cloaks and muffled to the eyes. They seemed a cloud of horror-shapes more dreadful than the *loup-garou* of Norman forests with which her nurse had frightened her so long ago at Aules.

Fright mounted to sheer panic, and panic gave way to a paralyzing horror as the limping, dragging step came nearer, scuffed and shuffled to a halt, and paused beside her.

"*Ha,* you have her? *A merveille!*" The voice was low and harsh and raucous as the tearing of a sheet of paper, but she recognized it. Macrin Henriot!

And now the blind was snapped from a dark-lantern, and the beam shone in her face, dazzling her with its quick brightness—but not in time. Before her dazed eyes ceased to function she beheld him peering at her through the gloom, leering like a fiend that comes to snatch a forfeit soul to hell.

Macrin Henriot, playmate of her childhood, discredited notary's apprentice, farrier in her father's stables, agent of the police of the Terror—but how changed! His dark, handsome, morose face was twisted almost out of semblance to a human countenance; one eye was closed until it was the merest slit; a corner of the mouth sagged down until it set his lips in a perpetual twisted, sneering grin, exposing teeth and drooling spittle; the whole side of his face seemed to have slipped, as though it had been dough that sloughed to shapelessness with its own weight. It overflowed the line of his jawbone, hanging down with a hound's dewlap. And as the face was, so the body was deformed. One shoulder thrust grotesquely up, as if his spine were permanently twisted in a corkscrew bend; the arm was bent at an unnatural angle and the hand was rigid, splay-boned, as unlike a human hand as if it were the gnarled root of a dead tree. One leg was stiffened at the knee as if bound fast in splints; the foot was twisted at the ankle till it turned in almost at a right angle.

This was the reason for the halting, dragging, shuffling limp, the dreadful dot-and-carry-one with which he walked. Paralysis! She had seen a peasant on her father's farm deformed in such a way when a horse had kicked him on the head. The blow from Mordecai's lead-loaded bludgeon . . .

He was speaking, slowly, painfully, with a sort of slobbering lisp. His eyes were dilated and bright with hate, his twisted mouth fell open and clapped shut as if he had no mastery of it, his deformed hand was fumbling like a fish that dies upon the angler's string, he slobbered like a mad dog with each word he uttered. But she could understand him. All too well!

"*Bon soir, Mademoiselle la Comtesse.* I have long anticipated this meeting. This time it is the chopper, with no choice between it and the poor cripple, Macrin Henriot. It was a merry chase you led us with your masquerade of being Madame Voestone, but at last we have you in the net, my pretty little pigeon. This time we shall not suffer interruption by *Monsieur l'Américain.* I have seen to that!"

A great lump, hot as molten lead, was forming in Susette's throat; there was a ringing in her ears that shut out every other sound. Her heart seemed smashed to fragments and each separate, aching piece was being torn out by

the roots. She was taken on the eve of her escape; Mardochée was taken, too—had he not said, *'l'Américain,* I have seen to that'?—her world was broken into little bits and the bits were ground to powder in the cruel mills of the Gods of Desolation. There was a frantic feeling in her breast beside her heart, she was choking, stifling, dying.

"Pardi', she swoons!" she heard a man exclaim as a wave of blackness flooded over her.

"Eh bien, then bring her out of it. Thrust a pin in her!"

There was a fumbling in the crowd, the rustling of clothing as a pin was sought, then a bitter, piercing pain in her left leg as the pointed wire was inserted to the head. She tried to writhe away, to cry out, to plead for pity from the torture, but she could neither move nor speak nor make the smallest sound.

"Tiens, mon commissaire, I think that she has died of a heart failure," the man who stabbed her with the pin told Henriot. "She does not respond to my tickling."

Rough hands were on her wrists, she felt her eyelids drawn back and knew a light flashed in her pupils, even though she saw no light. Then another hand thrust underneath her fichu, her outraged virgin bosom felt the pressure of cold fingers just above her heart. The hand was withdrawn slowly, as if loath to leave her tender flesh, and: *"B'en oui, elle est morte. A coup sûr!"*

"Bring the candle. Give it here!"

She heard the lantern rattle as the candle was removed from it, felt her sandal torn without unlacing from her left foot, then, excruciatingly, a searing, branding pain against her first and second toes.

Again she tried to scream, to draw away from the intolerable torment; once more she found herself unable so much as to flutter an eyelid or bend toe or finger.

"Vraiment, elle est morte." It was Henriot speaking, and his voice was softer than it had been. She felt his breath against her cheek as he knelt down beside her, heard him murmur, *"Ohé,* my little Suzon, I am sorry! I would have sent you to the chopper, but only because I loved you. You were so beautiful, so lovely—and so far above me. If I could not have you, I could not bear that any other should——" A sob, deep retching, almost strangling, broke his whisper, and if she could have moved she would have winced beneath the impact of his twisted, flaccid lips as he pressed a kiss against her mouth. *"Adieu, petite compagne,"* he breathed, *"adieu pour l'éternité!"*

"Eh bien, it seems the chopper has been cheated," remarked a policeman. "The trench is still open at the *cimetière de la Madeleine;* only ten were chopped today. Shall we——"

"Non!" Henriot denied. "I will not have her buried in the common *fosse.* Let a three-year concession be opened——"

"The citizen *commissaire* forgets that graves cost money, even three-year graves," a guardsman cut in dryly. "Who will pay for the concession?"

"Here," Henriot thrust a crumpled wad of *assignats* into the fellow's hand, "see thou to it! Some of you stand guard by her; you others, come with me. I have some more arrests to make, but I will have a wagon sent for her."

4. "Love Is Strong as Death . . ."

MORDECAI was packing in his lodgings. Most of his things had been transferred to Susette's little house, but

some odds and ends remained in the apartment, and he was not minded to leave them behind.

A happiness so great it almost hurt suffused him like the afterglow of a drink of fine old sherry. Susette—Susette, his heart seemed beating to the rhythm of her name. This was almost too good to be true, it was like something dreamed or read in a romance, too wonderful, too sweet, too utterly heart-satisfying to have happened to anyone like him. A singing heart needs singing lips to complement it, and instinctively he raised his lusty baritone in Master Isaac Watts' *Varina*:

"There is a land of pure delight
Where saints immortal reign;
Eternal day excludes the night,
And pleasures banish pain.
There everlasting spring abides,
And never-fading flowers;
Death, like a narrow sea, divides
This heav'nly land from——"

"M'sieur, M'sieur Mardochée"—high, cracked, hysterical, old Marjotte's voice broke his rendition of the hymn—*"pour l'amour de Dieu,* come; oh, come at once!"

She was clawing at him blindly. Her gnarled old hands were so deformed with age and labor and rheumatism that they looked like malformed, dying branches on a dwarfed pine tree; her eyes were glazed and filmed with grief and terror; little flecks of bubble-froth hung in the corners of her convulsed mouth.

"Come, come, *M'sieur,*" she gabbled, "it is *la petite*—the little Susette——" Her thin, shrill, brittle voice cracked like a shattering glass and she dropped down to the settle, hugging both hands to her stomach, rocking to and fro in an excess of agony too acute for words.

"Good heavens, what *is* it, Marjotte?" Mordecai took her shoulders in his hands and shook her gently. "What has happened——"

"Ohé, M'sieur, they've taken her, and she is dead!"

"What? You mean Susette's arrested——"

"She is dead, *M'sieur. Oui-da,* I myself have seen her corpse!"

Mordecai dropped on the bed, eyes staring, mouth a little open. "Dead?" he echoed unbelievingly.

"Vraiment. But yes, *M'sieur.* I saw her lying there all cold with the guardsmen round her——"

"When—how did it happen?"

"She went to the shop of Mère Duval to make some little purchases before the sun went down. I begged her not to go out in the twilight unattended, but she laughed at me. Had we not been safe from molestation since you took us under your protection? But certainly. I was preparing dinner, and when lamp-lighting time had come and she had not returned, I had concern. It was a dinner fit for our farewell to France, *M'sieur*—oysters, sole, *caneton au four*——"

"Yes, yes; of course. I'm sure the dinner was a work of art, Marjotte, but what of Mademoiselle Susette?"

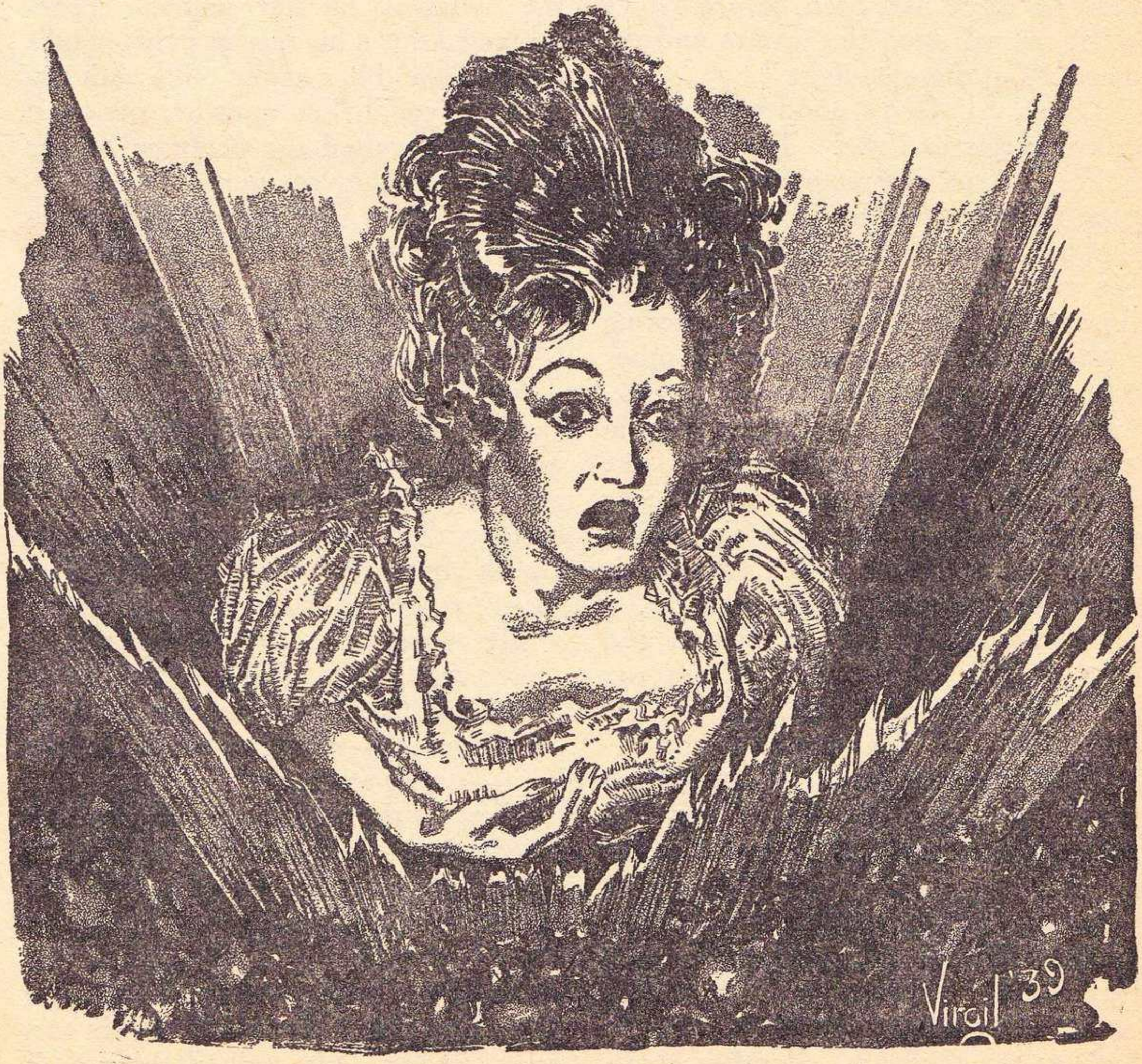
"B'en, M'sieur. When she came not I had the anxiety, and went to seek for her. Less than a hundred meters from the house I came upon her lying in the street with a ring of guardsmen round her. I am old, but when I wish to be I am of the silent foot, *M'sieur.* I crept up to them as noiselessly as any mouse. There lay my little one, my lamb, my baby, dead upon her back, and they were standing by and looking at her. There was Macrin Henriot — may Satan snatch him to hell with his eyes wide open!—and with him were his so vile myrmidons. Me, I heard them

talking. Oh, yes! She had suffered a heart failure when they set upon her, it seemed, and one of them suggested that they pitch her in the common grave where those who have been chopped lie in *la Madeleine*. But Henriot demanded that she be put in a three-year concession—she who is a *noble dame* to lie in a vile pauper's grave! Better to be buried in the *fosse* with all the good ones done to death by Robespierre than lie in such a sepulcher—"

"You're sure that she was dead, not fainting?"

"Mais oui, M'sieur. Too sure; too sure! I saw them feel her pulses, flash a light into her eye, and as the crowning infamy burn her little so sweet foot with fire to see if it would blister. *Hélas,* my little one, my tiny duckling, my sweet pigeon, thou art dead!"

Her wail became wild, high, keen, rose to a frenzied shriek, then failed with very intensity. She fought for breath, mouthed toothless gums as if she sought to bite the agony that racked her, rolled her eyes up till the pupils disappeared beneath the lids; then,



"Buried alive! She screamed in agony of soul and body.

with a choking, retching cry, half gasp, half hiccup, fell forward on her face, twitched spasmodically, and lay still.

It needed no physician to pronounce her dead. The film-glazed eyes, the flaccid jaw, the prolapsed tongue and idiotically opened mouth all bore their eloquent testimony. Marjotte lay dead of a broken heart, and Mordecai's heart was breaking.

How long he sat there staring sightlessly at nothing he could never tell. He was stunned, but not too stunned to suffer. The world seemed desolate as it had been before God's spirit moved upon the waters and decreed, "Let there be light."

Light? I' God's good name, what talk was this of light? There was no light! The sun and moon and stars had gone forever from his firmament; only shadows, cold and everlasting, stayed. He tried to face the facts, but one dreadful sentence rang with clamoring echoes in his brain, beating out all other thought. Susette, little sweet Susette, was dead. Dead, and already lying in a pauper's grave in the cemetery of the Madeleine. Nevermore would he be greeted by her purling, laughing voice, never feel the touch of her soft hands again, never look into her face. . . .

"By heaven, I will!" he shouted, and rose to fling his cloak about him and stamp out into the street. "*Adieu,* my poor Marjotte. I am going to her."

He'd promised her. "You shall go home with me, *petite Susette de mon coeur,*" he'd said, and go with him she should.

She was buried in a three-year grave, virtually laid on the surface; he could tear the earth away, break the flimsy coffin with his hands and take her little body to the *Deborah.* Brother Hezekiah would provide a pipe of rum into which they could put her; her flesh should not know corruption until they had reached Boston and he'd laid her in the Westhorne family plot within the shadow of Kings' Chapel.

The wind was rising now, and the storm that had delayed all day was breaking. "Howl tempest; bellow, thunder; pour, rain!" It had been raining on the night he met her; it was fitting it should rain tonight.

"Susette—Susette!" As on the night he met her, so now the scuffing of his feet upon the leaves kept cadence with the syllables of her name. Tears streamed down his face as in his mind's eye he beheld her at the table with the gleam of candlelight upon her arms and shoulders, sensed the perfume of her nearness as they sat upon the sofa by the fire. When he closed his hand he almost felt the answering pressure of her little fingers.

Her little hands, her laughing eyes, her sweet, small, ivory-gleaming feet! They'd minded him of Solomon's canticle when he first saw them; now another stanza of the *Song of Songs* ran in his mind. He smiled sardonically as he recalled the citations—sixth verse, eighth chapter of the *Song of Songs:* "Love is strong as death!"

He repeated it, again—again. Its meter seemed to fall into the rhythm of a drum that beats time for a march —"Love—is—strong-as-death; Love —is—strong-as-death!"

Now he'd reached the Place de la Revolution. Grim and bare as Death's own hungry skeleton the chopper reared in ghastly silhouette against a flare of lightning. That way, to the right, the cemetery of the Madeleine lay. Rain came down in gusts, in torrents, floods. He walked through it unnoticing as if it had been moonlight.

. . . "Beat high, heart; hasten, feet; we are going to Susette!"

5. *Inferno*

WHEN Susette fell she tried to summon strength to scream. With almost superhuman effort she sought to cry out, at least to groan, to twitch a toe or bend a finger—to do anything to make them realize she was still alive. The thought of being strapped down to the chopper's plank, to have to look into the blood-stained basket waiting for her head, had been a constant nightmare, but the chopper would be preferable to this. To be nailed in a coffin, carted to the cemetery, buried while alive—to smother slowly, horribly . . .

"Misère de Dieu," she heard a guardsman swear, "will he never come, that one? Me, I am no *croque-mort*—no damned watcher of the dead——"

The clop-clop of a horse's hooves against the flints sounded. *"Holà, mes enfants,* you have a fare for old *Jacques-Corbillard,* yes?" a voice hailed through the gloom. *"Bon.* Help me with this *sacré* coffin. The devil take those carpenters, they make them heavier each day!"

The rough pine box thumped hollowly upon the pavement; she felt herself heaved into it, heard the grate of wood on wood as the cover was laid on, heard the bang of hammer against nail and felt the jarring impact as they fastened down the lid. They shoved the coffin in the cart. A whip cracked. . . .

Often she had wondered how the wretches in the tumbril felt as they were hurried to the guillotine. Now she knew if they could have compared her fate with theirs they would have sung for joy. Theirs was a mercifully swift end: a stroke, a shock, and all was done. She was being taken to a slow and awful death by suffocation in the grave.

The minutes had seemed endless as she lay bereft of sight and movement on the pavement. Now it seemed the shambling cart-horse had the wings of Pegasus as it ambled slowly toward the cemetery.

They had halted. She felt the shock as they dragged her from the cart and dropped her on the muddy earth. Her feet were higher than her head as the driver and a helper manhandled the coffin. Another jarring thump and she had come to rest; then a report deafening as the bursting of a bombshell sounded just above her heart and the confined air inside the coffin beat against her ear-drums with the shock of it. A second detonation on the lid above her face, a third, a fourth, a perfect avalanche of shocks as clod on roaring clod came rattling down by shovelfuls upon the coffin top.

Her ears were paralyzed by the continuous battering of the falling earth; she could feel the constantly-increasing weight of it upon her breast, her mouth, her nostrils. She made a last supreme effort to rouse and scream for help; then a great flare, bright as blazing lightning, burst against her eyes, and the last shred of sensation left her.

SLOWLY consciousness returned. How good it was to lie here in her bed, to know the terrible experience had been a nightmare! She had not been seized by Henriot, not taken up for dead, not dropped unceremoniously in a grave. Presently, when she had had a chance to soothe her shaken nerves, she'd call Marjotte and have her make a cup of chocolate; then she'd rest until the morning came.

But how dark it was! The curtains had been drawn to keep the deadly

night air out, of course, but this was pitch-black darkness, impenetrable as a velvet hood. She moved her arms uneasily. To left and right were hard, rough wooden walls that pressed her sides and interfered with movement. She started up and fell back with a startled cry, for she had struck her head a violent blow. The air about her pressed against her ears; it had a damp and heavy feeling, as though confined.

Then with a reason-shattering shock she knew. Her scalp began to sting and prickle as the awful truth ran through her like an icy wave. This was no dream, but dreadful fact. The bonds of lethargy had dropped away, she was once more mistress of her body, conscious, able to call out for help—but none would ever hear her. She was coffined, shut up beneath a mound of muddy earth in the cemetery of the Madeleine.

Buried alive!

She screamed in agony of soul and body. The horrible reverberation of her voice in the sealed coffin rang against her ears like thunder-claps tossed back by mountain-peaks.

Her eyes were open—open staring-wide—and she searched the Stygian darkness for a gleam of light. It was as if she pressed her fingers on her closed eyelids. Only fiery sparks and shining patches of bright lightning-color showed, changed and faded like the patterns of a kaleidoscope.

Then she went mad. Shrieking, cursing the day that she was born and the God that let this dreadful fate befall her, she writhed and twisted, kicked and struggled. The coffin sides pressed her so closely that she could not get her hands up to her head, else she would have torn her hair out by the roots and scratched her face to the bone; but she dug her nails into her thighs through the flimsy stuff of her gown and bit her lips and tongue until her mouth was choked with blood and her raving cries were muted like the gurgles of a drowning man. At last with a tremendous effort she turned herself face down and beat her brow against the coffin floor. Again and again she struck her forehead on the rough pine planks, getting a slight surcease from her horror in the pain.

Once more she writhed inside the straitness of her tomb, twisted till she lay upon her back, arched her body, drew her knees up, kicked frenziedly against the coffin foot. It gave a very little and she thought she saw a flickering glow of light. One little minute, just long enough to breathe the air while they rushed her to the chopper—let her smell the open air once more! She started up, her forehead crashed against the coffin lid. A wave of weakness flooded over her. She fell back, sick and faint. . . .

6. "It Is a Vampire!"

THE rain had slacked almost imperceptibly as Mordecai strode toward the cemetery. By the time he reached the sexton's hut beside the gate there was no water falling save wind-lashed drippings from the trees and eaves.

His first knock brought no answer, but continued hammering at last evoked a shuffling step, and a blast of superheated, almost fetid air swept from the little house as the door was opened on a six-inch crack. Behind the little gnome-like man who peered at him through the small opening Mordecai descried a candle burning in a bottle and a charcoal *poêle* glowing redly.

"The Citizen has doubtless lost his way," the porter ventured. "This is the Cemetery of the Madeleine."

"The Citizen is not lost, and he is perfectly aware this is the Cemetery of the Madeleine," Mordecai replied; then, not waiting for the invitation which he knew would not be tendered, he pushed the little man aside and stepped into the pentice.

"The Citizen sexton would doubtless like to make some extra money?" he asked. "Say five hundred or a thousand francs?"

"*Un Américain,*" the porter recognized his slight accent, "and mad, as all the Yankees are. Drunk, too, *pardi'*."

Mordecai seized the fellow's shoulder, for he was edging slyly toward the door, and shook a sheaf of *assignats* beneath his nose. "Have the kindness to smell those, my friend," he ordered. "Regard me well: five hundred now, a like amount when you've done what I ask."

Speculative avarice brought a much brighter gleam to the intendant's little eyes. "The Citizen *Américain* desires



"The pistol grasped in his hand with cadaveric rigor told the story."

that I help him kill someone?" From his tone it was quite evident he did not turn the proposition down unheard. "Or is it that he has outside a body he desires secretly interred?"

"Consult your records," Mordecai replied. "Some hours ago, since sunset, they brought the body of a woman here——"

"They have brought many bodies here, Citizen. The chopper has been very busy——"

"This one was not chopped. She was found dead upon the street and hurried here for burial. In a three-year grave——"

"*B'en oui.* One remembers now. I helped the cartman bury her——"

"I want her disinterred."

"*Parbleu,* you are a resurrectionist —an anatomist, perhaps?"

Mordecai drew out his purse and dropped a golden *louis* on the pile of paper money. "You will do it?"

The sexton eyed the money greedily. "For fifteen hundred francs, perhaps——"

"A thousand or nothing."

"*Mille tonnerres,* Citizen, you have no heart! A poor man scarcely has the wherewithal to live these days, and the risk I run is great. However"—as Mordecai prepared to thrust the notes and gold back in his pocket—"one consents. There is nothing else to do. If the citizen must have the body at his price, then he must have it at his price." He shrugged as only Frenchmen can shrug when they wish to indicate complete dissociation from a matter, shuffled to the corner and picked up a rusty spade and pick-ax. "I wait your pleasure, Citizen."

A SORT of eery half-light lay upon the graveyard as they picked their way down what had been a graveled path. Across the clay-stained almost turfless lawn the *fosse* or common trench for executed bodies cut like a saber-slash in dirty flesh. Those whose names should be embalmed in history lay in the muddy ditch: Louis XVI, Charlotte Corday, Louis d'Orleans, Marie Antoinette. Silhouetted stark and ghastly by the torn clouds were the age-stained marble tombs of the wealthy, mostly empty now, for the mob had ransacked them for valuables and thrown their tenants out upon the bone-pile. A little farther off the rough unsodded mounds of ten-year graves were ranged beneath their wooden markers, none of which was cross-shaped, for religious emblems were forbidden for the dead as for the living. Huddled by the wall there showed the graves of the poor dead, five- and three-year concessions.

Graves of the five-year class were scarcely deeper than the coffins they enclosed, but their occupants could lie in them for half a decade. The three-year graves were little more than mounds of sodden earth heaped over coffins laid in two-foot trenches. In thirty-six months they would be leveled and the bodies in them thrown into the cemetery's common charnel-house. It was toward one of these the sexton strode.

"*Grand Dieu!*" he cried as the light from his dark-lantern picked the mound of mud from the surrounding darkness. "Observe him, Citizen!"

Face downward on the grave, arms spread as if he would embrace it, lay a man, and from the cockade in his hat and the tri-colored sash around his waist they recognized him as an agent of Public Security. No need to ask if he were dead or how he died. The wound in his right temple, spilling blood that dyed the red clay deeper

red, and the pistol grasped in his hand with cadaveric rigor told the story.

"*Morbleu, un suicide!*" the intendant murmured. "*Eh bien,* he chose a good place for it."

Unconcernedly as if he moved a bale of merchandise he prized the dead man from the grave-mound with his spade. The candle-lantern shed its gleam into the face of Macrin Henriot.

"*C'est ça,* that is that. Shall we begin, Citizen? Hold the lamp, if you please."

The sexton struck his spade into the grave, tossed back the clinging clay, and dug again. In a few minutes he had laid the coffin bare and with the flat end of his pick began to wrench the lid away.

Mordecai leaned forward, lantern raised. In the coffin lay Susette, rigid as if petrified. Her hands were tightly clenched, nails driven into palms, with little streams of drying blood running from each self-inflicted wound. Her eyes were closed, but on her slightly-parted lips there lay a double line of bloody froth.

"*Sainte Vierge*" — terror drove long-cultivated atheism from the intendant — "Blessèd Mary, pity us! Come, Citizen, and quickly. It is a vampire lying there! Behold the life-like countenance, the opened lips all bloody from the devil's breakfast, the hands all stained with gore!"

His teeth were chattering, but he was no coward. "Stand back, Citizen, and let me deal with it. I will strike it to the foul heart with my pickax, sever its unhallowed head with my spade, and we shall fill the grave again——"

"*Non, non!*" cried Mordecai as the sexton raised his pick to carry out his threat. Bending over the coffin he whispered, "Susette, little sweet Susette, did they do this to thee——" An impulse he could not explain moved him to lay his hand against her cheek. Her flesh was warm.

He thrust the sexton back so violently he landed sitting in a pool of muddy water, where he squatted like an elderly and nervous duck, squawking pleas for Mordecai to "come away all quickly."

But Mordecai did not come. Sinking to his knees beside the grave he laid his hand on Susette's heart. There was no doubt of it. Faint as the fluttering of a fledgling dropped from its nest and almost perished with exposure, but still perceptible, a feeble pulse was beating.

"Here"—he tossed a fistful of *assignats* at the sexton—"close the grave, and keep the mouth closed, also, *mon vieux.*"

Next moment he had bundled Susette in his cloak and started for the graveyard wall.

7. "Until the Morning Comes . . ."

THE alleyway behind the cemetery was lined with mews upon its farther side and almost dark as a tunnel. The sky, cloud-shrouded, pressed down on roofs and chimneys, but where the alley joined a cross-street a feeble patch of luminance coned down from an oil lantern fixed against a house wall. Slogging through the mud and filth that smeared the cobbles, Mordecai saw a cat dart from the shelter of the cemetery wall, pause in mid-step, one foot upraised, then shrink into invisibility against the miry roadway. It had seen something he could not, and with never-failing feline instinct distrusted it. Now from somewhere in the street beyond the turning came a footfall, then another. Flowing through the gloom that waited just outside the circle of the lantern's infirm beams he saw shadows darker than the shadows that

were there before. In an instant light gleamed on bayonets and pike-heads and a sword. It was the *patrouille grise* —the night patrol upon their rounds. The alley was a cul-de-sac, the blank-faced stables were all barred and double-locked, behind him was the eight-foot cemetery wall, and anyone who ran or sought to hide was instantly suspect.

He drew a deep breath, swung Susette down to his side, supporting her with one arm around her waist beneath the cloak, and, staggering, half in simulation, half with the awkwardness of his burden, began to sing:

"La vie est brève,—hic
Un peu d'espoir,
Un peu de rêve,—hic
Et puis—bon soir!"

The hiccup terminating the ditty was a masterpiece of inebriety, and the brigadier commanding the patrol laughed sympathetically. He too enjoyed an evening in the wine shops. To guzzle good red wine and feel the amorous touch of little hands—*parbleu,* that was the man's life, not walking through the stinking alleys searching for aristocrats! *"Hé,* Citizen," he called, "you would best go home and sleep it off, that *débauche. Mon Dieu,* but you are drunk like a pig—lucky one!"

THE streets were gray and empty, like the veins of a corpse from which the blood has been drained slowly; a hard dull-pewter luminance, not light nor yet darkness, permeated the air, and the wind was damp and chilling as the breath from a forced-open tomb as Mordecai turned toward the river.

Here were the wharves, redolent with bilge and brackish water and the strange scents of cargoes from far away. Ships' masts and yard-arms barred the eastern sky like barriers at prison windows. The deserted quays echoed small sounds like an empty auditorium: the scuttering of rats' feet, the grind of oaken sides on piles, the groan of cables in hawse-holes.

Susette stirred and whimpered, like a child affrighted by a dream. He bent his head and kissed her lightly. "Safe, my darling—safe! Rest thou in my arms until the morning comes and shadows flee away. . . ."

The sky was gray as a soiled silver bowl, but morning-light was polishing it to brightness. Dawn was at the city gates, and Paris slept.

A ship's lamp glinted on the blade of a cutlas; the thump of sea-boots sounded on the flagstones as a sentry paced before the gangway of a clipper tied up at the quay. Though he was far away, the hymn-tune that he sang to while away his vigil sounded with an unmistakable New England accent:

"One day of prayer and praise
His sacred courts within,
Is sweeter than ten thousand days
Of pleasurable sin."

"What ship is this?" Panting, staggering, all but spent, Mordecai approached the singing sailor, his precious burden clasped tight in his arms.

"She's th' *Deborah* out o' Boston town — howdy, Master Mordecai! Come aboard, we're waitin' fer ye," answered the seaman; then, with a bellow up the gangway:

"Hey, Cap'n Westhorne; they've arrove!"



"While the wild challenge still echoed on her lips, a ravenous mouth came storming down to silence hers.

Hellsgarde

By C. L. MOORE

A fantastic and blood-curdling story of the treasure in Hellsgarde Castle, and the dead men who stood guard over it—a fascinating tale by the author of "Shambleau"

JIREL of Joiry drew rein at the edge of the hill and sat awhile in silence, looking out and down. So this was Hellsgarde. She had seen it many times in her mind's eye as she saw it now from the high hill in the yellow light of sunset that turned every pool of the marshes to shining glass. The long causeway to the castle stretched out narrowly between swamps and

reeds up to the gate of that grim and eery fortress set alone among the quicksands. This same castle in the marshes, seen at evening from the high hilltop, had haunted her dreams for many nights now.

"You'll find it by sunset only, my lady," Guy of Garlot had told her with a sidelong grin marring his comely dark face. "Mists and wilderness ring it round, and there's magic in the swamps about Hellsgarde. Magic—and worse, if legends speak truth. You'll never come upon it save at evening."

Sitting her horse now on the hilltop, she remembered the grin in his black eyes and cursed him in a whisper. There was such a silence over the whole evening world that by instinct she dared not speak aloud. Dared not? It was no normal silence. Bird-song did not break it, and no leaves rustled. She huddled her shoulders together a little under the tunic of link-mail she wore and prodded her horse forward down the hill.

Guy of Garlot—Guy of Garlot! The hoofbeats thumped out the refrain all the way downhill. Black Guy with his thinly smiling lips and his slanted dark eyes and his unnatural comeliness—unnatural because Guy, within, was ugly as sin itself. It seemed no design of the good God that such sinfulness should wear Guy's dark beauty for a fleshly garment.

The horse hesitated at the head of the causeway which stretched between the marsh pools toward Hellsgarde. Jirel shook the reins impatiently and smiled a one-sided smile downward at his twitching ears.

"I go as loathly as you," she told him. "I go wincing under spurs too, my pretty. But go I must, and you too." And she cursed Guy again in a lingering whisper as the slow hoofbeats reverberated upon the stone arches of the causeway.

Beyond it loomed Hellsgarde, tall and dark against the sunset. All around her lay the yellow light of evening, above her in the sky, below her in the marshy pools beneath which quicksands quivered. She wondered who last had ridden this deserted causeway in the yellow glow of sunset, under what dreadful compulsion.

For no one sought Hellsgarde for pleasure. It was Guy of Garlot's slanting grin that drove Jirel across the marshes this evening—Guy and the knowledge that a score of her best men-at-arms lay shivering tonight in his dripping dungeons with no hope of life save the hope that she might buy their safety. And no riches could tempt Black Guy, not even Jirel's smoothly curving beauty and the promise of her full-lipped smile. And Garlot Castle, high on its rocky mountain peak, was impregnable against even Jirel's masterfully planned attacks. Only one thing could tempt the dark lord of Garlot, and that a thing without a name.

"It lies in Hellsgarde, my lady," he had told her with that hateful smooth civility which his sleek grin so belied. "And it is indeed Hell-guarded. Andred of Hellsgarde died defending it two hundred years ago, and I have coveted it all my life. But I love living, my lady! I would not venture into Hellsgarde for all the wealth in Christendom. If you want your men back alive, bring me the treasure that Andred died to save."

"But what is it, coward?"

Guy had shrugged. "Who knows? Whence it came and what it was no man can say now. You know the tale as well as I, my lady. He carried it in a leather casket locked with an iron key. It must have been small — but very

precious. Precious enough to die for, in the end—as I do not propose to die, my lady! You fetch it to me and buy twenty lives in the bargain."

She had sworn at him for a coward, but in the end she had gone. For after all, she was Joiry. Her men were hers to bully and threaten and command, but they were hers to die for too, if need be. She was afraid, but she remembered her men in Garlot's dungeons with the rack and the boot awaiting them, and she rode on.

THE causeway was so long. Sunset had begun to tarnish a little in the bright pools of the marsh, and she could look up at the castle now without being blinded by the dazzle beyond. A mist had begun to rise in level layers from the water, and the smell of it was not good in her nostrils.

Hellsgarde—Hellsgarde and Andred. She did not want to remember the hideous old story, but she could not keep her mind off it this evening. Andred had been a big, violent man, passionate and wilful and very cruel. Men hated him, but when the tale of his dying spread abroad even his enemies pitied Andred of Hellsgarde.

For the rumor of his treasure had drawn at last besiegers whom he could not overcome. Hellsgarde gate had fallen and the robber nobles who captured the castle searched in vain for the precious casket which Andred guarded. Torture could not loosen his lips, though they tried very terribly to make him speak. He was a powerful man, stubborn and brave. He lived a long while under torment, but he would not betray the hiding-place of his treasure.

They tore him limb from limb at last and cast his dismembered body into the quicksands, and came away empty-handed. No one ever found Andred's treasure.

Since then for two hundred years Hellsgarde had lain empty. It was a dismal place, full of mists and fevers from the marsh, and Andred did not lie easy in the quicksands where his murderers had cast him. Dismembered and scattered broadcast over the marshes, yet he would not lie quiet. He had treasured his mysterious wealth with a love stronger than death itself, and legend said he walked Hellsgarde as jealously in death as in life.

In the two hundred years searchers had gone fearfully to ransack the empty halls of Hellsgarde for that casket—gone, and vanished. There was magic in the marshes, and a man could come upon the castle only by sunset, and after sunset Andred's violent ghost rose out of the quicksands to guard the thing he died for. For generations now no one had been so foolhardy as to venture upon the way Jirel rode tonight.

She was drawing near the gateway. There was a broad platform before it, just beyond the place where Andred's drawbridge had once barred the approach to Hellsgarde. Long ago the gap in the causeway had been filled in with rubble by searchers who would reach the castle on horseback, and Jirel had thought of passing the night upon that platform under the gate arch, so that dawn might find her ready to begin her search.

But—the mists between her and the castle had thickened, and her eyes might be playing her false—but were not those the shapes of men drawn up in a double row before the doorway of Hellsgarde? Hellsgarde, that had stood empty and haunted these two hundred years? Blinking through the dazzle of sun on water and the thick-

ening of the mists, she rode on toward the gateway. She could feel the horse trembling between her knees, and with every step he grew more and more reluctant to go on. She set her teeth and forced him ahead resolutely, swallowing her own terror.

They *were* the figures of men, two rows of them, waiting motionless before the gate. But even through the mist and the sun-dazzle she could see that something was wrong. They were so still—so unearthly still as they faced her. And the horse was shying and trembling until she could scarcely force him forward.

She was quite near before she saw what was wrong, though she knew that at every forward step the obscure frightfulness about these guardsmen grew greater. But she was almost upon them before she realized why. They were all dead.

The captain at their front stood slumped down upon the great spear that propped him on his feet, driven through his throat so that the point stood out above his neck as he sagged there, his head dragging forward until his cheek lay against the shaft which transfixed him.

And so stood all the rest, behind him in a double row, reeling drunkenly upon the spears driven through throat or chest or shoulder to prop them on their feet in the hideous semblance of life.

So the company of dead men kept guard before the gateway of Hellsgarde. It was not unfitting—dead men guarding a dead castle in the barren deadlands of the swamp.

Jirel sat her horse before them for a long moment in silence, feeling the sweat gather on her forehead, clenching her hands on the pommel of the saddle. So far as she knew, no other living person in decades had ridden the long causeway to Hellsgarde; certainly no living man had dwelt in these haunted towers in generations. Yet—here stood the dead men reeling against the spears which had slain them but would not let them fall. Why?—how?—when? . . .

Death was no new thing to Jirel. She had slain too many men herself to fear it. But the ghastly unexpectedness of this dead guard! It was one thing to steel oneself to enter an empty ruin, quite another to face a double row of standing dead men whose blood still ran in dark rivulets, wetly across the stones at their feet. Still wet—they had died today, then. Today while she struggled cursing through the wilderness something had slain them here, something had made a jest of death as it propped them on their dead feet with their dead faces toward the causeway along which she must come riding. Had that something expected her? Could the dead Andred have known——?

She caught herself with a little shudder and shrugged beneath the mail, clenching her fingers on the pommel, swallowing hard. (Remember your men—remember Guy of Garlot—remember that you are Joiry!) The memory of Guy's comely face, bright with mockery, put steel into her and she snapped her chin up with a murmured oath. These men were dead—they could not hinder her. . . .

WAS that motion among the ghastly guard? Her heart leaped to her throat and she gripped the saddle between nervous knees with a reflex action that made the horse shudder. For one of the men in the row before her was slipping silently toward the flagstones. Had the spear-butt slid on the bloody tiles? Had a breeze dislodged

his precarious balance? There was no breeze. But with a curious little sigh from collapsing lungs he folded gently downward to his knees, to his side, to a flattened proneness on the stones. And a dark stream of blood trickled from his mouth to snake across the pavement as he lay there.

Jirel sat frozen. It was a nightmare. Only in nightmares could such things happen. This unbearable silence in the dying sunset, no breeze, no motion, no sound. Not even a ripple upon the mirroring waters lying so widely around her below the causeway, light draining from their surfaces. Sky and water were paling as if all life receded from about her, leaving only Jirel on her trembling horse facing the dead men and the dead castle. She scarcely dared move lest the thump of her mount's feet on the stones dislodge the balance of another man. And she thought she could not bear to see motion again among those motionless ranks. She could not bear it, and yet—and yet if something did not break the spell soon the screams gathering in her throat would burst past her lips and she knew she would never stop screaming.

A harsh scraping sounded beyond the dead guardsmen. Her heart squeezed itself to a stop. And then the blood began to thunder through her veins and her heart leaped and fell and leaped again in a frenzied pounding against the mail of her tunic.

For beyond the men the great door of Hellsgarde was swinging open. She gripped her knees against the saddle until her thighs ached, and her knuckles were bone-white upon the pommel. She made no move toward the great sword at her side. What use is a sword against dead men?

But it was no dead man who looked out under the arch of the doorway, stooped beneath his purple tunic with the heartening glow of firelight from beyond reddening his bowed shoulders. There was something odd about his pale, pinched face upturned to hers across the double line of dead defenders between them. After a moment she recognized what it was—he had the face of a hunchback, but there was no deformity upon his shoulders. He stooped a little as if with weariness, but he carried no hump. Yet it was the face of a cripple if she had ever seen one. His back was straight, but could his soul be? Would the good God have put the sign of deformity upon a human creature without cause? But he was human—he was real. Jirel sighed from the bottom of her lungs.

"Good evening to you, my lady," said the hunchback (but he was not humped) in the flat, ingratiating voice of a cripple.

"*These*—did not find it good," said Jirel shortly, gesturing. And the man grinned.

"My master's jest," he said.

Jirel looked back to the rows of standing dead, her heart quieting a little. Yes, a man might find a grim sort of humor in setting such a guard before his door. If a living man had done it, for an understandable reason, then the terror of the unknown was gone. But the man——

"Your master?" she echoed.

"My lord Alaric of Hellsgarde—you did not know?"

"Know what?" demanded Jirel flatly. She was beginning to dislike the fellow's sidelong unctuousness.

"Why, that my lord's family has taken residence here after many generations away."

"Sir Alaric is of Andred's kin?"

"He is."

Jirel shrugged mentally. It was God's blessing to feel the weight of terror lift from her, but this would complicate matters. She had not known that Andred left descendants, though it might well be so. And if they lived here, then be sure they would already have ransacked the castle from keep to dungeon for that nameless treasure which Andred had died to save and had not yet forsaken, were rumor true. Had they found it? There was only one way to learn that.

"I am nighted in the marshes," she said as courteously as she could manage. "Will your master give me shelter until morning?"

The hunchback's eyes—(but he was no hunchback, she must stop thinking of him so!)—his eyes slid very quickly, yet very comprehensively, from her tanned and red-lipped face downward over the lifting curves of her under the molding chain-mail, over her bare brown knees and slim, steel-greaved legs. There was a deeper unctuousness in his voice as he said:

"My master will make you very welcome, lady. Ride in."

JIREL kicked her horse's flank and guided him, snorting and trembling, through the gap in the ranks of dead men which the falling soldier had left. He was a battle-charger, he was used to dead men; yet he shuddered as he minced through these lines.

The courtyard within was warm with the light of the great fire in its center. Around it a cluster of loutish men in leather jerkins looked up as she passed.

"Wat, Piers—up, men!" snapped the man with the hunchback's face. "Take my lady's horse."

Jirel hesitated a moment before she swung from the saddle, her eyes dubious upon the faces around her. She thought she had never seen such brutish men before, and she wondered at the lord who dared employ them. Her own followers were tough enough, reckless, hard fellows without fear or scruple. But at least they were men. These louts around the fire seemed scarcely more than beasts; let greed or anger stir them and no man alive could control their wildness. She wondered with what threats of punishment the lord Alaric held sway here, what sort of man he must be to draw his guard from the very dregs of humanity.

The two who took her horse stared at her under shaggy beetle-brows. She flashed them a poison glance as she turned to follow the purple cloak of her guide. Her eyes were busy. Hellsgarde had been a strong fortress in Andred's day; under Alaric it was well manned, but she thought she sensed a queer, hovering sullenness in the very air as she followed her guide across the courtyard, down a passageway, under an arch into the great hall.

The shadows of two hundred haunted years hovered under the lofty roof-beams. It was cold here, damp with the breath of the swamps outside, dark with two centuries of ugly legend and the terrible tradition of murder. But Alaric before the fire in his scarlet tunic seemed pleasantly at home. The great blaze roaring up the chimney from six-foot logs drove back the chill and the dark and the damp a little in a semicircle about the fireplace, and in that semicircle a little company of brightly clad people sat silent, watching Jirel and her guide cross the echoing flags of the great hall toward them.

It was a pleasant scene, warm and firelit and bright with color, but even at a distance, something was wrong—something in the posture of the people crouching before the blaze, something

in their faces. Jirel knew a moment of wild wonder if all this were real. Did she really walk a haunted ruin empty two hundred years? Were the people flesh and blood, or only the bright shadows of her own imagination that had so desperately longed for companionship in the haunted marsh?

But no, there was nothing illusive about Alaric in his high-backed chair, his face a pale oval watching her progress. A humped dwarf leaned above his shoulder, fingers suspended over his lute-strings as he stared. On cushions and low benches by the fire a handful of women and girls, two young boys in bright blue, a pair of greyhounds with the firelight scarlet in their eyes—these made up the rest of the company.

Jirel's narrow yellow gaze summed them up as she crossed the hall. Striding smoothly in her thigh-length hauberk, she knew she was a figure on which a man's eyes must linger. Her supple height, the pleasant smooth curves of her under mail, the long, shapely legs bare beneath the linked metal of her hauberk, the swinging of the long sword whose weight upon its belt pulled in her waist to tigerish slimness—Alaric's eyes missed nothing of all these. Deliberately she tossed the dark cloak back over her shoulders, letting the firelight take the sleek mailed curves of her in a bright glimmer, flash from the shining greaves that clasped her calves. It was not her way to postpone the inevitable. Let Alaric learn in his first long stare how splendid a creature was Joiry's lady. And as for those women at his feet—well, let them know too.

She swaggered to a halt before Alaric, resting a hand on her sword-hilt, tossing back the cloak that had swirled about her as she swung to a stop. His face, half in the shadow of the chair, tilted up to her leanly. Here was no burly brute of a man such as she had half expected on the evidence of the men-at-arms he kept. He was of middle years, his face deeply grooved with living, his nose a hawk-beak, his mouth a sword-gash.

And there was something oddly wrong with his features, a queer cast upon them that made him seem akin to the purple-clad courtier hovering at Jirel's elbow, to the grinning jester who peered across the chair-back. With a little twist of the heart she saw what it was. There was no physical likeness between master and men in any feature, but the shadow of deformity lay upon all three faces, though only the hunchback wore it honestly. Looking at those faces, one would have sworn that each of the trio went limping through life under the burden of a crooked spine. Perhaps, Jirel thought involuntarily, with a small shudder, the master and the courtier as well as the fool did indeed carry a burden, and if they did she thought she would prefer the jester's to theirs. His at least was honest and of the flesh. But theirs must be of the spirit, for surely, she thought again, God in his wisdom does not for nothing mark a whole and healthy man with a cripple's face. It was a deformity of the soul that looked out of the eyes meeting hers.

And because the thought frightened her she swung her shoulders until the cape swirled wide, and flashed her white teeth in a smile more boldly reckless than the girl behind it felt.

"You must not crave the company of strangers, sir—you keep a discouraging guard before your gate!"

Alaric did not smile. "Honest travelers are welcome here," he said very smoothly. "But the next robbers who ride our causeway will think twice be-

fore they storm the gates. We have no gallows here where thieves may swing in chains, but I think the guard before my castle will be warning enough to the next raiders who come."

"A grisly sort of warning," said Jirel. And then, with belated courtesy, "I am Jirel of Joiry. I missed my way in the marsh tonight—I shall be grateful for your hospitality."

"And we for your presence, Lady Jirel."

Alaric's voice was oily, but his eyes raked her openly. She felt other eyes upon her back too, and her red hair stiffened a little at the roots with a prickling uneasiness. "We keep a small court here at Hellsgarde," went on Alaric's voice. "Damara, Ettard, Isoud, Morgaine—all of you, make our guest welcome!"

JIREL swung round with a swirl of her long cloak to face the women, wondering at the subtle slight to their dignity, for Alaric made no effort to introduce them separately.

She thought they crouched a little on their low seats by the fire, looking up with the queer effect of women peering fearfully from under lowered brows, though she could not have said why they seemed so, for they met her eyes squarely. And upon these faces too lay that strange shadow of deformity, not so definitely as upon the men's, but visible in the firelight. All of them were thin creatures with big eyes showing a rather shocking space of whiteness around the staring irises. Their cheekbones were sharp in the firelight, so that shadows stood hollowly beneath.

The woman who had risen when Alaric said "Damara" was as tall as Jirel, strongly made under her close green gown, but her face too had that queerly hollow look and her eyes stared too whitely under wide-open lids. She said in a tight voice:

"Sit down by the fire and warm yourself, lady. We dine in a few minutes."

Jirel sank to the low cushioned stool she dragged forward, one leg doubled under her for instant rising, her sword-hilt and sword-hand free. There was something wrong here. She could feel it in the air.

The two dogs growled a little and shifted away from her on the floor, and even that was—wrong. Dogs had fawned on her always—until now. And the firelight was so red in their eyes....

Looking away uneasily from those unnaturally red eyes, she saw the boys' features clearly for the first time, and her heart contracted a little. For naked evil was upon these two young faces. The others wore their shadow of deformity elusively, a thing more sensed than seen. It might be only a trick of her legend-fed imagination that put evil there. But the two young lads had the faces of devils, long faces with high cheekbones and slitted, lusterless eyes. Jirel shuddered a little inwardly. What sort of company had she stumbled into, where the very children and dogs wore evil like a garment?

She drew a deep breath and glanced around the circle of still faces that watched her wordlessly, with an intentness like that of—of beasts of prey? Her pride rebelled at that. Joiry was ever the predator, not the prey! She squared her cleft chin and said with determined casualness:

"You have dwelt here long?"

She could have sworn a look went round the semicircle before the fire, a swift, amused glance from face to face as if they shared a secret. Yet not an eye wavered from hers. Only the two boys leaned together a little, and the look of evil brightened upon their

wicked young faces. Alaric answered after the briefest possible pause:

"Not long. Nor will we stay long—now." There was a subtle menace in it, though Jirel could not have said why. And again that feeling of knowledge shared ran like a strong current around the circle, a little quiver as if a dreadful amusement were almost stirring in the air. But not a face changed or turned. The eyes were still eager—almost avid—upon the bright, strong face of Jirel with the firelight warming her golden tan and touching her red curls to flame and trembling upon the soft curve of her under-lip. For all the bright clothes of the company around her, she had the sudden feeling that dark robes and dark eyes and dark faces hemmed her in—like shadows around a fire.

The conversation had come to a full stop; the eyes never wavered from her. She could not fathom this strange interest, for it was queer Alaric had not asked anything at all about her coming. A woman alone in this wilderness at night was sufficiently unusual to arouse interest, yet no one seemed concerned to ask how she had come there. Why, then, this concerted and deep interest in the sight of her?

To conquer the little tremor she could not quite ignore she said boldly:

"Hellsgarde of the Marshes has an ugly reputation, my lord. I wonder you dare dwell here—or do you know the old tale?"

Unmistakably this time that quiver of amusement flashed around the circle, though not an eye left hers. Alaric's voice was dry as he answered:

"Yes—yes, we know the tale. We are—not afraid."

And suddenly Jirel was quite sure of a strange thing. Something in his voice and his words told her very surely that they had not come in spite of the terrible old legend, but *because of it.*

No normal people would deliberately seek out a haunted and blood-stained ruin for a dwelling-place, yet there could be no mistaking the implication in Alaric's voice, in the unspoken mirth at her words that ran like a whisper around the circle. She remembered those dead men at the door. What normal person could make a joke so grisly? No, no—this company was as definitely abnormal as a company of dwarfs or monsters. One could not sit with them long even in silence without sensing that. The look of abnormality upon their faces did not lie—it was a sure sign of a deformity of the soul.

THE conversation had stopped again. To break the nerve-racking silence Jirel said:

"We hear many strange tales of Hellsgarde"—and knew she was talking too much, but could not stop—anything was better than that staring silence—"tales of treasure and—and—is it true that one can come upon Hellsgarde Castle only in the sunset—as I did?"

Alaric paused deliberately for a moment before he answered with as deliberate evasiveness, "There are stranger tales than that of Hellsgarde—and who can say how much of truth is in them? Treasure? There may well be treasure here. Many have come seeking it—and remained, for ever."

Jirel remembered the dead men at the door, and she shot Alaric a yellow glare that would have clanged like the meeting of blades with his stare—had he met it. He was looking up into the shadows of the ceiling, and he was smiling a little. Did he suspect her errand? He had asked no questions. . . .

Jirel remembered Guy of Garlot's smile as he sent her on this quest, and a murderous wonder began to take shape in her mind. If Guy had known—if he had deliberately sent her into this peril—she let herself sink for a moment into a luxury of picturing that comely smile smashed in by the handle of her sword. . . .

They were watching her. She came back with a jerk and said at random:

"How cold the marshes are after sunset!" And she shivered a little, not until that moment realizing the chill of the great hall.

"We find it—pleasant," murmured Alaric, watching her.

The others were watching too, and again she sensed that ripple of subtle amusement running around the circle that closed her out of a secret shared. They were here for a purpose. She knew it suddenly: a strange, unfathomable purpose that bound them together with almost one mind, so that thoughts seemed to flow soundlessly from brain to brain; a purpose that included her now, and in no pleasant way. Danger was in the air, and she alone here by night in the deserted marshes, among these queer, abnormal people who watched her with an avid and unwavering eagerness. Well, she had been in peril before, and hewed her way out again.

A slovenly wench in a ragged smock tiptoed clumsily out of the shadows to murmur in Damara's ear, and Jirel felt with conscious relief the removal of at least one pair of staring eyes as the woman turned to nod. Jirel's gaze was scornful on the girl. A queer household they kept here—the bestial retainers, the sluttish wench in her soiled gown.

Not even Joiry's kitchen maids went so slovenly clad.

Damara turned back to the fire. "Shall we dine now?" she asked.

Every face around the fire brightened magically, and Jirel was conscious of a little loosening of the tension in her own mind. The very fact that the thought of food pleased them made the whole group seem more normal. And yet—she saw it in a moment—this was not even a normal eagerness. There was something a little horrid about the gleam in every eye, the avid hunger on every face. For a little while the thought of food supplanted herself in their interest, and that terrible battery of watchfulness forsook her. It was like an actual weight lifted. She breathed deeper.

Frowsy kitchen scullions and a pair of unwashed girls were carrying in the planks and trestles for the table, setting it up by the fire.

"We dine alone," Alaric was explaining as the group around the fire reshifted itself to make way. It seemed a witless sort of fastidiousness to Jirel, particularly since they let themselves be served by such shamefully unkempt lackeys. Other households dined all together, from lord to stable hands, at the long T-shaped tables where the salt divided noblesse from peasantry. But perhaps Alaric dared not allow those beast-wild men of his even that familiarity. And she was conscious of a tiny disappointment that the company of these staring, strange-faced people was not to be leavened even by the brutish earthiness of their retainers. The men-at-arms seemed scarcely human, but at least it was a normal, open sort of brutality, something she could understand.

When the table was ready Alaric seated her at his right hand, beside the two evil-faced youngsters who sat preternaturally quiet. Young lads of that

age were scufflers and squirmers at table in the company she knew. It was another count of eeriness against them that they scarcely moved save to reach for food.

Who were they? she wondered. Alaric's sons? Pages or squires from some noble family? She glanced around the table in deepening bewilderment, looking for signs of kinship on the shadowed faces, finding nothing but that twist of deformity to link the company together. Alaric had made no attempt to introduce any of them, and she could not guess what relationship bound them all together in this close, unspoken communion. She met the eyes of the dwarf at Alaric's elbow and looked quickly away again, angry at his little comprehending grin. He had been watching her.

There was no conversation after the meat was brought in. The whole company fell upon it with such a starved eagerness that one might think they had not dined in weeks before now. And not even their food tasted right or normal.

It looked well enough, but there was a subtle seasoning about it that made Jirel gag and lay down her knife after the first taste—a flavor almost of decay, and a sort of burning bitterness she could not put a name to, that lingered on the tongue long after the food itself was swallowed. Everything stank of it, the roast, the bread, the few vegetables, even the bitter wine.

After a brave effort, for she was hungry, Jirel gave up and made not even the pretense of eating. She sat with her arms folded on the table edge, right hand hanging near her sword, watching the ravenous company devour their tainted food. It was no wonder, she realized suddenly, that they ate alone. Surely not even the dull palates of their retainers could accept this revoltingly seasoned meat.

Alaric sat back at last in his high-backed chair, wiping his dagger on a morsel of bread.

"You do not hunger, Lady Jirel?" he asked, tilting a brow at her still-heaped trencher. She could not help her little grimace as she glanced down.

"Not now," she said, with wry humor.

Alaric did not smile. He leaned forward to pick up upon his dagger the thick slab of roast before her, and tossed it to the hearth. The two greyhounds streaked from beneath the table to growl over it hungrily, and Alaric glanced obliquely at Jirel, with a hint of a one-sided smile, as he wiped the knife again and sheathed it.

If he meant her to understand that the dogs were included in this queer closed circle of his, she caught it. Obviously there had been a message in that act and smile.

WHEN the table had been cleared away and the last glimmer of sunset had faded from the high, narrow slits of the windows, a sullen fellow in frieze went around the hall with a long pole-torch, lighting the cressets.

"Have you visited Hellsgarde before, my lady?" inquired Alaric. And as Jirel shook her head, "Let me show you the hall then, and my forefathers' arms and shields. Who knows?—you may find quarterings of your own among our escutcheons."

Jirel shuddered at the thought of discovering even a remote kinship with Hellsgarde's dwellers, but she laid her hand reluctantly on the arm he offered and let him lead her away from the fire out under the echoing vaults of the hall where cressets brought the shadows to life.

The hall was as Andred's murderers must have left it two centuries ago. What shields and armor had not fallen from the walls were thick with rust in the damp air of the marshes, and the tatters of pennons and tapestries had long ago taken on a uniform color of decay. But Alaric seemed to savor the damp and the desolation as a normal man might savor luxury. Slowly he led her around the hall, and she could feel the eyes of the company, who had resumed their seats by the fire, follow her all the way with one unwinking stare.

The dwarf had taken up his lute again and struck occasional chords in the echoing silence of the hall, but except for that there was no sound but the fall of their feet on the rushless flagstones and the murmur of Alaric's voice pointing out the vanished glories of Hellsgarde Castle.

They paused at the side of the big room farthest from the fire, and Alaric said in an unctuous voice, his eyes seeking Jirel's with curious insistence:

"Here on this spot where we stand, lady, died Andred of Hellsgarde two hundred years ago."

Jirel looked down involuntarily. Her feet were planted on the great blotch of a spreading stain that had the rough outline of a beast with questing head and paws outsprawled. It was a broad stain, black and splattered upon the stone. Andred must have been a big man. He had bled terribly on that day two centuries past.

Jirel felt her host's eyes on her face full of a queer anticipation, and she caught her breath a little to speak, but before she could utter a sound, quite suddenly there was a riot of wind all about them, shrieking out of nowhere in a whirlwind gust that came ravening with such fury that the cressets went out all together in one breath and darkness like a blow fell upon the hall.

In the instant of that blackness, while the whole great hall was black and vocal and bewildering with storm-wind, as if he had been waiting avidly for this moment all evening a man's arm seized Jirel in a grip like death and a mouth came down upon hers in a more savagely violent, wetly intimate kiss than she had ever known before. It all burst upon her so quickly that her impressions confused and ran together into one gust of terrible anger against Alaric as she struggled helplessly against that iron arm and ravenous mouth, while the storm wind shrieked in the darkness. She was conscious of nothing but the arm, the mouth, the insolent hand. She was not pressed against a man's body, but the strength of the arm was like steel about her.

And in the same moment of the seizure the arm was dragging her violently across the floor with irresistible force, never slackening its crushing grip, the kiss in all its revolting intimacy still ravaging her muted mouth. It was as if the kiss, the crush of the arm, the violence of the hand, the howl of the wind and the drag across the room were all but manifestations of a single vortex of violence.

It could not have lasted more than seconds. She had an impression of big, square, wide-spaced teeth against her lips and the queer violence behind them manifest not primarily in the savageness of the kiss or the embrace, or the wild drag across the room, but more as if all these were mere incidents to a burning vehemence behind them that beat like heat all around her.

Choking with impotent fury, she tried to struggle, tried to scream. But there was no chest to push for leverage and no body to arch away from, and

she could not resist. She could only make dumb animal sounds in her throat, sealed in behind the storming violation of that mouth.

She had scarcely time to think, it happened so quickly. She was too stunned by the violence and suddenness of the attack even to wonder at the absence of anything but the mouth, the arm, the hand. But she did have the distinct impression of walls closing in around her, as if she were being dragged out of the great open hall into a narrow closet. It was somehow as if that violence beating all about her were confined and made more violent by the presence of close walls very near.

It was all over so quickly that even as that feeling of closing walls dawned upon her she heard the little amazed cries of the others as the cressets were blown out all together. It was as if time had moved faster for her than for them. In another instant someone must have thrown brush on the fire, for the great blaze in the cavern of the chimney roared up with a gush of light and sound, for a moment beating back the darkness in the hall.

And Jirel was staggering alone in the center of the big room. No one was near her, though she could have sworn upon the cross-hilt of her sword that a split second before the heavy mouth had crushed her muted lips. It was gone now as if it had never been. Walls did not enclose her; there was no wind, there was no sound in the great hall.

Alaric stood over the black blotch of Andred's blood at the other side of the hall. She thought she must have known subconsciously after the first moment that it was not he whose lips ravaged her bruised mouth. That flaming vehemence was not in him. No, though he had been the only man near her when the dark closed down, he was not the man whose outrageous kiss still throbbed on her mouth.

She lifted an unsteady hand to those bruised lips and stared around her wildly, gasping for lost breath, half sobbing with fury.

The others were still around the fire, half the width of the room away. And as the light from the replenished blaze leaped up, she saw the blankness of their momentary surprise vanish before one leaping flame of avid hope that for an instant lit every face alike. With long running strides Alaric reached her side. In her dazed confusion she felt his hands on her arms shaking her eagerly, heard him gabbling in a tongue she did not know:

"G'hasta-est? Tai g'hasta? Tai g'hasta?"

Angrily she shook him off as the others closed round her in an eagerly excited group, babbling all together, *"G'hasta tai? Est g'hasta?"*

Alaric recovered his poise first. In a voice shaking with the first emotion she had heard from him he demanded with almost desperate eagerness.

"What was it? What happened? Was it—was it——?" But he seemed scarcely to dare name the thing his whole soul longed for, though the tremble of hope was in his voice.

Jirel caught herself on the verge of answering. Deliberately she paused to fight down the dizzy weakness that still swam in her brain, drooping her lids to hide the calculation that came up like a flame behind her yellow eyes. For the first time she had a leverage over these mysterious people. She knew something they frantically desired to know, and she must make full use of the knowledge she scarcely knew she had.

"H-happened?" The stammer was not entirely feigned. "There was a—a wind, and darkness—I don't know—it was all over so quickly." And she glanced up into the gloom with not wholly assumed terror. Whatever that thing had been — it was no human agency. She could have sworn that the instant before the light flared up, walls were closing around her as tightly as a tomb's walls; yet they had vanished more lightly than mist in the glow of the fire. But that mouth upon hers, those big, squarely spaced teeth against her lips, the crush of the brutal arm—nothing could have been more tangible. Yet there had been only the arm, the mouth, the hand. No body. . . . With a sudden shudder that made the goose-flesh ripple along her limbs she remembered that Andred had been dismembered before they flung him into the quicksands. . . . Andred. . . .

She did not know she had said it aloud, but Alaric pounced like a cat on the one word that left her lips.

"Andred? Was it Andred?"

Jirel recovered herself with a real effort, clenching her teeth to stop their chattering.

"Andred? He died two hundred years ago!"

"He will never die until——" One of the young boys with the evil faces said that much before Alaric whirled on him angrily, yet with curious deference.

"Silence! Wait! . . . Lady Jirel, you asked me if the legends of Hellsgarde are true. Now I tell you that the tale of Andred is. We believe he still walks the halls where his treasure lies hid, and we—we——" He hesitated, and Jirel saw a strange look of calculation dawn upon his face. He went on smoothly, "We believe there is but one way to find that treasure. Only the ghost of Andred can lead us there. And Andred's ghost has been—elusive, until now."

She could have sworn that he had not meant to say just that when he began to speak. She was surer of it when she saw the little flicker of communication ripple around the circle of faces closing her in. Amusement at a subtle jest in which she did not share . . . it was on every face around her, the hollow-cheeked women's white-rimmed, staring eyes brightened, the men's faces twitched a little with concealed mirth. Suddenly she felt smothered by abnormality and mystery and that subtle, perilous amusement without reason.

She was more shaken by her terrifying experience than she would have cared to admit. She had little need to feign weakness as she turned away from them toward the fire, eager to escape their terrible company even though it meant solitude in this haunted dark. She said:

"Let me—rest by the fire. Perhaps it—it—he won't return."

"But he must return!" She thought that nearly every voice around her spoke simultaneously, and eager agreement was bright upon every face. Even the two dogs had thrust themselves forward among the legs of the little crowd around Jirel, and their shadowed eyes, still faintly aglow as if with borrowed firelight, followed the conversation from face to face as if they too understood. Their gaze turned redly up to Alaric now as he said:

"For many nights we have waited in vain for the force that was Andred to make itself known to us. Not until you come does he create that vortex which—which is necessary if we are to find the treasure." Again, at that word, Jirel thought she felt a little current of amusement ripple from listener to lis-

tener. Alaric went on in his smooth voice, "We are fortunate to find one who has the gift of summoning Andred's spirit to Hellsgarde. I think there must be in you a kindred fierceness which Andred senses and seeks. We must call him out of the dark again —and we must use your power to do it."

Jirel stared around her incredulously. "You would call—*that*—up again?"

Eyes gleamed at her with a glow that was not of the firelight. "We would indeed," murmured the evil-faced boy at her elbow. "And we will not wait much longer. . . ."

"But—God's Mercy!" said Jirel, "—are all the legends wrong? They say Andred's spirit swoops down with sudden death on all who trespass in Hellsgarde. Why do you talk as if only I could evoke it? Do you want to die so terribly? I do not! I won't endure *that* again if you kill me for it. I'll have no more of Andred's kisses!"

THERE was a pulse of silence around the circle for a moment. Eyes met and looked away again. Then Alaric said:

"Andred resents only outsiders in Hellsgarde, not his own kinsmen and their retainers. Moreover, those legends you speak of are old ones, telling tales of long-ago trespassers in this castle.

"With the passage of years the spirits of the violent dead draw farther and farther away from their death-scenes. Andred is long dead, and he revisits Hellsgarde Castle less often and less vindictively as the years go by. We have striven a long while to draw him back—but you alone succeeded. No, lady, you must endure Andred's violence once again, or——"

"Or what?" demanded Jirel coldly, dropping her hand to her sword.

"There is no alternative." Alaric's voice was inflexible. "We are many to your one. We will hold you here until Andred comes again."

Jirel laughed. "You think Joiry's men will let her vanish without a trace? You'll have such a storming about Hellsgarde walls as——"

"I think not, lady. What soldiers will dare follow when a braver one than any of them was vanished in Hellsgarde? No, Joiry, your men will not seek you here. You——"

Jirel's sword flamed in the firelight as she sprang backward, dragging it clear. The blade flashed once—and then arms like iron pinioned her from behind. For a dreadful moment she thought they were Andred's, and her heart turned over. But Alaric smiled, and she knew. It was the dwarf who had slipped behind her at an unspoken message from his master, and if his back was weak his arms were not. He had a bear's grip upon her and she could not wrench herself free.

Struggling, sobbing curses, kicking hard with her steel-spurred heels, she could not break his hold. There was a murmurous babble all around her of that strange, haunting tongue again, *"L'vraista! Tai g'hasta vrai! El vraist' tai lau!"* And the two devil-faced boys dived for her ankles. They clung like ghoulishly grinning apes, pinning her feet to the floor. And Alaric stepped forward to wrench the sword from her hand. He murmured something in their queer speech, and the crowd scattered purposefully.

Fighting hard, Jirel was scarcely aware of their intention before it was accomplished. But she heard the sudden splash of water on blazing logs and the tremendous hissing of steam as the

fire went out and darkness fell like a blanket upon the shadowy hall. The crowd had melted away from her into the dark, and now the grip on her ankles suddenly ceased and the great arms that held her so hard heaved in a mighty swing.

Choking with fury, she reeled into the darkness. There was nothing to stop her, and those mighty arms had thrown her hard. She fell and slid helplessly across bare flagstones in black dark, her greaves and empty scabbard clanging upon stone. When she came to a halt, bruised and scratched and breathless, it was a moment before she could collect her senses enough to scramble up, too stunned even for curses.

"Stay where you are, Jirel of Joiry," Alaric's voice said calmly out of the blackness. "You cannot escape this hall—we guard every exit with drawn swords. Stand still—and wait."

Jirel got her breath and launched into a blasphemous survey of his ancestry and possible progeny with such vehemence that the dark for several minutes throbbed with her fury. Then she recalled Alaric's suggestion that violence in herself might attract a kindred violence in that strange force called Andred, and she ceased so abruptly that the silence was like a blow upon the ears.

It was a silence full of tense waiting. She could almost feel the patience and the anticipation that beat out upon her from the circle of invisible jailers, and at the thought of what they waited her blood ran chilly. She looked up blindly into the darkness overhead, certain for a long and dreadful moment that the familiar blast of storm-wind was gathering there to churn the night into chaos out of which Andred's arm would reach. . . .

After a while she said in a voice that sounded unexpectedly small in the darkness:

"Y-you might throw me a pillow. I'm tired of standing and this floor's cold."

To her surprise footsteps moved softly and quite surely across stone, and after a moment a pillow hurtled out of the darkness to thump softly at her feet. Jirel sank upon it thankfully, only to stiffen an instant later and glare about her in the dark, the hair prickling on her neck. So—they could see in the darkness! There had been too much certainty in those footsteps and the accurate toss of the pillow to doubt it. She huddled her shoulders together a little and tried not to think.

The darkness was enormous above her. Age upon age went by, with no sound except her own soft breathing to break that quiet pulsing with waiting and anticipation. Her terror grew. Suppose that dreadful storm-wind should come whooping through the hall again; suppose the bodiless arm should seize her and the mouth come ravening down upon her lips once more. . . . Coldness crept down her spine.

Yes, and suppose it did come again. What use, for her? These slinking abnormalities who were her jailers would never share the treasure with her which they were so avid to find—so avid that they dared evoke this terror by night and brave a death which legend whispered fearfully of, simply that they might possess it. *It*—did they know, then, what lay in Andred's terribly guarded box? What conceivable thing could be so precious that men would dare *this* to have it?

And what hope at all for her? If the monstrous thing called Andred did not come tonight — then he would come again some other night, sooner or later, and all nights would find her isolated

here as bait for the monster that haunted Hellsgarde. She had boasted without hope when she said her men would follow. They were brave men and they loved her—but they loved living more. No, there was not a man in Joiry who would dare follow where she had failed. She remembered Guy of Garlot's face, and let violence come flooding up in her for a moment. That handsome coward, goading her into this that he might possess the nameless thing he coveted. . . . Well, she would ruin his comely face for him with the cross-hilt of her sword—if she lived. If she lived! She was forgetting. . . .

SLOWLY the stars wheeled by the arrow-slit windows high up in the darkness of the walls. Jirel sat hugging her knees and watching them. The darkness sighed above her with vagrant drafts, any one of which might be Andred roaring down out of the night. . . .

Well, her captors had made one mistake. How much it might avail her she did not know, but they thought they had disarmed her, and Jirel hugged her greave-sheathed legs in the darkness and smiled a wicked smile, knowing they had not.

It must have been after midnight, and Jirel dozing uneasily with her head on her knees, when a long sigh from the darkness made her start awake. Alaric's voice, heavy with weariness and disappointment, spoke in his nameless language. It occurred to Jirel to wonder briefly that though this seemed to be their mother tongue (for they spoke it under stress and among themselves), yet their speech with her had no taint of accent. It was strange—but she was beyond wondering long about the monstrous folk among whom she had fallen.

Footsteps approached her, walking unerringly. Jirel shook herself awake and stood up, stretching cramped limbs. Hands seized her arms from both sides—at the first grasp, with no groping, though even her dark-accustomed eyes could see nothing. No one bothered to translate Alaric's speech to her, but she realized that they had given up their vigil for the night. She was too drugged with sleep to care. Even her terror had dulled as the endless night hours dragged by. She stumbled along between her captors, making no effort to resist. This was not the time to betray her hidden weapon, not to these people who walked the dark like cats. She would wait until the odds were evener.

No one troubled to strike a light. They went swiftly and unhesitatingly through the blackness, and when stairs rose unexpectedly underfoot Jirel was the only one who stumbled. Up steps, along a cold and echoing hall—and then a sudden thrust that sent her staggering. A stone wall caught her and a door slammed at her back. She whirled, a hot Norman oath smoking on her lips, and knew that she was alone.

Groping, she made out the narrow confines of her prison. There was a cot, a jug of water, a rough door through whose chinks light began to glimmer even as she ran questing hands across its surface. Voices spoke briefly outside, and in a moment she understood. Alaric had summoned one of his apish men to watch her while he and his people slept. She knew it must be a man-at-arms and not one of Alaric's company, for the fellow had brought a lantern with him. She wondered if the guardsmen knew how unerringly their masters walked the darkness—or if they cared. But it no longer seemed strange to her that Alaric dared employ such brutish men. She knew well

enough now with what ease he could control them—he and his night-sight and his terrible fearlessness.

Silence fell outside. Jirel smiled a thin smile and leaned into the nearest corner, drawing up one knee. The long, thin-bladed knife she carried between greave and leg slid noiselessly from its sheath. She waited with feline patience, her eyes upon the lighted chinks between the door's planks.

It seemed a long while before the guard ceased his muffled pacing, yawned loudly, tested the bar that fastened the door from without. Jirel's thin smile widened. The man grunted and—she had prayed he would—settled down at last on the floor with his back against the panels of her door. She knew he meant to sleep awhile in the certainty that the door could not be opened without waking him. She had caught her own guards at that trick too often not to expect it now.

Still she waited. Presently the even breath of slumber reached her ears, and she licked her lips and murmured, "Gentle Jesu, let him not wear mail!" and leaned to the door. Her knife was thin enough to slide easily between the panels. . . . He was not wearing mail—and the blade was razor-keen. He must scarcely have felt it, or known when he died. She felt the knife grate against bone and gave it an expert twist to clear the rib it had grazed, and heard the man give a sudden, startled grunt in his sleep, and then a long sigh. . . . He must never have awakened. In a moment blood began to gush through the panels of the door in heavy spurts, and Jirel smiled pleasantly and withdrew her knife.

It was simple enough to lift the bar with that narrow blade. The difficulty was in opening the door against the dead weight of the man outside, but she accomplished that too, without too much noise—and then the lantern sat waiting for her and the hall was long and empty in the half-dark. She could see the arch of the stairway and knew the way she had come. And she did not hesitate on the way down. She had thought it all out carefully in the darkness of the hall downstairs while she crouched on the cushion and waited for Andred's ravenous storm-blast to come shrieking down above her bent shoulders.

There was no way out. She knew that. Other castles had posterns and windows from which a fugitive might escape, but quicksands surrounded Hellsgarde and the only path to freedom lay along the causeway where Alaric's guard would be watching tonight. And only in romances does a lone adventurer escape through a guarded courtyard and a guarded gate.

And too—she had come here for a purpose. It was her duty to find that small treasured box which alone would buy the twenty lives depending on her. She would do that, or die. And perhaps, after all, it was fortunate that the castle had not been empty when she came. Without Alaric, it might never have occurred to her to dare the power of Andred's ghost in order to reach her goal. She realized now that it might well be the only way she would ever succeed. Too many searchers in the past had ransacked Hellsgarde Castle to leave her much hope unless great luck attended her. But Alaric had said it: there was a way—a terrible and deadly perilous way, but the only hope.

And after all, what chance did she have? To sit supinely waiting, a helpless decoy, until the night when Andred's power swooped down to claim her again—or to seek him out deliberately and challenge him to the duel.

The end would be the same—she must suffer his presence again, either way. But tonight there was a bare chance for her to escape with the treasure-casket, or at least to find it alone and if she lived to hide it and bargain with Alaric for freedom.

It was a forlorn and futile hope, she knew well. But it was not in her to sit waiting for death, and this way there was at least a bare hope for success. She gripped her bloody knife in one hand and her lantern in the other and went on down the stairs, cat-footed and quick.

HER little circle of light moving with her across the cold flags was so tenuous a defense against the dark. One gust of Andred's storm-wind would puff it out and the darkness would smash in upon her like a blow. And there were other ghosts here than Andred's—small, cold things in the dark just beyond her lantern light. She could feel their presence as she picked her way across the great hall, past the quenched logs of the fireplace, past the crumbling ruins of armor and tapestry, toward the one spot where she thought she might be surest of summoning up the dreadful thing she sought.

It was not easy to find. She ranged back and forth for many minutes with her little circle of light before a corner of that great black splotch she hunted moved into the light; beast-shaped, dark as murder itself upon the flagstones Andred's life-blood spilled two hundred years ago.

Here once before that ravening ghost had taken her; here if anywhere, surely he would come again. She had her underlip firmly between her teeth as she stepped upon that stain, and she was holding her breath without realizing it. She must have stood there for a full minute, feeling the goose-flesh shudder along her limbs, before she could nerve herself for the thing she must do next. But she had come too far to fail herself now. She drew a deep breath and blew out the lifted lantern.

Darkness crashed upon her with the impact of a physical blow, almost squeezing the breath from her body. And now suddenly fright was past and the familiar winy exultation of tension before battle rushed along her limbs and she looked up into the darkness defiantly and shouted to the great vaults of the ceiling, "Come out of Hell, dead Andred! Come if you dare, Andred the Damned!"

Wind—wind and storm and violence! It snatched the words from her lips and the breath from her throat in one tremendous whirling gust that came rushing out of nowhere. And in the instant of its coming, while the wild challenge still echoed on her lips, a ravenous mouth came storming down to silence hers and a great arm smacked down around her shoulders in a blow that sent her reeling as iron fingers dug agonizingly into her arm—a blow that sent her reeling but would not let her fall, for that terrible drag again was sweeping her across the floor with a speed that ran faster than time itself.

She had ducked her head instinctively when she felt the arm seize her, but not soon enough. The heavy mouth had hers, and again the square, wide-set teeth were bruising her lips and the violence of the monstrous kiss made fury bubble up in her sealed throat as she fought in vain against it.

This time the thing was not such a stunning surprise, and she could sense more clearly what was happening to her. As before, the whole violent fury of the attack burst upon her at once—the mouth seized hers and the arm

swept her almost off her feet in the same instant, and in that instant the unslacking grip around her shoulders rushed her across the dark floor, blinded in the blackness, deafened by the raving wind, muted and dazed by the terrible vehemence of the mouth and the pain of her iron-clawed arm. But she could sense dimly again that walls were closing around her, closer and closer, like a tomb's walls. And as before she was aware of a tremendous force beating about her, a greater violence than any one manifestation of it upon her body; for the mouth, the gripping hand, the arm, the sweeping drag itself were all but parts of that vortex.

And it was indeed a vortex—it was somehow spinning and narrowing as if the whole force that was Andred were concentrating into one tornado-whirl of savage power. Perhaps it was that feeling of narrowing and vortexing rotation which made walls seem to draw close about her. It was all too dimly sensed a thing to put clearly into words, and yet it was terribly real. Jirel, breathless and bruised and stunned with pain and violence, still knew clearly that here in the midst of the great open hall walls were drawing prison-tight about her.

Savagely she slashed at the arm around her shoulders, at the steel-fingered hand digging her arm to the bone. But the angle was an awkward one and she was too dazed to know if she cut flesh or simply stabbed at disembodied force. And the grip did not slacken; the storming mouth still held hers in a kiss so wild and infuriating that she could have sobbed with pure rage.

Those walls were very near . . . her stumbling knees touched stone. She groped dizzily with her free hand and felt walls dripping-damp, close around her. The forward motion had ceased, and the power which was Andred whirled in one concentrated cone of violence that stopped her breath and sent the darkness reeling around her.

Through the haze of her confusion she knew that this, then, must be his own place to which he had dragged her, a place of stone and damp and darkness somewhere *outside*—for they had reached it too quickly for it to be a real place—and yet it was tangible. . . . Stone walls cold against her hands, and what were these round and slipping things underfoot?—things that rattled a little as she stumbled among them—bones? Dear God, the bones of other seekers after treasure, who had found what they sought? For she thought the treasure-box must be here, surely, if it were anywhere at all—here in this darkness unreachable save through the very heart of the whirlwind. . . .

HER senses were failing and the whirl that was like the whirl in a tornado's heart seemed to create a vacuum which drew her out of her body in one thin, protesting wisp of self that had no strength to fight. . . .

Somewhere a long way off was her body, hanging limp in the clutch of the iron arm, gasping for breath under a kiss that made reality faint about her, still struggling feebly in some tomb-smelling, narrow place where stone walls dripped and bones turned underfoot—the bones of those who had come before her. . . .

But she was not there. She was a wispy wraith rooted only tenuously in that fainting body, a wraith that reeled out and out in a thin skein to spin on the whirls of tornado-violence pulling her farther and farther and farther away. . . . The darkness was slipping sidewise—the stone walls were a prison

no longer, for she was moving up along the great expanding whirl that sucked her out of her body, up and out around widening circles into night-time distances where space and time were not. . . .

Somewhere infinitely far away a foot that was not hers stumbled over something small and square, and a body that was not hers slid to its knees among wet, rattling bones, and a bosom that was not hers bruised itself on the corner of that square something as the tenantless body fell forward among bones upon a wet stone floor. But upon the widening whorls of the vortex the wisp that was Jirel rebelled in its spinning. She must go back—she must remember—there was something—something. . . .

For one fleeting instant she was in her body again, crumpled down upon the stones, arms sprawled about a small square thing that was slimy to the touch. A box—a wet leather box thick with fungus, bound with iron. Andred's box, that for two hundred years searchers had hunted in vain. The box that Andred had died for and that she would die for too—was dying for now in the darkness and the damp among the bones, with violence ravening down to seize her again. . . .

Dimly, as her senses left her for the second time, she heard a dog bark, high and hysterically, from far above. And another dog answered, and then she heard a man's voice shouting in a tongue she did not know, a wild, exultant shout, choking with triumph. But after that the dizziness of the whirlwind which snatched her out of her body made everything blur, until—until——

Queerly, it was music that brought her back. A lute's strings singing as if madness itself swept wild chords across them. The dwarfed jester's lute, shrieking with music that wakened her out of nowhere into her own fallen body in the dampness and the dark where that hard box-corner bruised her bosom.

And the whirlwind was—uncoiling—from about her. The walls widened until she was no longer aware of their prison closeness and the smell of damp and decay faded from her nostrils. In a dizzy flash of realization she clasped the wet casket to her breast just as the walls faded altogether and she sat up unsteadily, blinking into the dark.

The whirlwind still raved around her, but somehow, strangely, it did not touch her now. No, there was something outside it—some strong force against which it battled—a force that—that——

She was in the dark hall again. Somehow she knew it. And the wild lute-music shrilled and sang, and in some queer way—she saw. It was dark still—but she saw. For a luminous glow was generating itself in a ring around her and by its ghostlight she was aware—scarcely through sight—of familiar faces spinning past her in a wide, whirling ring. A witch dance, round and round. . . . Alaric's lined face flashed by, blazing with exultation; Damara's white-ringed eyes glared blindly into the dark. She saw the two boys whirl past, the light of hell itself luminous on their faces. There was a wild bark, and one of the greyhounds loped by her and away, firelight from no earthly flame glaring in its eyes, its tongue lolling in a canine grin of ecstasy. Round and round her through that luminous glow which was scarcely light the mad circle spun. And ever the lute-strings wailed and sang with a wilder music than strings can ever have sung before, and the terrible joy on

every face—yes, even upon the dogs'—was more frightening than even Andred's menace had been.

Andred—Andred. . . . The power of his volcano-force spun above her now, with a strength that stirred the red hair against her cheeks and a raving of wind through which the lute music screamed high. But it was not the full force that had overwhelmed her. For this maniac dance that spun round and round through the dark was building up a climax of cumulative strength that she could feel as she knelt there, hugging the slimy box. She thought the very air sang with tension and stress. That circle was reeling counterwise to the spin of Andred's vortexing force, and Andred was weakening. She could feel him slackening above her in the dark. The music shrieked louder above the failing storm-wind and the fearful joy upon those faces whirling past told her why. Somehow they were overpowering him. Something in the dwarf's mad lute-strings, something in the spinning of their dance was breaking down the strength of Andred's centuries-old violence. She could feel it weakening as she crouched there with the casket hugged bruisingly to her bosom.

And yet—was it this precious casket that they fought for? No one had a glance to spare for the crouching girl or the burden she hugged. Every face was lifted raptly, every eye stared blindly and exultantly into the upper dark as if the thing that was Andred were visible and—and infinitely desirable. It was a lust for that thing upon their faces that made joy so vivid there. Jirel's brain had almost ceased recording sensation in the bewilderment of what she watched.

When the dance ended she scarcely knew it. Lulled into a dizzy trance by the mad spinning of the dancers, she was almost nodding on her knees in their center, feeling her brain whirl with their whirling—feeling the motion slow about her so imperceptibly that nothing but the whirl itself registered on her mind. But the dancers were slackening—and with them, the whirl above. The wind no longer raved through the dark; it was a slow sigh now, growing softer and gentler as the circle of dancers ceased to spin. . . .

And then there was a great, soft, puffing sigh from the darkness above her that blew out her awareness like a candle-flame. . . .

DAYLIGHT fingering through the arrow-slits touched Jirel's closed lids. She awoke painfully, blinking in the light. Every muscle and bone of her supple body ached from the buffeting of last night's storm and violence, and the cold stones were hard beneath her. She sat up, groping by instinct for her knife. It lay a little distance off, rusting with last night's blood. And the casket—the casket! . . .

Panic swelling in her throat quieted in an instant as she saw that precious, molding thing lying on its side at her elbow. A little thing, its iron hinges rusty, its leather whitened and eaten with rot from two centuries in a nameless, dripping place; but safe, unopened. She picked it up, shaking it experimentally. And she heard the softest shifting within, a sound and weight like finest flour moving gently.

A rustle and a sigh from beyond brought her head up, and she stared around her in the shadows of the hall. In a broad, uneven circle the bodies of last night's dancers lay sprawled. Dead? No, slow breathing stirred them as they lay, and upon the face of the nearest—it was Damara—was a

look of such glutted satiety that Jirel glanced away in disgust. But they all shared it. She had seen revelers asleep after a night of drunken feasting with not half such surfeit, such almost obscene satisfaction upon their faces as Alaric's drugged company wore now. Remembering that obscure lusting she had seen in their eyes last night, she wondered what nameless satiety they had achieved in the dark after her own consciousness went out. . . .

A footfall sounded upon stone behind her and she spun half-way round, rising on one knee and shifting the knife-hilt firmer in her fist. It was Alaric, a little unsteady on his feet, looking down upon her with a sort of half-seeing abstraction. His scarlet tunic was dusty and rumpled as if he had slept in it all night upon the floor and had only just risen. He ran a hand through his ruffled hair and yawned, and looked down at her with a visible effort at focusing his attention.

"I'll have your horse brought up," he said, his eyes sliding indifferently away from her even as he spoke. "You may go now."

Jirel gaped up at him, her lips parting in amazement over white teeth. He was not watching her. His eyes had shifted focus and he was staring blindly into some delightful memory that had blotted out Jirel's very existence. And upon his face that look of almost obscene satiety relaxed every feature until even his sword-gash mouth hung loose.

"B-but——" Jirel blinked and clutched at the mildewed box she had risked her life for. He came back into focus for an impatient instant to say carelessly:

"Oh—that! Take the silly thing."

"You—you know what it is? I thought you wanted——"

He shrugged. "I could not have explained to you last night what it was I wanted of—Andred. So I said it was the treasure we sought—you could understand that. But as for that rotting little box—I don't know or care what lies inside. I've had—a better thing. . . ." And his remembering eyes shifted again to escape hers and stare blissfully into the past.

"Then w-why did you—save me?"

"Save you?" He laughed. "We had no thought of you or your treasure in what we—did—last night. You have served your purpose—you may go free."

"Served—what purpose?"

Impatiently for an instant he brought himself wholly back out of his remembering dream to say:

"You did what we were holding you for—called up Andred into our power. Lucky for you that the dogs sensed what happened after you had slipped off to dare the ghost alone. And lucky for us, too. I think Andred might not have come even to take you, had he sensed our presence. Make no doubt of it—he feared us, and with good reason."

Jirel looked up at him for a long instant, a little chill creeping down her spine, before she said in a shaken whisper:

"What—are you?" And for a moment she almost hoped he would not answer. But he smiled, and the look of deformity deepened upon his face.

"A hunter of undeath," he said softly. "A drinker of undeath, when I can find it. . . . My people and I lust after that dark force which the ghosts of the violent dead engender, and we travel far sometimes between—feastings." His eyes escaped hers for an instant to stare gloatingly into the past. Still looking with that unfocused gaze, in a voice she had not heard before

from him, he murmured, "I wonder if any man who has not tasted it could guess the utter ecstasy of drinking up the undeath of a strong ghost . . . a ghost as strong as Andred's . . . feeling that black power pouring into you in deep drafts as you suck it down—a thirst that strengthens as you drink—feel—darkness—spreading through every vein more sweetly than wine, more intoxicating. . . . To be drunk on undeath—a joy almost unbearable."

Watching him, Jirel was aware of a strong shudder that rose in the pit of her stomach and ran strongly and shakingly along her limbs. With an effort she tore her gaze away. The obscene ecstasy that Alaric's inward-looking eyes dwelt upon was a thing she would not see even in retrospect, through another's words and eyes. She scrambled to her feet, cradling the leather box in her arm, averting her eyes from his.

"Let me go, then," she said in a lowered voice, obscurely embarrassed as if she had looked inadvertently upon something indescribable. Alaric glanced up at her and smiled.

"You are free to go," he said, "but waste no time returning with your men for vengeance against the force we imposed on you." His smile deepened at her little twitch of acknowledgment, for that thought had been in her mind. "Nothing holds us now at Hellsgarde. We will leave today on — another search. One thing before you go—we owe you a debt for luring Andred into our power, for I think he would not have come without you. Take a warning away with you, lady."

"What is it?" Jirel's gaze flicked the man's briefly and fell again. She would not look into his eyes if she could help it. "What warning?"

"Do not open that box you carry."

And before she could get her breath to speak he had smiled at her and turned away, whistling for his men. Around her on the floor Jirel heard a rustling and a sigh as the sleepers began to stir. She stood quiet for an instant longer, staring down in bewilderment at the small box under her arm, before she turned to follow Alaric into the outer air.

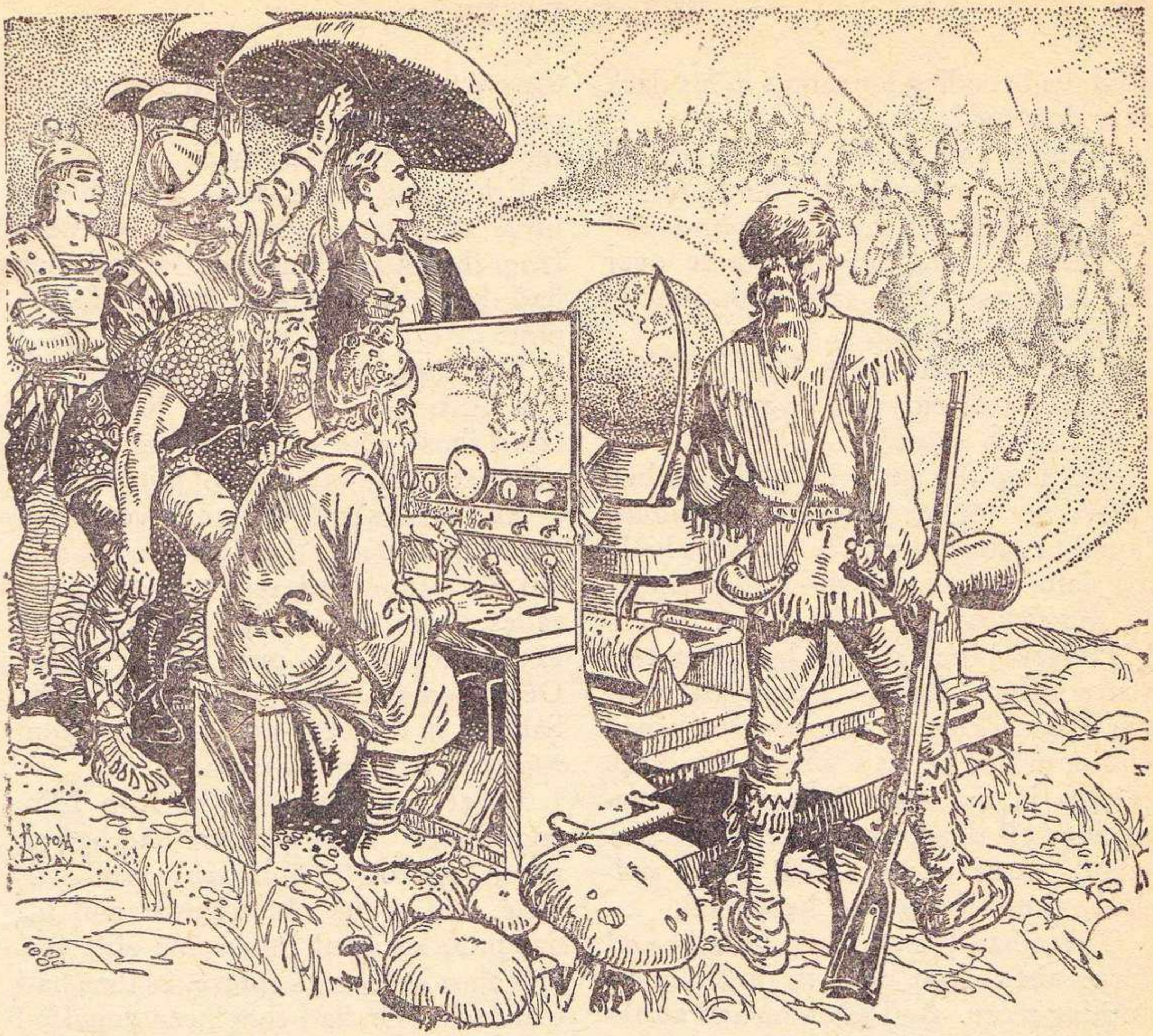
LAST night was a memory and a nightmare to forget. Not even the dead men still on their ghastly guard before the door could mar her triumph now.

Jirel rode back across the causeway in the strong light of morning, moving like a rider in a mirage between blue skies and blue reflecting waters. Behind her Hellsgarde Castle was a vision swimming among the mirroring pools of the marsh. And as she rode, she remembered.

The vortex of violence out of which she had snatched this box last night—the power and terror of the thing that had treasured it so long . . . what lay within? Something akin to—Andred? Alaric might not know, but he had guessed. . . . His warning still sounded in her ears.

She rode awhile with bent brows, but presently a wicked little smile began to thin the red lips of Joiry's sovereign lady. Well . . . she had suffered much for Guy of Garlot, but she thought now that she would not smash in his handsome, grinning face with her sword-hilt as she had dreamed so luxuriously of doing. No . . . she would have a better vengeance. . . .

She would hand him a little iron-bound leather box.



"Kim Idim still reached back into the past."

Armies from the Past

By EDMOND HAMILTON

A weird-scientific tale of adventure, and the clash of armed men—an exciting story of time-travel and a world enslaved—a narrative of our planet two million years hence

ETHAN DREW stood in the lamplit living-room of his penthouse apartment staring up at the sword. There was a yearning longing in his brown, aquiline face and brooding gray eyes as he gazed at the weapon. Slowly he reached up and took it down from above the stone fireplace.

It was a long, gleaming saber, its hilt and the back of its blade nicked and scarred. Lovingly he ran his finger along those scars that spoke with mute eloquence of desperate battle.

And the brooding loneliness in his dark face deepened.

"Swain, and Pedro Lopez, and all the rest," he whispered. "And Chiri—if I could only see them all again——"

Then sick hopelessness came over his features. His tall, broad-shouldered figure sagged.

"No," he muttered dully. "That was all a million years away."

A million years!

Holding the sword tightly, Ethan Drew no longer saw the luxurious, lamplit room about him. He was looking into memory now—into memory of the *future*.

He saw himself as he had been two years before, Private Ethan Drew of the French Foreign Legion, ambushed with a patrol of his comrades by Arab raiders in the deep Sahara, his companions all dead, and he, the last survivor, about to be killed, when suddenly the miracle had happened.

There had been a blaze of light and force about him, and he had known nothing more. And when he had awakened, it had been in a strange place and a strange time—a time a million years in the future.

He had been drawn across those ages of time by Kim Idim, old scientist of that far day, and Chiri, his slim, lovely daughter. And five other men had been drawn out of past ages by the old scientist, too—five fighting-men of different times, snatched across the abyss of the ages by the old scientist's potent time-ray.

Hank Martin, Rocky Mountain trapper of Kit Carson's day; John Crewe, Puritan soldier of the army of Oliver Cromwell; Pedro Lopez, Spanish conquistador of the troops of Cortez; Swain Njallson, huge Viking sea-raider of the Tenth Century; and Ptah, soldier of the armies of ancient Egypt; these were the five who had been drawn out of their own times into the future, the same as Ethan Drew.

Ethan had found them staunch and loyal comrades, those five warriors from the past. Together, he and they had dared the perils of that far future time.

Together, they had helped the girl Chiri save her father, Kim Idim, from those who meant to use the old scientist's time-ray for evil purposes.

And at the last, when the very land was sinking under them all into the sea, old Kim Idim had saved the six comrades from death by sending them back, each to his own time. Ethan Drew had awakened once more in the Sahara, in the very year and day from which he had been drawn.

What had happened to Kim Idim and Chiri? That question had been a throbbing wonder in Ethan's mind ever since. Had the old scientist and his daughter escaped into some still further time in Earth's future, as they had planned? Or had they been engulfed by the catastrophe of the sinking continent, and met their deaths?

He did not know. He would never know, and that realization was a cold ache in his heart. He would never again fight shoulder to shoulder with those five loyal comrades from the past. He would never again see Chiri, that lovely girl of the far future whom he had learned to love.

Ethan turned slowly. Still holding the sword, he stepped wearily through the open French doors onto the terrace of his penthouse. He stood there against the parapet, gazing with hopeless longing into the night.

New York slept, a vast pattern of twinkling lights, stretched under dark, low-hanging banks of cloud. Westward, against the cloud-curtain, glided

the red and green lights of the late Miami plane.

"Chiri!" whispered Ethan, his lips hardly pronouncing the name.

Suddenly he stiffened. He sensed a change in the atmosphere, a strange, swiftly gathering hush and tension, a murmur as of unfamiliar forces.

He did not understand. But his gray eyes were suddenly brilliant with dawning excitement, with incredulous hope.

"Chiri?" he repeated tensely.

Then it happened. A blaze of light, a crash of thunder, all about him. And he was hurled into darkness.

THE clash of swords and hoarse shouts of fighting men broke on Ethan's ears as he came back to consciousness. Bewilderedly he opened his eyes. He lay in a small metal room whose high windows admitted a flood of dusky, deep red sunlight quite unlike the sunlight of his own time.

He was lying beside a squat machine of singularly grotesque appearance, crowned by a world-map globe. With a wild leap of gladness, Ethan recognized the mechanism. It was such a time-ray projector as once before had been used to draw him out of his own age into the future.

Then two heads bent frantically over him. It was an old man and a girl, both dressed in short white robes. He recognized the gray hair, thin, lined face and faded blue eyes of the man instantly. And his eyes swung to the girl's face, soft and lovely under a cloud of midnight hair, her red lips parted and dark eyes wide with anxiety.

"Chiri!" he cried, stumbling to his feet. "And Kim Idim! You've drawn me across time again, then? For two long years I've hoped and prayed that you would!"

The girl Chiri flew into his arms.

"Ethan, we are in danger!" she gasped. "This is a time two million years in the future from your age. My father and I fled into this time after the destruction of Tzar—and now the Masters who rule Earth in this age are seeking with their slaves to capture us!"

"That is why I drew you and your comrades out of the past again!" Kim Idim cried. "Only from time could I summon help, when the Masters attacked us here!"

Ethan Drew turned, appalled. Through the open door of the little metal house he saw a strange scene.

Outside lay a weird and unearthly forest of huge green toadstools, towering in the dusky light of the westering red sun. And out of this grotesque toadstool forest, white-skinned men in armor and helmets were surging with uplifted swords toward the little house.

Behind them, urging them on, were a few leaders of totally different appearance. They were tall, red-skinned men with spindly arms and legs, huge chests and high, hairless skulls from whose cadaverous faces looked hollow white eyes. These Masters did not look entirely human!

Fighting with the white slaves of the Masters, holding them back from the house, stood five men: a tall figure in buckskin and coon cap, wielding a clubbed rifle; a Spanish trooper in helmet and cuirass, swearing as he struck with his sword; a big Puritan in felt hat and homespun uniform swinging an enormous broadsword; a huge Viking whirling a gleaming ax; and a small, wiry Egyptian in bronze, stabbing viciously.

"It's Swain, and Hank Martin, and all the rest!" cried Ethan joyfully, starting toward the door.

"Yes, I drew them like you out of time when the Masters first attacked our dwelling!" Kim Idim exclaimed.

"You and Chiri wait here," Ethan ordered. And clutching the sword which he had unconsciously brought across time with him, he ran out and plunged into the fight.

Two of the white warriors were pressing the buckskin-clad frontiersman hard. Ethan fell upon the two from one side before they realized his presence.

Two terrific stabbing strokes—and the two warriors reeled back with their throats gaping and spurting red. Hank Martin, the tall trapper, spun around, and his leathery brown face lighted up as he recognized Ethan Drew.

"It's young Drew, pardners!" he called to the others. "Kim Idim's yanked him across time again, too!"

"Greetings, comrade!" yelled Pedro Lopez as he fought. The Spanish conquistador swore violently as his sword flashed. "Name of God, now we're all here we'll gut these cursed scum!"

"Cease your godless profanity, Lopez!" boomed the stern voice of John Crewe, the big Puritan, through the clashing conflict. "It is no time, when our lives are in peril, to take the Lord's name in vain."

"Osiris, will the dogs never quit attacking?" panted Ptah, the little Egyptian, stabbing furiously with his bronze shortsword.

But Swain Njallson, his blond hair flowing wildly from beneath his horned helmet, his icy blue eyes gleaming, uttered a deep, rumbling laugh as he smote with his great ax.

"Ho, comrade, this is living again!" he cried to Ethan.

All Ethan Drew's swordsmanship came swiftly back into his brain and muscles as he stabbed and hacked. There were still a half-dozen of the white warriors facing them, attacking fiercely at the urging of the red Masters behind them.

Pedro Lopez slipped on bloody grass and went down. Two warriors leaped in like cats to strike at the fallen Spaniard. But Hank Martin's rifle-butt crashed down on the helmet of one, and Lopez, on his knees, stabbed up in a ripping stroke that disemboweled the other.

"Haw! Haw!" guffawed the buckskin trapper. "Can't ye stand up and fight like a man, Pedro?"

"Let me at them!" roared the Spaniard, rushing forward like a maddened bull. "*Sangre de Cristo,* I'll——"

"They're giving way!" boomed John Crewe's triumphant shout, his massive face flaming with battle-light.

The few remaining warriors were retreating, for the urging shouts of the red Masters had stopped—the unhuman red-skinned leaders had melted back into the forest and vanished.

But as Ethan and his comrades fiercely pressed these last opponents, a scream came from the house.

"Ethan!" shrilled Chiri's silver voice.

Ethan Drew spun around. He shouted hoarsely at what he saw. The four red Masters had penetrated the little metal house from the rear, were dragging Chiri and Kim Idim out of the back.

Yelling, Ethan ran back toward the house, his bloody sword raised. He burst through its two small chambers and out the door in the rear.

There were horses there—the Masters had mounted them and were dragging the stunned old man and the wildcat-struggling girl up with them. And as Ethan rushed wildly at them, the leader of the four Masters yelled an order.

THE four steeds dashed away into the dusky gloom of the grotesque toadstool forest. Ethan ran wildly after them, but in a moment they were out of sight. The cries of Chiri receded into the distance.

His dark face contorted, his gray eyes wild, Ethan ran back around to the front of the little house. The last of the white warriors there had fallen, and Hank Martin and the others were coming running to meet him.

"Those red devils have got Chiri and Kim Idim!" Ethan cried hoarsely. "While we fought here, they slipped around and into the back of the house. They rode toward the west—we've got to follow!"

"Of course!" shouted Pedro Lopez fiercely, starting instantly forward. "*Por Dios,* they'll regret the day they dared molest the friends of a cavalier of Spain!"

Swain and John Crewe also started unhesitatingly forward with Ethan. But Ptah held them back, the little Egyptian's dark, crafty face urgent in expression.

"Wait!" he cried. "If they were mounted, we cannot soon overtake them. And by rushing blindly after them without knowing where we go, we shall but run ourselves into peril."

"Ptah's right," drawled Hank Martin keenly. "We need to get hosses somewhere. And we need to find out where they'll have likely taken Kim Idim and the gal."

Ethan saw the force of their reasoning, yet every fiber in him quivered with the urge to rush at once through the toadstool forest after the red abductors.

For two long years Ethan had dreamed of seeing Chiri once more. And now, when that dream had come true, when he had even held her for a moment in his arms, she had been snatched from him to an unguessable fate.

"I think one of them white warriors ain't quite dead yet," Hank Martin was saying. "We might larn somethin' from him."

They hurried back to the dozen sprawled bodies on the trampled grass. The lanky trapper turned one of them over. It was a warrior whose breast bled from two gaping wounds, but whose eyes were still open.

The dying man glared up at them in hate, as they bent over him. Ethan spoke to him, using the language of Tzar which he had learned in the age a million years before this, and which he hoped was still spoken in this further time.

"Where did you and your Masters come from?" he asked tensely.

"From the city Luun—dog!" gasped the dying man, in a tongue much the same as that which Ethan had used.

"Where is Luun? And who rules there, you whites or the red Masters?" Ethan exclaimed.

"The Masters rule, of course," muttered the Luunian warrior. "Ever since they came to Earth a hundred thousand years ago, the Masters have been the rightful rulers of this world and we humans serve them willingly in our cities, of which Luun is the greatest.

"The city Luun," the gasping voice continued, "lies a half-day's march from here across the great plain that stretches west of this forest. It was from Luun that we came today, to capture the old man and girl who the Masters had heard were living alone in this forest."

The Luunian raised himself by a convulsive effort, and his dimming eyes glared up at them in undying hate.

"I have told you the way to Luun,

because I know that if you go there the Masters will slay you all, as befits men who dare rebel against their sacred rule."

Before Ethan could speak again, the Luunian fell back, dead. The six comrades got to their feet.

"It shore amazes me," drawled Hank Martin, "that these white men would let them red devils rule them. You heard him—even when he was passin' in his checks, he claimed it was right and fittin' for the Masters to rule."

"The Masters must be wizards," said John Crewe gloomily. "Aye, demons who by compact with Satan have somehow enslaved the races of man."

"Monsters, devils or what-not, I'm going to Luun after them!" Ethan exclaimed passionately. "Chiri and her father are not going to be their slaves. You others can come or not, as you see fit."

"If any of you is not willing to come," roared Pedro Lopez, his mustachios twitching and his florid face menacing, "he'll measure swords with me, here and now."

"Aw, cool off, Pedro," drawled the trapper calmly. "We're all with Drew, and he knows it."

"Aye," rumbled Swain, a glitter in his eye. "There should be fighting in plenty in such a city."

"Hear how the heathen lusts for blood," John Crewe said with stern disapproval, glowering at Swain.

"He's wrong—we're not going to try to fight our way into Luun," Ethan said swiftly. "That would be hopeless. We'll have to enter by stealth, under cover of darkness, and seek out Chiri and her father and spirit them away."

"Then why not don the armor of these dead men?" cried Ptah, pointing to the slain Luunians. "In such guise, we could far more easily penetrate Luun undetected."

Although Ethan was chafing at the delay, he saw the force of the suggestion.

"We'll do it," he said. "Quick, men!"

John Crewe frowned disapprovingly at the armor that Ptah was already stripping from the slain men.

"Is a Christian man to wear such pagan attire as that?" he demanded.

"What matters our dress, so long as we carry our good swords?" Pedro Lopez retorted. "When we cavaliers of Spain followed Don Hernando up into Mexico, we were glad at times to wear even the cotton armor of the Aztecs."

IN A FEW minutes, all stood attired in the metal armor of the dead Luunians, though Swain's great limbs were badly cramped by it, and Hank Martin looked uncomfortable.

"Now for horses!" Ethan exclaimed. "These Luunians must have left their mounts somewhere near by. Scatter and search for them."

In fact, a short search discovered a dozen horses tethered near by in the dusky shade of the giant toadstool forest. The steeds bore rude, high leather saddles. And they reared and snorted as the six comrades mounted.

"Now for Luun!" Ethan cried. "Come on!"

He led the way as the little troop galloped westward through the looming, grotesque toadstools.

The sun was setting ahead, casting a broken red blaze through the forest into their faces. The hooves of the running horses made no sound on the soft, moss-like turf.

The marvel of it for a moment took Ethan's mind. He and five comrades

out of ages long before his own, riding through this unearthly world of two million years in the future! But his sense of wonder faded as the desperate urgency of their mission repossessed his thoughts.

"It's plain enough to a certain extent what happened," he called as he rode. "Kim Idim and Chiri came into this time by means of his projector, and built that little house in the forest and lived there alone. And then the Masters heard of their existence, and came to capture them."

"But it still ain't plain to me," retorted Hank Martin, "where them Masters themselves came from."

"From another world, that dying warrior said," Ethan reminded him. And he nodded, momentarily thoughtful, "They looked like creatures of another planet, all right. Yet how did a few of them conquer and enslave all humans on Earth?"

They emerged suddenly, after only a few minutes ride through the toadstool forest, onto a great, empty grass plain. Its rolling swales stretched to the distant horizon, upon which was poised the enormous, dull-red orb of the setting sun.

Reining their horses and gazing ahead, they made out presently against the glowing red shield of the sun-disk, a far-distant cluster of black domes and minarets.

"That's Luun!" exclaimed Ethan eagerly.

Hank Martin's keen eyes squinted. "It's plenty far away. It'll be near midnight, time we get there."

As they spurred forward, the huge red sun-shield sank rapidly from sight, and the distant towers of Luun quickly vanished in gathering shadows.

Stars pricked out in the darkening sky, and looked down like curious white eyes at the little company that rode steadily on across the night-shrouded plain. Into the sky slowly wheeled strange constellations that Ethan Drew could not recognize, new star-patterns of this future time.

As he rode, he looked up at the planets that shone with calm brightness amid the twinkling stars. From which of those planets had come those red-skinned, hollow-eyed Masters who now were rulers of old Earth?

To Ethan's frantically anxious mind, the ride across the plain beneath those wheeling stars seemed endless. But at last the black domes and towers of Luun loomed large against the light-gemmed heavens, a mile ahead. They had been riding for some time through cultivated fields and pastures.

"Slow down," Ethan called tensely to the others. "From now on, we've got to act like an ordinary group of Luunian soldiers, riding back into the city after duty."

"Me, I don't cotton to cities," muttered Hank Martin, staring distrustfully at the black mass of structures. "An' how can we find Kim Idim an' the gal in thet big place?"

"Why, we'll ask one of these people," declared Pedro Lopez. "And if he won't tell us, we'll cut his throat and ask another."

"That is splendid strategy, Pedro," commented Ptah ironically. "A man who can think up such ruses as that ought to be a general of armies."

"Why, it is nothing——" Lopez began grandiloquently, and then as he heard Ptah chuckling in the dark, he exclaimed furiously, "Do you dare make mock of me? I'll show you that Pedro Lopez, the veteran of a hundred pitched battles and countless minor skirmishes, is not to be——"

"Shut up, Pedro," rasped Ethan.

"Do you want to let the whole city know we're coming?"

He continued tautly to the others, "There must be a central prison of some kind in this city, and that would be where the Masters would put Kim Idim and Chiri. We must find it."

"An' when we find this *calabozo*, how're we goin' to git in it an' git them two out?" Hank Martin demanded.

"I have an idea as to that," Ethan told him. "It may or may not work, but we'll try it."

"Aye," boomed John Crewe unexpectedly. "Put your trust in God—and strike hard. That was ever the motto of my leader."

"Keep that rifle out of sight, Hank," warned Ethan as they started forward. "It would give you away. And you keep your ax hidden too, Swain."

Swain Njallson grunted. "I do not like this creeping about by stealth," the Viking grumbled. "It is not my way to slink into an enemy's city in secret."

ETHAN's heart thudded as they rode into the city itself. The hooves of their horses clattered on the worn stone paving of winding streets that were dark except for an occasional torch flaring in a stone socket. Only a few people were in the ill-lit streets, all of them white slaves and soldiers, and these only glanced at the little passing troop.

The barbaric appearance of the city Luun, the complete lack of artificial light or any other evidences of industrial civilization, puzzled Ethan. If the red Masters had really once come from another world, that implied scientific knowledge which accorded ill with their present archaic form of life. Even in the fight back in the forest, he had noticed that they possessed no other weapons than swords and spears.

As they rode on in a compact band through the dark and winding ways of Luun, a vast black bulk took form ahead. It was a monstrous fortress in the form of a terraced cube, a brutal pile that rose like a mountain of masonry. By the torchlight that spilled from its myriad windows, they saw that its massive entrances were guarded by solid ranks of Luunian warriors.

"That fortress may be where they have Chiri and Kim Idim!" Ethan exclaimed as he and his comrades reined up and stared ahead through the darkness.

"If so, we can't hope to save them," muttered Ptah. "It would take a great army to force that place."

"I don't think Kim Idim an' the gal are in there," said Hank Martin keenly. He pointed to a smaller structure beyond the great fortress, a low, oblong black building. "Thet looks more like the *calabozo* to me—see the barred winders?"

Ethan perceived that the trapper was right. The windows of the oblong building were heavily barred.

"Yes, that must be the prison of Luun!" he exclaimed with renewed hope.

He turned in the saddle. "I'm going there, and I want you with me, Ptah. The rest of you will wait here."

"How in hell's name do you expect to accomplish anything with only two swords?" Pedro Lopez exclaimed angrily. "We'll all go."

"No!" Ethan ordered. "If we get Kim Idim and Chiri out at all, it will be by trickery. And more than one man accompanying me would arouse suspicion and ruin my plan."

Though the conquistador muttered complainingly, he remained with the others in the dark street while Ethan and Ptah rode on toward the prison, across the plaza in front of the fortress.

As they circled to avoid passing too close to the mountainous cubical fortress, Ethan glimpsed groups of the red Masters inside its myriad torchlit chambers.

"All the Masters of Luun must dwell in that fortress," muttered Ptah. "We have seen none of them elsewhere in the city, and no other place here is so heavily guarded."

Ethan nodded. He told the little Egyptian tautly, "Let me do the talking when we enter the prison."

IN A FEW minutes they rode up to the entrance of the low, oblong prison. It was a great archway closed by barred metal gates. Inside the bars, in a torchlit anteroom, four of the white Luunian guards were stationed.

"A message from the Masters!" Ethan called peremptorily in their tongue. "Summon your officer."

He hoped fervently that they would not notice the different accent and stumbling way in which he used their language. If that gave him away, all was lost.

But the warriors inside seemed to notice nothing. One ran to call their officer, while the others opened the barred gates for Ethan and Ptah to enter. The American and Egyptian did so, dismounting inside the gates as they swung shut again.

The officer of the Luunian guards appeared, rubbing his eyes sleepily and adjusting his metal helmet.

"What word from the Masters?" he asked respectfully.

"Our sacred rulers have sent me to fetch to them the old man and the girl captured today in the forest," Ethan stated sharply. "The Masters would question them."

"But the girl is not here—only the old man is here!" protested the Luunian captain. "Surely the Masters know that?"

Ethan's heart sank like lead. The Luunian was staring at him perplexedly, and he rallied himself.

"Of course they know that!" he snapped. "I did not say I had come for the old man *and* girl—I said I was here to fetch the old man who was captured *with* the girl."

"Your pardon—I understood you wrongly," the Luunian replied. "I will take you to him."

Ethan and Ptah followed him along torchlit corridors of stone, gloomy, chill passageways that breathed the mustiness of ages. Then the Luunian captain stopped and unlocked a door with a clumsy metal key.

"Your man is inside," he told Ethan.

It seemed to Ethan that the officer was staring at him too sharply, with too much sudden interest.

"Very well, you may return to your couch," Ethan said with assumed friendliness. "We will take the prisoner to the Masters."

The officer left them, returning along the stone corridors. And at once Ethan and Ptah sprang into the dark stone cell. Thin hands clutched Ethan's arm from the darkness.

"I recognized your voice!" gasped Kim Idim. "You are mad to take this chance!"

"Where's Chiri?" Ethan exclaimed tensely. "If she's not in this building, where are they keeping her?"

"She is in the dungeons of the fortress of the Masters," Kim Idim answered, his voice agonized. "Yes, because she is young and beautiful, the Masters have sentenced her to take part in the monthly Feast of Life, tomorrow noon."

"The Feast of Life—what is that?" demanded Ptah.

"I do not know exactly, but it is some horrible rite which the Masters practise each month on certain selected human victims, who are never seen alive again," Kim Idim answered, his tone heavy with dread.

"Osiris save the maiden—for we cannot!" Ptah exclaimed in horror. "It would require thousands of men to force an entrance into that guarded fortress. Nor could we enter there by trickery, as we have done here."

"But we've got to get Chiri out of there somehow!" Ethan exclaimed hoarsely. He asked desperately, "Kim Idim, couldn't we stir up these Luunians to revolt against the Masters, and storm the fortress?"

"No, no!" Kim Idim declared. "The Luunians would never revolt against their rulers, for all the people of this city are drugged into hypnotized submission to the Masters."

"Drugged?" cried the Egyptian.

"Yes, I have discovered it since I have been prisoned here," the old scientist told them rapidly. "When the Masters came to earth from another world long ago, they conquered and enslaved humanity by secretly poisoning all water supplies with an hypnotic drug, which subtly changed their brains so that they fell into a state of perpetual awe of and submission to the Masters.

"That was millenniums ago. Since then the Masters, undisputed rulers of the earth, have become decadent and lost almost all their former scientific powers, but they still continue to drug the people of their cities, and those people will never rebel until they cease to be so drugged. Indeed, these Luunians would fight to the death to protect the Masters."

"Then I was right—there is no hope for the girl," Ptah exclaimed. "For if there are no men left on Earth except the drugged slaves of the Masters, where shall we get the army that would be needed to storm that fortress?"

"*I* can get that army—yes, and a mighty one!" Kim Idim declared excitedly. "I can do it, if I can get back to my house in the forest where is the time-ray projector."

Ethan, even in his agonized apprehension for Chiri, was stupefied by the implication.

"Good God, Kim Idim, you don't mean you'd get an army from——"

"From the past, yes!" Kim Idim exclaimed. "With the projector, I can draw thousands of men at a time out of dead ages, as easily as I drew you six. Out of the past I can draw whole great armies, and we can lead them back here to Luun, attack the city and the fortress, rescue Chiri and destroy the Masters' rule for ever."

For a space of moments, Ethan and Ptah stared aghast at the old scientist, petrified by the incredible audacity of the plan he had proposed.

To draw great armies of fighting-men out of the past! To raise the hosts of the past against the drugged, enslaved people of the future!

"By the claws of Bast, it is a great plan!" cried Ptah excitedly. "And it is the only one by which we can hope to save the maiden."

"It might be done," muttered Ethan, his thoughts racing. "But it will take hours to get Kim Idim back to his projector, to draw those armies from the past and get them moving toward this city. And at noon tomorrow, you said, Chiri is to meet some hideous fate."

Ethan's jaw clamped in sudden decision. "Ptah, you and the other boys will ride back with Kim Idim to the projector, and help him put his plan into effect."

"And you?" cried the Egyptian worriedly.

"I'm staying here in Luun," Ethan clipped. "I won't leave Chiri here—for if this wild plan of Kim Idim's should take too long, we'd be too late to save her from the Feast of Life. I'll stay and try to get her out of the fortress, and if I fail, you may still be in time. At least, you can avenge us."

"No, Ethan, your resolve is mad!" cried Kim Idim. "I tell you, that fortress is so guarded by companies of Luunian warriors that not even a rat could enter it unchallenged. You will be merely throwing your life away."

"Nevertheless, I'm going to try it," Ethan returned grimly. "Come on, Ptah—we've got to get out of here so you can get out of the city with Kim Idim."

THEY hastened out of the cell, and along the dusky stone corridors. The old scientist walked between the other two like a prisoner escorted by guards.

Ethan tensed as they neared the anteroom within the entrance. Suddenly the little Egyptian halted.

"Listen!" he hissed.

They heard the rapid, obsequious voice of the Luunian captain of guards who had led them through the prison.

"I suspected at once that the man was an impostor and not a messenger from you, Highness," the Luunian was saying. "He did not know that the girl is not here, and he spoke our tongue awry and did not even look like a man of Luun."

"We delayed too long!" Ptah hissed.

The Egyptian's sword flashed out, and at the same moment Ethan Drew's blade rasped from its sheath.

"Keep behind us, Kim Idim," ordered Ethan. "Come on, Ptah."

They pushed on and emerged abruptly into the big stone anteroom just inside the barred prison gates.

The Luunian captain and the four gate-guards were there. And beside the officer was a red-skinned, hairless caricature of humanity—one of the spindle-limbed Masters.

"There are the impostors!" cried the Luunian officer loudly as the three emerged.

The Master's hollow eyes flashed instantly with alarm.

"It is two of the strangers who slew our men in the forest today!" the red creature cried in a shrill, high voice. "Kill them!"

But already Ethan and Ptah were rushing forward. The Luunian captain and one of his men died as they were tugging out their swords, smitten by blades like lightning-bolts.

"Guards!" the Master screamed in his unhumanly shrill tones, scrambling fearfully to one side.

"Open that gate, Ptah!" yelled Ethan. "I'll hold these off!"

As he shouted, Ethan's sword swung in a terrific slicing sweep toward the unhuman red creature who was shouting the alarm. The head of the Master leaped from his shoulders, and black blood spurted from his decapitated trunk as it crumpled.

The three remaining Luunian guards were momentarily transfixed with horror as they beheld the death of one of the rulers their drugged minds revered.

"He has slain one of the sacred ones!" shrieked one of the Luunians. "Kill him!"

The three rushed toward Ethan with swords out, wild rage on their contorted faces.

Ptah was fumbling frantically with the catches of the barred gates. And a distant rush of feet was audible as more

guards came running from elsewhere in the prison building.

Kim Idim thrust a foot and tripped one of the three charging Luunians. As his companions stumbled over him, Ethan stabbed fiercely at them, then slashed downward. It was a brief explosion of steel and motion, at the end of which the man who had tripped and one of the others lay dead, while the third reeled back with his shoulder torn.

"Guards! This way!" he screamed.

"The gates are open!" yelled Ptah.

Ethan grabbed Kim Idim's arm and ran with the old scientist and the Egyptian out of the torchlit prison into the darkness. They heard a roar of rage behind them, as a dozen Luunian warriors poured after them. Ethan raised his voice in a wild shout.

"Swain! Hank! This way!"

Through the dark streets answered Hank Martin's voice in a ringing yell. There was a rush of clattering hoofs, and out of the darkness rode the trapper and Lopez, Swain and Crewe.

"Where's the gal?" yelled Hank Martin.

"We can't reach her—we can only save her if we get Kim Idim back to his machine!" cried Ptah.

"Look out!" bellowed Lopez. "Here they come!"

The Luunian guards, mad with rage, were flinging themselves forward with insane ferocity.

"Kill the blasphemers who slew a Master!" their leader was shrieking.

Ethan whirled, as the Luunians charged. A blade tore his forearm open and another grazed his thigh as he struck in desperate defense.

Ptah was fighting beside him, and now the four mounted men spurred their plunging steeds amid the Luunians. Broadsword and saber, battle-ax and clubbed rifle, smashed down on the raging warriors. But the crazy, scrambling fight in the dark street went on. Ethan heard a rising uproar all through the surrounding streets. A great bell somewhere in the huge fortress had begun to clang in alarm.

John Crewe, his face flaming crimson, dropped from his horse beside the staggering Kim Idim. He thrust the old man up into his saddle and yelled hoarsely to Ethan.

"Ride for it! I'll hold back these godless ones!"

"No, we won't leave you here!" Ethan cried.

But as he shouted, a sword rang off Crewe's helmet, and the big Puritan sank to the ground, stunned.

ETHAN and Ptah had gained the backs of their horses. The American tried to spur forward to where John Crewe lay, but the maddened Luunians prevented him.

"If we don't git movin', we'll all leave our scalps here!" yelled Hank Martin urgently.

"You can't hope to save either Chiri or Crewe now!" Ptah shouted to Ethan. "Ride, or our only chance to rescue them later will be lost!"

Ethan realized that the Egyptian spoke truth. Luunian warriors were coming on the run from all directions, and the whole city seemed waking to the alarm.

"Out of Luun, then!" he cried.

They dug spurs into their horses and dashed through the dark streets, alive with emerging warriors.

Leaning over their horses' necks, Ethan and his comrades slashed fiercely at the startled Luunians who sought to halt them. The hooves of their mounts waked a thunder of echoes in the dark, narrow stone streets.

Behind them, the alarm bell in the fortress of the Masters was still clanging wildly, and torches were bobbing like swirling fireflies. But in a few moments they were out of the great city, galloping through the darkness over the surrounding farmlands and then over the grassy plain.

"Eastward!" Kim Idim shouted thinly over the rush of wind. "We go too much to the north!"

Ethan reined his pounding steed to the right, and the others followed. Glancing back, he saw the vast black mass of Luun alive with torches, rapidly receding behind them.

Bitter rage and disappointment throbbed in his heart, and fear—fear for Chiri and for his Puritan comrade.

"It's the first time ever I left a fellow soldier in the lurch!" Pedro Lopez was raging as he rode. "Name of God, why did we run away and leave him there to be killed?"

"Your comrade was only stunned—and he will not be killed, at least until tomorrow noon," Kim Idim called. "He will undoubtedly be sentenced to the Feast of Life, like my Chiri. And we shall return to Luun, before the Feast takes place, if my plan succeeds."

"What is this Feast?" demanded the enraged Spaniard. "And what is this plan?"

Ethan shouted a brief plan to them, and he heard their exclamations of bewilderment.

"Holy smoke, whole armies from the past?" gasped Hank Martin. "Why, the scheme is plumb loco!"

"I can do it!" Kim Idim cried. "By simply expanding the field of the time-ray, I can draw an army through time as easily as one man."

"The plan is good!" cried Pedro Lopez exultantly. "*Dios,* we'll show these soft ones of the future how men of the past could fight! We'll tear their cursed city wide open."

"Aye," rumbled Swain harshly. "By Thor, it will be something to fight shoulder to shoulder with the great warriors of past ages."

"But I can't figger," called Hank Martin, to the old scientist, "why you don't jest use thet machine of yours to yank Chiri and Crewe themselves out of the city."

"That is impossible," Kim Idim cried to him. "The time-ray can only operate spatially when it is being simultaneously projected along the time-dimension."

As they rode, Ethan had been clumsily binding an improvised bandage around his wounded forearm. The lights of Luun had disappeared behind them some time before, but Ptah turned in his saddle and looked anxiously back across the starlit plain.

"They'll follow us," the little Egyptian called tautly. "And they'll guess we're heading for the forest."

"Ha, let them follow!" cried Pedro Lopez scornfully. "We'll make mincemeat of those who are unlucky enough to overtake us."

"We must hurry," urged Ethan, agonized with apprehension. "Unless we re-enter Luun with our forces by noon, we'll be too late."

Rushing hoofs drummed the dark plain as mile after mile dropped behind them. In the vague, thin starlight, they could not discern how close pursuit might be behind them.

HOURS that seemed eternities to Ethan had passed by the time they glimpsed ahead of them the dark wall of the grotesque toadstool forest. Without slackening speed, they rode into the deep shadow of the towering growths.

Quickly they came to the little clearing in the forest where Kim Idim's metal house glinted vaguely. They pitched hastily from the saddles of the panting horses.

"It is nearly morning!" Kim Idim declared. "And we must carry the projector out onto the plain—there is not room in this forest for the hosts I shall draw from the past."

"First I'm gittin' back into decent clothes," muttered Hank Martin. I feel naked in this durned armor."

He and Lopez and the Viking scrambled back into their proper clothing, and then followed Ethan and Ptah and the old scientist into the little house. With Kim Idim directing, the five comrades bent and lifted the massive time-ray projector.

The mechanism was appallingly heavy. Without the great strength of Swain, they could not have carried it. Straining every muscle, they bore the thing out of the house and through the forest. Kim Idim followed with the horses.

Dawn was paling the heavens as they emerged onto the great plain. At the old scientist's direction, they carried the projector to the summit of a small bare hillock. There they set it down.

"Look!" cried Ptah suddenly, pointing westward across the plain. "The Luunians come!"

Two miles away, a dark mass was approaching.

"A big bunch of mounted warriors," muttered Hank Martin. "We can't hold off a crowd like that, out here in the open."

"Hurry, Kim Idim!" Ethan exclaimed tautly. "It's now or never for your scheme."

Kim Idim was already working with frantic speed, twisting the amazingly intricate controls of his great creation, setting the dials that directed the time-ray along the mysterious time-dimension and in space. The old scientist peered tensely, as he worked, into the glass screen in the projector's face.

A picture, a *living* picture, suddenly appeared in the screen, a vista of a green coast and a blue sea, with a small city of marble and brick buildings on the shore; dignified men in togas, slaves in leather tunics, a few soldiers in crested helmet and armor, walked in its cobbled streets. In the screen, they saw this living scene as though from high above.

"That's a city of the Roman empire!" Ethan cried. "But there are only a few fighting-men there."

"I shall have to find their warriors," Kim Idim panted. He slowly turned a knob.

The stylus touching the world-globe atop the projector moved imperceptibly in answer. The scene in the glass screen shifted swiftly, over the countryside of that imperial Roman province of more than two million years before.

"The Luunians are near!" warned Lopez, and Ethan heard the rasp of the Spaniard's sword as he drew.

"Looks like we're due for a scrap," Hank Martin drawled in agreement, calmly reloading his long rifle.

Ethan saw that the Luunians numbered about two hundred mounted men, led by a half-dozen of the red Masters. They were now less than a mile away, riding steadily forward.

"I have it!" Kim Idim cried excitedly.

Ethan spun back to the projector. In the screen, he looked down on a stone road, and a marching body of some four thousand armored men, winding like a great metal snake along that Roman highway of long ago.

"A Roman legion on the march!"

Ethan cried. "Can you draw them all through, Kim Idim?"

"I think so," panted the old man, his forehead damp, his hands trembling as he touched the knobs.

A fierce, wolfish yell from scores of throats crashed on Ethan's ears. The advancing body of Luunians had seen their quarry on the hillock. They came on in a gallop.

"*Dios,* they'll ride right up over us!" yelled Pedro Lopez. "They'll——"

"Look!" screamed Ptah. "In the name of Osiris, *look!*"

Kim Idim had, a moment before, shut a switch. And instantly, the incredible had taken place.

A Roman legion of four thousand men had suddenly materialized out there on the empty plain.

For a moment, Ethan and his comrades were as stupefied as the Luunians who had stopped in their charge and were staring petrifiedly at the suddenly-materialized legion.

"You've done it, Kim Idim!" Ethan shouted hoarsely.

"Others—other armies of the dead ages," Kim Idim was panting as he reset his controls. "I'll get them——"

The Roman soldiers out on the plain for a long minute stared about them, utterly bewildered by their sudden swift transition from their own world into this, to them, alien one. A babel of cries arose from the legionnaries.

But the confusion of the Romans lasted only briefly. Their officers had glimpsed the mounted Luunians near by. And Ethan and his companions heard the officers bark rapid orders in staccato Latin.

THE Romans responded quickly. The long column in which they had been formed changed shape smoothly and swiftly, its maniples shifting like cogs of a machine, the knights or mounted men moving out in a screen toward the Luunians, the solid mass of footmen forming up into three divisins facing their potential enemy.

"*Sangre de Cristo,* that's discipline!" shouted Pedro Lopez.

"Keep at it, Kim Idim!" cried Hank Martin, hopping in excitement. "We'll need plenty more men."

The switch of the projector clicked shut again. A second body of men appeared like magic on the plain, some distance beyond the Roman legion.

These were a thousand unmounted men, black-bearded soldiers in peaked metal caps and kirtle-like skirts, bearing tall shields and long, heavy spears. Stunned for a moment, these newcomers began milling about in wild confusion.

"Assyrian spearmen!" yelled Ptah. "I've fought with those devils, more than once."

"Haw! Haw! Look at them Luunians pullin' out!" exulted the trapper.

The two hundred Luunian horsemen, petrified by the appearance of the Roman legion, had come to life with cries of terror as the Assyrian spearmen materialized. They had wheeled, were riding in a wild gallop back toward their city.

Kim Idim, trembling as though appalled by the supernatural audacity of what he was doing, was working like a madman with the projector controls. Every few minutes he slammed the switch shut—and each time, Ethan and his comrades saw a new host materialize suddenly on the plain.

A band of Spartan warriors, stocky men in heavy armor who looked stupidly but fearlessly about them, had appeared after the Assyrians. And close after them came into being a force of a few hundred huge blond men in

horned helmets, Ninth Century Northmen at sight of whom Swain Njallson shouted loudly!

A troop of three hundred mail-clad, mounted Crusaders; a host of white-robed Arab horsemen out of the armies of Abu Bekr; and a full eight hundred of Genghis Khan's Mongol riders, wiry, swarthy little men on shaggy ponies—these three forces appeared swiftly after one another.

Yet still Kim Idim reached back into the past with the potent band of the time-ray, first for a regiment of Napoleon's infantry, tall men in cocked hats and blue and white uniforms, bayonets glinting in the sun; and then for a band of several hundred mounted Indian braves, copper-skinned savages in brilliant feathers and war paint.

"That's a Sioux war party!" cried Hank Martin excitedly as this last force materialized on the plain.

"Can you talk their language, Hank?" Ethan asked tensely, and the trapper nodded.

"Sure can, seein' as how I was a prisoner in one of their villages a hull winter."

"But look!" cried Ptah in consternation. "The armies attack each other!"

Ethan cried out in dismay. Out on the plain, the hosts from the past were wheeling to give battle. Romans, Assyrians and Spartans, Northmen, Crusaders and Arabs, Mongols and French and Sioux—all of them, at first stunned by their sudden transition to this new scene, now seemed to hold the others responsible for the phenomenon.

The *buccinas*, or great curved trumpets of the Romans, were bellowing hoarsely and the legion was moving like a ponderous, irresistible machine toward the Assyrians, who with wolf-like battle cries were marching to meet the Romans. The Spartans stood their ground like a rock, ready for any attacker, but Crusaders and Arabs, seeing in each other well-known foes, were riding full tilt toward each other. The French regiment still stood bewildered, but the Vikings were on the march toward it, their axes gleaming wickedly. And, far out on the plain, Mongols and red Sioux were circling.

"We've got to stop them from fighting each other!" Ethan cried desperately. "We'll never separate them once they get tangled in battle."

"Hank, fire your rifle into the air," he ordered urgently.

The trapper obeyed instantly. And the ringing report of the rifle brought the eyes of all the thousands out on the plain toward the hillock.

Ethan cupped his hands and shouted to them with all the force of his lungs, first in French and Arabic, then in stumbling, half-forgotten Latin and Greek.

"Do not attack each other!" he yelled to the dazed hosts. "It is we who have brought you into this world. Send your leaders here to us, and we will explain!"

Hank Martin and Swain repeated his cry, the first in the harsh Sioux tongue and the second in his native Northland language. And Ptah added his version for the Assyrians.

"They understood!" Pedro Lopez cried. "See, the leaders come."

"Thank heaven!" Ethan muttered. "Even the Mongols must have understood my Arabic—they're all coming."

From every one of the armies out on the plain, a single man was approaching the hillock. An unspoken truce had been declared between the hosts.

SHEEPSKIN-CLAD Mongol chieftain, Roman commander, French colonel and mailed Crusader leader—these

rode up onto the hillock first. An Arab emir and a Sioux war-chief in full regalia followed. And last, on foot, tramped a stalwart Northman, a heavy-faced Spartan officer, and a cruel-eyed, black-bearded Assyrian captain.

"What manner of men are you and how dare you work your magic upon a Roman legion?" demanded the Roman commander in hard, clipped Latin.

"What world is this?" the French colonel was exclaiming bewilderedly. "*Dieu,* but a few minutes ago my regiment was marching through Saxony, and now——"

And a babble of voices in different tongues broke loose upon Ethan. Only the Mongols and Spartans and Sioux waited, grimly silent.

"You have been drawn far into the ages to be," Ethan answered, raising his voice and repeating each sentence in the different tongues he had used. "Not magic, but the skill of yon old man has snatched you from your own times. And we have brought you into this far age, to fight!

"Yes, we desire you to follow us to the attack of a mighty city which lies but a few hours' march from here. It is a city in which demonic tyrants oppress men of Earth. Only by destroying those tyrants can bewitched people who serve them and fight for them be freed from bondage."

"And if we refuse?" demanded the mailed Crusader harshly.

"Then we shall refuse to send you back to your own ages!" Ethan told them all. "But if you follow us to this battle and conquer, after it is over we will return you once more to your own times and lands."

There followed a taut silence, after Ptah and Swain and the trapper had repeated Ethan's proposal in the tongues spoken by the others.

"I agree, for my legion," the Roman commander said finally, breaking the silence. "For it seems that only by so doing can we win back to our own land."

"Though it goes ill for us to fight side by side with infidels," declared the Arab emir finally, "we shall do so in this case."

The Mongol captain had a contemptuous sneer on his swart, flat face as he told Ethan in stumbling Arabic: "We men of the great Khan are more accustomed to killing Moslems than to fighting as their allies. But we agree also."

The others, one by one, also agreed, some slowly, others, like the Northmen, fired by prospect of battle.

Ethan turned finally to Hank Martin, who had been exchanging harsh syllables with the Sioux war-chief.

"What about those Indians?" he asked.

The trapper grinned. "This chief says it's plain that we've got great medicine, an' he an' his braves will follow us anywhere, so long as thar's scalps to be taken."

"Go back and get your men ready to march at once," Ethan told the assembled captains. And he briefly indicated the plan of formation he desired.

As the leaders hurried back to their respective forces, Kim Idim clutched Ethan's arm.

"Ethan, the sun is already high! We must hasten, if we are to reach Luun before noon—before the mysterious Feast of Life."

Ethan's heart sank as he perceived how far the sun had climbed into the heavens.

"We've lost too much time," he said, his voice raw with anxiety. "Come on!"

. He and the four comrades and the old scientist mounted quickly. And they

galloped together down from the hillock and between the armies that were forming up to march.

The solid mass of the Roman legion lay in the center of the great host, with the Assyrian spearmen and Napoleonic infantry on its right, and the Spartans and Northmen on its left. The cavalry formed two wings extending from either flank—the Arabs and Mongols forming one wing, and the Sioux and Crusaders the other.

Ethan raised his arm and waved it in signal.

"Forward!" he yelled, spurring ahead.

His cry was echoed by bellowing of Roman *buccinas,* braying of Mongol horns, fierce Sioux war-cries and silver blare of French bugles.

The plain quivered to the resounding thunder of thousands of feet and hooves trampling forward. The whole great host was moving west, horsemen in a trot, the footmen in a rapid march.

"Yippee!" yelled Hank Martin excitedly. "With this outfit, we'll clean up them Masters an' their soldiers like rollin' off a log."

"There are many thousands of the Luunians," warned Ptah. "And they'll have been warned of our coming by their horsemen who fled back to the city."

"We must concentrate on getting into the city and storming that fortress," Ethan declared tautly. "Chiri and John Crewe will be in there—if they still live."

"We'll tear the cursed place down stone by stone if we have to!" swore Lopez.

Dust arose in a great cloud as the trampling host moved onward. Mile after mile fell behind them, while Ethan's anxiety rose to fever pitch as he saw the red disk of the sun swinging ever higher.

"We're going to be too late!" Kim Idim cried, the old man's face deathly as he rode. "It lacks but an hour of noon—we shall never make it in time."

"We've *got* to," Ethan declared violently. "Chiri and John Crewe await death there—we must go faster."

Ptah shook his head. "The footmen cannot march faster than this. They would fall exhausted if they tried."

"Then I'm going to ride ahead to Luun with only the horsemen!" Ethan exclaimed desperately. "By riding hard, we can make it in time."

"You can't attack that great city with only a couple of thousand horsemen!" cried Ptah, aghast. "You'll be outnumbered by a hundred to one."

Maybe we can cut our way into the fortress," Ethan insisted. "Hank, you and Pedro will come with me—ride out now to our horsemen and tell them we're going ahead.

"Ptah, you and Swain and Kim Idim bring the footmen along as fast as you can. If we fail to get into the fortress, we may at least hold up that cursed Feast until you come up with our main forces."

Pedro Lopez and the trapper had ridden hastily to the wings. Now the four bands of horsemen began to forge forward on either side, as they galloped their steeds. They converged together in front of the main host.

Ethan spurred to the van of the gathered cavalry, and shouted back to them, using the Arabic, and Hank Martin repeated in the Indian tongue.

"We ride ahead to force the stronghold of our enemy! Follow me!"

Wild Sioux war-whoop and fierce Mongol shout, deep Crusader battle-cry and fanatic Arabic yell, answered

him as the four great forces of horsemen spurred forward.

The mighty host of footmen dropped from sight behind them as they galloped over the plain, Lopez and the trapper riding hard on either side of Ethan, in the van.

"Chiri! Chiri!" Ethan kept whispering as he rode. He *couldn't* lose her now.

The drum of rushing hoofs marked the passing of fatally slow minutes. And the sun was higher, higher. . . .

"Thar's Luun ahead!" yelled Hank Martin, pointing a buckskin arm.

"And the Luunians are starting to come out to meet us!" Lopez cried.

The domes and towers of the city had appeared on the horizon ahead. Ethan could clearly discern the mountainous square bulk of the fortress of the Masters.

And he could also see that companies of Luunian warriors were already beginning to march out of the city to meet the oncoming hosts of whose advance they had had warning.

"We'll ride right through them into the city!" he shouted.

He drew his sword, and as it flashed aloft in the sunlight, he turned and yelled to the hosts behind.

"Follow me into the city! Charge through these ahead!"

A chorus of wild yells answered him. His two thousand riders massed close together as they galloped onward at headlong speed.

The Luunians, commanded by a number of the Masters, were hastily forming in a long mass across their path, just outside the city. Before they could complete formation, Ethan's horsemen struck their line like a thunderbolt.

A delirium of contorted faces and flashing swords and spears whirled about Ethan at the moment of impact. He hacked and stabbed, heard Lopez swearing wildly as the Spaniard struck like a madman, felt the armored Luunians in front of them falling and being trampled under the hooves of their horses.

And then that reeling moment of terrific shock and battle was passed, and Ethan was aware that he and his hosts were through the Luunian forces, were galloping now right into the narrow streets of the great stone city.

"To the fortress!" he yelled to Lopez and Hank. "If I fall, lead the others straight there."

"We'll have to chaw through these devils to git there!" shouted the trapper, pointing ahead.

The narrow stone streets of Luun were filling with armored men, warriors who had been making ready to follow the others out of the city to oppose the coming host.

The Masters commanding them screamed orders in their shrill, inhuman voices. But the commands were lost in the crazy roar of battle shouts from Ethan's motley horde as they crashed into the streets of Luun.

"Saint Denis, and at them!" rose the deep shout of mailed Crusaders wielding swords and battle-axes.

"Muhamad rasul Allah!" screamed the fanatic yell of the Arabs as their simitars flashed.

Ethan, as he fought forward, glimpsed his Mongols surging ahead in a parallel street. The swarthy little horsemen were forcing their shaggy ponies, stabbing viciously. And over the whole roar of combat rose the terrible, piercing war-whoop of the Sioux, the red savages clinging like cats to their mounts as their bows twanged and their tomahawks clove down through helmets and skulls.

THE headlong rush of Ethan's forces carried them crashing through the streets, toward the mountainous bulk of the great fortress. But as they entered the plaza in front of the giant structure, Luunian warriors were swarming toward them from every part of the city, by thousands.

Over their heads, the gigantic fortress frowned like a thundercloud as they forced their way toward the doors. Ethan glimpsed Masters running wildly in through the entrances.

"Into the fortress—quick!" he yelled to Hank and Lopez, spurring fiercely ahead.

"Hell's name, what a fight!" gasped the Spaniard, his face wet with blood and sweat, his eyes wild.

Ethan and his two comrades, and a score of mingled Mongols and Sioux, won to the entrance of the huge building.

They rode right inside, their horses slipping and plunging, into great, shadowy stone chambers.

Here scores of the red Masters scuttled before them in terror. A few Luunians opposed them. Men died to the music of clashing steel and clattering hooves in those great shadowy chambers, as Ethan's band forced onward.

They burst on their steeds into a huge circular chamber. At its center rose a big, round stone table, with a ring of many cushioned seats around it.

Upon the high stone table, fastened down by metal fetters, lay a half-hundred men and girls. Into an incision in the arm of each of them had been inserted a thin metal tube, which led down from each to one of the cushioned seats.

"*Dios*, what ghastly thing has been going on here?" Lopez gasped.

"*This* is the Feast of Life of those fiends the Masters!" Ethan cried. "A drinking of the blood of helpless victims! God, if Chiri is dead——"

Chill horror was freezing his spine as he leaped from his horse and ran to the high table of victims. For he knew now the full hideous nature of those red Masters who had come to Earth ages before from another world.

The Masters were vampires, taking their food, not naturally, but through the blood of others. He guessed that it was a custom that they had brought from their own native planet, and that they had kept it up as a ceremonial rite through their generations on Earth.

"Chiri!" he yelled frantically.

"Ethan, I am here!" cried a weak voice.

He leaped up onto the stone table, over the supine bodies of helpless victims, and found her.

Chiri was living, but was pale as death itself. And her great dark eyes had shuddering terror in them as Ethan severed her fetters with a sword-stroke.

"Ethan!" she sobbed as he helped her up. "The Masters—they had begun to drink our life-blood, when the alarm of attack halted the dreadful Feast."

"Loose my bonds, that I may wreak God's vengeance on those unholy children of Satan!" boomed a great, wrathful voice.

"It's John Crewe!" shouted Hank Martin, his taut face lighting.

The big Puritan lay fettered among the other victims. As Lopez shattered his metal bonds, Crewe rose, his massive face flaming red, eyes flashing fanatically.

"Retribution!" he shouted, snatching a sword from the floor. "We shall leave not one of those red demons to defile God's green Earth."

"Out of here now!" Ethan yelled, leaping back into his saddle, with Chiri held tightly in the curve of his left arm. "We've got to fight back out of Luun."

The Puritan climbed to the back of a horse from which a slain Mongol had fallen.

With his remaining followers, Ethan spurred back out through the shadowy stone rooms.

They burst out into the blazing sunlight of the great plaza. And they stopped, appalled by what they saw.

"Trapped!" cried Lopez with an oath.

The two thousand horsemen whom Ethan had led into Luun were milling in the plaza, attacked by Luunian warriors pouring in solid masses from every part of the city, led by screaming Masters. They blocked every avenue of escape.

ETHAN and his companions rode into the milling mass of Mongols and Sioux and Arabs and Crusaders. The young American shouted to his surrounded followers.

"Charge—break through into the eastern streets!" he yelled, waving his reddened sword, Chiri clinging terrifiedly behind him.

"We'll never make it," Hank Martin panted. "They got us boxed."

The horsemen answered Ethan's shouts by charging determinedly toward the eastern side of the plaza. But solid masses of Luunians were an impassable barrier. The drugged white warriors were fighting like demons at the urging of the Masters.

Once more Ethan led his repulsed band forward in a desperate charge—and again they were dashed back by the crowding Luunian hordes.

"It ain't no use!" Hank Martin cried. The trapper's face was terrible with blood and perspiration, his head bare, his rifle-butt broken away. "We're goners!"

"We'll take plenty of the dogs with us, then," roared Lopez, foaming with rage.

"Kill the red ones, the sons of Satan!" shouted Crewe's great voice. "Rid the earth of as many as we can, before we die."

The Luunians were pressing forward, stabbing up with sword and spear. Horses crashed down with their riders, bodies piled up, as the red Masters urged their hordes on to annihilate the trapped horsemen.

Then through the mad roar of the fight came a new sound, a hoarse, mighty bellowing through the streets.

"That's the *buccinas* of the Romans!" Ethan cried hoarsely. "Ptah and Swain have reached Luun with the main forces!"

The hoarse bellowing of the Roman trumpets swept nearer, louder. And now could be heard the insistent shrilling of French bugles sounding the charge.

In through the city by converging streets pushed the host of footmen from the past. Along three streets clanked the Romans, shields up, swords drawn, faces stern as they fought forward to the hoarse baying of their war-trumpets.

Along streets on either side of their advance came the Spartans and French, the Greeks striding forward like men of bronze in their heavy armor, stolidly hewing down all in their way; the infantry of Napoleon charging with excited battle-cries and leveled bayonets.

And from the south, Ptah was advancing at the head of a thousand blood-mad, wolf-faced Assyrians, while from the opposite direction, Swain Njallson and three hundred berserk

Northmen were smashing with sword and ax toward the plaza.

"Look at them Masters run!" yelled Hank Martin exultantly.

The red Masters were fleeing, darting in all directions frantically as they saw their warriors crumpling beneath that terrible converging attack.

And though the drugged, enslaved Luunians had fought fiercely until now for their rulers, they seemed to become bewildered when the Masters fled. They too gave way and fled.

In less than an hour, it was all over. The last of the unhuman Masters had been hunted down and ruthlessly slain. And the stupefied Luunians had surrendered their weapons.

IN THE plaza in front of the great fortress, Ethan stood with his arm around Chiri. Besides him were five comrades and old Kim Idim.

And before Ethan in the plaza had gathered the thousands of fighting-men of different ages who had conquered Luun. Hundreds of their host lay dead—but the thousands who still lived hailed Ethan with a great shout.

"You have done what you promised to do, have conquered this city," Ethan shouted to them. "Now your work is done, for the Masters here are all dead and the people of Luun will soon become normal again, when they are no longer drugged.

"And now," he continued, "Kim Idim will fulfill his part of our promise and will send you back to your own times and lands. You need but march back across the plain to where his machine waits, and it will be done."

When his words had been translated to them all, there was a pause, a buzz of thousands of voices.

Then a French captaiin gave voice to his thoughts.

"We'd rather stay here, now that we're here," he told Ethan. "This looks like a good time, a good world. If you let us stay, we'll follow wherever you lead."

"Do the rest of you feel that way?" Ethan demanded.

The answer, when they understood his question, was an overwhelming affirmative shout. Soldiers of fortune all, men without ties, they had no desire to return.

"Then you stay!" Ethan cried. "There are still other Masters in other cities—we shall clean them out, one by one, until all Earth is rid of those red tyrants."

He added with a sudden thought, "There'll be legends back in past times—legends of a Roman legion that strangely vanished, a French regiment that never was heard of again, and so on. But who back there would dream the truth?"

Chiri, clinging to his arm, cried to him anxiously.

"Then you too are going to stay in this time, Ethan—you and your comrades?"

"I shore am," drawled Hank Martin. "Now there's a hull tribe of Sioux here, I feel kinder at home."

"And I remain too," declared Lopez. "If there is fighting ahead, my prowess will be sorely needed."

Swain said merely, "I stay." And Ptah nodded agreement.

"And I," added Crewe. "There be many souls here to whom the word of God should be taught—by means of a little force, if necessary."

Ethan was holding Chiri tight in his arms.

And Hank Martin burst into a loud guffaw.

"I guess nobody needs to ask if *he's* stayin'!" the trapper said.



"The waves around the boat parted, and three heads appeared in the water."

The Red Swimmer

By ROBERT BLOCH

A horrendous story of the Spanish Main and an unscrupulous English pirate—a tale of the Elixir of Life, and horrible red arms that reached out of the sea

LUKE TREACH bowed and smirked in the Spanish sunlight as his distinguished passengers came up the gangplank. His curled and scented hair rippled most elegantly in the Caribbean breeze; a breeze that lifted the dainty ruffles at the wrists and throat of his rich velvet coat.

He made a fine figure of a Spanish gentleman, did English Luke Treach that merry morning, as he stood stroking his spade beard to hide the malicious smile which he had managed to erase from his lean, browned face, but which still persisted about his cruelly thin lips.

Captain Luke Treach bowed then, as the old grandee and his daughter ascended, bowed low a second time when the white-bearded gentleman addressed him as "Captain Obispo." Treach gazed covertly into the aged, aristocratic face of his passenger, then allowed his glance to embrace the figure of the woman. Abruptly he started, jerked erect.

Now Captain Treach had gazed on the fine ladies of old England, yes, and the plump, rosy-cheeked barmaids, too; he had seen the dusky Caribs that danced upon the beach; in Cuba and Barbados and the Antilles there were dark-eyed Spanish girls that lured with sly laughter, and mulatto or mestizo maidens savage in the charm of their delight. Captain Treach had known many women, but there was none to compare with the girl who now stood before him.

Her hair was ebony over ivory forehead, her eyes dark diamonds and lips warm ruby red. These comparisons came naturally to the Captain, for his covetous nature was ever ruling. But never had it ruled him as it did at this moment; he wanted this girl, with her maiden beauty of face and her slim, young, untaught body curved and lissome for delight. Young, dark, smiling—Body of Christ! The captain swore inwardly as his lips shaped their polite greeting.

Courteously he welcomed Señor Montelupe and his daughter to the ship. Yes, their cabins were in readiness, and he trusted that they would be comfortable. But certainly, they would cast off at once, and might the Blessed Savior speed them on a prosperous, untroubled voyage to Mother Spain.

Guns and men here? Yes, for there were pirates—cursed scoundrels, these buccaneers; and if they attacked, it was best to be ready—though Gracious God forbid!

CAPTAIN TREACH escorted Señor Montelupe and his daughter to their cabins, then returned to watch his bullies bring up the chests and bags his passengers brought with them; chests and bags—silk, satin, gold, jewels.

It made Treach smile. He smiled again as he thought of pirates. This second smile made his wolfish face assume an almost beneficent aspect, for it was the charitable smile of one well pleased with himself. And Captain Luke Treach, now known as Captain Obispo, but more famous as "English Luke," had good reason to respect his cleverness.

First, he had taken the galleon. Few men had been lost, much wealth gained. After efficiently disposing of the crew and their captain, he had hit upon a brilliant idea. Instead of careening off some inlet and waiting until intermediaries reached him to buy and dispose of his loot, he would seek a regular port.

The galleon *Golden Crest* had been bound for Vera Cruz. Very well, he would sail for Vera Cruz, rig himself out in the captain's garb, and dress his men according to Spanish style. He and his mates spoke the tongue well—with a little careful disguise they would pass as Spaniards. On reaching port they could dispose of their cargo, cash in the booty, and sail away again swiftly with no one the wiser. Better still, the appearance of the ship would

preclude any fuss such as might be occasioned by its disappearance; there would be no reprisal, no scouring of the seas by Spanish fleets in search of English Luke the buccaneer.

A noble idea, Luke Treach thought at the time. And it had worked. With the common seamen kept on shipboard against any betrayal, he and his lieutenants had entered town. Officials had even been permitted to land on the ship and inspect it. Trade had been accomplished without suspicion, and Luke was ready to sail.

Then Commandante Portiz had asked him to take passengers. At first Luke had demurred, until he had learned that Señor Montelupe and his daughter were returning to Spain with all their wealth. They wanted to leave at once; he had been an official and there was some scandal.

Wealthy? Scandal meant money—it would be brought aboard ship. Luke Treach agreed, and the affair was settled.

Now they were ready to set sail, and more luck had befallen the clever captain. This daughter of Montelupe—she was a new treasure, another prize.

So Treach smiled indulgently when he thought of his cunning and what it had gained for him.

But ever business-like, his musing abruptly ceased and his thoughts turned to the exigencies of the moment. He gave the orders to lift anchor in the clarion voice for which he was justly famous.

A moment later he proved that his English erudition in the matter of cursing, as he loosed a fine volley of oaths at the half-naked seamen straining at the ropes on deck.

Then Captain Treach sauntered below, gentleman-like, pausing merely to kick aside the sailor who chanced to stray across his path carrying a spar-piece. He rapped discreetly on the cabin door, surreptitiously spat out his plug of tobacco and entered the Montelupe quarters.

THE old man greeted him, but Captain Treach had eyes only for the appointments he found therein; for the piles of brocaded and jeweled cloth now removed from their wrappings and stacked against the wall; for the jewel-caskets and the ingots in the rough sea-bags.

And then he stared at Ynez Montelupe, stared with the selfsame avidity. All the while he spoke graciously enough to the old fool, but his gaze burned a blush into the girl's cheeks, and he thought of the night—not tonight, but the next, when they would be past hail or chance of pursuit.

He chatted for perhaps an hour. Yes, he had an excellent voyage out. No, his passage had been free of storm or danger from freebooters, though that cursed Blackbeard was reputed to be in these waters. He fabricated news from Spain, glibly explained the death at sea of the ship's *padre*. He was forced to do most of the talking, for the doltish old man merely stared at him with his liquid, curiously youthful brown eyes. Treach didn't like that stare; it held a faint tinge of contempt or amusement; but then, he would not have to put up with it for long. On this thought he took his departure, after graciously asking their attendance at dinner in his own quarters.

Upstairs the gentlemanly mood left him, and he called for rum and his lieutenant, Roger Groat. Groat shambled into his cabin, mouthing oaths and damnation because the lace frippery at his wrists dangled into his tankard while he was drinking. The red-bearded

lieutenant made it known that he was sick of wearing these thrice-damned Spanish spangles, and the men were tired of the masquerade as well. They grumbled because they weren't put ashore to amuse themselves with the proceeds of the plunder.

To this information Captain Treach listened with occasional frowns. Then he told Groat that they would sail on only another day, dispose of the old fool, and head in for the nearest island a few hours off their position at that time.

"Rich, isn't he?" muttered Groat. "Blackie and Tom swore he had bullion in those bags o' his."

He chuckled, then snickered as he brought a hairy paw down on the table at which they sat.

"And the girl's a beauty. A beauty, by God, and there'll be rare sport——"

Captain Treach raised his hand. A slight gesture, but the accompanying frown was enough to quell the big man into silence.

"The girl is mine," he snapped. "Mine alone. The swag we'll divide according to our articles, but the girl is mine.

"You and the others will have your fill of wenching when we put in, but she's mine."

Groat could not restrain a hoarse chuckle.

"I don't envy her, at that. Remember Lucy, on that English ship we took? When you finished with her and Salvatore tried to take her, you flayed the lass. And I warrant this one would prefer the crew's sport to the other end."

Captain Treach smiled. "Tell Salvatore I want wine for dinner. Amontillado. I want my guests to eat, drink and be merry tonight."

They both laughed.

2

They both laughed. This Captain Obispo was certainly a witty man. And tonight he was out-doing himself. Señorita Ynez found her first instinctive dislike fading, though she still felt a tinge of strange panic whenever his beady eyes rested too intently upon her face or bosom.

As for Señor Montelupe, his taciturnity waned under the brandy and the mellow amontillado sherry. His reserve down, he proceeded to let his host guide the conversation into personal channels.

Captain Treach asked him about his duties in Vera Cruz; learned that the old man had held a secretarial post for years and owned several lucrative mines. There had been a scandal of sorts. . . .

Money, the captain presumed. No, not exactly money. The old man's reticence held him silent for a moment, but the wine, the courtesy, the mood urged him on. His bright eyes grew shadowy as he spoke.

There was — was the captain a church-goer?

Something in the shadowed eyes cued Treach to ignore the natural lie and speak truly. No, he was not a son of the Mother Church.

That was well, said Señor Montelupe. For there was a charge against him, a charge of sorcery.

Yes, the Black Arts, as ignorant fools called them—the mantic arts. He had studied with the Moorish masters in Spain as a youth; not wizardry or witchcraft, but the true magics that lie in nature; aeromancy, the controlling of winds; hydromancy, divination and command of waters; pyromancy, the lore of fire. It was science, not sorcery, which he sought to rule, and the ancient

Moors held secrets of natural wisdom known to seers before Solomon.

Here in this new world he had availed himself of his governmental position to study certain things; it would be wise for one so old to take heed of the Elixir Vitæ, the Elixir of Life.

And native blood was cheap; slaves and peons died by the dozens in the mines each day, perished by flogging and torture. He had meant no harm; he wanted to kill no one, but merely to study the blood of a few slaves, to experiment with revivification of the dead—that did no harm. And he *had* discovered things—marvelous secrets, gathered from the wisdom of Egyptis, the Orient, the Arab sages. In his hands he would use his knowledge for good, not evil.

But the natives complained, the people whispered, and the *alcalde* told the *padre,* who in turn brought tidings to the Commandante. And so Señor Montelupe had given up his post, taken his daughter—his wife was dead these many years, alas!—and departed for home.

Luke listened, with a polite show of interest. No need to antagonize the old duffer. He and his talk of magic—but then, what could one expect from a bloody Spaniard?—those fools were all alike with their Inquisition, and witch-burning, and alchemy.

Alchemy! The thought crossed his mind even as he nodded in polite assent to the grandee's words. Alchemy—the transmutation of base metals into gold, wasn't it? Perhaps this stupid Southern dog knew something. Best to draw him out.

LUKE drew him out, aided by further drafts of wine. He politely hinted that a man of Señor Montelupe's wisdom must have uncovered secrets in his quest of baleful knowledge.

Señor Montelupe stroked his gray beard as he replied that he had uncovered secrets. His eyes flamed with a bright gleam of fanaticism as he leaned across the great cabin-table.

He, Montelupe, had succeeded in his experiments. Men had sought the Elixir of Life in ancient lands for centuries untold, without avail. Charm, incantation, invocation — all methods had failed. But he had come to a new world, and there his efforts had been crowned with triumph. It was a great discovery; much toil and study had gone into it, and not a little blood. It was not generally known, but his wife had died from an injection of a spurious Elixir he had compounded in earlier studies. Since then the tragic failure had spurred him on, and many slaves had been sacrificed to the attainment of perfection. But he had done it—there was a vial filled with a golden liquid; not the mythical water of poor Ponce de Leon's Fountain of Youth, but the veritable *Elixir Vitae.* Its compoundment had cost Señor Montelupe many years of his life, but now when he returned to Spain with his wealth, he and his daughter would be insured eternity—eternity in which to study, to seek further wisdom.

Luke Treach frowned and swore damnation to himself. The blasted idiot was mad! No alchemical secrets here, no Philosopher's Stone, or anything real; only this demented gibberish about some crazy scheme of perpetual life. The Spanish dog bored him; for that he would pay on the morrow. And she would pay, too—Ynez, listening with a cryptic smile that implied belief in her father's words, and a covert glimmer in her eyes which proclaimed that she thought the captain

an ignorant fool, incapable of understanding the magnitude of her sire's secrets.

Yes, he would pay, and she would pay—though in sweeter coinage.

With that thought hidden in his politely-phrased adieu, Luke Treach strode up on deck for a breath of fresh air; air untainted by this fool's talk of wizardry and enchantment.

He checked the position, oversaw the change of watch at the wheel, and retired to sleep against the morrow's sport.

NIGHT clouds had scudded before the dawn, and the sun ruled azure southern heavens ere he awoke. The cabin window showed him beauty of sea and sky, but his ears heard sounds most unlovely.

This was the day, and the men were drunk. Groat had evidently broken out the rum.

Cursing, Treach ran up on deck, and found shambles. The *Golden Crest* drifted, unpiloted. Laughing, gleeful men overran the ship, moving about at will or clustering before the broached casks that stood upon the after-deck. The English sea-dogs had abandoned their Spanish costumes in favor of pirate regalia, or utter nakedness.

Treach saw his steward, Salvatore, slopping rum over his maroon coat with the white piping, then wiping his red mouth with the lacy sleeve that had once graced the arm of a Portuguese admiral of war. He saw Roger Groat slapping his naked, tattooed thighs with the flat of a cutlass as he danced about "One-Light" Samuel Slew, whose black eye-patch was the sole incongruous note in the ensemble he wore—the grotesque finery of some silken lady whose denuded body had long since passed to the mercies of the sharks. The rest roared and bellowed forth crude gibes, or shouted toasts over the swilling of their tankards.

Treach paused. The men had broken discipline, but they were in a jovial mood and order could be restored. But what matter? Their drinking could have waited until night, as planned, but a few hours made no difference now. Let them have their sport. And he—now he could go below and seek Ynez.

He went, smiling.

Ynez and her father were staring out of the cabin window, their eyes veiled with perplexity.

"What does this mean, Captain?" asked the old man, as Treach entered. Then his face betrayed that he knew the answer.

For Treach had entered without knocking, and he had entered not as Captain Obispo, but as English Luke —swaggering, his smile a sneer.

"What does this mean?" Ynez echoed, in a faint voice that trailed away beneath the intensity of Treach's stare.

Treach laughed.

"Mean? It means a lot, I fancy. Firstly, that you've made a mistake in taking passage with us. Ye see, we've changed our colors—we're an English crew, not Spanish, and we fly still a third flag today, I fancy. Have ye heard of the Jolly Roger?"

He grinned. His bow was a mockery of previous courtliness.

"So it's English Luke Treach at yer service today, my friends."

"Buccaneer!" The old Spaniard scowled, then drew Ynez close to his side. She trembled in her father's arms, but her terror invested her with a weird enhancing of beauty; the beauty of a frightened fawn. Luke stared at the softness of her black eyes, at the trembling of her fear-taut body.

He stared so closely that he did not see the sudden gesture of the old man—did not observe his hand slip a tiny golden vial from his pocket to the bodice of his daughter.

He stared at the girl, and then he began to laugh. The laugh told all. It told Señor Montelupe that he need not waste words in threats or pleas. It told Ynez Montelupe that which made her crimson with shame.

Laughing, the pirate advanced. This time he saw the second movement of the old man—saw the silver dagger slid from the sleeve and raised on high. But his laughter did not cease as he tore the cutlass from its scabbard at his side. The blade slashed down upon the Spaniard's wrist. When it struck it seemed as though the steel had sent sparks flying, but it was only blood, spurting forth in tiny gouts as the hand fell severed to the cabin floor.

The old man cried out; then Luke was upon him, lifting the graybeard bodily and carrying him from the cabin. On deck he collared Roger Groat and kicked the form of the fainting grandee to indicate his prize.

"Amuse yourself," he instructed the lieutenant. "I go below again."

"Amuse *yourself,*" parroted Groat, leering.

Treach good-naturedly pushed the man in the face with the flat of his wet blade, and went down the stairs again.

ONCE more he entered the cabin, and saw that Ynez still stood there. She faced him now and she did not cringe. Her features held no fear, for they were set in the immobility of death. Only her eyes were alive—so dreadfully, so intently alive that Luke Treach stood staring aghast into their black depths. His own face twisted as though seared by the black flame that leapt forth from her burning orbs. Then he mastered himself and advanced.

"Ye'd best pull no tricks with me, girl," he muttered.

Her dead face smiled a dead smile—the mirthless smile of a corpse that crawls to feed. And her voice spoke, muffled as though it came from the under-earth.

"I fear ye not," said Ynez. "I fear no man, and no thing. Ye had best fear *me.*"

Her tone was leaden, and the words were heavy against Luke Treach's ears. He grimaced, shrugged in a bravado he did not feel.

"Enough of this!" he growled. "Come, lass——"

"Wait."

Luke paused.

"Ye shall have will over me, if ye must. But dog though thou art, I warn thee still. My father gave me this."

She held up the little golden vial. It was empty.

"Ye heard what it contained—the precious distillation which insures eternal life. I drank of it. And so I warn thee. I cannot die, and the hatred within me cannot die. Use me as thou wilt; yea, cast me into the sea"—her eyes flamed—"but I shall return, Luke Treach. I shall return. And there will be reckoning."

For a moment the buccaneer trembled with instinctive horror. Then the wine mounted to his brain, and as the light faded from the girl's eyes he stepped across the cabin with a hoarse laugh. Ynez threw the empty vial in his face, but he only grinned.

3

LUKE TREACH stumbled from the cabin with a curse—stumbled with the body of the swooning girl across

his shoulder. Lurching figures moved in the dusk, snarling and laughing in drunken animation.

Treach cursed savagely as he sought the deck and made for a group of huddling men that clustered about the mast.

He was rather surprised to see that old Señor Montelupe was still alive, considering what had been done to him.

The old grandee was nailed to the mast most painfully, by his remaining hand.

The men turned to Treach and regarded him with bleary eyes.

"What'll we do, Cap'n?" demanded Groat, moving to the pirate's side. "A tough old bird, this vulture. He'll not die and he'll not be still. He hangs there and curses and prays in his Spanish, damme if he don't."

Treach smiled wolfishly.

"Perhaps I can devise a new diversion," he said.

There was snickering, for the buckos knew their captain. They watched as he threw the swooning Ynez to the deck, and the mangled head of Montelupe turned to follow Treach's movements.

The captain's knife flashed, and the anguished old man moaned aloud. as he cast the terribly altered form over the vessel's side. Then Treach faced the father. The gray Spaniard stared from tortured eyes until Luke's face fell in shame.

"Fool!" The voice rang faint, but vibrant with hatred. "Fool!"

Luke wished to turn away, but those eyes, that voice, held him prisoner before the victim.

"There is vengeance for fools," hissed the old man. "I've prayed to Powers while your dogs tormented me; prayed to Powers over wind and water. You and your currish crew are doomed, I swear—and *your* torment shall not end there."

Was this death-racked horror really smiling?

Luke shuddered. He stepped forward, blenching before the madman's eyes. For the old man was mumbling.

To the crew, it appeared as if Montelupe were whispering in confidence to Treach, for the captain bent his head close to the ravaged face, and the Spaniard's lips moved. It was hard to hear what he was saying.

"Vengeance . . . my daughter . . . elixir . . . nothing can stop life that will flow eternally through veins . . . nothing can stop hate . . . vengeance for you . . . return."

In the gathering shadow it was difficult for the men to see the expression on their captain's face. Could it be fear at the dying man's whispers?

But a moment later everyone witnessed their captain's rage. For suddenly the horrid head writhed as the old Spaniard spat full in Treach's face.

Then a sword flashed out, and a red-daubed head rolled across the deck. At that moment the sky bled, and crimson waters bubbled against the sunset. When the maimed body went over the side, the waters stirred with a new turbulence, and a wind sprang up from the flaming western sky.

Treach shuddered even as he cursed, noting the silence of his companions, their furtive looks and gesturings. The imbecile had awed them with his curses —faith, but it was lucky they had not heard what the old devil had said there at the last! Still, his wizard babbling was working on these superstitious fools.

With an effort, Luke met the mood and mastered it. He shouted for fresh rum, roundly cuffed the nearest mem-

bers of the crew, and swaggered forward.

After a time his mates followed, and the warm bite of the liquor soon banished morbid melancholy.

They drank as sunset smoldered into dusk, drank as the dark clouds of night fled before the rise of wailing winds; drank even as the waters lashed the ship through trough and swell. For now white waves raced and reared, and the sea began to boil and bubble as though heated at some devil's cauldron from below.

NEAR midnight the storm broke, and the rain lashed the drunken roisterers from the deck. It was then that several awoke from their bemusement, but it was too late.

The *Golden Crest* whirled in an angry sea amidst a wind that shrieked and tore at sail and spar. Treach roared futile orders to the scant dozen of his crew that he could muster, but these did not avail. No one dared go aloft or brave the gale above the deck. Even when the mast fell, the panic-crazed men were helpless to forestall further disaster.

The black night howled about them, and the sea surged over the decks as the ship heeled against the storm. Floundering figures were tossed screaming over the side as the waters retreated; cursing sailors blundered in the darkness as the yard-arms crashed about them to splinter the deck and cabins into a shambles.

Some there were who made a break for the boats. Five or six lifted one over the side and clambered in, just as a new wave struck. They dashed to death against the bows as the craft smashed to bits before the flooding impact of the water.

The ship lurched madly. It was leaking, foundering—that was a certainty. Treach collared Roger Groat, Salvatore, Samuel Slew, and as many others as he could shake into consciousness. His orders were curt, oath-weighted. They dashed below, returning with rations, water-jugs. A great combing wave crashed over the deck, then subsided as the men dashed for another boat.

They made it, lowered the ropes and floundered in, casting off just in time to escape the flooding fury that spent itself against the vessel's side.

Rowing was madness in these swirling waters, but they pushed away in time.

Already the great vessel was rearing and plunging in the throes of final surrender. It rose and sank, and above the storm came the sound of faint shrieks as those left behind realized the imminence of their doom.

Then, with a geyser-burst, the waters boiled above the ship, poising against the ruined mast-stumps before they hurled down to smash the vessel to ruins.

With a rumble, they fell and claimed their own. The craft rose up, tilted at the bow, and fell into the gigantic trough as the wave crashed down upon it. There was a single mighty roar of triumph as the ship slid into the sea; then foaming waters closed about it, and a terrible circle spread and widened from the point of its disappearance.

Treach and the men met the shock, though two yammering forms disappeared under the drenching violence of the inundation and were sucked down by the hungry depths.

Then they tossed all alone in the black storm amidst the sound of gigantic laughter, and the booming wind mocked them through the night.

4

IT WAS calm as death the next morning, and the waves purred against the side of the boat as though in satisfaction at the appeasement of their hunger.

The weary men slept as the sun rose; Treach huddled forward over the provisions, Roger Groat bent over his oar, Salvatore stretched across his seat, Sam Slew and Gorlac lying supine in the dampness at the bottom of the craft.

It was Gorlac who woke first; Gorlac, the gigantic Krooman. His brutal negroid face wrinkled into a frown as he surveyed his sleeping companions and the empty sea in which they drifted. Then his eyes fell upon the two water-casks, the oiled sea-bag of provisions at the captain's side. He stretched black ape-arms forward, ate and drank noisily.

Treach chose this moment to awake, and for a second he stared at the giant Negro, who sat obliviously munching a slab of bully-beef. Then he snarled an oath and drew his knife. In a moment he had flung himself forward on the startled black and buried his blade in the gleaming ebon column of the corded neck.

Gorlac grunted in pain, and crushed the captain's body in a terrible embrace. His arms tightened as Treach tore the knife from the wound in the neck and stabbed again and again at the dark back.

The Negro, grimacing with mad pain, locked his great hands about the pirate's neck and squeezed—squeezed terribly, with sobs of agony as he sought to throttle his foe. Then Treach slid the knife around to the ribs, arched upward in a silver slash, and disemboweled his antagonist. The ape-paws relaxed their grip, and the captain slid the twitching body over the side.

It fell with a splash, and disappeared. The captain crawled back to his place, feeling his throat experimentally to make sure that all was well; then polishing his knife carefully on his breeches. He looked up to face the stares of his awakened companions. The scuffle had taken place so quickly that the men were still rubbing their eyes and grumbling their bewilderment.

"Gorlac's gone," announced Treach, in a harsh voice. "And damn my lights and liver, the rest of ye curs will go too if I catch ye tampering with the provisions."

He took out a small stone from his blouse and began to sharpen his knife, gazing meaningly at his audience. They sat stolid, each man looking off into the empty sea and thinking his own thoughts.

Luke mused with the rest. His mind was teeming in turmoil. First thoughts were pangs of regret as he remembered the fine ship, the fine crew he had lost —and more tragic still, the stores of bullion and silver ingots; the money-chests gleaned from trading off loot for gold doubloons and pieces-of-eight. And there had been a small fortune in the silks and jewels and moneys left by his two passengers as well. It was all lost.

Further reflection was brought to bear on his own plight; adrift here in the boundless sea with three men, an open boat, and water and provisions for perhaps two days.

From these ponderings his thoughts strayed off into darker considerations. Luke Treach was a practical man and an all-round materialistic scoundrel to boot, but he could not help but remember the strange dying words of the Spaniard — he who claimed mantic

powers. The wretch may have been raving, but he spoke of aeromancy, power over wind and water, and of conjuring up a storm. The storm had come. And the seer had cursed him with other things. . . .

But enough! A little food, a little water, a few attempts at formulating a plan; these were the things he needed to drive such foolishness from his brain.

He apportioned a meager fare of beef and hard-tack to the three survivors of his crew, and snapped orders for rowing assignments and night watches. Dark grinning Salvatore, big dour Groat and the leanly sinister "Dead-Light" Slew listened stolidly to his commands and set to.

But rowing is onerous, and the broiling sun of the mid-Caribbean no kindly overseer. The sea is a lonely place, and last night these men had glimpsed Death with jaws agape to swallow. Now they feared that those jaws would close about them again, not to engulf but to gnaw slowly with the sharp teeth of thirst and hunger.

THE day passed in sullen, apprehensive silence; Groat and Slew, then Treach and Salvatore, taking the oars while the alternate pair rested and tried to shield their eyes from the eternal glare.

Row—but where? There was no compass, and until the stars shone guidance was missing. Treach hoped to put south to the islands, and the sun's deceptive shimmer showed him the way none too truly.

Nevertheless the labor kept the men from thinking too much; kept them from remembering little things that now came to slyly torment Treach. There had been a little golden vial, and the wizard had sworn a vengeance. What was that about Eternal Life? Couldn't torture kill? What did it mean?

Sunset again—flaming sunset, like that in which Montelupe had died. He had died; the dead harm no one. She too could harm no one, now.

But it was night. Captain Treach apportioned the food in darkness, watched his companions at the water to insure that they were not overgreedy.

Treach snapped commands, set the course by the stars. The men hauled at the oars in silence, and the boat glided through black waters.

Groat and Slew labored. Salvatore dropped off to sleep, his swarthy face buried in his hands as he huddled up against the forward seat. Treach kept awake by sheer will, cursing mechanically at the oarsmen, so that the sound of his voice might drown out the greater sound of the Silence — the empty Silence of rolling waters. The very rustle and lap of the waves seemed to become a part of a maddening stillness that sapped the mind. The night sea was an entity that crawled about them. Treach felt this, although no concrete thought was formulated. But his instinct awakened him to fear; fear which the silent sea now personified. Here, drifting alone in black infinitude, the Powers of which the dead wizard had spoken assumed new reality. It was easy for the tired imagination to conceive of vast pulsing shapes, embodiments of the night and the wind and the water.

Treach felt his burning forehead, drew the back of his hand over lips cracked with fever.

He fell asleep while the waters murmured. In his dreams the water was whispering. From far away it whispered—from behind the boat. The whispering grew louder. It was right

behind the boat now. He could almost hear words floating up out of the water. The whispering was trying to tell him something — something about vengeance, and a curse—right under the boat now. . . .

There was a scream of utter agony.

TREACH wrenched himself from sleep, sat bolt-upright as the scream trailed off into a gurgling noise in the blackness.

"What's that?" he shouted to his companions.

For a moment there was no answer. Groat's face was buried in trembling hands.

Salvatore heard him, but when he opened his mouth it merely hung loosely, without moving in speech. And Slew was gone.

"Where's Sam?" shouted Treach.

Salvatore managed to regain partial control of his jaws.

"He—gone," the swarthy man spluttered. "It came over the side and took him—it was kissing him and then it pulled him into the water—it took him —*santo Dios*——"

Then Treach was upon Salvatore, shaking his shoulders and shrieking into his very face.

"What took him, damme? Speak up, man, for the love of heaven!"

"I not know," whimpered the other. "I not know. We row here, and then Slew he stop rowing. I take the oar. He just sit there at end of boat. All at once he say, 'Listen.' I listen, hear nothing. 'Listen,' he say. 'I hear whisper.' I tell him he crazy. But he just sit and look at water and say, 'It getting louder.' All at once he lean down, and then—*sacramento!*—two arms come up out of water and go around his neck. He just scream once and then over side he go. No splash, no bubbles. He go, and I see arms—all red arms. *All red!*"

As the big man slumped down in the boat Treach peered wildly at the black waters about him. They were still, unruffled. No body, no rippling.

"You're daft, man," he whispered, but there was no conviction in his voice.

"Those red arms," Groat muttered, from behind. "I never believed in mermaids or sea-monsters, but——"

"Shut up, both of you! You're crazy! Slew fell overboard, that's all. Fever's got you. There's nothing in the water but sharks. And they have no arms."

"You threw something in water with arms," Salvatore mumbled.

Treach struck the man across the mouth. "Shut up!" he screamed. "Let me alone."

Silently, he sat there until dawn arose, and when he saw its redness, he shuddered.

THEY were all mad now, food and water gone, Slew gone. And the sun, searing down, cooked the madness into their brains until thoughts writhed and twisted amidst flames.

Salvatore wouldn't row any more. He kept staring at the water behind the boat while Treach and Groat worked the oars. Treach watched him.

Toward midday Salvatore turned.

"There," he whispered. "I know. I know it come. I see it. There in the water. It following us. Swimming in water. Oh, Cap'n, look there."

"Shut up!" But Treach looked. It was only sunlight glinting on the waves behind.

"Look. It move again!"

Something *was* moving, away back.

"Sharks, you fool!"

"Sharks are not red."

"Shut up!"

They pulled the oars, but Salvatore

gazed back as sunset dripped blood upon the waves. He was trembling and his face was soaking with perspiration not born of heat alone.

"Let us all stay awake tonight," he whispered. "Maybe we pray and it go away. Otherwise——"

"Quiet!" Treach snapped the command with his old authority.

But the authority was in his voice alone now. Inside, Luke Treach was afraid.

When the sun went down he heard the whispering at once. It welled out of the black waters, and he prayed that the moon might rise at once. Hearing that whispering in the blackness was too much. He turned toward the back of the boat. He'd talk to Salvatore, anything, just drown out that growing whisper. He turned—and saw.

The big man was on his knees. He was leaning over the gunwale. His arms were outstretched and he was staring down into the black water, his face icy with horror.

And two arms were rising out of the water—two long, red arms. They were pinkly phosphorescent in the darkness. They glowed like—like stripped flesh.

The arms reached out, twin serpents that embraced. Treach tried to call out, to motion to Groat. He was frozen, frozen as the arms rose, embraced Salvatore. And silently, the big man toppled over the side. The splash broke the spell.

"Quick!" Treach screamed. Groat followed him on his hands and knees as they thrashed their oars in the blackness of the waves. Nothing moved.

"Sharks move a lot," Groat muttered, in a hoarse voice. "Sharks move, and octopus move. But this—you saw?"

"I didn't see anything," Treach lied. "He was mad. Threw himself over."

"Drowning men move," Groat croaked.

Treach mastered himself. "Row," he commanded. "For God's sake, row, man! We must reach land before tomorrow night."

They rowed as though Death were at their heels. And in their hearts it was this they feared. They rowed past midnight; tired, feverish, aflame with thirst and hunger. But Fear called their strokes, and Fear drove the boat on through the inky, whispering waters.

Treach was nearly mad now. There *was* something out there! He could no longer keep from thinking of the curse —of what Ynez had said about not being able to die. Yet he had killed her; what he did would kill anyone. She must be dead.

"What's that?" Groat had stopped rowing.

"Where?"

"Back there in the water — see, where the moonlight hits the wave."

"I don't see——" Treach stopped, eyes wide with dread.

"Yes, you do. You see it. That head, coming toward us."

They sat there while the bobbing thing approached. And the whispering rose about them in a great murmur as of winds rising from ocean depths, and the whispering was clear this time so that they heard.

"Where are you, Luke Treach? I come for you. You have taken my eyes, Luke Treach, and I cannot see. But you are there, and I come for you."

Groat began to laugh. A low chuckling rose from his throat until it drowned out the sound of the whispering. Groat raised his head to the moon and bayed his laughter. He sat there quaking with mirth.

And Treach watched him, then watched the bobbing head that circled

the boat. It went around once, twice. It stopped for a moment on his side, and he saw a dark, seal-like outline that might or might not have been human. It hesitated in the water, and Treach drew his knife. Then it circled the boat again and came to rest on the side where Groat sat laughing. Two arms rose out of the water in the moonlight—two red arms, glistening and wet. And Groat went over, still laughing. His laughter rose, then bubbled away as the arms dragged him down.

It was then that Treach himself began to laugh. All alone in the boat he sat, laughing up to the moon. He laughed because he knew he was mad—what he had seen could not be true.

He was mad, and yet he would escape. Luke Treach seized an oar and began to row with demented fury.

THE sun was high when he ceased. Madness passed, and the events of the night were a dream. Treach leaned back, rubbed his eyes, and looked around in amazement.

"Groat? Salvatore? Slew? Where are you?"

They were gone—but they couldn't be gone, or it would be true.

"Groat? Salvatore? Slew?"

And then the waves around the boat parted, and three heads appeared in the water. Sam Slew's one-eyed stare came from a blue, bloated face. Salvatore's eyes were closed and his mouth was sealed with seaweed. The drowned visage of Groat, smiling through a tangle of kelp, bobbed horridly on the waves. All three heads came to the side of the boat. They shimmered there through the haze of heat from the sun.

Treach had been screaming for a long time in a high shrill voice when they disappeared.

"Fever," he muttered. "Just one day more."

He clawed at the oars.

But now he couldn't keep his eyes off the water. And as noon approached, he could begin to see the swimmer behind—far off, crawling through the trough of the waves. It was keeping distance; but a few strokes and it would be upon him.

The delirious pirate redoubled his efforts with every ounce of remaining strength. And still the gap between boat and swimmer narrowed. Now Treach could see long red arms in the water. He could not quite make out a head or face, but he saw the arms. Remembering what he had done he shuddered. *Red arms!*

But the breeze was changing. Offshore?

He faced the sunset. A black bulk loomed from the water to his west. Dominica, he guessed. If he could make it before nightfall he would be safe.

He rowed on, faster.

The swimmer was fast, too. The gap narrowed, just as the red band of sunset narrowed.

"How can she follow?" Treach muttered. "She's blind. I know that. She took the others, searching for me. How can she follow? Wizard tricks—that vial! Why didn't I believe it would keep her alive, even after *that!* I must row—harder."

Panting, the wrecked body of Luke Treach tugged at the oars. His bloodshot eyes stared now at the bobbing head just behind the boat. His ears buzzed, but he heard the whisperings.

"I swore it, Luke Treach. Now I come for you."

There was no use to row, but Treach rowed; no use to scream, but Treach screamed; screamed and rowed as the

red thing swam around the boat. Then it was crawling over the side, and Luke Treach avoided the pinkish-red arms as they reached out. Laughing, he drew his knife. But then it crawled into the boat so that Treach saw it, drowned, yet livid red all over. And he pointed the knife, but it came on, eyeless and groping. One hand grasped the knife and then both arms went around Luke Treach so that he fell back. The hand grasping the knife came down and a voice that was not a voice whispered:

"I came a long way—from death itself. And now I shall do to you what you did to me before you cast me over the side. You shall be as red as I am."

And the knife sang down as Luke Treach's knife had sung down when he killed Ynez before her father and cast her into the sea. It sang down, and when it ceased the red swimmer went over the side of the drifting boat and disappeared.

Night fell, and still the boat drifted. At dawn it bumped the shore.

Two men found it there some hours later.

They peered into it and shuddered at the sight of the figure lying on the bottom of the boat.

"Dead?" whispered one.

"Of course he's dead."

"Wrecked, doubtlessly, in an open boat."

"Yes." His voice was vibrant with horror. "But what could have done *this* to him?"

"Just what was done?—I cannot understand it yet."

The first man stared again at the red thing in the boat. "You fool," he said, "can't you see that this man was *flayed alive?*"

In an Old Street

By VINCENT STARRETT

Does the wind keep no saltness of their tears
Who lived and sorrowed here and now are dust?
Does the sun store no laughter and no lust
Of them that kissed and perished down the years?
Red as an ember from the molten spheres
Life was a flame where now the creeping rust
Gnaws the gaunt bones of silence; the proud thrust
Of the tall chimneys only perseveres.

Once there was drama rich and passionate
Under these symbols feeling for the sky;
Life was a joyous wound—and damn the scars!
Only the futile gesture stays thought I:
And for a time I paused to contemplate
The high and windy virtue of the stars.



"Down toward the ghastly horde Edmond was drawn."

Hydra

By HENRY KUTTNER

A unique tale of the fourth dimension, a dangerous experiment in occultism, and the ghastly horror that reached back from that other plane of space

"There are sacraments of evil as well as of good about us, and we live and move to my belief in an unknown world, a place where there are caves and shadows and dwellers in twilight. It is possible that man may sometimes return on the track of evolution, and it is my belief that an awful lore is not yet dead."

—ARTHUR MACHEN.

TWO men died; possibly three. So much is known. The tabloids ran flaming headlines telling of the mysterious mutilation and death of Kenneth Scott, noted Baltimore author and occultist, and later, they capitalized similarly on the disappearance of Robert Ludwig, whose correspondence with Scott was well known in literary circles. The equally strange and even more ghastly death of Paul Edmond, while separated from the scene of the Scott horror by the width of a continent, was clearly connected with it. This was shown by the presence of a certain much-discussed object which was found clutched in Edmond's rigid hands—and which the credulous claim caused his death. While this solution is improbable, it is nevertheless true that Paul Edmond bled to death because his carotid artery was severed, and it is also true that there are features about the case difficult to explain in the light of present-day science.

The tabloids made a great deal of Edmond's diary, and even conventional papers found it difficult to handle that unusual document in a fashion that would not lay them open to the charge of yellow journalism. The Hollywood *Citizen-News* solved the problem for its contemporaries by quoting the least fantastic portions of the diary, and hinting plainly that Edmond had been a fiction writer, and that the man's notes had never been intended as a truthful summary of events. The privately printed pamphlet, *On the Sending Out of the Soul,* which played so important a part in the diary, seems to be of purely fictional origin. None of the local booksellers has heard of it, and Mr. Russell Hodgkins, California's most noted bibliophile, declares that the title and the volume must have originated in the mind of the ill-fated Paul Edmond.

Yet, according to Edmond's diary and certain other papers and letters discovered in his desk, it was this pamphlet which caused Ludwig and Edmond to undertake the disastrous experiment. Ludwig had decided to visit his California correspondent, making a leisurely voyage from New York by way of the Panama Canal. The *Carnatic* docked on August 15th, and Ludwig spent several hours wandering through San Pedro. It was there, in a musty "swap shop," that he bought the pamphlet, *On the Sending Out of the Soul.* When the young man arrived at

Edmond's Hollywood apartment he had the booklet with him.

Both Ludwig and Edmond were deeply interested in the occult. They had dabbled in witchcraft and demonology, as a result of their acquaintance with Scott, who possessed one of the best occult libraries in America.

Scott was a strange man. Slender, sharp-eyed, and taciturn, he spent most of his time in an old brownstone house in Baltimore. His knowledge of esoteric matters was little short of phenomenal; he had read the *Chhaya Ritual,* and in his letters to Ludwig and Edmond had hinted at the real meanings behind the veiled hints and warnings in that half-legendary manuscript. In his great library were such names as Sinistrari, Zancherius, and the ill-famed Gougenot des Mousseau; and in his library safe he had, it was rumored, an immense scrapbook filled with excerpts copied from such fantastic sources as the *Book of Karnak,* the monstrous Sixtystone, and the blasphemous Elder Key, of which only two copies are reputed to exist on earth.

It was little wonder, therefore, that the two students were anxious to tear aside the veil and view the astounding mysteries of which Scott hinted so cautiously. In his diary Edmond confessed that his own curiosity was the direct cause of the tragedy.

Yet it was Ludwig who bought the booklet and pored over it with Edmond in the latter's apartment. Certainly Edmond described the pamphlet plainly enough, and it is strange, therefore, that no bibliophile could identify it. According to the diary, it was quite small, about four by five inches, bound in coarse brown paper, and yellowed and crumbling with age. The printing—in Eighteenth Century type with the long *s*—was crudely done, and there was neither a date-line nor a publisher's imprint. There were eight pages; seven of them filled with what Edmond called the usual banal sophisms of mysticism, and on the last page were the specific directions for what would nowadays be known as "projecting one's astral."

The general process was familiar to both students. Their researches had informed them that the soul—or in modern occult language, "astral body"—is supposed to be an ethereal double or ghost, capable of projection to a distance. But the specific directions—finding these was unusual. Nor did they seem difficult to follow. Edmond has purposely been vague about these preparations, but one gathers that the two students visited several chemists before obtaining the ingredients needed. Where they secured the *cannabis indica* later discovered on the scene of the tragedy is a mystery, but not, of course, one impossible of solution.

On August 15th Ludwig, apparently without Edmond's knowledge, wrote to Scott by air-mail, describing the pamphlet and its contents, and asking for advice.

On the night of August 18th, approximately half an hour after Kenneth Scott received Ludwig's letter, the two young occultists undertook their disastrous experiment.

2

LATER, Edmond blamed himself. In the diary he mentions Ludwig's uneasiness, as though the latter sensed some hidden danger. Ludwig suggested postponing the trial for a few days, but Edmond laughed at his fears. It ended with the two placing the required ingredients in a brazier and kindling the mixture.

There were other preparations, too,

but Edmond is quite vague. He makes one or two furtive references to "the seven lamps" and "the infra color," but nothing can be made of these terms. The two had decided to attempt projection of their astral bodies across the continent; they would attempt communication with Kenneth Scott. One can detect a tinge of youthful vanity in this.

Cannabis indica formed one of the ingredients of the mixture in the brazier; that has been ascertained by analysis. It was the presence of this Indian drug which led so many to believe that the later entries in Edmond's diary were evolved from nothing more tangible than the fantasies of an opium or hashish dream, directed along the curious channels they took merely because of the students' preoccupation with those things at the time. Edmond dreamed he saw Scott's house in Baltimore. But it must be remembered that he had been staring at a photograph of that house which he had placed on the table before him; and he was consciously willing to go there. Nothing is more logical therefore, than that Edmond simply dreamed *what he wanted to dream.*

But Ludwig had the identical vision, or, at least, so he stated afterward—unless Edmond, in that entry, lied. It is the opinion of Professor Perry L. Lewis, a recognized expert on dream-phenomena, that Edmond, during his hashish vision, spoke of his illusions aloud, with no conscious intention of so doing, nor any later memory of it—and that Ludwig, as in a hypnotic trance, simply saw the phantasms Edmond's words conjured up in his mind.

Edmond states in his diary that after watching the burning contents of the brazier for some minutes, he fell into a state of somnolent trance, in which he saw his surroundings clearly, but with certain curious alterations which can only be attributed to the action of the drug. The marijuana smoker may see a tiny hall bedroom metamorphose itself into a huge vaulted chamber; similarly, Edmond stated that the room in which he sat seemed to enlarge. Oddly, however, the growth was of a strangely abnormal type; the geometry of the room gradually became *all wrong.* Edmond stresses this point without attempting to explain it. Just when the shifting became noticeable he does not mention, but presently he found himself in the midst of a chamber which, although recognizably his own, had changed *until it centered at a certain point.*

The notes are almost incoherent here. Edmond obviously found it difficult to describe what he saw in his vision. All the lines and curves of the room, he insists with odd emphasis, seemed to point at one specific spot, the brazier where the mixture of drugs and chemicals was smoldering.

Very faintly a persistent ringing came to his ears, but this dwindled and at last died away altogether. At the time Edmond thought the sound due to the effects of the drug. It was not until later that he learned of Scott's frantic efforts to reach him by means of long-distance telephone. The shrill ringing grew fainter and faded into silence.

Edmond was of an experimental turn of mind. He tried to shift his gaze to specific objects he remembered, a vase, a lamp, a table. But the room seemed to possess an indescribable viscid fluidity, so that he found his stare inevitably slipping along warped lines and curves until he was again watching the brazier. And it was then that he became conscious of something unusual taking place at that spot.

The mixture no longer smoldered. Instead, a strange crystal formation was building itself up within the brazier. This object Edmond found impossible to describe; he could only say that it seemed a continuation of the warped lines of the room, carrying them *beyond* the point where they centered. Apparently unconscious of the insanity of such a concept, he goes on to say that his eyes began to ache as he watched the crystalline object, but he could not turn away his gaze.

The crystal drew him. He felt an abrupt and agonizing suction; there was a high-pitched thrumming in the air, and suddenly he was drifting with increasing velocity toward the thing in the brazier. It sucked him in—such is Edmond's inexplicable phrase; he felt a moment of incredible cold, and then a new vision rose up before him.

GRAY fog, and instability. Edmond stressed this curious feeling of flux, which he declared existed *within himself*. He felt, he says oddly, like a cloud of smoke, wavering and drifting aimlessly. But when he glanced down he saw his own body, fully clothed and apparently quite substantial.

Now a dreadful feeling of uneasiness began to oppress his mind. The fog thickened and whirled; the nightmare, causeless fear familiar to the opium-taker clutched him in its grip. Something, he felt, was approaching, something utterly horrible and frightful in its potent menace. Then, quite suddenly, the fog was gone.

Far beneath him he saw what at first he took to be the sea. He was hanging unsupported in empty air, and a surging grayness shimmered and crawled from horizon to horizon. The fluctuating leaden surface was dotted and speckled with round dark blobs; these were innumerable. Without conscious volition he felt himself drawn down vertically, and as he approached the mysterious grayness he saw it more clearly.

He could not determine its nature. It seemed merely a sea of gray slime, protoplasmic and featureless. But the dark blobs became recognizable as heads.

Into Edmond's mind flashed the memory of a narrative he had once read, written in the Twelfth Century by the monk Alberico, and purporting to be the record of a descent into hell. Like Dante, Alberico had seen the torments of the damned; the blasphemers (he wrote in his stilted, pedantic Latin) had been immersed to their necks in a lake of molten metal. Edmond remembered Alberico's description now. Then he saw that the heads were not those of beings partly submerged in the gray slime; instead, they were homogenous with the grayness. They grew from it!

Edmond's fear had left him. With oddly detached curiosity he scanned the fantastic surface below. There were human heads bobbing and nodding from the gray sea, uncountable thousands of them, but by far the greater number of the heads were not human. Some of these latter bore traces of the anthropoid, but others were scarcely recognizable as living objects.

For the heads lived. Their eyes stared with awful agony; their lips writhed in soundless laments; tears coursed down the sunken cheeks of many. Even the horribly inhuman heads—bird-like, reptilian, monstrous things of living stone and metal and vegetable matter—showed traces of the unceasing torment that gnawed at them. Down toward the ghastly horde Edmond was drawn.

Again blackness enveloped him. It

was transitory, but as he emerged from momentary unconsciousness he felt (he says) curiously changed. Something had happened to him during that fateful period of darkness. There seemed to be a cloudy vagueness shadowing his mind, so that he viewed his surroundings darkly and through a kind of haze. In this new vision he seemed to be high in the air above a silent, moonlit city, and rapidly moving downward.

There was a full moon, and by its light he recognized the old brownstone house toward which he was descending. It was Kenneth Scott's home, made familiar to him by the photograph. A vague thrill of triumph warmed him; the experiment, then, had succeeded.

The house loomed up before him. He was hovering outside an open, unlighted window. Peering in, he recognized the slender form of Kenneth Scott seated at a desk. The occultist's lips were tightly compressed, and a worried scowl darkened his face. A great book with yellowed parchment pages was open before the man, who was studying it carefully. Occasionally his worried eyes would turn to the telephone on the desk beside him. Edmond made an attempt to call to Scott, and the latter looked up, staring through the window.

Instantly a shocking change transformed Scott's face. The man seemed to become quite insane with fear. He sprang up from the desk, overturning his chair, and simultaneously Edmond felt an impelling urge dragging him forward.

WHAT happened after that is confused and hazy. Edmond's notes are fragmentary at this point, and it is only possible to gather that Edmond was in the room and pursuing the frantic Scott in a fashion that was inexplicable and utterly abnormal. He was *flowing*—and Scott was caught and *engulfed* — and here Edmond's notes break off utterly, as though he had been overcome by remembrance of the episode.

Merciful blackness swallowed Edmond then, but there was one more flashing vision before the dream faded and was gone. Again he seemed to be outside Scott's window, swiftly retreating into the night, and through the open square of yellow radiance was visible part of Scott's desk and the crumpled body of the man himself lying on the carpet beyond it. At least Edmond assumed that it was Scott's body, for either the man was lying with his head doubled at an impossible angle out of sight beneath his torso, *or else he was headless.*

That ended the dream. Edmond awoke to find the room in darkness, and Ludwig stirring sleepily near by. Both students were distracted and overwrought. They argued excitedly for some time, with occasional semi-hysterical outbursts, and Ludwig revealed that his vision had been identical with Edmond's. It is a pity that neither of them took the trouble to analyze the situation and look for a logical explanation, but both, of course, were mystics, and thoroughly credulous.

The telephone rang. An impatient operator asked if Edmond would receive a call from Baltimore. She had, she said, been ringing the apartment for some time without getting a response. Edmond cut her off abruptly and requested that the connection be put through. But this could not be done. The operator at the Baltimore exchange reported that her party did not answer, and, after a futile exchange of questions, Edmond hung up. It was

then Ludwig confessed to writing Scott, bemoaning the reticence that had made him refrain from telling the Baltimore occultist the purpose of the experiment —the destination to which the astrals were directed.

Nor were their fears calmed by the discovery of the object in the brazier. Apparently part of the vision at least had been founded on truth; the unknown chemicals had crystallized into a thing that appeared to be all planes and angles. It was formed of some brittle substance resembling frosted glass, was roughly pyramidal, and measured about six inches from apex to base. Ludwig wanted to smash it at once, but Edmond prevented him.

Their arguments were brought to an end by the arrival of a telegram from Scott. It read:

ATTEMPT NO EXPERIMENTS WITH PAMPHLET YOU MENTION STOP TREMENDOUSLY DANGEROUS AND MAY MEAN MY DEATH STOP AM WRITING YOU TODAY BY AIR MAIL FULL DETAILS STOP ADVISE YOU BURN PAMPHLET
KENNETH SCOTT

3

THERE were two more communications which resulted in Paul Edmond's temporary stay at a Hollywood hospital. The first was an item which appeared in time for the morning edition of the Los Angeles *Times* of August 20th. It stated briefly that Kenneth Scott, well-known author and occultist, residing in Baltimore, Maryland, had been mysteriously murdered. There were no clues to indicate the identity of the assailant, and the body had not been discovered until the afternoon of the 19th. The fact that the victim's head had been severed from his body and was inexplicably missing made identification at first doubtful, but Scott's physician confirmed the logical supposition. A quantity of grayish slime smeared on the carpet added another element of mystery to the case. Scott's head, the coroner declared, had been cleanly severed from his body by a sharp blade. Police stated that an arrest would be made shortly.

Needless to say, that arrest was never made. The tabloids seized the juicy morsel and made much of it, and an enterprising reporter unearthed the fact that Scott had sent an air-mail letter from the Baltimore Central post office shortly before the time at which his death had been fixed. It was this communication which was the direct cause of Edmond's nervous collapse and his retirement to a hospital.

The letter was found in Edmond's apartment, but it sheds little light on the case. Scott was a visionary, and his letter bears an almost suspicious resemblance to his fictional work.

"Both of you know" (ran part of the long letter) "how much truth there is often to be found behind old legends and folk-lore. The Cyclops is no longer a myth, as any doctor familiar with monstrous births can tell you. And you know how my theories regarding the Elixir Vitæ have been confirmed by the discovery of heavy water. Well, the myth of the Hydra is based on such a truth.

"There are innumerable tales of multi-headed monsters, all springing from the actual entity of whose real existence a very few have known through the ages. This creature did not originate on earth, but in the gulfs Outside. It was, after a fashion, a vampiric entity, living not on the blood of its victims but on their heads—their brains. This may sound strange to you, but you know by this time that there are beings Outside whose needs

and flesh are not as ours. Through the eons this entity has ravened in the abyss beyond our dimension, sending out its call to claim victims where it could. For this entity, by absorbing the heads and brains of intelligent creatures both of this world and of other planets, emerges with its powers and vitality greatly augmented.

"You both know that through the ages there have been certain people willing to worship the Great Ones—even the evil Aliens who have come down to us in folk-lore as demons. Every god and every entity has had its worshippers, from black Pharol to the least of the Aliens whose powers are more than human. And these cults intermingle in a very curious way, so that we find traces of a forgotten worship cropping up in far later times. When the Romans worshipped the Magna Mater in Italy's dark forests, for instance, why do you suppose they incorporated into their ritual the mystic adoration, 'Gorgo, Mormo, *thousand-faced moon*'? The implication is clear.

"I have gone into considerable detail, but it has been necessary to prepare you for my explanation of the origin of that pamphlet Robert found in San Pedro. I knew of this booklet, which was printed in Salem in 1783, but I had thought that there were no longer any copies in existence. That pamphlet is a *trap,* and a most damnable one, created by the worshippers of the Hydra to lure victims into the maw of their god!

"It purports to be merely an innocent experiment with the astral self. However, the real purpose of the thing is to open a gateway and prepare a sacrifice for the Hydra. When the booklets were first distributed, through secret underground channels, there was an epidemic of deaths in New England. Dozens of men and women were found headless, with no trace of any human murderer. Yet the real killers were the ones who performed the experiment according to the directions given in the booklet, and unknowingly let the Hydra use their vital forces to materialize on this planet.

"Baldly speaking, what happens is this: the subject, following the instructions, inhales the fumes of the drug which tears apart the veil between our world and Outside. He concentrates upon the person whom he wishes his astral to visit, and that person is doomed. For the experimenter is drawn Outside, into another dimension of space, and through a certain psychic and chemical process is temporarily made one with the Hydra. What it amounts to is this: the Hydra, using the experimenter's astral as a host, comes to earth and takes its prey—which is the person upon whom the subject has been concentrating. There is no real danger to the experimenter himself, save, perhaps, for a possible severe nervous shock. But the other—the victim—is taken by the Hydra for its own. He is doomed to eternal torment, except in certain unusual cases where he can maintain a psychic link with an earthly mind. But I need not speak of that.

"I am greatly worried. I have put through a long-distance call to Edmond's apartment, and no doubt you will hear from me tonight long before this letter can arrive. If you are rash enough to undertake the experiment before I can communicate with you, I shall be in grave danger, for you may attempt projection of your astral to Baltimore, to me. After I have posted this letter, and while I am waiting for my telephone call to be put through, I shall do my utmost to find a protective

formula, although I do not think one exists.

"KENNETH SCOTT."

IT WAS this letter which sent Edmond to the hospital for a few days to recover from his nervous condition. Ludwig was apparently of stronger stuff; he stayed, at Edmond's request, in the latter's apartment, and indulged in some experimenting of his own.

Just what happened in Edmond's apartment during the next few days will never be fully known. Ludwig visited his host daily at the hospital, and told him of his experiments, and Edmond noted what he could remember on slips of paper which he subsequently inserted between pages of his diary. One is inclined to believe that the anomalous mixture of drugs in the brazier continued to exert its influence on the minds of the two students, for certainly Ludwig's experiences, as recorded by Edmond, seem like a continuation of the original hashish dream.

Ludwig had burned the pamphlet, as might be expected. And then, on the night following Edmond's removal to the hospital, the other youth maintained, he had heard Scott speaking to him.

Edmond did not scoff, for he was vastly credulous. He listened intently while Ludwig declared that the occultist was still alive, although existing in another dimension of space. The Hydra had captured Scott, but the occultist had the power to communicate with Ludwig. It is necessary to keep constantly in mind the fact that neither of these two youths was quite normal after the mental agitation he had undergone.

So Ludwig added more and more every day to his tale, and Edmond listened. They spoke furtively, in whispers, and Edmond kept careful watch over his notes so that they would not fall into skeptical hands. The whole crux of the matter, Ludwig said, was the strange crystalline object which had formed in the brazier. It was this which kept open the path to Outside. One could pass through it if one wished, despite the fact that it was not as large as a man's head, because the crystal created a "warp in space"—a term Edmond mentions several times, but entirely neglects to explain. The Hydra, however, could not return to earth unless the original conditions were duplicated.

Ludwig said he had heard Scott's voice whispering thinly from the crystalline thing of insane planes and angles, and the occultist was in horrible agony and insistent that Ludwig rescue him. It would not be difficult, provided the student followed instructions implicitly. There were dangers, but he must have courage, obey, and strive to undo the harm he had done. Only thus could Scott be freed from endless agony and return to earth.

So, Ludwig told Edmond, he went through the crystal—again this vague and extraordinary phrase!—taking those things Scott had said he would need. Chief among these was a razor-keen, bone-handled carving knife. There were other objects, some of them difficult to obtain, which Ludwig did not specify, or which if he did, Edmond did not mention in his notes.

According to Ludwig's narrative, he went through the crystal, and he found Scott. But not at first. There were nights of fumbling progress through fantastic and terrible visions of nightmare, guided always by the insistent whisper of Scott's voice. There were gates to be passed, and strange dimensions to traverse. And so Ludwig

moved through awful abysses of pulsing, fearful darkness; he went through a place of curious violet light that sent tinkling, evil trills of goblin laughter after him; he went through a Cyclopean deserted city of ebon stone which he shudderingly recognized as fabled Dis. In the end he found Scott.

HE DID what was necessary. When he came to the hospital the next day Edmond was shocked by the bloodless pallor of his friend, and the little crawling lights of madness that shone in his eyes. The pupils were unnaturally dilated, and Ludwig spoke that day in disjointed whispers which Edmond found hard to follow. The notes suffered. It is only clear that Ludwig declared he had freed Scott from the grip of the Hydra, and that over and over again the youth kept muttering something about the terrible gray slime that had smeared the blade of his carving-knife. He said his task was not yet ended.

Undoubtedly it was the drug-poisoned mind of Robert Ludwig speaking when he told how he had left Scott, or at least the living part of him, in a plane of space which was not inimical to human life, and which was not subject to entirely natural laws and processes. Scott wanted to return to earth. He could return now, Ludwig told Edmond, but the strange vitality that maintained life in what was left of Scott would dissipate immediately on earth. Only in certain planes and dimensions was it possible for Scott to exist at all, and the alien force that kept him alive was gradually departing now that he was no longer drawing sustenance from the Hydra. Ludwig said that quick action was necessary.

There was a certain spot Outside where Scott could achieve his desire. In that place thought was obscurely linked to energy and matter, because of an insane shrill piping (Ludwig said) that eternally filtered from beyond a veil of flickering colors. It was very near the Center, the Center of Chaos, where dwells Azathoth, the Lord of All Things. All that exists was created by the thoughts of Azathoth, and only in the Center of Ultimate Chaos could Scott find means to live again on earth in human form. There is an erasure in Edmond's notes at this point, and it is only possible to make out the fragment: "... *of thought made real.*"

White-faced, hollow-cheeked, Ludwig said that he must complete his task. He must take Scott to the Center, although he confessed to a horrible fear that made him hesitate. There were dangers in the way, and pitfalls where one might easily be trapped. Worst of all, the veil shielding Azathoth was thin, and even the slightest glimpse of the Lord of All Things would mean utter and complete destruction to the beholder. Scott had spoken of that, Ludwig said, and had also mentioned the dreadful lure that would drag the young student's eyes to the fatal spot unless he fought strongly against it.

Biting his lips nervously, Robert Ludwig left the hospital, and we assume met with foul play on his way to Edmond's apartment. For Edmond never saw his friend again on earth.

4

THE police were still searching for the missing head of Kenneth Scott. Edmond gathered that from the newspapers. He waited impatiently the next day for Ludwig to appear, and after several hours had passed without

result, he telephoned his apartment and got no response. Eventually, worried and almost sick with anxiety, he spent a turbulent ten minutes with his doctor and another with the superintendent. Finally he achieved his purpose and went by taxi to his apartment, having overruled the objection of hospital officials.

Ludwig was gone. He had vanished without a trace. Edmond considered summoning the police, but speedily dismissed the thought. He paced about the apartment nervously, seldom turning his gaze from the crystalline object that still rested in the brazier.

His diary gives little clue to what happened that night. One can conjecture that he prepared another dose of the narcotic drug, or that the toxic effects of the fumes Edmond inhaled several days before had finally worked such disintegration within his brain that he could no longer distinguish between the false and the real. An entry in the diary dated the following morning begins abruptly, "I've heard him. Just as Bob said, he spoke through the crystal thing. He's desperate, and tells me that Bob failed. He didn't get Scott to the Center, or S. could have materialized again on earth and rescued Bob. Something — I'm not sure what—caught Bob, God help him. May God help all of us. . . . Scott says I must begin where Bob left off and finish the job."

There is a soul laid bare on the last pages of that record, and it is not a pleasant sight. Somehow the most frightful of the unearthly horrors the diary describes seem not quite as dreadful as the last conflict that took place in that apartment above Hollywood, when a man wrestled with his fear and realized his weakness. It is probably just as well that the pamphlet was destroyed, for such a brain-wrecking drug as was described in it must surely have originated in some hell as terrible as any which Edmond portrays. The last pages of the diary show a mind crumbling into ruin.

"I went through. Bob has made it easier; I can begin where he left off, as Scott says. And I went up through the Cold Flame and the Whirling Vortices until I reached the place where Scott is. Where he *was,* rather, for I picked him up and carried him through several planes before I had to return. Bob didn't mention the suction one has to keep fighting against. But it doesn't get very strong until I've got quite a distance in."

THE next entry is dated a day later. It is scarcely legible.

"Couldn't stand it. Had to get out. Walked around Griffith Park for hours. Then I came back to the apartment and almost immediately Scott spoke to me. I'm afraid. I think he senses that, and is frightened too, and angry.

"He says we can't waste any more time. His vitality is almost gone, and he's got to reach the Center quick and get back to earth. I saw Bob. Just a glimpse, and I wouldn't have known it was he if Scott hadn't told me. He was all-awry, and horrible somehow. Scott said the atoms of his body had adapted themselves to another dimension when he let himself get caught. I've got to be careful. We're nearly at the Center."

The last entry.

"Once more will do it. God, I'm afraid, horribly afraid. *I heard the piping.* It turned my brain into ice. Scott was shouting at me, urging me on, and I think trying to drown that—other sound, but of course he couldn't do it. There was a very faint violet glow in

the distance, and a flickering of colored lights. Beyond, Scott told me, was Azathoth.

"I can't do it. I don't dare—not with that piping, and those Shapes I saw moving far down. If I look in that direction when I'm at the Veil it will mean—but Scott is insanely angry with me. He says I was the cause of it all. I had an almost uncontrollable impulse to let the suction draw me back, and then to smash the Gateway—the crystal thing. Maybe if I find myself unable to keep looking away from the Veil when next I go through I'll do just that. I told Scott if he let me come back to earth for one more breathing-space I'd finish the job this next time. He agreed, but said to hurry. His vitality is going fast. He said if I didn't come through the Gateway in ten minutes he'd come after me. He won't, though. The life that keeps him going Outside wouldn't be any use on earth, except for a second or two.

"My ten minutes is up. Scott is calling from the Gateway. *I'm not going!* I can't face it—not the last horror Outside, with those things moving behind the Veil and that awful piping screaming out——

"I won't go, I tell you! No, Scott—I can't face it! You can't come out—*like that.* You'd die—I tell you I won't go! You can't force me—I'll smash the Gateway first! . . . what? No! No, you can't . . . you can't do it! . . . Scott! Don't, *don't . . . God—he's coming out——"*

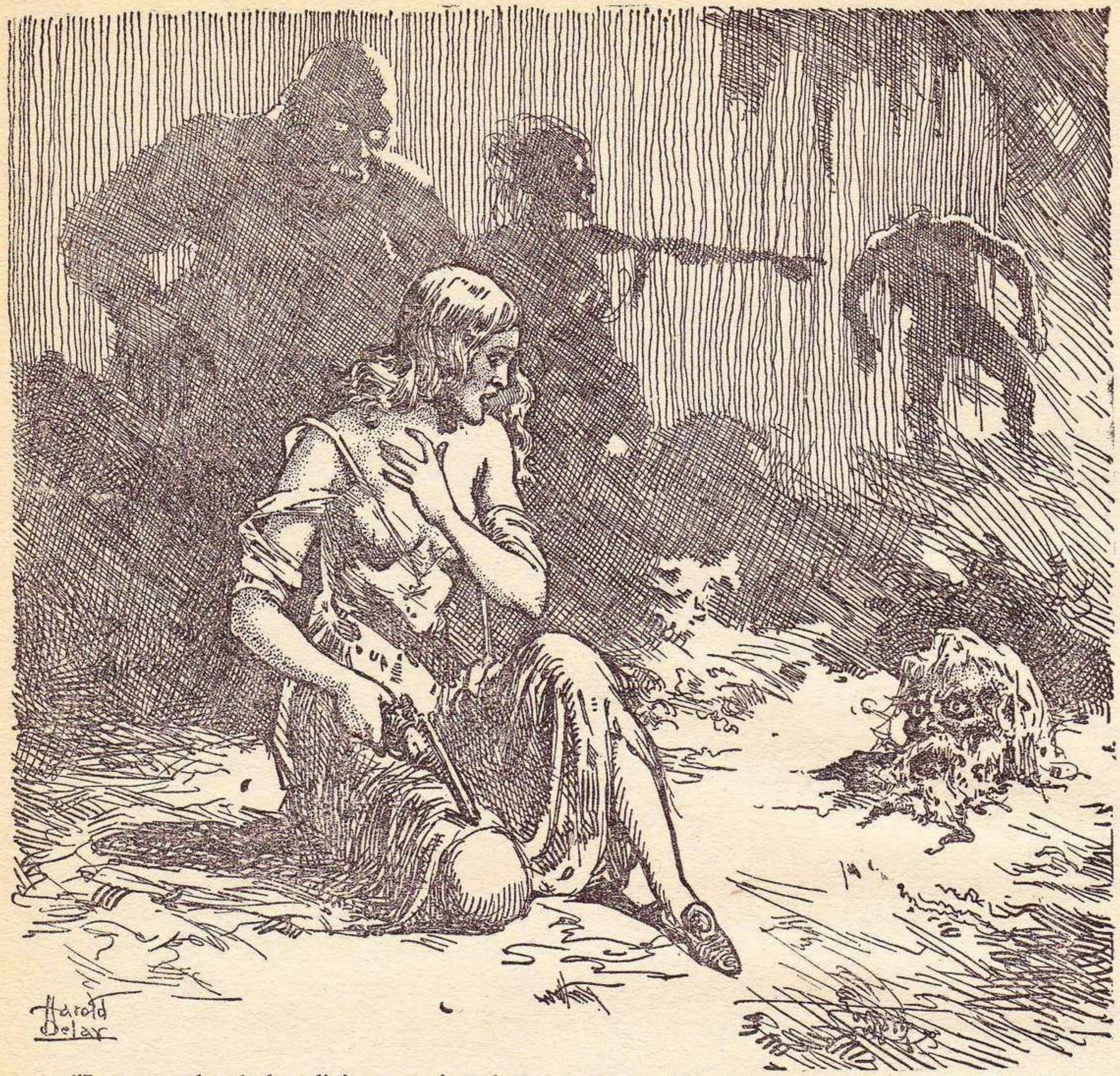
That was the last entry in the diary, which police found open on Edmond's desk. A hideous screaming and subsequently a stream of red liquid seeping out sluggishly from beneath the door of Edmond's apartment had resulted in the arrival of two radio patrol officers.

The body of Paul Edmond was found near the door, the head and shoulders lying in a widening crimson pool.

Near by was an overturned brass brazier, and a flaky white substance, granular in nature, was scattered over the carpet. Edmond's stiff fingers still tightly gripped the object which has since been the cause of so much discussion.

This object was in an incredible state of preservation, in view of its nature. Part of it was coated with a peculiar grayish slime, and its jaws were clamped tightly, the teeth having horribly mangled Edmond's throat and severed the carotid artery.

There was no need to search further for the missing head of Kenneth Scott.



"It was a head, but living, as though its owner had been buried to his bearded chin."

Fearful Rock

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

The Story Thus Far

SCENE, the Missouri-Arkansas border, in Civil War times, within the shadow of a natural obelisk called Fearful Rock, a deserted, haunted house. Enid Mandifer is sent there by her stepfather, Persil Mandifer, as a sacrifice to the Nameless One he worships. She encounters, instead, Lieutenant Kane Lanark, of the Union Army, who has camped his cavalry patrol at the demon-haunted house.

This story began in WEIRD TALES for February.

Her story of strange worship puzzles and repels Lanark and his semi-fanatical sergeant, Jager; yet the lieutenant is attracted by her. A horned image, found in the cellar, is smashed by Jager, and in its hollow middle is discovered a strange, unopenable box. Lanark hides this in a brick oven of the house, just as Mandifer and his son appear and predict dire things to come.

Southern guerrillas attack, and flee again when the house bursts into blue flame. Six of the guerrillas have been killed, also the two Mandifer men; but when a grave is prepared, the two latter bodies have disappeared.

After the war, Lanark returns to the Fearful Rock country. He finds Sergeant Jager working as a frontier preacher, and Enid Mandifer living alone and haunted in her stepfather's house. Later, visiting the rock at night, he learns that the guerrillas' grave is opened. Beside it he meets and fights an enemy who proves to be one of the enemy he himself killed. He discusses the mysterious horror with Jager, and they determine to fight it.

Enid Mandifer, interviewed, remembers something of Persil Mandifer's strange worship, and of a box which he claimed held his "fate and fortune"; it could be opened only at midnight under a full moon—such as will shine that very night.

The story continues:

PART III

11. Return of the Sacrifice

THROUGH the cross-hatching of new-leafed branches the full moon shone down from its zenith. Lanark and Enid Mandifer walked gingerly through the night-filled timber in the gulley beyond which, they knew, lay the ruins of the house where so much repellent mystery had been born.

"It's just eleven o'clock," whispered Lanark, looking at his big silver watch. He was dressed in white shirt and dark trousers, without coat, hat or gloves. His revolver rode in the front of his waistband, and as he limped along, the sheath of Jager's old cavalry saber thumped and rasped his left boot-top. "We must be almost there."

"We are there," replied Enid. "Here's the clearing, and the little brook of water."

She was right. They had come to the open space where first they had met. The moonlight made the ground and its new grass pallid, and struck frosty-gold lights from the runlet in the very center of the clearing. Beyond, to the west, lay menacing shadows.

Enid stooped and laid upon the ground the hand-mirror she carried, "Stand to one side," she said, "and please don't look."

Lanark obeyed, and the girl began to undress.

The young man felt dew at his mustache, and a chill in his heart that was not from dew. He stared into the trees beyond the clearing, trying to have faith in Jager's plan. "We must make the devils come forth and face us," the sergeant-preacher had argued. "Miss Mandifer shall be our decoy, to draw them out where we can get at them. All is very strange, but this much we know—the unholy worship did go on; Miss Mandifer was to be sacrificed as part of it; and, when the sacrifice was not completed, all these evil things happened. We have the hauntings, the blue fire of the house, the creature that attacked Mr. Lanark, and a host of other mysteries to credit to these causes. Let us profit by what little we have found out, and put an

end to the Devil's rule in this country."

It had all sounded logical, but Lanark, listening, had been hesitant until Enid herself agreed. Then it was that Jager, strengthening his self-assumed position of leadership, had made the assignments. Enid would make the journey, as before, from her house to the gulley, there strip and say the words with which her stepfather had charged her four springs ago. Lanark, armed, would accompany her as guard. Jager himself would circle far to the east and approach the ruins from the opposite direction, observing, and, if need be, attacking.

These preparations Lanark reviewed mentally, while he heard Enid's bare feet splashing timidly in the water. It came to him, a bit too late, that the arms he bore might not avail against supernatural enemies. Yet Jager had seemed confident. . . . Enid was speaking, apparently repeating the ritual that was supposed to summon the unnamed god-demon of Persil Mandifer:

"A maid, alone and pure, I stand, not upon water nor on land; I hold a mirror in my hand, in which to see what Fate may send. . . ." She broke off and screamed.

Lanark whipped around. The girl stood, misty-pale in the wash of moonlight, all crouched and curved together like a bow.

"It was coming!" she quavered. "I saw it in the mirror—over yonder, among those trees——"

Lanark glared across the little strip of water and the moonlit grass beyond. Ten paces away, between two trunks, something shone in the shadows—shone darkly, like tar, though the filtered moon-rays did not touch it. He saw nothing of the shape, save that it moved and lived—and watched.

He drew his revolver and fired, twice. There was a crash of twigs, as though something had flinched backward at the reports.

Lanark splashed through the water and, despite his limp, charged at the place where the presence lurked.

12. Jager

IT HAD been some minutes before eleven o'clock when Jager reined in his old black horse at a distance of two miles from Fearful Rock.

Most of those now alive who knew Jager personally are apt to describe him as he was when they were young and he was old—a burly graybeard, a notable preacher and exhorter, particularly at funerals. He preferred the New Testament to the Old, though he was apt to misquote his texts from either; and he loved children, and once preached a telling sermon against the proposition of infant damnation. His tombstone, at Fort Smith, Arkansas, bears as epitaph a verse from the third chapter of the first book of Samuel: *Here am I, for thou didst call me.*

Jager when young is harder to study and to visualize. However, the diary of a long-dead farmer's wife of Pennsylvania records that the "Jager boy" was dull but serious at school, and that his appetite for mince pie amounted to a passion. In Topeka, Kansas, lives a retired railroad conductor whose father, on the pre-Rebellion frontier, once heard Jager defy Southern hoodlums to shoot him for voting Free-state in a territorial election. Ex-Major Kane Lanark mentioned Jager frequently and with admiration in the remarkable pen-and-ink memoir on which the present narrative is based.

How he approached Fearful Rock, and what he encountered there, he himself often described verbally to such of

his friends as pretended that they believed him.

The moonlight showed him a stunted tree, with one gnarled root looping up out of the earth, and to that root he tethered his animal. Then, like Lanark, he threw off his coat, strapping it to the cantle of his saddle, and unfastened his "hickory" blue shirt at the throat. From a saddle-bag he drew a trusty-looking revolver, its barrel sawed off. Turning its butt toward the moon, he spun the cylinder to make sure that it was loaded. Then he thrust it into his belt without benefit of holster, and started on foot toward the rock and its remains of a house.

Approaching, he sought by instinct the cover of trees and bush-clumps, moving smoothly and noiselessly; Jager had been noted during his service in the Army of the Frontier for his ability to scout at night, an ability which he credited to the fact that he had been born in the darkest hours. He made almost as good progress as though he had been moving in broad daylight. At eleven o'clock sharp, as he guessed—like many men who never carry watches, he had become good at judging the time—he was within two hundred yards of the rock itself, and cover had run out. There he paused, chin-deep in a clump of early weeds.

Lanark and the girl, as he surmised, must be well into the gulley by this time. He, Jager, smiled as he remembered with what alacrity Lanark had accepted the assignment of bodyguard to Enid Mandifer. Those two young people acted as if they were on the brink of falling in love, and no mistake. . . .

His eyes were making out details of the scene ahead. Was even the full moon so bright as all this? He could not see very clearly the ruined foundations, for they sat in a depression of the earth. Yet there seemed to be a clinging blue light at about that point, a feeble but undeniable blue. Mentally he compared it to deep, still water, then to the poorest of skimmed milk. Jager remembered the flames that once had burned there, blue as amethyst.

But the blue light was not solid, and it had no heat. Within it, dimmed as though by mist, stood and moved—figures. They were human, at least they were upright; and they stood in a row, like soldiers, all but two. That pair was dark-seeming, and one was grossly thick, the other thin as an exclamation point. The line moved, bent, formed a weaving circle which spread as its units opened their order. Jager had never seen such a maneuver in four years of army service.

Now the circle was moving, rolling around; the figures were tramping counter-clockwise—"withershins" was the old-fashioned word for that kind of motion, as Jager remembered from his boyhood in Pennsylvania. The two darker figures, the ones that had stood separate, were nowhere to be seen; perhaps they were inclosed in the center of the turning circle, the moving shapes of which numbered six. There had been six of Quantrill's guerrillas that died in almost that spot.

The ground was bare except for spring grass, but Jager made shift to crawl forward on hands and knees, his eyes fixed on the group ahead, his beard bristling nervously upon his set chin. He crept ten yards, twenty yards, forty. Some high stalks of grass, killed but not leveled by winter, afforded him a bit of cover, and he paused again, taking care not to rustle the dry stems. He could see the maneuvering creatures more plainly.

They were men, all right, standing

each upon two legs, waving each two arms. No, one of them had only an arm and a stump. Had not one of Quantrill's men—yes! It came to the back of Jager's mind that Lanark himself had cut away an enemy's pistol hand with a stroke of his saber. Again he reflected that there had been six dead guerrillas, and that six were the forms treading so strange a measure yonder. He began to crawl forward again. Sweat made a slow, cold trickle along his spine.

But the two that had stood separate from the six were not to be seen anywhere, inside the circle or out. And Jager began to fancy that his first far glimpse had shown him something strange about that pair of dark forms, something inhuman or sub-human.

Then a shot rang out, clear and sharp. It came from beyond the circle of creatures and the blue-misted ruins. A second shot followed it.

JAGER almost rose into plain view in the moonlight, but fell flat a moment later. Indeed, he might well have been seen by those he spied upon, had they not all turned in the direction whence the shots had sounded. Jager heard voices, a murmur of them with nothing that sounded like articulate words. He made bold to rise on his hands for a closer look. The six figures were moving eastward, as though to investigate.

Jager lifted himself to hands and knees, then rose to a crouch. He ran forward, drawing his gun as he did so. The great uneven shaft that was Fearful Rock gave him a bar of shadow into which he plunged gratefully, and a moment later he was at the edge of the ruin-filled foundation hole, perhaps at the same point where Lanark had stood the night before.

From that pit rose the diluted blue radiance that seemed to involve this quarter. Staring thus closely, Jager found the light similar to that given off by rotten wood, or fungi, or certain brands of lucifer matches. It was like an echo of light, he pondered rather absently, and almost grinned at his own malapropism. But he was not here to make jokes with himself.

He listened, peered about, then began moving cautiously along the lip of the foundation hole. Another shot he heard, and a loud, defiant yell that sounded like Lanark; then an answering burst of laughter, throaty and muffled, that seemed to come from several mouths at once. Jager felt a new and fiercer chill. He, an earnest Protestant from birth, signed himself with the cross—signed himself with the right hand that clutched his revolver.

Yet there was no doubt as to which way lay his duty. He skirted the open foundation of the ruined house, moved eastward over the trampled earth where the six things had formed their open-order circle. Like Lanark, he saw the opened grave-trench. He paused and gazed down.

Two sack-like blotches of pallor lay there—Lanark had described them correctly: they were empty human skins. Jager paused. There was no sound from ahead; he peered and saw the ravine to eastward, filled with trees and gloom. He hesitated at plunging in, the place was so ideal an ambush. Even as he paused, his toes at the brink of the opened grave, he heard a smashing, rustling noise. Bodies were returning through the twigs and leafage of the ravine, returning swiftly.

Had they met Lanark and vanquished him? Had they spied or sensed Jager in their rear?

He was beside the grave, and since

the first year of the war he had known what to do, with enemy approaching and a deep hole at hand. He dived in, head first like a chipmunk into its burrow, and landed on the bottom on all fours.

His first act was to shake his revolver, lest sand had stopped the muzzle.

A charm from the *Long Lost Friend* book whispered itself through his brain, a marksman's charm to bring accuracy with the gun. He repeated it, half audibly, without knowing what the words might mean:

"Ut nemo in sense tentant, descendre nemo; at precedenti spectatur mantica tergo."

At that instant his eyes fell upon the nearest of the two pallid, empty skins, which lay full in the moonlight. He forgot everything else. For he knew that collapsed face, even without the sharp stiletto-like bone of the nose to jut forth in its center. He knew that narrowness through the jowls and temples, that height of brow, that hair white as thistledown.

Persil Mandifer's skull had been inside. It must have been there, and living, recently. Jager's left hand crept out, and drew quickly back as though it had touched a snake. The texture of the skin was soft, clammy, moist . . . *fresh!*

And the other pallidity like a great empty bladder—that could have fitted no other body than the gross one of Larue Mandifer.

Thus, Jager realized, had Lanark entered the grave on the night before, and found these same two skins. Looking up, Lanark had found a horrid enemy waiting to grapple him.

Jager, too, looked up.

A towering silhouette shut out half the starry sky overhead.

13. Lanark

THE combination of pluck and common sense is something of a rarity, and men who possess that combination are apt to go far. Kane Lanark was such a man, and though he charged unhesitatingly across the little strip of water and at the unknown thing in the trees, he was not outrunning his discretion.

He had seen men die in his time, many of them in abject flight, with bullets overtaking them in the spine or the back of the head. It was nothing pleasant to watch, but it crystallized within his mind the realization that dread of death is no armor against danger, and that an enemy attacked is far less formidable than an enemy attacking. That brace of maxims comforted him and bore him up in more tight places than one.

And General Blunt of the Army of the Frontier, an officer who was all that his name implies and who was never given to overstatement, once so unbent as to say in official writing that Captain Kane Lanark was an ornament to any combat force.

And so his rush was nothing frantic. All that faltered was his lame leg. He meant to destroy the thing that had showed itself, but fully as definitely he meant not to be destroyed by it. As he ran, he flung his revolver across to his left hand and dragged free the saber that danced at his side.

But the creature he wanted to meet did not bide his coming. He heard another crash and rattle—it had backed into some shrubs or bushes farther in among the trees. He paused under the branches of the first belt of timber, well aware that he was probably a fair mark for a bullet. Yet he did not expect a gun in the hands of whatever

lurked ahead; he was not sure at all that it even had hands.

Of a sudden he felt, rather than saw, motion upon his left flank. He pivoted upon the heel of his sound right foot and, lifting the saber, spat professionally between hilt and palm. He meant killing, did Lanark, but nothing presented itself. A chuckle drifted to him, a contemptuous burble of sound; he thought of what Enid had said about divining her stepfather's mockery. Again the chuckle, dying away toward the left.

But up ahead came more noise of motion, and this was identifiable as feet —heavy, measured tramping of feet. New and stupid recruits walked like that, in their first drills. So did tired soldiers on the march. And the feet were coming his way.

Lanark's first reaction to this realization was of relief. Marching men, even enemies, would be welcome because he knew how to deal with them. Then he thought of Enid behind him, probably in retreat out of the gully. He must give her time to get away. He moved westward, toward the approaching party, but with caution and silence.

The moonlight came patchily down through the lattice-like mass of branches and twigs, and again Lanark saw motion. This time it was directly ahead. He counted five, then six figures, quite human. The moonlight, when they moved in it, gave him glimpses of butternut shirts, white faces. One had a great waterfall of beard.

Lanark drew a deep breath. "Stand!" he shouted, and with his left hand leveled his pistol.

They stood, but only for a moment. Each figure's attitude shifted ever so slightly as Lanark moved a pace forward. The trees were sparse around him, and the moon shone stronger through their branches. He recognized the man with the great beard—he did not need to see that one arm was hewed away halfway between wrist and elbow. Another face was equally familiar, with its sharp mustaches and wide eyes; he had stared into it no longer ago than last night.

The six guerrillas stirred into motion again, approaching and closing in. Lanark had them before him in a semi-circle.

"Stand!" he said again, and when they did not he fired, full for the center of that black beard in the forefront. The body of the guerrilla started and staggered—no more. It had been hit, but it was not going to fall. Lanark knew a sudden damp closeness about him, as though he stood in a small room full of sweaty garments. The six figures were converging, like beasts seeking a common trough or manger.

He did not shoot again. The man he had shot was not bleeding. Six pairs of eyes fixed themselves upon him, with a steadiness that was more than unwinking. He wondered, inconsequentially, if those eyes had lids. . . . Now they were within reach.

He fell quickly on guard with his saber, whirling it to left and then to right, the old moulinets he had learned in the fencing-room at the Virginia Military Institute. Again the half-dozen approachers came to an abrupt stop, one or two flinching back from the twinkling tongue of steel. Lanark extended his arm, made a wider horizontal sweep with his point, and the space before him widened. The two forms at the horns of the semi-circle began to slip forward and outward, as though to pass him and take him in the rear.

"That won't do," Lanark said aloud, and hopped quickly forward, then

lunged at the blackbeard. His point met flesh, or at least a soft substance. No bones impeded it. A moment later his basket-hilt thudded against the butternut shirt front, the figure reeled backward from the force of the blow. With a practised wrench, Lanark cleared his weapon, cutting fiercely at another who was moving upon him with an unnerving lightness. His edge came home, and he drew it vigorously toward himself—a bread-slicing maneuver that would surely lay flesh open to the bone, disable one assailant. But the creature only tottered and came in again, and Lanark saw that the face he had hacked almost in two was the one with bulge eyes and spike mustaches.

All he could do was side-step and then retreat—retreat eastward in the direction of Fearful Rock. The blackbearded thing was down, stumbled or swooning, and he sprang across it. As he did so the body writhed just beneath him, clutching with one hand upward. Hooked by an ankle, Lanark fell sprawling at full length, losing his revolver but not his sword. He twisted over at his left side, hacking murderously in the direction of his feet. As once before, he cut away a hand and wrist and was free. He surged to his feet, and found the blackbeard also up, thrusting its hairy, fishy-white face at him. With dark rage swelling his every muscle, Lanark carried his right arm back across his chest, his right hand with the hilt going over his left shoulder. Then he struck at the hairy head with all the power of arm and shoulder and, turning his body, thrust in its weight behind the blow. The head flew from the shoulders, as though it had been stuck there ever so lightly.

Then the others were pushing around and upon him. Lanark smelled blood, rot, dampness, filth. He heard, for the first time, soft snickering voices, that spoke no words but seemed to be sneering at him for the entertainment of one another. The work was too close to thrust; he hacked and hewed, and struck with the curved guard as with brass knuckles. And they fell back from him, all but one form that could not see.

It tottered heavily and gropingly toward him, hunching its headless shoulders and holding out its handless arms, as though it played with him a game of blind-man's-buff. And from that horrid truncated enemy Lanark fled, fled like a deer for all his lameness.

THEY followed, but they made slow, stupid work of it. Lanark's sword, which could not kill, had wounded them all. He was well ahead, coming to rising ground, toiling upward out of the gully, into the open country shadowed by Fearful Rock.

He paused there, clear of the trees, wiped his clammy brow with the sleeve of his left arm. The moon was so bright overhead that it almost blinded him. He became aware of a kneading, clasping sensation at his right ankle, and looked down to see what caused it.

A hand clung there, a hand without arm or body. It was a pale hand that moved and crawled, as if trying to mount his boot-leg and get at his belly —his heart—his throat. The bright moon showed him the strained tendons of it, and the scant coarse hair upon its wide back.

Lanark opened his lips to scream like any woman, but no sound came. With his other foot he scraped the thing loose and away. Its fingers quitted their hold grudgingly, and under the sole of his boot they curled and writhed upward, like the legs of an overturned

crab. They fastened upon his instep.

When, with the point of his saber, he forced the thing free again, still he saw that it lived and groped for a hold upon him. With his lip clenched bloodily between his teeth, he chopped and minced at the horrid little thing, and even then its severed fingers humped and inched upon the ground, like worms.

"It won't die," Lanark murmured hoarsely, aloud; often in the past he had thought that speaking thus, when one was alone, presaged insanity. "It won't die—not though I chop it into atoms until the evil is driven away."

Then he wondered, for the first time since he had left Enid, where Jager was. He turned in the direction of the rock and the ruined house, and walked wearily for perhaps twenty paces. He was swimming in sweat, and blood throbbed in his ears.

Then he found himself looking into the open grave where the guerrillas had lain, whence they had issued to fight once more. At the bottom he saw the two palenesses that were empty skins.

He saw something else—a dark form that was trying to scramble out. Once again he tightened his grip upon the hilt of his saber.

At the same instant he knew that still another creature was hurrying out of the gulley and at him from behind.

14. Enid

LANARK'S guess was wrong; Enid Mandifer had not retreated westward up the gulley.

She had stared, all in a heart-stopping chill, as Lanark made for the thing that terrified her. As though of themselves, her hands reached down to the earth, found her dress, and pulled it over her head. She thrust her feet into her shoes. Then she moved, at only a fast walk, after Lanark.

There was really nothing else she could have done, and Lanark might have known that, had he been able to take thought in the moments that followed. Had she fled, she would have had no place to go save to the house where once her stepfather had lived; and it would be no refuge, but a place of whispering horror. Too, she would be alone, dreadfully alone. It took no meditation on her part to settle the fact that Lanark was her one hope of protection. As a matter of simple fact, he would have done well to remain with her, on the defensive; but then, he could not have foreseen what was waiting in the shadowed woods beyond.

She did carry something that might serve as a weapon—the hand-mirror. And in a pocket of her dress lay the Bible, of which she had once told Lanark. She had read much in it, driven by terror, and I daresay it was as much a talisman to her as was the *Long Lost Friend* to Jager. Her lips pattered a verse from it: "Deliver me from mine enemies, O my God . . . for lo, they lie in wait for my soul."

It was hard for her to decide what she had expected to find within the rim of trees beyond the clearing. Lanark was not in sight, but a commotion had risen some little distance ahead. Enid moved onward, because she must.

She heard Lanark's pistol shot, and then what sounded like several men struggling. She tried to peer and see, but there was only a swirl of violent motion, and through it the flash of steel—that would be Lanark's saber. She crouched behind a wide trunk.

"That is useless," said an accented voice she knew, close at her elbow.

She spun around, stared and sprang away. It was not her stepfather that

stood there. The form was human to some degree—it had arms and legs, and a featureless head; but its nakedness was slimy wet and dark, and about it clung a smell of blood.

"That is useless," muttered once more the voice of Persil Mandifer. "You do not hide from the power that rules this place."

Behind the first dark slimness came a second shape, a gross immensity, equally black and foul and shiny. Larue?

"You have offered yourself," said Persil Mandifer, though Enid could see no lips move in the filthy-seeming shadow that should have been a face. "I think you will be accepted this time. Of course, it cannot profit me—what I am now, I shall be always. Perhaps you, too——"

Larue's voice chuckled, and Enid ran, toward where Lanark had been fighting. That would be more endurable than this mad dream forced upon her. Anything would be more endurable. Twigs and thorns plucked at her skirt like spiteful fingers, but she ripped away from them and ran. She came into another clearing, a small one. The moon, striking between the boughs, made here a pool of light and touched up something of metal.

It was Lanark's revolver. Enid bent and seized it. A few feet away rested something else, something rather like a strangely shaggy cabbage. As Enid touched the gun, she saw what that fringed rondure was. A head, but living, as though its owner had been buried to his bearded chin.

"What——" she began to ask aloud. It was surely living, its eyebrows arched and scowled and its gleaming eyes moved. Its tongue crawled out and licked grinning, hairy lips. She saw its smile, hard and brief as a knife flashed for a moment from its scabbard.

Enid Mandifer almost dropped the revolver. She had become sickeningly aware that the head possessed no body.

"There is the rest of him," spoke Persil Mandifer, again behind her shoulder. And she saw a heart-shaking terror, staggering and groping between the trees, a body without a head or hands.

She ran again, but slowly and painfully, as though this were in truth a nightmare. The headless hulk seemed to divine her effort at retreat, for it dragged itself clumsily across, as though to cut her off. It held out its handless stumps of arms.

"No use to shoot," came Persil Mandifer's mocking comment—he was following swiftly. "That poor creature cannot be killed again."

OTHER shapes were approaching from all sides, shapes dressed in filthy, ragged clothes. The face of one was divided by a dark cleft, as though Lanark's saber had split it, but no blood showed. Another seemed to have no lower jaw; the remaining top of his face jutted forward, like the short visage of a snake lifted to strike. These things had eyes, turned unblinkingly upon her; they could see and approach.

The headless torso blundered at her again, went past by inches. It recovered itself and turned. It knew, somehow, that she was there; it was trying to capture her. She shrank away, staring around for an avenue of escape.

"Be thankful," droned Persil Mandifer from somewhere. "These are no more than dead men, whipped into a mockery of life. They will prepare you a little for the wonders to come."

But Enid had commanded her shuddering muscles. She ran. One of the

things caught her sleeve, but the cloth tore and she won free. She heard sounds that could hardly be called voices, from the mouths of such as had mouths. And Persil Mandifer laughed quietly, and said something in a language Enid had never heard before. The thick voice of his son Larue answered him in the same tongue, then called out in English:

"Enid, you only run in the direction we want you to run!"

It was true, and there was nothing that she could do about it. The entities behind her were following, not very fast, like herdsmen leisurely driving a sheep in the way it should go. And she knew that the sides of the gulley, to north and south, could never be climbed. There was only the slope ahead to the eastward, up which Lanark must have gone. The thought of him strengthened her. If the two of them found the king-horror, the Nameless One, at the base of Fearful Rock, they could face it together.

She was aware that she had come out of the timber of the ravine.

All was moonlight here, painted by the soft pallor in grays and silvers and shadow-blacks. There was the rock lifted among the stars, there the stretch of clump-dotted plain—and here, almost before her, Lanark.

He stood poised above a hole in the ground, his saber lifted above his head as though to begin a downward sweep. Something burly was climbing up out of that hole. But, even as he tightened his sinews to strike, Lanark whirled around, and his eyes glared murderously at Enid.

15. Evil's End

"DON'T!" Enid screamed. "Don't, it's only I——"

Lanark growled, and spun back to face what was now hoisting itself above ground level.

"And be careful of me, too" said the object. "It's Jager, Mr. Lanark."

The point of the saber lowered. The three of them were standing close together on the edge of the opened grave. Lanark looked down. He saw at the bottom the two areas of loose white.

"Are those the——"

"Yes," Jager replied without waiting for him to finish. "Two human skins. They are fresh; soft and damp." Enid was listening, but she was past shuddering. "One of them," continued Jager, "was taken from Persil Mandifer. I know his face."

He made a scuffing kick-motion with one boot. Clods flew into the grave, falling with a dull plop, as upon wet blankets. He kicked more earth down, swiftly and savagely.

"Help me," he said to the others. "Salt should be thrown on those skins —that's what the old legends say—but we have no salt. Dirt will have to do. Don't you see?" he almost shrieked. "Somewhere near here, two bodies are hiding, or moving about, without these skins to cover them."

Both Lanark and Enid knew they had seen those bodies. In a moment three pairs of feet were thrusting earth down into the grave.

"Don't!" It was a wail from the trees in the ravine, a wail in the voice of Persil Mandifer. "We must return to those skins before dawn!"

Two black silhouettes, wetly shiny in the moonlight, had come into the open. Behind them straggled six more, the guerrillas.

"Don't!" came the cry again, this time a command. "You cannot destroy us now. It is midnight, the hour of the Nameless One."

At the word "midnight" an idea

fairly exploded itself in Lanark's brain. He thrust his sword into the hands of his old sergeant.

"Guard against them," he said in the old tone of command. "That book of yours may serve as shield, and Enid's Bible. I have something else to do."

He turned and ran around the edge of the grave, then toward the hole that was filled with the ruins of the old house; the hole that emitted a glow of weak blue light.

Into it he flung himself, wondering if this diluted gleam of the old unearthly blaze would burn him. It did not; his booted legs felt warmth like that of a hot stove, no more. From above he heard the voice of Jager, shouting, tensely and masterfully, a formula from the *Long Lost Friend:*

"Ye evil things, stand and look upon me for a moment, while I charm three drops of blood from you, which you have forfeited. The first from your teeth, the second from your lungs, the third from your heart's own main." Louder went his voice, and higher, as though he had to fight to keep down his hysteria: "God bid me vanquish you all!"

Lanark had reached the upward column of the broken chimney. All about his feet lay fragments, glowing blue. He shoved at them with his toe. There was an oblong of metal. He touched it—yes, that had been a door to an old brick oven. He lifted it. Underneath lay what he had hidden four years ago —a case of unknown construction.

But as he picked it up, he saw that it had a lid. What had Enid overheard from her stepfather, so long ago? ". . . that he would live and prosper until the secret writing should be taken forth and destroyed . . . it would never open, save at the place of the Nameless One, at midnight under a full moon."

With his thumbnail he pried at the lid, and it came open easily. The box seemed full of darkness, and when he thrust in his hands he felt something crumble, like paper burned to ashes. That was what it was—ashes. He turned the case over, and let the flakes fall out, like strange black snow.

From somewhere resounded a shriek, or chorus of shrieks. Then a woman weeping—that would be Enid—and a cry of "God be thanked!" unmistakably from Jager. The blue light died away all around Lanark, and his legs were cool. The old basement had fallen strangely dark. Then he was aware of great fatigue, the trembling of his hands, the ropy weakness of his lamed leg. And he could not climb out again, until Jager came and put down a hand.

AT ROSY dawn the three sat on the front stoop of Jager's cabin. Enid was pouring coffee from a serviceable old black pot.

"We shall never know all that happened and portended," said Jager, taking a mouthful of home-made bread, "but what we have seen will tell us all that we should know."

"This much is plain," added Lanark. "Persil Mandifer worshipped an evil spirit, and that evil spirit had life and power."

"Perhaps we would know everything, if the paper in the box had not burned in the fire," went on Jager. "That is probably as well—that it burned, I mean. Some secrets are just as well never told." He fell thoughtful, pulled his beard, and went on. "Even burned, the power of that document worked; but when the ashes fell from their case, all was over. The bodies of the guerrillas were dry bones

on the instant, and as for the skinless things that moved and spoke as Mandifer and his son——"

He broke off, for Enid had turned deathly pale at memory of that part of the business.

"We shall go back when the sun is well up," said Lanark, "and put those things back to rest in their grave."

He sat for a moment, coffee-cup in hand, and gazed into the brightening sky.

To the two items he had spoken of as plainly indicated, he mentally added a third; the worship carried on by Persil Mandifer—was that name French, perhaps Main-de-Fer?—was tremendously old. He, Persil, must have received teachings in it from a former votary, his father perhaps, and must have conducted a complex and secret ritual for decades.

The attempted sacrifice rite for which Enid had been destined was something the world would never know, not as regards the climax. For a little band of Yankee horsemen, with himself at their head, had blundered into the situation, throwing it completely out of order and spelling for it the beginning of the end.

The end had come. Lanark was sure of that. How much of the power and motivity of the worship had been exerted by the Nameless One that now must continue nameless, how much of it was Persil Mandifer's doing, how much was accident of nature and horror-hallucination of witnesses, nobody could now decide. As Jager had suggested, it was probably as well that part of the mystery would remain. Things being as they were, one might pick up the threads of his normal human existence, and be happy and fearless.

But he could not forget what he had seen. The two Mandifers, able to live or to counterfeit life by creeping from their skins at night, had perished as inexplicably as they had been resurrected. The guerrillas, too, whose corpses had challenged him, must be finding a grateful rest now that the awful semblance of life had quitted their slack, butchered limbs. And the blue fire that had burst forth in the midst of the old battle, to linger ghostwise for years; the horned image that Jager had broken; the seeming powers of the *Long Lost Friend,* as an amulet and a storehouse of charms—these were items in the strange fabric. He would remember them for ever, without rationalizing them.

He drank coffee, into which someone, probably Enid, had dropped sugar while he mused. Rationalization, he decided, was not enough, had never been enough. To judge a large and dark mystery by what vestigial portions touched one, was to err like the blind men in the old doggerel who, groping at an elephant here and there, called it in turn a snake, a spear, a tree, a fan, a wall. Better not to brood or ponder upon what had happened. Try to be thankful, and forget.

"I shall build my church under Fearful Rock," Jager was saying, "and it shall be called Fearful Rock no more, but Welcome Rock."

Lanark looked up. Enid had come and seated herself beside him. He studied her profile. Suddenly he could read her thoughts, as plainly as though they were written upon her cheek.

She was thinking that grass would grow anew in her front yard, and that she would marry Kane Lanark as soon as he asked her.

[THE END]



"His head began to turn on his stooped shoulders—to turn slowly, slowly. And of a sudden I thought I was going mad."

The High Places

By FRANCES GARFIELD

A ghost story of aviation

. . . the high places of our air are swarming full of those wicked spirits, whose temptations trouble us.

Cotton Mather.—*The Devil Discovered.*

WE WERE still arguing as Swithin parked his car in the gloom at the edge of the airport — arguing gently. Everything about Swithin was gentle, even his arguments. For a moment we sat together in the snug dim light of the car's interior. Swithin's lean gloved hands rested slackly on the wheel, and his soft gray eyes regarded me thoughtfully, studiously.

"Here we are, Katharine," he said, "but I still have that premonition about the danger of your flying. For the last

time, please let me take you to the railroad station."

"And for the last time," I said firmly, "I've got to budget my hours. I want to spend the week with my brother, not on trains."

It was true. I could spare only a week from my job, and my brother Bill was getting married, a thousand miles away in Chicago. A plane was the only answer, and Swithin at last bowed his brown head in token of defeat. We got out together, went through a gate, and across the wide, flat field.

The long hangar was dimly illuminated at one end, with only three or four men in sight—mechanics, I supposed. Floodlights illumined a cemented patch, with strange shadows clustered around. No other passengers; I would be alone on the spur hop to Wichita, where we met the TWA.

Swithin put his arm around me.

"Wire me at once when you land," he whispered, and kissed me. It soothed, that kiss, if it did not galvanize. "And now I'll go. I hate to see a loved one sail away from me."

We parted, and I turned to meet an attendant who took from me my two suitcases. The plane was already buzzing, like a huge dragon-fly ready to skim off above oceanic ponds and immense reeds and lily pads. And now I thought, as I tried not to think, of Enic Graf, who had done things to my heart I had never thought possible, who had hurt and dazzled me, whom I was to have married when, a year ago, he fell out of the sky, aflame in a flaming ship.

Dead now, his body ashes where other bodies were dust, he could still make my heart stop, my feet falter, my lips grow dry. Even now I had not wholly escaped his compelling, crude grasp; not even though Swithin and I had found each other, had settled into a tender and peaceable relationship of understanding happiness.

THE pilot was before me, saluting as though I were a superior officer.

"You're the passenger for Wichita, lady?" he asked in a high, cheerful voice. "We're ready if you are."

"Thank you," I said. Who had said that all pilots resembled each other, with piercing, narrow eyes and square jaws? This was a thin-faced young man, stooped in the shoulders and as anxious to please as a waiter. Not much about him of Rickenbacker, Lindbergh, Corrigan, nothing at all of Enic Graf. "What sort of a journey will we have?"

He shook his head dubiously. "Lots of clouds off there," he said, and for the first time I realized that the moon should be shining.

He helped me into the cabin of the plane. It was all of brown paneling and wide glass panes, like the inside of a station wagon, and had room for only three passengers. I took the seat behind his, and he drew a safety belt of strong webbing across in front.

"Maybe we'll have bumpy weather," he explained.

And then we were off, off and up. A glance sidewise showed me the lights and the hangar dropping and dwindling. Dew seemed forming on the pane beside me, and the upward slope of the ship made me slide down into the angle of the seat.

I had never flown before—strange, since I had known and loved Enic. I would not be flying now, if Swithin had had his way. I sought for novel impressions, but it all seemed as if I had done it before. Perhaps too many friends had talked to me of the joys and thrills of flying.

The light in the cabin was too dim to

read by, and in any case a humming vibration of the craft would make reading uncomfortable. I leaned back and closed my eyes, thinking of Bill and his approaching happiness, of the gift I had brought for the Mrs. Bill to be—a Zorinos cape, one I would have loved to keep. It was stowed behind me, in one of the suitcases, all of brown skins sewed together in little bands that displayed in a succession of patterns, like the graining of fine wood, the pelt-markings. She would like it, no matter what type of woman she might be. The thought came, and I dismissed it, of the day when my own wedding had been at hand, and the news of Enic's crash came like a heavy door slamming against my face. And then I was asleep. I dreamed the plane was falling.

I awakened with a sickening jerk. I may have screamed. The pilot turned halfway around.

"What's the matter, lady?" he called above the growl of the motor.

"I had a bad dream," I called back.

"Don't be scared. No danger. Just bumpy weather—clouds. I'm going to get above them."

There was evidently rain, and the windows were thickly misted. The pilot did things with his controls, and again the nose of the craft lifted itself, as though it climbed steep stairs. I could see the hands of the pilot on his instruments. They, at least, were typical, comfortingly so—big, blunt, capable. Enic's hands had been long and sensitive, like a surgeon's or a violinist's, and across the back of his right hand had sprawled a jagged Z of a scar. Again I drove the thought of him from my mind, and lay back for another snatch of the sleep that seemed determined to possess me.

My awakening was calm. The plane flew on a smooth level, and light filled the abyss outside my window. I mopped with one gloved hand at the glass, and peered out into a sky filled with the light of the great cream-colored moon. Far below were the clouds, or what must be the clouds, a drab continent without visible rent or lump in it. I gasped with the beauty of it, then with the terror of thinking how high we must be.

"What's our altitude, pilot?" I cried out, trying to be gay.

His head began to turn on his stooped shoulders—to turn slowly, slowly. And of a sudden I thought I was going mad.

IT WAS not his lean face that came around, but the face of another, a face that I knew. Square jaw, wide lips with bracket-like lines at their corners, proud broken nose, eyes as deep and dark and shining as two pools by lanternlight—so pale, so stiff, so utterly without the flavor of Enic Graf, yet so unmistakably Enic.

Frost-cold nails of fear dug into my backbone. I reasoned with myself, flatly and a little stupidly, as one reasons with a panicky child. This wasn't Enic—Enic's handful of remains had gone to the grave twelve months before. It was a mask. That was it, a false face, cunningly made but not cunningly enough.

I leaned forward.

"This is a very poor joke," I said, too loudly for dignity. "And it's a cruel one."

And I heard his soft chuckle, as plainly as though the engine had shut off—his soft, deep chuckle, the chuckle with which Enic once maddened and conquered me. The face came all the way around, and, for all its stiffness and dead pallor, the eyes were bright and alive.

"Joke?" he repeated, in Enic's deep voice, and chuckled again. "I don't joke with you, Katharine."

His left hand only remained on the controls. His right elbow hooked over the back of his seat, and its hand came into view—a slender, delicate hand, a hand I knew, and upon its back, shining in the dimness like touchwood, a jagged Z-scar.

All these details wavered before my eyes, like a very old motion picture, but I could not deny that they were definite. The pilot had changed, had melted and run into a travesty of Enic. Reason tried to hold command, frantically and inadequately, like a leader against whom tried old troops had rebelled.

Something dawned in my head, a saving thought: ectoplasm . . . what was it? I had heard of ectoplasm, had read of it in Swithin's books, had laughed over a comedy film about it. The name of the film was *Topper*—but that was hardly important now. Ectoplasm, the spirit-commanded aura that could flow forth, become solid and take shape, to form upon a living body the strange semblance of a dead person—this must be the answer.

"Who are you?" I asked, knowing all the time who it was, and Enic chuckled yet again, with almost honest mirth.

"Why do you ask, Katharine?" he mocked me, in that soft deep voice that I could hear above the roar of the motor. "There's no reason to ask."

"What do you want?" I cried, and marveled at the hysterical ring of my voice in my own ears.

"You," he answered. "You, of course." Dead hand lifted to dead face, long fingers tapped line-bracketed cheek. "Did you think you would ever be quit of me? I died up here, Katharine. And I waited. You came up, and we're together again."

I shrank back, as though he had moved to seize me. "But you're dead," I protested wildly. "And I'm—I'm alive!"

"Yes," he nodded, as one who concedes an unimportant item of a discussion. "Anyway, you aren't bringing Swithin into this." His lips widened in a tigerish grin. "You don't love him as much as you think."

"Enic," I said, and paused to govern my voice. I must keep steady, in word and in heart and in mind. "Enic, you're wrong. I love Swithin."

"And you don't love me?" His voice was suddenly plaintive, offering the note that had so often melted my resolve in the past.

"I can't love you, Enic. Not now. You're dead," I cried at him again. "The dead can't love——"

"Can't they, though?" His left hand crawled over his controls, doing something I did not recognize. "I'm dead, but I love you. I'll have you, Katharine. You'll see."

The ship bucked and leaped around us. Suddenly I slid forward in my seat, almost fell out of it but for the safety belt.

"What's happening?" I screamed.

The motor's roar rose high, cracked, and became a terrifying whine.

"We're falling," said Enic, and still his voice could dominate the din. "I'm letting us crash, Katharine."

"No! No!" I begged.

"You'll never feel it," he told me, as though to comfort me. "We're going faster, Katharine—faster—you'll lose your wits, go to sleep—to sleep—and when you awaken——"

That whining wail was the air that tore at the struts, I knew. It was quieter now, or my ears were growing numb.

And the pale, stiff face of Enic Graf was growing dim, distant. Fog shadowed it.

"We'll be together up here in the heights," he was promising me, not loudly, but from worlds away. "Together, Katharine——"

I WAS hanging limp against my safety belt. It was the only solid thing in the universe. And I went deaf, blind. I was swallowed by black silence.

Then a roar, a prickling sensation in my toes, and lurid light in my eyes; it sounded as though the motor was going. And a high, anxious voice was dinning at me: "Lady! Lady, are you all right?"

I pawed at my face, sat up straight. The plane was traveling on a level once more. And the pilot, his heavy hands on the controls, was sitting with his thin face half over his shoulder.

"That was a close call," he told me, striving hard to sound cheerful.

"Was it?" I mumbled idiotically. I knew that I looked unkempt, that my hat must be askew, my rouge smeared. For the moment I did not care. "What happened to us?" I demanded.

"Well, I don't rightly know," he said, slowly and embarrassedly, like a schoolboy unable to recite. "I got up above the clouds, 'way up there, and tried to level her out—and she kept going up."

He shook his head and thrust out his thin jaw. "Nothing jammed or anything, because it's all right now. But she kept going up, up, as if a big hand had grabbed us and was lifting us."

"Yes," I prompted. "And then?"

"Then I seemed to pass out. Maybe the air was thin . . . but I didn't have any sense of danger. It was more like leaning back while the relief pilot takes the controls. Does that sound crazy?"

"Not very crazy," I assured him. "But you don't remember what happened?"

"Not a thing," he confessed. "Not until we were falling, and I shook it off and pulled us out of the dive."

I gazed at him searchingly. "What's your name, pilot?"

"Alvin Piper." He cleared his throat. "If you're going to make a complaint, lady, that's your privilege. But I got a wife and two kids in school——"

"I won't complain," I promised. "I was wondering, Mr. Piper, if you ever knew a pilot named Graf. Enic Graf."

"Graf? I don't think so—no, wait." He nodded fiercely. "I used to know a Graf who tested for the Stearman people. Had a broken nose, and a big scar on his hand."

"That's right," I agreed.

We suddenly sailed into a dim clearness. Moonlight washed the fogged windows.

"Weather's breaking up already," the pilot informed me with deep satisfaction. "That's Wichita up ahead, where the lights are. . . . But what's Enic Graf got to do with this business, lady? He died a year ago."

"Did he?" I asked, and in spite of myself I laughed shortly.

The pilot looked at me strangely, wonderingly, but I could not tell him why I doubted. I could not tell Swithin, or my brother Bill. I could not tell anyone.

I knew only that I must never fly again, lest Enic be waiting for me in the upper abyss.

Mommy

By MARY ELIZABETH COUNSELMAN

A very human story about a little girl in an orphanage, who was considered queer by the other children because she claimed that her dead mother visited her

"I WANT to adopt a child about seven years old," Mrs. Ellison had explained to the matron a few hours before.

Now, standing in the big bare yard of the Acipco County Orphanage, she studied each of the smaller girls who scampered past her. There was a chubby dark-curled mite seesawing near the tall iron gate, Mrs. Ellison noted. A lovely cherub, she thought, who would make a wonderful little daughter for a childless widow like herself. Pumping madly in one of the swings was another, brown-eyed and laughing as she herself had been at that age.

So many motherless children, herded together like livestock and perforce treated almost as such—how was one to make the great decision that would change one's own life as well as the child's for ever after today?

"Good Heavens! I'm shopping for a daughter," the tall gentle-eyed woman mused guiltily. "How inhuman! It . . . it should be the other way 'round, if only a child had vision enough to select."

Her thought snapped off like a twig. Something was tugging at her skirt with timid insistence, and she peered down, startled to find a thin homely little girl looking up at her. The penetrating blue eyes were much too large for that sallow sensitive face. Two mouse-colored braids hung over narrow shoulders against the starched collar of her orphanage uniform, and the arm that reached up at Mrs. Ellison was matchthin and peppered with freckles like the face and neck.

I don't believe I've ever seen a more unattractive child, was the woman's first thought. But then the little girl smiled, and her face lighted slowly as a candle in a dark room. It was a sweet strange smile, full of wistfulness and yet the paradox of a quiet *knowledge*.

"Are you the lady my mommy sent for me?" her small voice piped. It was a timid voice, rather vague like the blue eyes, but oddly compelling for all that.

Mrs. Ellison knelt down, smiling. Her hands moved, smoothing the ratty braids. The child wouldn't look so homely with careful attention, her thoughts veered, while she murmured aloud:

"I don't know, sweetheart. Has your mommy gone to Heaven?"

The child regarded her gravely for a moment. Then she shook her head.

"No, ma'm. My mommy comes to see me any time I want her to. She talks to me every night, an'——"

At that instant the matron bustled up, starched and puffing, a tiny frown of annoyance creasing her smooth fore-

head at sight of the little girl with the kneeling woman.

"Mrs. Ellison, I'm so sorry I was delayed. . . . Run along to your play, Martha dear," she commanded briskly. "Matron wants to talk to the nice lady. Run away; that's a good girl."

The visitor rose, puzzled at her tone of impatience. But the thin-faced child hesitated only a second, during which her deep blue eyes searched for something in Mrs. Ellison's expression with a solemn intensity. Then she wheeled without a word and walked slowly away toward a group of children near by. At her approach, however, they promptly turned and left her standing there, leaning against the trunk of a giant white oak that dwarfed her small body.

MRS. ELLISON watched the by-play with a queer pang. "Who is that child?" she murmured. "There's . . . there's something different about her."

"Martha?" The matron's laugh of exasperation knifed into her mood. "I'm sure you wouldn't care to take on *that* responsibility! She's really our problem child. Doesn't get on with the other children and constantly breaks our petty rules here. Oh, I don't mean she's deliberately bad, but—"

"Just a misfit?" The tall brown-haired visitor nodded her sympathy. "Perhaps it's the mother's interference. I understand from little Martha that she visits her quite often, and that's always hard on a child's morale. A pity she couldn't just take her away from here and support her the best way she——"

Mrs. Ellison broke off, conscious that the matron was smiling at her quizzically.

"My dear," the orphanage head spread her hands, "that child has no mother—she died over a year ago. Tuberculosis, I'm told, aggravated by night work in a cotton mill. I see I must explain our little Martha to you. . . .

"The poor baby had such a shock, she's never been able to adjust herself. Some minds, tortured beyond endurance, fall into amnesia as an escape. Others—like poor little Martha's—simply build up a dream-world in which they need not face the cruel truth. She has a positive fixation that her mother is beside her at all times. 'Why, I can see her in the night, can't you?' she'll say, time and again. Carries on long imaginary conversations in the ward after lights-out, so that the other children complain of her keeping them awake. They don't dislike her, but I think they're a bit afraid of her."

"Afraid?" Mrs. Ellison quirked an eyebrow at the absurdity. "Why on earth should anyone be afraid of that pitiful little mite?"

The matron fidgeted, then gave a nervous laugh. "Well"—she averted her gaze sheepishly—"well, it *is* odd. Some unexplainable things have happened since the child has been here at the Home with us.

"I must tell you first that Martha's mother was a remarkable woman. Physically a wreck, and morally. . . . There was no father, you understand. A drunken sailor, most probably, as the woman seems to have been a cheap dance-hall hostess before her child was born in a charity hospital.

"But little Martha's birth seemed to bring out the best in her—a fierce maternal instinct. It happens often—rather proving, I think, the divinity in all mankind. Anyway, the mother changed her mode of living at once, got a job in the mill, and literally killed herself working for her child.

"She fought death with a stubborn will that prolonged her life by months, they tell me. But in the end her frail body gave way.

"At the last she called little Martha to her bedside and made the child some sort of crazy promise that she would *never leave her*, no matter what anyone said about death and the like. Her sick body was only a worn-out coat, she told the child, that her *real* 'mommy' was throwing away so that it could not hinder her any longer in taking care of her baby.

"A natural thing to say, of course, but disastrous in its effect on a child's impressionable mind. It developed a complex in Martha . . . so weirdly borne out by coincidence, however, that I . . . I sometimes catch myself wondering! Really, it's . . . it's uncanny!"

MRS. ELLISON laughed softly She was a matter-of-fact woman, little given to fantasy. But, nettled by her skepticism, the matron gave details.

"You think I'm imagining things?" she bridled. "Listen! There was the time a certain actress wanted to adopt the child. I can't think why she chose homely little Martha—unless as a foil for her own beauty. But all was in order and Martha was being sent for, although she behaved badly and screamed all night that her 'mommy' hadn't sent this lady for her.

"With the woman's secretary waiting in our very antechamber for Martha to be dressed, we received a call from the actress's press agent saying the deal was off. It appears she was simply adopting Martha as a publicity stunt, to swing public opinion her way when a nasty scandal broke in which her name would be involved. *But that very morning she had fallen downstairs and fractured her nose!* In case the plastic surgery wasn't successful, her agent informed me, the dear lady's contract might not be renewed and 'she couldn't support a child.' We read between the lines, of course, as the actress had millions salted away. . . .

"But there it stands. Martha was saved from such an adoption because *something* tripped that cold-blooded woman and temporarily marred her looks!"

Mrs. Ellison gave another soft laugh. "A timely coincidence," she murmured. "Poor little Martha!"

"Yes," the matron nodded wryly. "But it strengthened her belief that her 'mommy' was watching over her interests night and day! As for the other children here, they're as convinced as she is . . . especially since the time that circus came to town, and our amusement fund didn't stretch over the last ten of our enrollment.

"Martha was one of those who drew lots and lost. She was heartbroken, like the other nine losers. Then suddenly, as I was lining up those who could go, little Martha ran forward and tugged at my arm.

"'Matron! Matron!' she cried, her eyes shining with excitement. 'Mommy says I can go! Mommy says to take all the others, and she'll pay their way somehow, so I can go!'

"Of course, that outburst upset the other children and raised their hopes so, I hadn't the heart to leave them behind. I decided to borrow the difference from our food bill and juggle accounts later. A foolhardy impulse, but you'll understand how I felt.

"So off they went to the circus, every one of them. They were fairly dancing with anticipation waiting outside the big tent while I bought the tickets; but my conscience was beginning to prickle. Those ten extra tickets meant a scantier

diet for all of them well into the next month's budget, and I was sure the board would discover it and give me a severe reprimand.

"I stopped short right there, thinking it over and wishing heartily that I could spank little Martha. But at that moment I . . . I happened to glance down at the sawdust.

"There just under my foot was a small wad of paper money neatly folded around some silver change. My heart almost stopped, let me tell you, when I counted it—*the exact amount, to a penny, for those ten tickets!* I had the local paper advertise later for its loser, but no one claimed it. I've . . . I've often speculated on the many ways it could have got there."

Mrs. Ellison's smile had faded a trifle, but now it came back, full of gentle tolerance. "Perhaps some drunken person dropped it," she suggested. "Surely, my dear matron, there's nothing supernatural about losing money on a circus ground!"

"Humph! Oh. Well . . . maybe not." The plump orphanage head looked disgruntled but unconvinced. "There were other times," she pursued stoutly. "That time, for instance, when little Martha swallowed an open safety-pin, the way children will do if you don't watch them every minute!

"It was a terrible day last fall, when we had that ice storm, you remember. Wires were down, and we couldn't locate a doctor, with the poor little thing choking and crying, and that open pin jabbing into her throat with every move she'd make! I was frantic, and Miss Peebles, our resident nurse, was at her wit's end . . . when all of a sudden this interstate bus broke down, spang in front of the Home gate. . . ."

Mrs. Ellison's eyes twinkled faintly. "And I suppose," she put in, teasingly, "there was a doctor for little Martha on the bus?"

THE MATRON did not return her smile, but surreptitiously mopped off a dew of moisture that sprang to her upper lip at the memory.

"A doctor?" she replied grimly. "*There were eight* — coming home from the state medical convention! One was an ear, eye, nose and throat specialist. Of course, he had that safety-pin out in a jiffy.

"What was so queer, the bus driver said it was battery trouble, with his new battery and wiring just checked carefully at the last station! Oh, it *could* happen, yes. I grant you, it *could* happen."

Mrs. Ellison chuckled. The chuckle seemed to annoy the matron, and she burst out afresh.

"There are dozens of minor incidents like that," she declared. "Martha is eternally finding things the other children will pass a hundred times. Pennies in the grass. A half-package of gum. A broken toy fire-engine, once, that some child must have thrown over the Home fence in a temper. Ask Martha where she gets them, and she'll invariably answer: 'Mommy gave it to me,' with those big eyes of hers as innocent as a lamb's. If I scold her and tell her to say she found it, she'll just say: 'Oh, yes—but Mommy told me where it was.'

"All that has made a vast impression on the other children. That's why they're a bit in awe of her—because they believe she's hourly guarded and pampered by a . . . by a——"

The matron floundered, reddening. Mrs. Ellison lifted one eyebrow humorously at the plump house-mother; saw the flush deepen in her round cheeks.

"By a ghost?" she finished, gently

derisive. "My dear matron, I'm astonished that a sensible woman like yourself would permit such a silly notion to survive! Why, it's medieval!"

The orphanage head folded her lips primly. "Well," she said in a tone that defied argument, "I only say it's queer, and that's what it is! The children are afraid of Martha, and she's a problem I'm at a loss to solve. If only somebody would take her off my hands—somebody I wouldn't mind her going to, with the child's good at heart. But, there! Nobody wants the poor homely little thing, though she asks everybody who comes here if she's 'the lady her mommy sent' to adopt her. It's a crying shame—but who'd want a crazy child when there are so many normal ones to be had?"

She followed the visitor's gaze with a look of perplexity, and regarded the little girl sitting cross-legged on the ground, playing by herself while others scampered past in noisy groups.

But Mrs. Ellison was folding her gloves and putting them in her purse with the gesture of a knight drawing on his gauntlets of chain-mail. Then she faced the matron and announced:

"Who'd want her? *I* do! And just as soon as it can be arranged! That fixation has been nourished too long in the child's mind. But a home, some new toys and a little affection will make her forget that nonsense. So . . . if you'll just rush the formalities, I'd be ever so grateful."

The matron blinked at her, surprised for a moment, a tiny flicker of doubt burning behind her spectacles. Then she shrugged and sighed deeply.

"That I will!" was her promise. "I only hope you won't regret it, Mrs. Ellison. Frankly, I haven't been able to cope with the situation. It's . . . it's a strange case, and needs a lot of understanding. Don't be too impatient with the child."

"Nonsense!" The visitor squared her shoulders firmly. "Martha simply needs a mother." And she strode across the grounds toward the small figure playing alone under the oak tree with a handful of acorn cups.

The matron, watching her, shook her head doubtfully as Mrs. Ellison knelt beside the child. Then, with reluctance, she turned away, for there were some two hundred other orphans who demanded her daily attention.

LITTLE MARTHA looked up shyly, gravely questioning. Mrs. Ellison studied the vague sweet smile accorded her and gathered the child impulsively into her arms. But she was chagrined at the lack of response. Little Martha, not quite cold to her advance, was like a small bony doll in her embrace, neither affectionate nor defiant. One hand clutched an acorn cup with a tiny grass handle, but the other hung limp and did not steal about her neck as Mrs. Ellison had half expected. It was almost a challenge, she thought, and smiled at the absurdity.

"Martha dear," she whispered, "you are going home with me and be my little girl. I'll give you a pony and cart, and lots of dollies, and have your hair curled like that little girl over there. Would you like that?"

The blue eyes lighted, giving Martha's sallow face a certain quaint beauty for all its freckles and angularity.

"Oh, yes'm!" she breathed. "I . . . I would! But I'll have to ask Mommy first," she added shyly. "Tonight I guess maybe she'll tell me if you're the one."

"Now, now!" Mrs. Ellison laughed with an effort. "You must call *me* your

mommy, dear, because you'll be my own little girl tomorrow!"

"Yes'm," the grave child nodded obediently, "I'll call you Mother, if Mommy says it's all right. Oh, I . . . I do hope you're the one!"

And Mrs. Ellison left, feeling baffled and entirely unsure whether or not she had won that first match.

The ponderous amount of red tape was snipped through, true to the matron's promise. A few days later, with a late autumn sun gilding the yellow leaves a brighter gold, Mrs. Ellison again drove to the Acipco County Orphanage.

She had dismissed her chauffeur, bought a woolly Sealyham pup at a pet shop en route, as well as a lovely little blue silk dress, and set forth rather grimly. These, she thought, are my weapons. With these I will lay for ever the ghost of Martha's "mommy," and she'll haunt that lonely child no longer!

An hour later, they were whirling out of the orphanage driveway—a tall gentle-eyed woman at the steering-wheel and, close beside her, a little girl in a blue dress, ecstatically hugging her new puppy.

Threading her way through the afternoon traffic, Mrs. Ellison smiled and chatted merrily, but her heart seethed. Confound that selfish hysterical woman, dying on her hospital cot! She had left a mark on this wistful credulous baby that time could not erase!

For a moment, glancing sidewise at her adopted daughter, Martha's second mother hated that first one who stood between them like an invisible wall, in spite of everything she could do.

Or, did she? Eerily Mrs. Ellison felt an alien presence in that wide car seat—but not between her and the child. Rather, it seemed that *someone* . . . *something* . . . was seated on the other side of little Martha, allied with her new mother, guarding the child on one side while she herself guarded the other.

The tall woman shook herself angrily. What utter rot! Was she, too, succumbing to the child's hallucination? She must exorcise that spirit now, or admit defeat by something that did not exist.

"Do you love your new mommy?" she coaxed, bending sidewise to hug little Martha with one arm.

The child snuggled closer. Wide blue eyes blazed up at her, aglow with happiness. "Oh, yes, Mother! You are really and truly my mother now, aren't you? So I'll tell you a secret," as the woman's face lighted with triumph. "Mommy told me last night that she picked you out for me a long, long time ago! An' she said——"

"Martha!" Mrs. Ellison drew back sharply as from an unexpected blow. "Stop talking like that!" she commanded shortly. "I want you to forget all that nonsense about your mother, Remember and love her always, of course. But your mommy went to Heaven over a year ago, and you must stop pretending that——"

A SCREAM from the child cut her short. Mrs. Ellison broke off, jerked her head around, and was transfixed with horror to see a huge and driverless gasoline truck hurtling down upon them from the long narrow hill they were slowly ascending.

The great red juggernaut was picking up speed. It careened from curb to curb like a drunken monster, making for their car with a blood-chilling accuracy, blunt-nosed and heavy as a locomotive.

Panic swept over Mrs. Ellison,

freezing her hands to the steering-wheel. A few more yards, and disaster would strike them head-on with a grinding crash. It seemed to the woman that she could hear that sickening sound already . . . and there was not an alley, not a convenient driveway for them to dart into. Only a low rock wall on one side, a sloping terrace on the other. And, as though realizing the futility of further motion, the car stalled dead in the path of the runaway truck.

"OH, DARLING—*jump!*" Mrs. Ellison screamed. Jump out and run! I . . . I can't——"

But the child at her side had not even heard her. For one who faced death, she seemed strangely calm. Her sallow face had gone so pale that the freckles stood out darkly, and her grip on the new puppy tightened. But her lips moved softly in a half-prayer that was almost inaudible to the woman beside her.

"Mommy! Mom-my!" the whisper fairly screamed. "Make it stop, Mommy! *Please make it stop!*"

Mrs. Ellison tugged at the child, intent on pulling her out of the doomed car in a last wild chance at safety. But before she could wrench open the car door . . . there was a metallic squeal of stripped gears.

Looking up, wild-eyed, she saw the onrushing truck hop sidewise awkwardly and come to a scraping halt against the curb — a scant five feet above them.

People came running then—frightened residents, and a policeman, and the white-faced truck-driver. They crowded about the truck, then rushed to the stalled car where Mrs. Ellison was slumped weakly at the wheel. Beside her sat a homely little girl whose strange quiet smile caused them to look at her and look again intently.

"Jeez, lady!" the truck-driver babbled an incoherent apology. "I sure thought I had her braked steady! Jeepers, if that packing-case on the seat hadn't a-fell against the gear-shift and knocked her into reverse, you . . . you might a-been——"

Mrs. Ellison merely nodded in answer. She could not trust her voice. She could only stare in a dazed way at the truck, then shift her gaze queerly to the little girl seated beside her.

"Are . . . you quite all right, Martha dear?" she whispered after a moment. "Then, let's you and I and . . . and Mommy go along home."

Will-o'-the-Wisp

By CHARLES SLOAN REID

Through wood and fen where elves delight
  To stage a dance or time a race,
A witch's lantern flares tonight
  To lead my feet a merry chase.

The Wicked Clergyman

By H. P. LOVECRAFT

A brief posthumous tale by a master of eery fiction

I WAS shown into the attic chamber by a grave, intelligent-looking man with quiet clothes and an iron-gray beard, who spoke to me in this fashion:

"Yes, *he* lived here—but I don't advise your doing anything. Your curiosity makes you irresponsible. *We* never come here at night, and it's only because of *his* will that we keep it this way. You know what *he* did. That abominable society took charge at last, and we don't know where *he* is buried. There was no way the law or anything else could reach the society.

"I hope you won't stay till after dark. And I beg of you to let that thing on the table—the thing that looks like a match-box—alone. We don't know what it is, but we suspect it has something to do with what *he* did. *We* even avoid looking at it very steadily."

After a time the man left me alone in the attic room. It was very dingy and dusty, and only primitively furnished, but it had a neatness which showed it was not a slum-denizen's quarters. There were shelves full of theological and classical books, and another bookcase containing treatises on magic—Paracelsus, Albertus Magnus, Trithemius, Hermes Trismegistus, Borellus, and others in strange alphabets whose titles I could not decipher. The furniture was very plain. There was a door, but it led only into a closet. The only egress was the aperture in the floor up to which the crude, steep staircase led. The windows were of bull's-eye pattern, and the black oak beams bespoke unbelievable antiquity. Plainly, this house was of the Old World. I seemed to know where I was, but cannot recall what I then knew. Certainly, the town was *not* London. My impression is of a small seaport.

The small object on the table fascinated me intensely. I seemed to know what to do with it, for I drew a pocket electric light—or what looked like one—out of my pocket and nervously tested its flashes. The light was not white but violet, and seemed less like true light than like some radio-active bombardment. I recall that I did not regard it as a common flashlight—indeed, I *had* a common flashlight in another pocket.

It was getting dark, and the ancient roofs and chimney-pots outside looked very queer through the bull's-eye window-panes. Finally I summoned up courage and propped the small object up on the table against a book—then turned the rays of the peculiar violet light upon it. The light seemed now to be more like a rain or hail of small violet particles than like a continuous beam. As the particles struck the glassy surface at the center of the strange device, they seemed to produce a crackling noise like the sputtering of a vacuum tube through which sparks are passed. The dark glassy surface

displayed a pinkish glow, and a vague white shape seemed to be taking form at its center. Then I noticed that I was not alone in the room—and put the ray-projector back in my pocket.

But the newcomer did not speak—nor did I hear any sound whatever during all the immediately following moments. Everything was shadowy pantomime, as if seen at a vast distance through some intervening haze—although on the other hand the newcomer and all subsequent comers loomed large and close, as if both near and distant, according to some abnormal geometry.

THE newcomer was a thin, dark man of medium height attired in the clerical garb of the Anglican church. He was apparently about thirty years old, with a sallow, olive complexion and fairly good features, but an abnormally high forehead. His black hair was well cut and neatly brushed, and he was clean-shaven though blue-chinned with a heavy growth of beard. He wore rimless spectacles with steel bows. His build and lower facial features were like other clergymen I had seen, but he had a vastly higher forehead, and was darker and more intelligent-looking—also more subtly and concealedly *evil*-looking. At the present moment—having just lighted a faint oil lamp—he looked nervous, and before I knew it he was casting all his magical books into a fireplace on the window side of the room (where the wall slanted sharply) which I had not noticed before. The flames devoured the volumes greedily—leaping up in strange colors and emitting indescribably hideous odors as the strangely hieroglyphed leaves and wormy bindings succumbed to the devastating element. All at once I saw there were others in the room—grave-looking men in clerical costume, one of whom wore the bands and knee-breeches of a bishop. Though I could hear nothing, I could see that they were bringing a decision of vast import to the first-comer. They seemed to hate and fear him at the same time, and he seemed to return these sentiments. His face set itself into a grim expression, but I could see his right hand shaking as he tried to grip the back of a chair. The bishop pointed to the empty case and to the fireplace (where the flames had died down amidst a charred, non-committal mass), and seemed filled with a peculiar loathing. The first-comer then gave a wry smile and reached out with his left hand toward the small object on the table. Everyone then seemed frightened. The procession of clerics began filing down the steep stairs through the trap-door in the floor, turning and making menacing gestures as they left. The bishop was last to go.

The first-comer now went to a cupboard on the inner side of the room and extracted a coil of rope. Mounting a chair, he attached one end of the rope to a hook in the great exposed central beam of black oak, and began making a noose with the other end. Realizing he was about to hang himself, I started forward to dissuade or save him. He saw me and ceased his preparations, looking at me with a kind of *triumph* which puzzled and disturbed me. He slowly stepped down from the chair and began gliding toward me with a positively wolfish grin on his dark, thin-lipped face.

I felt somehow in deadly peril, and drew out the peculiar ray-projector as a weapon of defense. Why I thought it could help me, I do not know. I turned it on—full in his face, and saw

the sallow features glow first with violet and then with pinkish light. His expression of wolfish exultation began to be crowded aside by a look of profound fear—which did not, however, wholly displace the exultation. He stopped in his tracks—then, flailing his arms wildly in the air, began to stagger backward. I saw he was edging toward the open stair-well in the floor, and tried to shout a warning, but he did not hear me. In another instant he had lurched backward through the opening and was lost to view.

I found difficulty in moving toward the stair-well, but when I did get there I found no crushed body on the floor below. Instead there was a clatter of people coming up with lanterns, for the spell of phantasmal silence had broken, and I once more heard sounds and saw figures as normally tri-dimensional. Something had evidently drawn a crowd to this place. Had there been a noise I had not heard? Presently the two people (simple villagers, apparently) farthest in the lead saw me—and stood paralyzed. One of them shrieked loudly and reverberantly:

"Ahrrrh!... It be 'ee, zur? Again?"

Then they all turned and fled frantically. All, that is, but one. When the crowd was gone I saw the grave-bearded man who had brought me to this place—standing alone with a lantern. He was gazing at me gaspingly and fascinatedly, but did not seem afraid. Then he began to ascend the stairs, and joined me in the attic. He spoke:

"So you *didn't* let it alone! I'm sorry. I know what has happened. It happened once before, but the man got frightened and shot himself. You ought not to have made *him* come back. You know what *he* wants. But you mustn't get frightened like the other man he got. Something very strange and terrible has happened to you, but it didn't get far enough to hurt your mind and personality. If you'll keep cool, and accept the need for making certain radical readjustments in your life, you can keep right on enjoying the world, and the fruits of your scholarship. But you can't live here—and I don't think you'll wish to go back to London. I'd advise America.

"You mustn't try anything more with that—thing. Nothing can be put back now. It would only make matters worse to do—or summon—anything. You are not as badly off as you might be—but you must get out of here at once and stay away. You'd better thank Heaven it didn't go further. . . .

"I'm going to prepare you as bluntly as I can. There's been a certain change—in your personal appearance. *He* always causes that. But in a new country you can get used to it. There's a mirror up at the other end of the room, and I'm going to take you to it. You'll get a shock—though you will see nothing repulsive."

I WAS now shaking with deadly fear, and the bearded man almost had to hold me up as he walked me across the room to the mirror, the faint lamp (i. e., that formerly on the table, not the still fainter lantern he had brought) in his free hand. This is what I saw in the glass:

A thin, dark man of medium stature attired in the clerical garb of the Anglican church, apparently about thirty, and with rimless, steel-bowed glasses glistening beneath a sallow, olive forehead of abnormal height.

It was the silent first-comer who had burned his books.

For all the rest of my life, in outward form, I was to be that man!

Special News Bulletin

By VINCENT GADDIS

A short weird tale of radio and a passenger air-liner

DOCTOR EDWARD CRANDON stepped from the taxi. Lightning flashed. A gust of rain swept through the night.

"To Chicago, sir?"

"Yes." The doctor surrendered his suitcase to the airport attendant. The huge ship loomed into view. Its motors were roaring. The hangar lights were dim eyes in the mist, but the cabin windows gleamed cheerfully.

"Bad night, sir."

"It certainly is!"

The attendant handed the suitcase to the smiling hostess. Doctor Crandon stepped aboard and followed the hostess to his seat. A bad night. His first trip in the air. But the convention was only a few hours away, and his nervousness would vanish.

He settled back against the cushions and glanced at the other passengers: a middle-aged man reading a newspaper —a laughing couple, talking softly—a lady, rather old, wiping her eyes—a young man writing on the back of an envelope—a girl using her compact.

The lights flashed out. The ship moved. Drops of water struck the window-pane, forming miniature rivers. Doctor Crandon pulled the blind down. They were in the air.

The plane lurched wildly. A sinking sensation, an instant of animal fear and panic, and then the plane was again roaring steadily through the night. The lights flashed on. Doctor Crandon smiled. Air-pocket.

The hostess appeared, smiling at the passengers. She calmed the old lady, adjusted a pillow, brought a glass of water to the middle-aged man. Doctor Crandon glanced at his watch. Eight-thirty. Time for the news broadcast. As if reading his thoughts, the hostess stopped at his seat.

"Would you care to listen to the radio, sir? There's a small set at each seat with earphones attached instead of a loudspeaker."

"Thank you. I believe I will." Doctor Crandon slipped the phones over his head, and the hostess passed on. He spun the dial. A voice.

"At this time we bring you the news dispatches received over our special leased wires."

"Right on time," the doctor murmured.

The voice continued: "The *Hindenburg,* famous German dirigible, crashed in flames at Lakehurst, New Jersey, late today. The great ship, while attempting to land, and only several hundred feet in the air——"

Doctor Crandon sat upright, his face frowning. Strange! The *Hindenburg* had crashed months ago. He remembered listening to these very words the night of the tragedy. Perhaps the news report was being repeated for some reason. He moved the dial. Lightning flashed. Thunder echoed through the cabin. Static—the soft, haunting murmur of an orchestra—another voice.

"We interrupt this program to bring

you a special news bulletin. The Japanese forces have seized control of Shanghai. All foreigners have been warned——" The voice faded. Shanghai had been taken the night Kellar, his heart-disease patient, died. Weeks ago.

Suddenly Doctor Crandon recalled reading a scientific theory. Every sound that has ever been made is still vibrating in the ether. Every radio program is still in existence in space. The noises of long-dead history might some day be captured. Could it be possible that, due to electrical and magnetic conditions caused by the storm, the radio was picking up broadcasts made weeks before?

THE doctor's attention returned to the radio as a strange hum struck his ears. The hum faded into music—weird music, unlike anything he had ever heard. The music stopped. Clear, penetrating, came an announcement:

"Special news flash. The United States of Europe has declared war on the Federation of South American States. President Mary Dixon, in an official statement, has announced that refusal to grant trade——"

Static. Again the sky flamed with brilliant light. A woman's voice.

"Increased meteoric interference may cause officials to stop all space traffic between Mars and Venus. The solar system will move out of the danger zone within two weeks. The Scenic Spaceways Company tonight canceled all week-end trips to planets beyond Mars and——"

The future? Doctor Crandon was listening to broadcasts that were yet to be made! Time—the fourth dimension. Time—extending into space like length and breadth. The events of the future really existed somewhere, and due to some freakish law of nature, some unknown condition of cosmic forces in the air, it was possible for him to tune in on tomorrow. His discovery would rock the scientific world.

He glanced at the passengers. Were any of them using their radios? The old lady was staring into space—the couple were still talking—the middle-aged man was sleeping—the young man was reading a magazine—the girl was working on her fingernails. The secret was his—alone.

A cold paralysis gripped him. He was on the edge of the great unknown. He must listen. Stock market reports. Race results. The tide of wars. New discoveries. He could make millions, be a prophet, a great inventor. He slowly turned the dial, listened.

Suddenly the roaring motors died. A series of jolts. The plane was landing. So soon? Doctor Crandon looked at his watch. Eight-thirty. The hostess appeared, smiling. The passengers arose and prepared to leave.

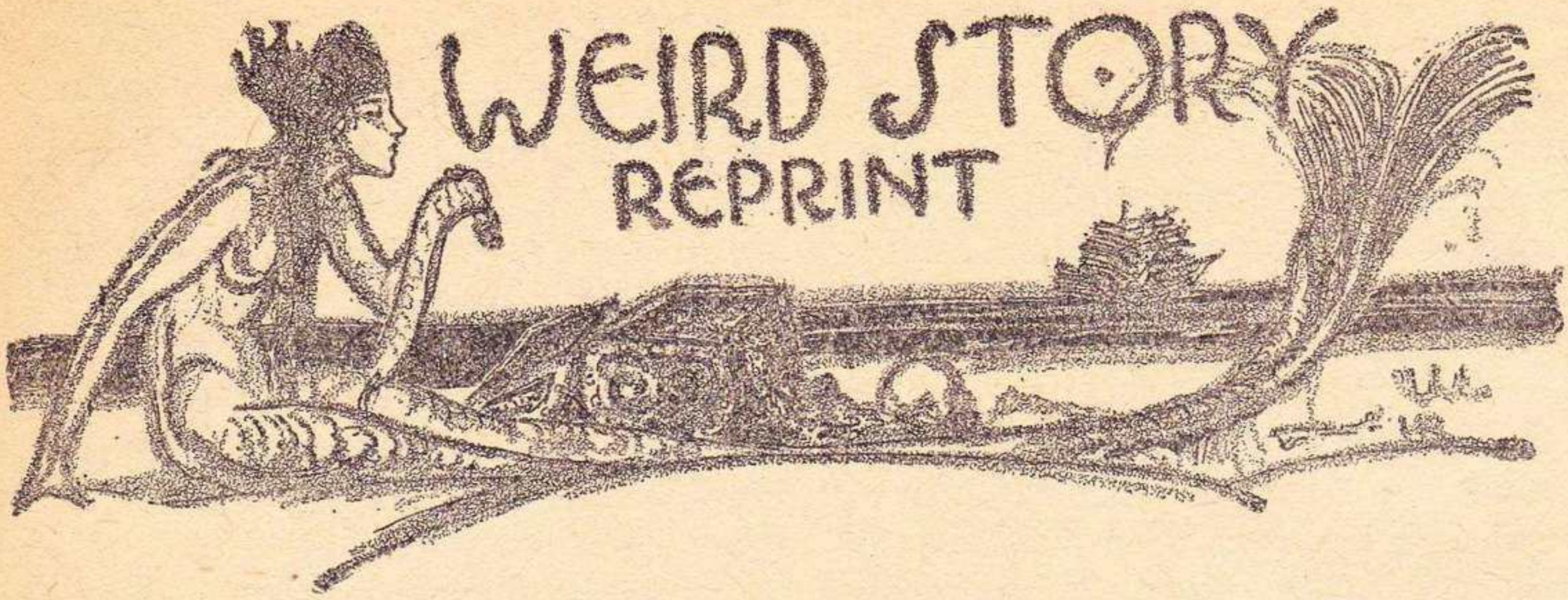
It was dark outside. Doctor Crandon reached for the blind, but the hostess caught his arm.

"Wait," she said.

Still smiling, she opened the top of the radio, turned something inside, jerked a wire. A voice boomed into the earphones. Doctor Crandon stiffened as he listened to the words:

"Special news bulletin. The 8.15 New York-Chicago airliner crashed tonight shortly after leaving the airport. Seven passengers, two pilots, and a hostess were on board. All were killed instantly. Among the passengers was Doctor Edward Crandon, famous specialist. He was on his way to attend the Chicago Medical Convention——"

Doctor Crandon jerked the phones from his head and followed the other passengers to the door.



The Curse of Yig

By Z. B. BISHOP

IN 1925 I went into Oklahoma looking for snake lore, and I came out with a fear of snakes that will last me the rest of my life. I admit it is foolish, since there are natural explanations for everything I saw and heard, but it masters me none the less. If the old story had been all there was to it, I would not have been so badly shaken. My work as an American Indian ethnologist has hardened me to all kinds of extravagant legendry, and I know that simple white people can beat the redskins at their own game when it comes to fanciful inventions. But I can't forget what I saw with my own eyes at the insane asylum in Guthrie.

I called at that asylum because a few of the oldest settlers told me I would find something important there. Neither Indians nor white men would discuss the snake-god legends I had come to trace. The oil-boom newcomers, of course, knew nothing of such matters, and the red men and old pioneers were plainly frightened when I spoke of them. Not more than six or seven people mentioned the asylum, and those who did were careful to talk in whispers. But the whisperers said that Dr. McNeill could show me a very terrible relic and tell me all I wanted to know. He could explain why Yig, the half-human father of serpents, is a shunned and feared object in central Oklahoma, and why old settlers shiver at the secret Indian orgies which make the autumn days and nights hideous with the ceaseless beating of tom-toms in lonely places.

It was with the scent of a hound on the trail that I went to Guthrie, for I had spent many years collecting data on the evolution of serpent-worship among the Indians. I had always felt, from well-defined undertones of legend and archeology, that great Quetzalcoatl—benign snake-god of the Mexicans—had had an older and darker prototype; and during recent months I had well-nigh proved it in a series of researches stretching from Guatemala to the Oklahoma plains. But everything

* From WEIRD TALES for November, 1929.

was tantalizing and incomplete, for above the border the cult of the snake was hedged about by fear and furtiveness.

Now it appeared that a new and copious source of data was about to dawn, and I sought the head of the asylum with an eagerness I did not try to cloak. Doctor McNeill was a small clean-shaven man of somewhat advanced years, and I saw at once from his speech and manner that he was a scholar of no mean attainments in many branches outside his profession. Grave and doubtful when I first made known my errand, his face grew thoughtful as he carefully scanned my credentials and the letter of introduction which a kindly old ex-Indian agent had given me.

"So you've been studying the Yig-legend, eh?" he reflected sententiously. "I know that many of our Oklahoma ethnologists have tried to connect it with Quetzalcoatl, but I don't think any of them have traced the intermediate steps so well. You've done remarkable work for a man as young as you seem to be, and you certainly deserve all the data we can give.

"I don't suppose old Major Moore or any of the others told you what it is I have here. They don't like to talk about it, and neither do I. It is very tragic and very horrible, but that is all. I refuse to consider it anything supernatural. There's a story about it that I'll tell you after you see it—a devilish sad story, but one that I won't call magic. It merely shows the potency that belief has over some people. I'll admit there are times when I feel a shiver that's more than physical, but in daylight I set all that down to nerves. I'm not a young fellow any more, alas!

"To come to the point, the thing I have is what you might call a victim of Yig's curse—a physically living victim. We don't let the bulk of the nurses see it, although most of them know it's here. There are just two steady old chaps whom I let feed it and clean out its quarters—used to be three, but good old Stevens passed on a few years ago. I suppose I'll have to break in a new group pretty soon; for the thing does not seem to age or change much, and we old boys can't last for ever. Maybe the ethics of the near future will let us give it a merciless release, but it's hard to tell.

"Did you see that single ground-glass basement window over in the east wing when you came up the drive? That's where it is. I'll take you there myself now. You needn't make any comment. Just look through the movable panel in the door and thank God the light isn't any stronger. Then I'll tell you the story—or as much as I've been able to piece together."

WE WALKED downstairs very quietly, and did not talk as we threaded the corridors of the seemingly deserted basement. Doctor McNeill unlocked a gray-painted steel door, but it was only a bulkhead leading to a further stretch of hallway. At length he paused before a door marked B 116, opened a small observation panel which he could use only by standing on tiptoe, and pounded several times upon the painted metal, as if to arouse the occupant, whatever it might be.

A faint stench came from the aperture as the doctor unclosed it, and I fancied his pounding elicited a kind of low, hissing response. Finally he motioned me to replace him at the peephole, and I did so with a causeless and increasing tremor. The barred, ground-glass window, close to the earth outside, admitted only a feeble and uncertain pallor; and I had to look into the malo-

dorous den for several seconds before I could see what was crawling and wriggling about on the straw-covered floor, emitting every now and then a weak and vacuous hiss. Then the shadowed outlines began to take shape, and I perceived that the squirming entity bore some remote resemblance to a human form laid flat on its belly. I clutched at the door-handle for support as I tried to keep from fainting.

The moving object was almost of human size, and entirely devoid of clothing. It was absolutely hairless, and its tawny-looking back seemed subtly squamous in the dim, ghoulish light.

Around the shoulders it was rather speckled and brownish, and the head was very curiously flat. As it looked up to hiss at me I saw that the beady little black eyes were damnably anthropoid, but I could not bear to study them long. They fastened themselves on me with a horrible persistence, so that I closed the panel gaspingly and left the creature to wriggle about unseen in its matted straw and spectral twilight. I must have reeled a bit, for I saw that the doctor was gently holding my arm as he guided me away. I was stuttering over and over again: "B-but for God's sake, *what is it?*"

Doctor McNeill told me the story in his private office as I sprawled opposite him in an easy-chair. The gold and crimson of late afternoon changed to the violet of early dusk, but still I sat awed and motionless. I resented every ring of the telephone and every whir of the buzzer, and I could have cursed the nurses and internes whose knocks now and then summoned the doctor briefly to the outer office. Night came, and I was glad my host switched on all the lights. Scientist though I was, my zeal for research was half forgotten amid such breathless ecstasies of fright as a small boy might feel when whispered witch-tales go the rounds of the chimney-corner.

It seems that Yig, the snake-god of the central plains tribes—presumably the primal source of the more southerly Quetzalcoatl or Kukulcan — was an odd, half-anthropomorphic devil of highly arbitrary and capricious nature. He was not wholly evil, and was usually quite well disposed toward those who gave proper respect to him and his children, the serpents; but in the autumn he became abnormally ravenous and had to be driven away by means of suitable rites. That was why the tom-toms in the Pawnee, Wichita, and Caddo country pounded ceaselessly week in and week out in August, September, and October; and why the medicine-men made strange noises with rattles and whistles curiously like those of the Aztecs and Mayas.

Yig's chief trait was a relentless devotion to his children—a devotion so great that the redskins almost feared to protect themselves from the venomous rattlesnakes which thronged the region. Frightful clandestine tales hinted of his vengeance upon mortals who flouted him or wreaked harm upon his wriggling progeny; his chosen method being to turn his victim, after suitable tortures, to a spotted snake.

IN THE old days of the Indian Territory, the doctor went on, there was not quite so much secrecy about Yig. The plains tribes, less cautious than the desert nomads and Pueblos, talked quite freely of their legends and autumn ceremonies with the first Indian agents, and let considerable of the lore spread out through the neighboring regions of white settlement. The great fear came in the land-rush days

of 'eighty-nine, when some extraordinary incidents had been rumored, and the rumors sustained, by what seemed to be hideously tangible proofs. Indians said that the new white men did not know how to get on with Yig, and afterward the settlers came to take that theory at face value. Now no old-timer in middle Oklahoma, white or red, could be induced to breathe a word about the snake-god except in vague hints. Yet after all, the doctor added with almost needless emphasis, the only truly authenticated horror had been a thing of pitiful tragedy rather than of bewitchment. It was all very material and cruel—even that last phase which had caused so much dispute.

Doctor McNeill paused and cleared his throat before getting down to his special story, and I felt a tingling sensation as when a theatre curtain rises. The thing had begun when Walker Davis and his wife Audrey left Arkansas to settle in the newly opened public lands in the spring of 1889, and the end had come in the country of the Wichitas—north of the Wichita River, in what is at present Caddo County. There is a small village called Binger there now, and the railway goes through; but otherwise the place is less changed than other parts of Oklahoma. It is still a section of farms and ranches—quite productive in these days—since the great oil-fields do not come very close.

Walker and Audrey had come from Franklin County in the Ozarks with a canvas-topped wagon, two mules, an ancient and useless dog called Wolf, and all their household goods. They were typical hill-folk, youngish and perhaps a little more ambitious than most, and looked forward to a life of better returns for their hard work than they had had in Arkansas. Both were lean, raw-boned specimens; the man tall, sandy, and gray-eyed, and the woman short and rather dark, with a black straightness of hair suggesting a slight Indian admixture.

In general, there was very little of distinction about them, and but for one thing their annals might not have differed from those of thousands of other pioneers who flocked into the new country at that time. That thing was Walker's almost epileptic fear of snakes, which some laid to prenatal causes, and some said came from a dark prophecy about his end with which an old Indian squaw had tried to scare him when he was small. Whatever the cause, the effect was marked indeed; for despite his strong general courage the very mention of a snake would cause him to grow faint and pale, while the sight of even a tiny specimen would produce a shock sometimes bordering on a convulsion seizure.

The Davises started out early in the year, in the hope of being on their new land for the spring plowing. Travel was slow; for the roads were bad in Arkansas, while in the Territory there were great stretches of rolling hills and red, sandy barrens without any roads whatever. As the terrain grew flatter, the change from their native mountains depressed them more, perhaps, than they realized, but they found the people at the Indian agencies very affable, while most of the settled Indians seemed friendly and civil. Now and then they encountered a fellow-pioneer, with whom crude pleasantries and expressions of amiable rivalry were generally exchanged.

Owing to the season, there were not many snakes in evidence, so Walker did not suffer from his special temperamental weakness. In the earlier stages

of the journey, too, there were no Indian snake legends to trouble him; for the transplanted tribes from the southeast do not share the wilder beliefs of their western neighbors. As fate would have it, it was a white man at Okmulgee in the Creek country who gave the Davises the first hint of the Yig beliefs; a hint which had a curiously fascinating effect on Walker, and caused him to ask questions very freely after that.

Before long Walker's fascination had developed into a bad case of fright. He took the most extraordinary precautions at each of the nightly camps, always clearing away whatever vegetation he found, and avoiding stony places whenever he could. Every clump of stunted bushes and every cleft in the great, slab-like rocks seemed to him now to hide malevolent serpents, while every human figure not obviously part of a settlement or emigrant train seemed to him a potential snake-god till nearness had proved the contrary. Fortunately no troublesome encounters came at this stage to shake his nerves still further.

As they approached the Kickapoo country they found it harder and harder to avoid camping near rocks. Finally it was no longer possible, and poor Walker was reduced to the puerile expedient of droning some of the rustic anti-snake charms he had learned in his boyhood. Two or three times a snake was really glimpsed, and these sights did not help the sufferer in his efforts to preserve composure.

On the twenty-second evening of the journey a savage wind made it imperative, for the sake of the mules, to camp in as sheltered a spot as possible; and Audrey persuaded her husband to take advantage of a cliff which rose uncommonly high above the dried bed of a former tributary of the Canadian River. He did not like the rocky cast of the place, but allowed himself to be overruled this once; leading the animals sullenly toward the protecting slope, which the nature of the ground would not allow the wagon to approach.

Audrey, examining the rocks near the wagon, meanwhile noticed a singular sniffing on the part of the feeble old dog. Seizing a rifle, she followed his lead, and presently thanked her stars that she had forestalled Walker in her discovery. For there, snugly nested in the gap between two boulders, was a sight it would have done him no good to see. Visible only as one convoluted expanse, but perhaps comprising as many as three or four separate units, was a mass of lazy wriggling which could not be other than a brood of newborn rattlesnakes.

Anxious to save Walker from a trying shock, Audrey did not hesitate to act, but took the gun firmly by the barrel and brought the butt down again and again upon the writhing objects. Her own sense of loathing was great, but it did not amount to a real fear. Finally she saw that her task was done, and turned to cleanse the improvised bludgeon in the red sand and dry, dead grass near by. She must, she reflected, cover the nest up before Walker got back from tethering the mules. Old Wolf, tottering relic of mixed shepherd and coyote ancestry that he was, had vanished, and she feared he had gone to fetch his master.

FOOTSTEPS at that instant proved her fear well founded. A second more, and Walker had seen everything. Audrey made a move to catch him if he should faint, but he did no more than sway. Then the look of pure fright on his bloodless face turned slowly to

something like mingled awe and anger, and he began to upbraid his wife in trembling tones.

"Gawd's sake, Aud, but why'd ye go for to do that? Hain't ye heerd all the things they've ben tellin' about this snake-devil Yig? Ye'd ought to a told me, and we'd a moved on. Don't ye know they's a devil-god what gets even if ye hurts his children? What for d'ye think the Injuns all dances and beats their drums in the fall about? This land's under a curse, I can tell ye —nigh every soul we've a-talked to sence we come in's said the same. Yig rules here, an' he comes out every fall for to git his victims and turn 'em into snakes. Why, Aud, they won't none of them Injuns acrost the Canayjin kill a snake for love nor money!

"Gawd knows what ye done to yourself, gal, a-stompin' out a hull brood o' Yig's chillen. He'll git ye, sure, sooner or later, unlessen I kin buy a charm offen some o' the Injun medicine-men. He'll git ye, Aud, as sure's they's a Gawd in heaven—he'll come oua the night and turn ye into a crawlin' spotted snake!"

All the rest of the journey Walker kept up the frightened reproofs and prophecies. They crossed the Canadian near Newcastle, and soon afterward met with the first of the real plains Indians they had seen—a party of blanketed Wichitas, whose leader talked freely under the spell of the whisky offered him, and taught poor Walker a long-winded protective charm against Yig in exchange for a quart bottle of the same inspiring fluid. By the end of the week the chosen site in the Wichita country was reached, and the Davises made haste to trace their boundaries and perform the spring plowing before even beginning the construction of a cabin.

The region was flat, drearily windy, and sparse of natural vegetation, but promised great fertility under cultivation. Occasional outcroppings of granite diversified a soil of decomposed red sandstone, and here and there a great flat rock would stretch along the surface of the ground like a man-made floor. There seemed to be very few snakes, or possible dens for them; so Audrey at last persuaded Walker to build the one-room cabin over a vast, smooth slab of exposed stone. With such a flooring and with a good-sized fireplace the wettest weather might be defied—though it soon became evident that dampness was no salient quality of the district. Logs were hauled in the wagon from the nearest belt of woods, many miles toward the Wichita Mountains.

Walker built his wide-chimneyed cabin and crude barn with the aid of the other settlers, though the nearest one was over a mile away. In turn, he helped his helpers at similar house-raisings, so that many ties of friendship sprang up between the new neighbors. There was no town worthy the name nearer than El Reno, on the railway thirty miles or more to the northeast; and before many weeks had passed, the people of the section had become very cohesive despite the wideness of their scattering. The Indians, a few of whom had begun to settle down on ranches, were for the most part harmless, though somewhat quarrelsome when fired by the liquid stimulation which found its way to them despite all Government bans.

Of all the neighbors the Davises found Joe and Sally Compton, who likewise hailed from Arkansas, the most helpful and congenial. Sally is still alive, known now as Grandma Compton; and her son Clyde, then an infant

in arms, has become one of the leading men of the State. Sally and Audrey used to visit each other often, for their cabins were only two miles apart; and in the long spring and summer afternoons they exchanged many a tale of old Arkansas and many a rumor about the new country.

Sally was very sympathetic about Walker's weakness regarding snakes, but perhaps did more to aggravate than cure the parallel nervousness which Audrey was acquiring through his incessant praying and prophesying about the curse of Yig. She was uncommonly full of gruesome snake stories, and produced a direfully strong impression with her acknowledged masterpiece—the tale of a man in Scott County who had been bitten by a whole horde of rattlers at once, and had swelled so monstrously from poison that his body had finally burst with a pop. Needless to say, Audrey did not repeat this anecdote to her husband, and she implored the Comptons to beware of starting it on the rounds of the countryside. It is to Joe's and Sally's credit that they heeded this plea with the utmost fidelity.

Walker did his corn-planting early, and in midsummer improved his time by harvesting a fair crop of the native grass of the region. With the help of Joe Compton he dug a well which gave a moderate supply of very good water, though he planned to sink an artesian later on. He did not run into many serious snake scares, and made his land as inhospitable as possible for wriggling visitors. Every now and then he rode over to the cluster of thatched, conical huts which formed the main village of the Wichitas, and talked long with the old men and shamans about the snake-god and how to nullify his wrath. Charms were always ready in exchange for whisky, but much of the information he got was far from reassuring.

Yig was a great god. He was bad medicine. He did not forget things. In the autumn his children were hungry and wild, and Yig was hungry and wild, too. All the tribes made medicine against Yig when the corn harvest came. They gave him some corn, and danced in proper regalia to the sound of whistle, rattle, and drum. They kept the drums pounding to drive Yig away, and called down the aid of Tirâwa, whose children men are, even as the snakes are Yig's children. It was bad that the squaw of Davis killed the children of Yig. Let Davis say the charms many times when the corn harvest comes. Yig is Yig. Yig is a great god.

By the time the corn harvest did come, Walker had succeeded in getting his wife into a deplorably jumpy state. His prayers and borrowed incantations came to be a nuisance; and when the autumn rites of the Indians began, there was always a distant wind-borne pounding of tom-toms to lend an added background of the sinister. It was maddening to have the muffled clatter always stealing over the wide, red plains. Why would it never stop? Day and night, week on week, it was always going in exhaustless relays, as persistently as the red dusty winds that carried it. Audrey loathed it more than her husband did, for he saw in it a compensating element of protection. It was with this sense of a mighty, intangible bulwark against evil that he got in his corn crop and prepared cabin and stable for the coming winter.

The autumn was abnormally warm, and except for their primitive cookery the Davises found scant use for the stone fireplace Walker had built with such care. Something in the unnatural-

ness of the hot dust-clouds preyed on the nerves of all the settlers, but most of all on Audrey's and Walker's. The notions of a hovering snake-curse and the weird, endless rhythm of the distant Indian drums formed a bad combination which any added element of the bizarre went far to render utterly unendurable.

Notwithstanding this strain, several festive gatherings were held at one or another of the cabins after the crops were reaped: keeping naively alive in modernity those curious rites of the harvest-home which are as old as human agriculture itself. Lafayette Smith, who came from southern Missouri and had a cabin about three miles east of Walker's, was a very passable fiddler; and his tunes did much to make the celebrants forget the monotonous beating of the distant tom-toms. Then Hallowe'en drew near, and the settlers planned another frolic—this time, had they but known it, of a lineage older than even agriculture: the dread Witch-Sabbath of the primal pre-Aryans, kept alive through ages in the midnight blackness of secret woods, and still hinting at vague terrors under its latter-day mask of comedy and lightness. Hallowe'en was to fall on a Thursday, and the neighbors agreed to gather for their first revel at the Davis cabin.

IT WAS on that thirty-first of October that the warm spell broke. The morning was gray and leaden, and by noon the incessant winds had changed from searingness to rawness. People shivered all the more because they were not prepared for the chill, and Walker Davis's old dog, Wolf, dragged himself wearily indoors to a place beside the hearth. But the distant drums still thumped on, nor were the white citizenry less inclined to pursue their chosen rites. As early as four in the afternoon the wagons began to arrive at Walker's cabin; and in the evening, after a memorable barbecue, Lafayette Smith's fiddle inspired a very fair-sized company to great feats of saltatory grotesqueness in the one good-sized but crowded room. The younger folk indulged in the amiable inanities proper to the season, and now and then old Wolf would howl with doleful and spine-tickling ominousness at some especially spectral strain from Lafayette's squeaky violin—a device he had never heard before. Mostly, though, this battered veteran slept through the merriment, for he was past the age of active interests and lived largely in his dreams. Tom and Jennie Rigby had brought their collie Zeke along, but the canines did not fraternize. Zeke seemed strangely uneasy over something, and nosed around curiously all the evening.

Audrey and Walker made a fine couple on the floor, and Grandma Compton still likes to recall her impression of their dancing that night. Their worries seemed forgotten for the nonce, and Walker was shaved and trimmed into a surprising degree of spruceness. By ten o'clock all hands were healthily tired, and the guests began to depart family by family with many handshakings and bluff assurances of what a fine time everybody had had. Tom and Jennie thought Zeke's eery howls as he followed them to their wagon were marks of regret at having to go home; though Audrey said it must be the far-away tom-toms which annoyed him, for the distant thumping was surely ghastly enough after the merriment within.

The night was bitterly cold, and for the first time Walker put a great log in the fireplace and banked it with ashes to keep it smoldering till morning. Old

Wolf dragged himself within the ruddy glow and lapsed into his customary coma. Audrey and Walker, too tired to think of charms or curses, tumbled into the rough pine bed and were asleep before the cheap alarm-clock on the mantel had ticked out three minutes. And from far away, the rhythmic pounding of those hellish tom-toms still pulsed on the chill night wind.

Doctor McNeill paused here and removed his glasses, as if a blurring of the objective world might make the reminiscent vision clearer.

"You'll soon appreciate," he said, "that I had a great deal of difficulty in piecing out all that happened after the guests left. There were times, though —at first—when I was able to make a try at it." After a moment of silence he went on with the tale.

Audrey had terrible dreams of Yig, who appeared to her in the guise of Satan as depicted in cheap engravings she had seen. It was, indeed, from an absolute ecstasy of nightmare that she started suddenly awake to find Walker already conscious and sitting up in bed. He seemed to be listening intently to something, and silenced her with a whisper when she began to ask what had aroused him.

"Hark, Aud!" he breathed. "Don't ye hear somethin' a-singin' and buzzin' and rustlin'? D'ye reckon it's the fall crickets?"

Certainly, there was distinctly audible within the cabin such a sound as he had described. Audrey tried to analyze it, and was impressed with some element at once horrible and familiar, which hovered just outside the rim of her memory. And beyond it all, waking a hideous thought, the monotonous beating of the distant tom-toms came incessantly across the black plains on which a cloudy half-moon had set.

"Walker—s'pose it's—the—the—curse o' Yig?"

She could feel him tremble.

"No, gal, I don't reckon he comes that way. He's shapen like a man, except ye look at him clost. That's what Chief Gray Eagle says. This here's some varmints come in outen the cold —not crickets, I calc'late, but summat like 'em. I orter git up and stomp 'em out afore they make much headway or git at the cupboard."

He rose, felt for the lantern that hung within easy reach, and rattled the tin match-box nailed to the wall beside it. Audrey sat up in bed and watched the flare of the match grow into the steady glow of the lantern. Then, as their eyes began to take in the whole of the room, the crude rafters shook with the frenzy of their simultaneous shriek. For the flat, rocky floor, revealed in the new-born illumination, was one seething, brown-speckled mass of wriggling rattlesnakes, slithering toward the fire, and even now turning their loathsome heads to menace the fright-blasted lantern-bearer.

It was only for an instant that Audrey saw the things. The reptiles were of every size, of uncountable numbers, and apparently of several varieties; and even as she looked, two or three of them reared their heads as if to strike at Walker. She did not faint—it was Walker's crash to the floor that extinguished the lantern and plunged her into blackness. He had not screamed a second time—fright had paralyzed him, and he fell as if shot by a silent arrow from no mortal's bow. To Audrey the entire world seemed to whirl about fantastically, mingling with the nightmare from which she had started.

Voluntary motion of any sort was impossible, for will and the sense of

reality had left her. She fell back inertly on her pillow, hoping that she would wake soon. No actual sense of what had happened penetrated her mind for some time. Then, little by little, the suspicion that she was really awake began to dawn on her; and she was convulsed with a mounting blend of panic and grief which made her long to shriek out despite the inhibiting spell which kept her mute.

Walker was gone, and she had not been able to help him. He had died of snakes, just as the old witch-woman had predicted when he was a little boy. Poor Wolf had not been able to help, either —probably he had not even awakened from his senile stupor. And now the crawling things must be coming for her, writhing closer and closer every moment in the dark, perhaps even now twining slipperily about the bedposts and oozing up over the coarse woollen blankets. Unconsciously she crept under the clothes and trembled.

It must be the curse of Yig. He had sent his monstrous children on All-Hallows' Night, and they had taken Walker first. Why was that—wasn't he innocent enough? Why not come straight for her—hadn't she killed those little rattlers alone? Then she thought of the curse's form as told by the Indians. She wouldn't be killed—just turned to a spotted snake. Ugh! So she would be like those things she had glimpsed on the floor—those things which Yig had sent to get her and enroll her among their number! She tried to mumble a charm that Walker had taught her, but found she could not utter a single sound.

THE NOISY ticking of the alarm-clock sounded above the maddening beat of the distant tom-toms. The snakes were taking a long time—did they mean to delay on purpose to play on her nerves? Every now and then she thought she felt a steady, insidious pressure on the bedclothes, but each time it turned out to be only the automatic twitchings of her over-wrought nerves. The clock ticked on in the dark, and a change came slowly over her thoughts.

Those snakes *couldn't* have taken so long! They couldn't be Yig's messengers after all, but just natural rattlers that were nested below the rock and had been drawn there by the fire. They weren't coming for her, perhaps—perhaps they had sated themselves on poor Walker. Where were they now? Gone? Coiled by the fire? Still crawling over the prone corpse of their victim? The clock ticked, and the distant drums throbbed on.

At the thought of her husband's body lying there in the pitch blackness a thrill of purely physical horror passed over Audrey. That story of Sally Compton's about the man back in Scott County! He, too, had been bitten by a whole bunch of rattlesnakes, and what had happened to him? The poison had rotted the flesh and swelled the whole corpse, and in the end the bloated thing had *burst* horribly—burst horribly with a detestable *popping* noise. Was that what was happening to Walker down there on the rock floor? Instinctively she felt that she had begun to *listen* for something too terrible even to name to herself.

The clock ticked on, keeping a kind of mocking, sardonic time with the far-off drumming that the night wind brought. She wished it were a striking clock, so that she could know how long this eldritch vigil must last. She cursed the toughness of fiber that kept her from fainting, and wondered what sort of relief the dawn could bring, after all. Probably neighbors would pass—no

doubt somebody would call—would they find her still sane? Was she still sane now?

Morbidly listening, Audrey all at once became aware of something which she had to verify with every effort of her will before she could believe it; and which, once verified, she did not know whether to welcome or dread. *The distant beating of the Indian tom-toms had ceased.*

She did not relish this new and sudden silence, after all! There was something sinister about it. The loud-ticking clock seemed abnormal in its new loneliness. Capable at last of conscious motion, she shook the covers from her face and looked into the darkness toward the window. It must have cleared after the moon set, for she saw the square aperture distinctly against the background of stars.

Then without warning came that shocking, unutterable sound—ugh!—that dull *pop* of cleft skin and escaping poison in the dark. God!— The bonds of muteness snapped, and the black night waxed reverberant with Audrey's screams of stark, unbridled frenzy.

Consciousness did not pass away with the shock. How merciful if only it had! Amidst the echoes of her shrieking Audrey still saw the star-sprinkled square of window ahead, and heard the doom-boding ticking of that frightful clock. Did she hear another sound? Was that square window still a perfect square? She was in no condition to weigh the evidence of her senses or distinguish between fact and hallucination.

No—that window was *not* a perfect square. *Something had encroached on the lower edge.* Nor was the ticking of the clock the only sound in the room. There was, beyond dispute, a heavy breathing neither her own nor poor Wolf's. Wolf slept very silently, and his wakeful wheezing was unmistakable. Then Audrey saw against the stars the black, demoniac silhouette of something anthropoid—the undulant bulk of a gigantic head and shoulders fumbling slowly toward her.

"Y'aaaah! Y'aaaah! Go away! Go away! Go away, snake devil! Go 'way, Yig! I didn't mean to kill 'em—I was feared he'd be scairt of 'em. Don't, Yig, don't! I didn't go for to hurt yore chillen—don't come nigh me—don't change me into no spotted snake!"

But the half-formless head and shoulders only lurched onward toward the bed, very silently.

Everything snapped at once inside Audrey's head, and in a second she had turned from a cowering child to a raging madwoman. She knew where the ax was—hung against the wall on those pegs near the lantern. It was within easy reach, and she could find it in the dark. Before she was conscious of anything further it was in her hands, and she was creeping toward the foot of the bed—toward the monstrous head and shoulders that every moment groped their way nearer. Had there been any light, the look on her face would not have been pleasant to see.

"Take *that*, you! And *that*, and *that*, and *that!*"

She was laughing shrilly now, and her cackles mounted higher as she saw that the starlight beyond the window was yielding to the dim prophetic pallor of coming dawn.

DOCTOR MCNEILL wiped the perspiration from his forehead and put on his glasses again. I waited for him to resume, and as he kept silent, I spoke softly.

"She lived? She was found? Was it ever explained?"

The doctor cleared his throat.

"Yes—she lived, in a way. And it was explained. I told you there was no bewitchment—only cruel, pitiful, material horror."

It was Sally Compton who had made the discovery. She had ridden over to the Davis cabin the next afternoon to talk over the party with Audrey, and had seen no smoke from the chimney. That was queer. It had turned very warm again, yet Audrey was usually cooking something at that hour. The mules were making hungry-sounding noises in the barn, and there was no sign of old Wolf sunning himself in the accustomed spot by the door.

Altogether, Sally did not like the look of the place, so was very timid and hesitant as she dismounted and knocked. She got no answer, but waited some time before trying the crude door of split logs. The lock, it appeared, was unfastened; and she slowly pushed her way in. Then, perceiving what was there, she reeled back, gasped, and clung to the jamb to preserve her balance.

A terrible odor had welled out as she opened the door, but that was not what had stunned her. It was what she had seen. For within that shadowy cabin monstrous things had happened and three shocking objects remained on the floor to awe and baffle the beholder.

NEAR the burned-out fireplace was the great dog—purple decay on the skin left bare by mange and old age, and the whole carcass burst by the puffing effect of rattlesnake poison. It must have been bitten by a veritable legion of the reptiles.

To the right of the door was the ax-hacked remnant of what had been a man—clad in a nightshirt, and with the shattered bulk of a lantern clenched in one hand. *He was totally free from any sign of snake-bite.* Near him lay the ensanguined ax, carelessly discarded.

And wriggling flat on the floor was a loathsome, vacant-eyed thing that had been a woman, but was now only a mute mad caricature. All that this thing could do was to hiss, and hiss, and hiss.

Both the doctor and I were brushing cold drops from our foreheads by this time. He poured something from a flask on his desk, took a nip, and handed another glass to me. I could only suggest tremulously and stupidly:

"So Walker had only fainted that first time—the screams roused him, and the ax did the rest?"

"Yes." Doctor McNeill's voice was low. "But he met his death from snakes just the same. It was his fear working in two ways—it made him faint, and it made him fill his wife with the wild stories that caused her to strike out when she thought she saw the snake devil."

I thought for a moment.

"And Audrey—wasn't it queer how the curse of Yig seemed to work itself out on her? I suppose the impresion of hissing snakes had been fairly ground into her."

"Yes. There were lucid spells at first, but they got to be fewer and fewer. Her hair came white at the roots as it grew, and later began to fall out. The skin grew blotchy, and when she died——"

I interrupted with a start.

"*Died?* Then what was that—that thing downstairs?"

Doctor McNeill spoke gravely.

"*That* is what was born to her three-quarters of a year afterwards. There were three more of them—two were even worse—but this is the only one that lived."

COMING NEXT MONTH

ROBERT E. HOWARD, at the time of his tragic death, was working on a new novel for WEIRD TALES. He had completed a rough first draft, and nearly completed a revision which was to be his final version. The bullet which crashed into his brain prevented the author from finishing this, his last story. It is a thrilling tale of popping action, depicted as only Howard could depict action, with a bone-crushing wildcat of a hero, in the weirdest possible adventures.

So engrossing is this story, *Almuric,* that WEIRD TALES would not be playing fair with you, the readers, if we did not let you see it. Therefore we have pieced together the nearly completed final draft that Howard wrote, with the final pages of Howard's rough first draft, which contains a smashing denouement.

Beginning in the United States in our day, the scene quickly shifts to another planet, called by the author Almuric. From his arrival in Almuric, the hero tells the story of his weird adventures in his own words. And what adventures they are! The creator of those indomitable characters that have delighted thousands of readers of this magazine—King Kull and his Shadow Kingdom, Solomon Kane the dour Puritan righter of wrongs, Conan the barbarian adventurer—has here created the doughtiest hero of them all: Esau Cairn, also known as Esau Ironhand.

This fascinating story will begin publication in next month's WEIRD TALES.

ALMURIC

By Robert E. Howard

—also—

THE DARK ISLE

By ROBERT BLOCH

A tale of the Romans and the Druids, and the horrendous doom revealed by the flaring torchlight in a frightful underground cavern in England.

THE THINKING MACHINE

By J. J. CONNINGTON

A strange and curious story about a fantastic machine that possessed a brute desire to slay—a startling thrill-tale of an eery invention.

THE HOLLOW MOON

By EVERIL WORRELL

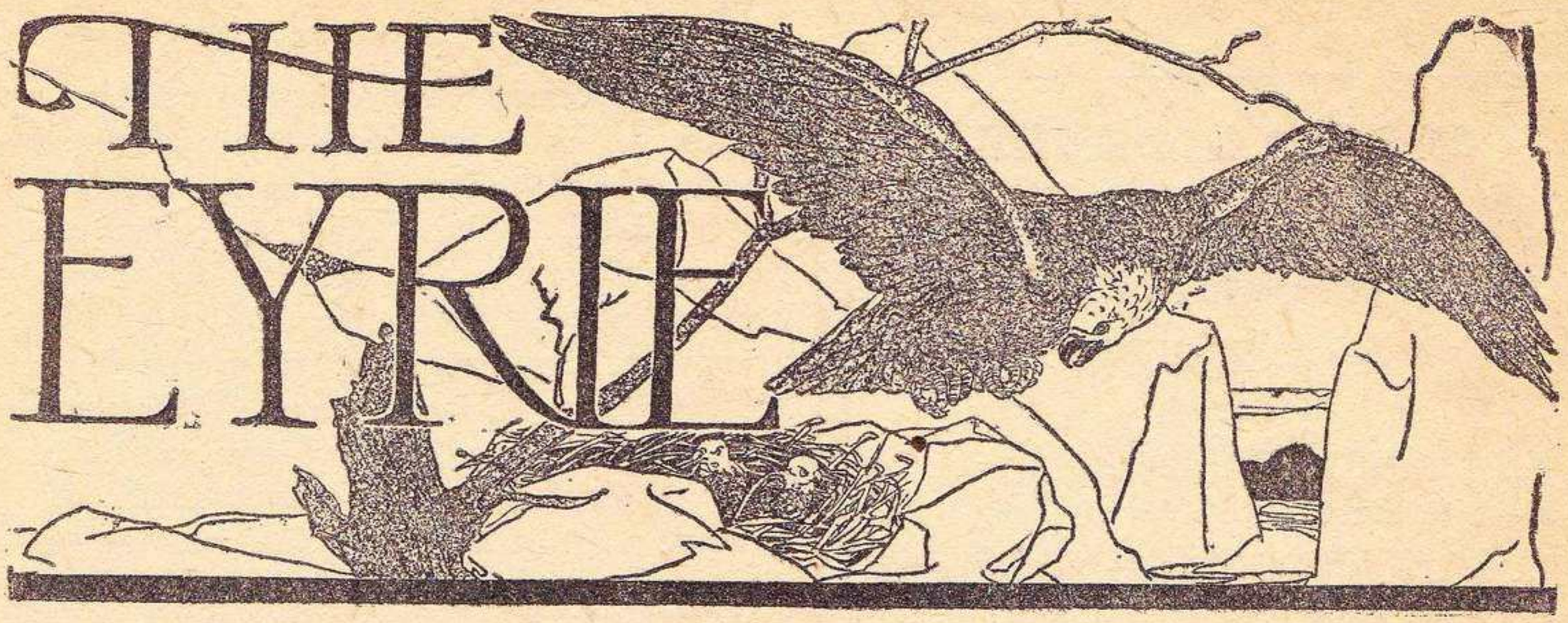
A fascinatingly different story about a weird adventure that befell a yachting party shipwrecked in the South Seas—the strangest of all vampire tales.

WASHINGTON NOCTURNE

By SEABURY QUINN

Who was the stranger that walked before the Tomb and vanished, yet by his mere coming radically changed the lives of three persons?—a tale of the Unknown Soldier.

May Issue of Weird Tales . . . . . Out April 1



THE increased number of pages has been enthusiastically received by you, the readers, judging by the letters that you have sent to the Eyrie. The only doubt in any of your letters has been a slight fear that we will not be able to keep up the quality that you have come to expect in WEIRD TALES. We can only pledge again that there will be no falling off in the quality of our stories. Of this you may be sure.

A Jumbo Edition

Sam Moskowitz writes from Newark, New Jersey: "Need I mention the great gratification with which I read the jumbo (comparatively speaking) issue of WEIRD TALES which hit the newsstand but a few days past? The increased content, it gives me pleasure to state, has not in the least affected the fine quality of your material. All the little nicknacks which give the magazine atmosphere are back again, along with the masterful Finlay and the incomparable Lovecraft, Howard and Smith. May you find the success your magazine justly deserves."

32 Pages Thicker

Harry Warner, Jr., writes from Hagerstown, Maryland: "What a shock to see WEIRD TALES 32 pages thicker! Of course, I had known it was coming, for I had seen the announcements, and was expecting it. But even at that, it still seems too good to be true. Now if you can only continue to fill 160 pages with the kind of literature you are accustomed to printing everything will be all right. *I Found Cleopatra* ended wonderfully, one of the best Egyptian tales I've ever read, and with a truly logical ending. The only fault I can find is that there was a little too much 'cowboy and Indian' stuff in parts of it; outside of that it was perfect. Clark Ashton Smith's ability as an author is confirmed even more by *The Double Shadow*, and in *The Transgressor* by Henry Kuttner you have one of the few really good time-travel tales ever written. This is a pet subject of mine, but most of the yarns along this line are positively silly. But in a thousand words or so Kuttner writes one of the best of them all —perhaps only second to the grand-daddy of them all, Wells' *The Time Machine*. *The Drifting Snow* came a little soon after *The Snow-Man*, but despite this was truly readable. *The Last Horror* didn't click with me, for some reason; marvelous as a psychological study, but not so fitting for WEIRD. I've not read the rest of the issue yet—no time, except for *Death Is an Elephant* which was okay. Unusual subject, and well done."

A Promise Fulfilled

Paul N. Nicholaioff writes: "After finishing reading the February issue of WEIRD TALES I couldn't resist the urge to write you and let you know how much I enjoyed it! 160 pages! I almost collapsed after thumbing it down through the last page to make sure it was true. Many times in the past whenever I finished reading WEIRD TALES I often asked myself grudgingly: 'Couldn't they spare a few more pages?'—but was glad to get the next month's issue and fork over that two-bits across the counter, willingly, too. So you can imagine my feelings when I espied

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that announcement in the January number—and the tumult of emotion that overwhelmed me when I held the promised issue and found that it was so. Seabury Quinn's yarn gets my vote for being the best, though Hindin's is not far behind. And I mustn't forget *The Transgressor* by Henry Kuttner, so very short but baffling to the imagination. The reprint was excellent. Don't think I care much for your new serial, though. *The Double Shadow* was just a lot of high words to me. Smith can turn out stuff much better than that. This is the first disappointment. I will say this: I enjoyed his reprint in the last month's issue. And the verses make the magazine complete. Five in all this month!—well, well. *The King and the Oak* by Robert E. Howard gets first prize."

An Astounding Feat

Charles Hidley writes: "I am sure that all the truly loyal readers of WEIRD TALES have offered a fervent prayer of thanks on the restoration of The Unique Magazine to its former excellence. You have, since the new ownership, given us something new and thrilling, besides the stories each month. The return of JPD [Doolin] who can really draw well when he tries. (The best illustration for the November issue was *The Nameless City*.) Then Virgil Finlay came home in the December number with *More Lives Than One* (best drawing in issue), that most delightful tale by Seabury Quinn. January—the cover by Findlay and better illustrations (*The Fifth Candle* took the prize). February, the most amazing issue of all—*160 pages*—an astounding feat of good sense, and long sought after by us all. Who could ask for more? But you give us more. First, you bring back H. S. DeLay after a long absence. His filmy, mysterious works of art are just the thing for the weird type of magazine. You present a *serial* by Manly Wade Wellman which has caught my interest more firmly than any other serial ever has. You print stories by Clark Ashton Smith and Donald Wandrei, both away from the fold too long a time. You give us two sonnets by H. P. Lovecraft. I could go on and on with all the marvels you have accomplished. Speaking of the latter two authors, couldn't some of your poets present a series

of sonnets similar to those presented about ten years ago, namely, *Fungi from Yuggoth* by H. P. L. and *Sonnets of the Midnight Hours* by Wandrei? These were a great success, and I'm sure others comparable to them would be welcomed by the majority of your readers. The February issue was the best one in some time. The first installment of *Fearful Rock,* as I mentioned before, was superb. *The Drifting Snow* by August W. Derleth was a charming and *different* kind of vampire tale, off the trail. The horribly suggestive *Giant-Plasm,* never revealing but still not concealing something of the terror of that strange life. This was a fine comeback for Mr. Wandrei. *The Double Shadow*—stories like this one that relate a calm, creeping awfulness, coming slowly to claim its victims, give me chills for hours after. It was a very good story. Reprint, *The Last Horror,* was a magnificent characterization. What a wonderful movie that would make! *Shapes of Men That Were* is the best pictorial Finlay has done since his return. Finally, the five poems and the conclusion of *I Found Cleopatra* completed a perfect issue. Kelley's second story was better than his former try, but is this weird? I doubt it very much. Very good action and adventure, though. *Death Is an Elephant*—fair; *The Transgressor*—confusing. Lastly, Quinn's tale of the little evil elemental, which was so logical it was unbelievable, could not be catalogued. It was good except for too much explanation and too little story, or something. It just didn't set right with me. Best illustration (not including poem) was *The Double Shadow.* Cover—very poor; Eyrie—too small."

Oogier and Oogier

Caroline Ferber writes from Chicago: "Wow! wotta colorful cover on the February issue! And the 160 pages is a dandy treat—so much more to read. Finlay's illustration for Quinn's *Poltergeist of Swan Upping* is exceptionally good. He has the stunningest backgrounds in his black and white work. . . . *Death Is an Elephant* conveyed a hypnotic influence all rite. And wotta 'Geist' was Quinn's Poltergeist—mean li'l divil, warn't he? Dear fran' Jules put him to rest, tho I confess I would feel rather uncomfy in that

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6.25-17	2.99	1.35
28x5.25-18	2.90	1.35
29x5.25-19	2.95	1.35
30x5.25-20	2.95	1.35
31x5.25-21	3.25	1.35
5.50-17	3.35	1.40
28x5.50-18	3.35	1.40
29x5.50-19	3.35	1.45
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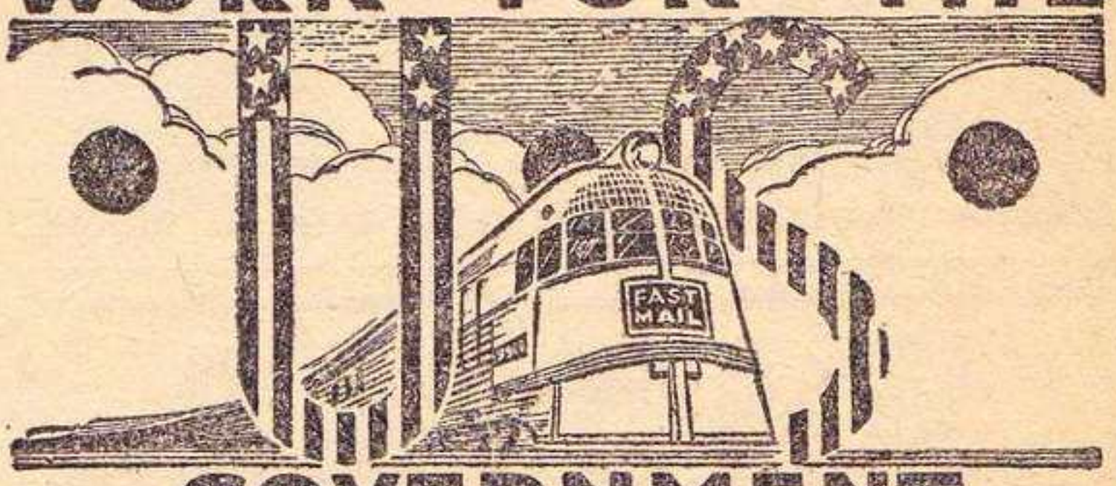
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steel cage whereby the naughty entity was trapped. A darn good mess o' reading, sho'nuff—Quinn is still tops with me. Smith can give the creepiest yarns from times beyond recorded history! This *Double Shadow* had me looking over my shoulder expecting a horrible reptilian monster gazing upon me with baleful glare. Still, the thot of an alligator walking upright makes one wonder if pink elephants aren't next in line. Manly Weird Wellman promises a good 'un. *Fearful Rock* is plenty fearful already—these queer people—Persil Mandifer and his grotesque son are very oogy. Hurry with the next issue. Glad to see August Derleth again on our pages. Although most of his stories run on the ghost type, *The Drifting Snow* proved good entertainment—and I like Wisconsin. Donald Wandrei's *Giant-Plasm* was ok—but I don't care for amebas or stories of them. Goody—the wily Cleo done herself in finally and so the lovely lass and sturdy hero were happy. Kelley's entire *I Found Cleopatra* was much to my liking. Uh—HK has me wondering about his *Transgressor*—does this go on and on and on? It's rather an amusing tale. Omi mi—the reprint *The Last Horror* was a horror. Can't say it was 'zackly weird, but such an adventure! Horrors! Now for a bit of comment on the poemry—Howard's *The King and the Oak*—excellent! Kramer's *Crazy Nell*—pathetic. Lovecraft's *Zaman's Hill* has almost a Pied Piper theme—on the gruesome side. Scanning the Eyrie, it seems Kelley and his Egyptian tales are plenty popular—into which I cast my vote also. My favorite of this issue is *The Poltergeist of Swan Upping*. Bye bye—shall reappear next month."

Two Great Authors

Alexis Papoff writes from Cleveland: "I have been reading your magazine for five years and think it's great. That's an awfully commonplace way of describing WT, but the fact is I don't quite know how else to describe it. It has me quite hypnotized. Seabury Quinn's story *Lynne Foster Is Dead* was one of the most absorbing stories I have ever read. It is as lovely, and fantastic and well written, though of course in a different way, as his *Globe of Memories,* which I consider one of

the greatest of all weird tales. Seabury Quinn is one of your best and most versatile authors. His stories are always excellent, lovely and imaginative and fantastic. I don't think he gets enough credit. He is one of my main reasons for buying this magazine. In this month's issue I enjoyed most of all *A Rendezvous in Averoigne* by Clark Ashton Smith. Why don't we hear more often from him? He is another great author."

A Crackerjack

Richard Kraft writes from Allenhurst, New Jersey: "*The Last Horror* by Eli Colter is superb; it is one of the greatest stories I have ever read in WT. In fact it is one of the greatest stories I have ever read anywhere. Keep up the good work in your reprint department. All in all your February issue is a crackerjack. Who is this Nathan Hindin? His first tale is a pip; exciting, different and refreshingly unhackneyed. It cops first place among your new stories. The inimitable Doctor de Grandin is much better than usual in a thoroughly satisfying yarn and noses out *The Drifting Snow* for second place. The latter, by the way, is another darn good story. Your cover is much better than last month's and is a fitting herald for the new 160-page WEIRD."

Recent Stories

D. de Woronin writes from Trelawney, Southern Rhodesia: "A few words about the stories in your magazine for the last year or so: But for one story, I would hesitate in choosing the best, for you had such a crop of excellent yarns. But this story stands right

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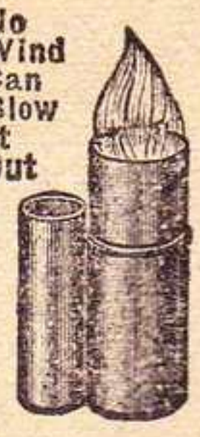
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A prophetic glimpse into the future

out and above the rest, to wit, Nictzin Dyalhis's *The Sea-Witch*. Why doesn't this man write more? Every time he plies his pen he produces a gem—take for instance his *Sapphire Goddess*—but he plies his pen so very seldom. And what of C. L. Moore? Has she given up writing? I miss Northwest Smith and Jirel. Kuttner's Elak reminds me of Conan, and, as Conan was my very favorite character, I am glad that someone is taking his place. The same applies to Clifford Ball's heroes—what about some more, Clifford? Quinn surpassed himself in *Fortune's Fools* and *Goetterdaemmerung,* and I think these two efforts were better than his *Roads,* which, all the same, was a magnificent yarn. Now that Hamilton has given up moving the cosmos in an off-handed manner, he has turned out some first-rate literature, *The Isle of the Sleeper* being possibly the best; though it is hard to choose, so good was his stuff lately. Bloch seems to have found himself to his own advantage—but I am merely repeating other people's opinion."

Hope for an Impossibility

Donald V. Allgeier writes from Licking, Missouri: "Congratulations on the larger size. The February copy of WT was great. After a few bad issues you've re-attained your former heights in everything except quality of paper. I give first place in the February issue to the reprint, *The Last Horror* by Eli Colter. I've been wanting to read it for years and I certainly was not disappointed. It was great and entirely different from what I had expected. That brilliant speech which brought about the black's suicide was marvelously gripping. *Death Is an Elephant* takes second place, I think. It's an unusual tale and very well done. Virgil drew an unweird but artistic cover for it. Donald Wandrei surprised me pleasantly with *Giant-Plasm.* I expected another of those interminable yarns of invaders from space that spread over the earth till our hero finds that common table salt or something is fatal to them. This story is different and is very entertaining. Clark Ashton Smith is up to par in *The Double Shadow.* So far *Fearful Rock* doesn't seem very weird but perhaps it will become so. *I Found Cleo-*

patra let down a lot in the last two installments, though it's still a fine yarn. . . . Kuttner's ultra-short was fine and I'm glad to see Derleth back. All in all, a fine issue. For sheer goose-pimply horror, however, give me *Medusa's Coil* in the January WT. It's the weirdest and scariest thing in ages. Too bad the picture was so poor. *The Silver Coffin* was a nifty, too, and *Waxworks* appealed to me. Virgil's cover drawing for *The Fifth Candle* was great and the interior illustration for *Bride of the Lightning* was even better. I hope for an impossibility—that WT will continue to improve."

Congrats

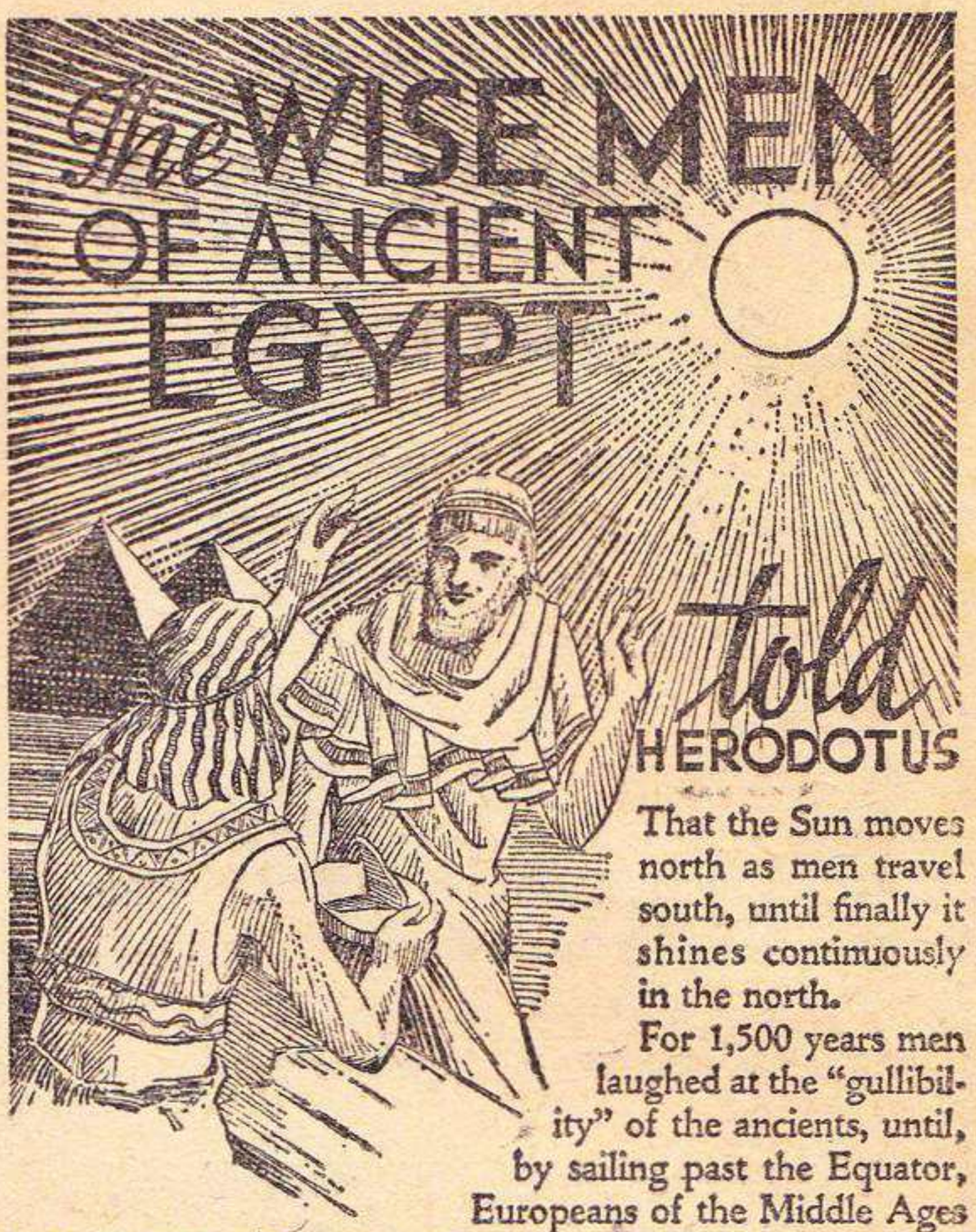
C. Wilkos writes from Chicago: "Please forward my congrats to T. Kelley for his conclusive ending to *I Found Cleopatra,* which takes first honors this month. The reprint department is second with *The Last Horror* by Eli Colter, and N. Hindin third with *Death Is an Elephant.* Mr. Quinn's *Globe of Memories, Roads,* and *Goetterdaemmerung* ought to be enough encouragement for him to forget M. de Grandin."

Conan Is Her Favorite

Miss E. B. Hardy writes from Lewiston, Maine: "My vote for favorite story in February's WEIRD TALES goes to the reprint, Eli Colter's *The Last Horror.* Closely following this fine story comes *Fearful Rock* (Part I) by Manly Wade Wellman. If the succeeding installments prove as interesting as the opening one, we have a good deal of pleasure awaiting us. (Don't disappoint us, Mr. Wellman.) I am glad to learn you are planning to reprint Robert E. Howard's King Kull stories, as I missed out on those, though I read his Conan stories. Conan was, and still is, my favorite WEIRD TALES hero, and I miss him very much."

Concise Comments

Catherine Allen writes from Latonia, Kentucky: "Please will you reprint *The Last Poet and the Robot* by A. Merritt, as it is about the only story by him I haven't read? Also please give us some more stories by Clifford Ball about Rald, Thief of Forthe."



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Gans T. Field writes from New York City: "My vote goes to *The Poltergeist of Swan Upping*—the more so because Mr. Quinn's de Grandin speaks flatteringly of my character, Judge Pursuivant. The judge and I are glad to have found so distinguished a friend and well-wisher, and more than glad to have suggested a way out of another of Doctor de Grandin's intriguing psychic difficulties."

B. Reagan writes from Pittsburgh: "The snow vampire is original—Derleth should get credit for this innovation. *Fearful Rock* could become the best story of 1939. The start is fine."

Seymour Kapetansky writes from Detroit: "I'm fearful of what a 160-page size will do to the quality. But you've never let your readers down, so I have a lot of faith in you."

R. Kelly writes from New York City: "Congratulations on keeping the magazine *weird*. It is just as good today as it was seven or eight years ago when I first started reading it. I like the idea of printing only reprints from WT."

Most Popular Story

What are your favorite stories in this issue? We want to know which ones you like best, and if there are any that you do not like we want to know about them too. Address your letter to The Eyrie, WEIRD TALES, 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York. Your favorite story in the February issue was Seabury Quinn's *The Poltergeist of Swan Upping*, which was closely pressed for first place by Clark Ashton Smith's weird fantasy, *The Double Shadow*.

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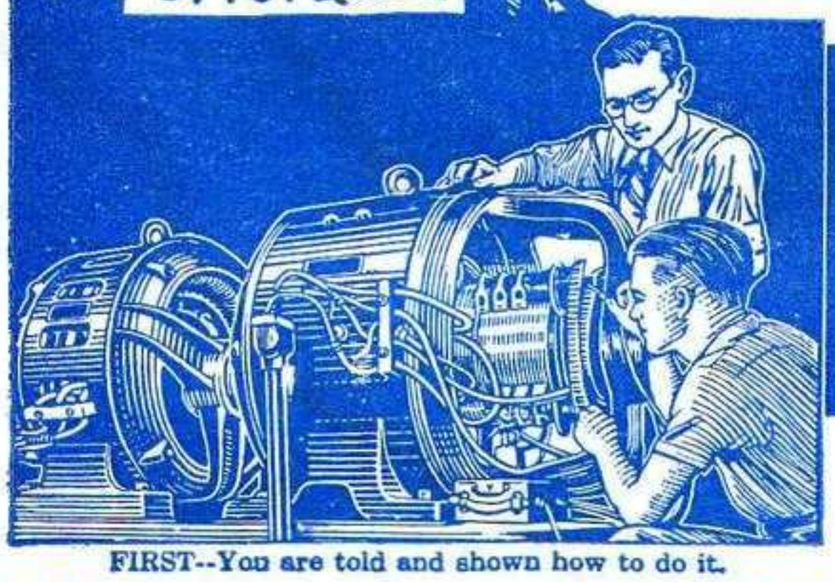
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