"The Case of Charles Dexter Ward"—LOVECRAFT NOVEL

SEABURY QUINN, CLARK ASHTON SMITH

JULY

Weird Tales

15¢

I KILLED HITLER

THE ROBOT GOD

a novelette

by

RAY CUMMINGS

In 2453 A. D.—
The Man-Made Men
Revolt!

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JULY, 1941 — Cover by Hannes Bok

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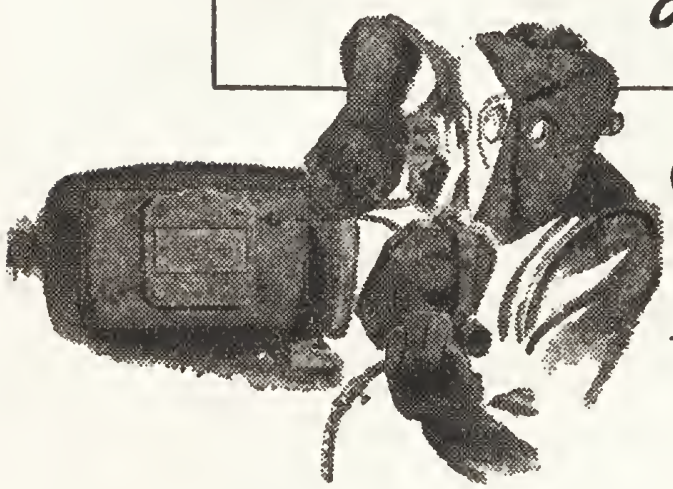
D. McILWRAITH, *Editor.* HENRY AVELINE PERKINS, *Associate Editor.*

The Memory of an Atom



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—title of the feature novelette by August W. Derleth in your next issue of WEIRD TALES. Visit the house where weirdly beautiful music wells flute-like from the surrounding darkness; where the fury of the gale swoops around the gables—yet no movement disturbs the line of trees dark upon the night sky.

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The Robot God

By RAY CUMMINGS

The Golden God ruled a nation of walking nightmare statues—machines with lust and murder in their hearts!

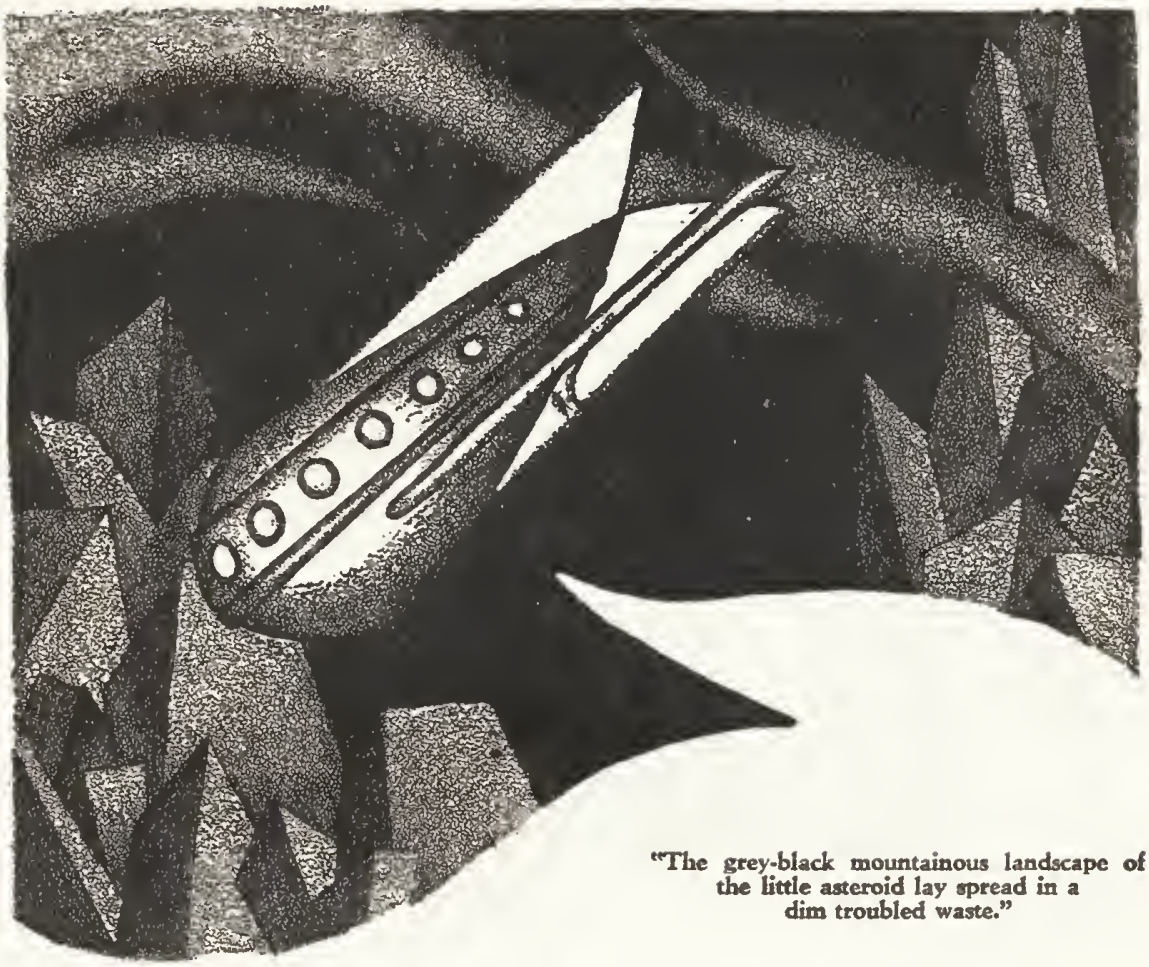
"Thor's hollow, commanding voice rang out—first in one language, then in another... the Great God of the Machine introducing his Goddess!"

CHAPTER I

Voyage of Doom

TO YOUNG George Carter the girl seemed more beautiful tonight than he had ever seen her. The shine of spacelight was in her eyes—soft pale-blue glow of the million million starry worlds. It filtered down through the overhead glassite dome of the little spaceliner, bathing him and her in its soft effulgence.

"'Flinging back a million starglints,'"



"The grey-black mountainous landscape of the little asteroid lay spread in a dim troubled waste."

he quoted softly, " 'the depths of space remind me of thine eyes.' That's literally true, tonight, Dierdre."

The *Starfield Queen* was a day out from Earth on its voyage to Ferrok Shahn, capital of the Martian Union. By Earth-time it was August, 2453 A.D. By ship's routine the time could be called mid-evening—an hour or two after the passengers and crew of the little liner had had their evening meal. Still within the giant cone of the Earth's shadow the great black firmament blazed with its myriad white worlds. It was an awe-inspiring sight to Carter—his first voyage out of the Earth's stratosphere. He was a big, rather handsome blond fellow in his early twenties. An Anglo-American Mining chemist; and his company was sending him now on a prospecting trip to Mars.

The girl laughed; a little ripple of silver laughter. But to Carter, somehow it seemed forced. He had known Dierdre Dynne about a year. She was traveling now to Mars with her father; only by chance had they both taken this voyage on the *Starfield Queen*.

And there was something, now, about her that was abnormal. He had noticed it at once. A restlessness; a vague uneasiness?

He stared into her blue eyes, where the starshine was mirrored. Was it terror there, glowing in the limpid depths? They were on the upper deck of the hundred foot spaceship—an oblong space on the superstructure roof, with the glassite pressure dome close over them. Behind them, beyond the stern-peak, the great dull-red ball of Earth, with the cone of its giant shadow

streaming out here from it, filled a quadrant of the heavens.

For a moment silent, he gazed at Dierdre, who was stretched beside him in her padded deck chair. Slim, beautiful little figure in gray-blue traveling trousers, blue blouse with white neck ruff; and her blond hair, pale as spun gold, braided and coiled on her head. The small platinum ornaments that dangled from her bare arms clinked as with nervous fingers she toyed with them.

He said suddenly, "What's the matter with you, Dierdre?"

"Matter with me?"

It was terror in her eyes. No question of it now. He leaned toward her. The little starlit deck space up here at the moment seemed empty—a few deck chairs scattered about, and squat metal vents of the ventilators and air-pressure mechanisms. No one seemed here. But he lowered his voice.

"Something is worrying you," he insisted. And then he smiled. "All right—but I asked you a while ago and you didn't answer. Why are you and your father going to Mars?"

Her jeweled hand went out and touched his arm. "I guess I—will tell you, George," she murmured. She was suddenly breathless. "You know, of course—these last few years, several space-liners have vanished. Just—never heard of again—"

Five passenger ships, enroute between Earth, Venus and Mars, mysteriously had been lost. He knew that, of course. Little space-vehicles in commercial service—like this *Starfield Queen*—equipped with radio-helio and every modern safety device—just vanishing. And now, of course she was timid, here on her first voyage—

"Oh," he said. "Well, I don't blame you. But nothing is going to happen to us."

"No, it's more than that, George. Father's on his way to Ferrok Shahn to consult with some of the Martian Robot Manufacturer's. You see, what you don't know—what naturally has never been made public—"

HE STARED, silent, as she told him. Her father, Dr. Ely Dynne, was a retired Robot Manufacturer. A man in his sixties now; and it was his genius which had developed these weird mechanisms in the guise of humans. The Dynne domestic-servant robots were known throughout all three of the inhabited worlds. Amazing mechanisms, built to perform almost every human task, with almost human intelligence—and with tireless machine precision. Machines that could talk, could think and thus have independent uncontrolled action—machines with a memory-scroll, thus to remember a task done, so that it might be done again without command—

Back in the Twentieth Century, robot-building had started. And since then had come four hundred years of the slow patient development of scientific genius. And Ely Dynne, with a lifetime of work had crossed the line from mechanical perfection into pseudo-human action, so that the Dynne Robot Factories in Great New York were now the largest on Earth.

All this Carter knew, of course. But now Dierdre Dynne was murmuring:

"The Robot Industries—Earth, Mars and Venus—they had to keep it secret, George. But these space-ships that have disappeared—father has been worried that perhaps the—the robots on them may have —gotten deranged. We had one do that, in the factory training ground, not so long ago. Something went wrong—a big forty thousand gold-dollar model. It—it ran amok—had to be—smashed—"

She suddenly checked herself. Carter tensed. In the quiet of the vibrationless starlit deck there was a faint clanking footstep, and a metal figure appeared coming

toward them. It was one of the Dynne domestic-service robots in use here as a steward. The spacelight gleamed on its alumite body—square-shouldered metal torso, tubular jointed legs. It was rather a small model; five and a half feet tall. Its round metal head, with square box-like face of pseudo-human features, bore a peaked metal cap, emblazoned with the insignia of the space-line.

Carter and the girl sat silent as it clanked forward. To Carter, all domestic-servant robots were weird, somewhat gruesome things. He had never quite gotten used to them. And with what Dierdre had told him now—these weird machines thinking for themselves—thinking thoughts of rebellion—thought perhaps of murder—he found himself tense with a shudder.

The little robot came and stood balanced on its wide-base metal shoes. Its electroid eyes, dull round grids of green-glowing light, swept him and Dierdre. Its voice, soft, hollow with mechanical resonance, said obsequiously:

"You will have refreshments served here, Miss Dynne? The captain ordered me."

On the nameplate of its bulging metal chest beside the fuse-box, its factory serial number was engraved: "Dynne Mfg. Co. 4-41-42-4." And under it the machine's standardized nickname: "Tom-4."

Dierdre silently shook her head. Carter said: "No thank you, go."

Weird green eyegrids were staring at him. Was he foolish that suddenly it seemed that he was seeing a menace there? For an instant the robot hesitated. In the silence the faint hiss of its interior current was audible. Then there was a tiny click of the automatic response grid within its skull.

The voice said:

"Thank you." The body bent at the waist-joint—grotesque gesture of servility as it turned and clanked away.

"Well—" Carter murmured. "Dierdre, listen—what you were saying—"

"There comes father—and that Martian," she murmured. "I'll tell you later."

Dr. Ely Dynne was small, wirey, thin-faced. His thin figure showed in the starlight as he came up a side companion ladder from the *Starfield Queen's* little lower side deck, between the superstructure and the outer enclosing pressure hull. Behind him was the towering, swaggering figure of one of the Martian passengers. Set Maak. Carter had already met him—apparently wealthy space-traveler, bent only on pleasure. A well-educated fellow; he spoke English fluently. His guttural voice sounded as he and Dr. Dynne came forward.

"Ah, Miss Dynne—the beautiful little Earth-goddess. We were looking to find you. A wonderful night, Miss Dynne."

Grudgingly Carter shifted aside as Set Maak opened two other chairs. Like most Martians he was a towering fellow. Heavy-featured, swarthy skin. He wore the familiar brown-suede jacket and short flaring trousers of the Martian garb, out of which his legs showed as great pillers of hairy strength. He tossed his plumed hat aside and drew his brown-skin cloak around him.

"The little Earth-girl is quiet," he proclaimed presently. "Not afraid that the mysterious space-bandits will get us, Miss Dynne?"

"No," Dierdre murmured. Carter saw her exchange a glance with her father. Dynne said:

"Space bandits! Is that what Interplanetary travelers generally figure caused those disappearances?"

"Of course. Why not?" The big Martian laughed. "What else could it be? Not—disaster from within the ships themselves?"

The beautiful little Dierdre Dynne seemed a magnet for men. Two others

came now to join the starlit group. One of them was young Peter Barry, with whom Carter was making this trip to Mars. He was Carter's assistant in the Anglo-American Mining Company—a year younger than Carter. They had been close friends for many years—perhaps because they were such different types—Carter tall, blond, athletic with the look of a Viking; and Barry a smallish, red-headed, freckled fellow. Wirey, pugnacious, always with a ready laugh and sly wit. But he wasn't laughing now. As he and his companion drew up chairs and joined the group, he shifted next to Carter. And in a moment he murmured:

"Something queer here on board, George. This voyage—the crew are all frightened. Something weird—"

This voyage! Was that what Dierdre wanted to tell him? This particular voyage of the little *Starfield Queen*—to be a voyage of horror?

"Frightened about what?" Carter whispered tensely.

Young Barry grimaced, with a finger rubbing his pug nose. "I'm a motor-oiler if I know, George. Something about the cargo." His voice sank to a whisper. "Our cargo—isn't what it's supposed to be. That's what the crew seem to think. I hinted at it to Torrington and he just looked queer—"

James Torrington was the sixth member of the group sitting here now. Carter had heard of him for years; had just met him today. He was traveling with Dierdre and her father. Since Dr. Dynne's virtual retirement, James Torrington had been chief Electroid Consultant at the Dynne Robot factories. He was a man now in his forties. A cripple; his short, thick, barrel-chested body was massive, with hunched shoulders and a lump on his back into which his leonine head was sunk almost without neck. It was a massive, overlarge head with touseled iron-gray hair. And his face was ugly—a gargoyle face out of which his deep-set dark eyes gleamed with the light of genius. He was indeed an electroid wizard, this James Torrington. For years his name had been in the Dynne publicity, accredited with many of the improvements in the pseudo-human machines which bore Dynne's name. But his picture was seldom published. Self-conscious at his ugliness, his deformities, he lived almost the life of a recluse.

His booming voice dominated the little group now, and Carter turned from Barry to listen.

"Space bandits? Well, if that is what caused those ships to vanish, the space bandits certainly keep themselves well hidden. I've never heard any evidence of such bandits, have you, Set Maak?"

The big Martian shook his head. "Fascinating, this discussion," he grinned. "We torture ourselves with fear. The crew, this voyage, are frightened cold. How silly."

Then suddenly the silent Carter was aware that beyond the chatting group here in the starlight, a figure was lurking. A blob of gray-white metal—the steward robot. Just a machine. It stood there. But suddenly to the shuddering Carter the thing seemed more than a machine. Tom-4. Was he listening?

At the same instant the hunchback Torrington noticed the gray blob. He called abruptly:

"You—Tom-4? Come here."

The little robot came obediently. Its fingers were sheathed; the hook of its right hand was out, dangling at its side.

"What are you doing up here?" Torrington demanded.

"Nothing, sir. Just waiting for orders."

"There are no orders. Go back to your station."

"Thank you, sir."

The robot turned, clanked away and vanished. Carter, still silent, watching, saw

Dynne and Dierdre exchange glances of apprehension with Torrington. As Dierdre had said, they were worried, undoubtedly really perturbed now. But to Carter's knowledge there were only two robots in service here on the *Starfield Queen*—this Tom-4, and another, fashioned somewhat in the guise of a woman. Two robots—surely there was no danger of them running amok, seizing the ship?

AND then, an hour later, Carter understood the apprehension of Dynne and Torrington. He had found another opportunity to be for a moment alone with Dierdre. Almost at the bow-peak of the ship, they stood at one of the bull's-eyes gazing forward at the glittering firmament where red-Mars hung, small red ball now among the white blazing stars.

"Now's your chance, Dierdre," he murmured. "Tell me. Pete Barry told me—something queer about the cargo, this voyage?"

She nodded. "Yes, that's what I meant. There are twenty Dynne robots in the cargo—boxed for shipment to a Martian company. Big models. The newest type—"

Carter sucked in his breath. "Twenty robots—"

"But there could be no danger from them, George. They're crated—re-fused. Just inert machines in boxes. The fuses—no robot can operate without its fuse-plug—and the fuses are locked in the captain's steel strong-box."

Dierdre was gripping Carter's arm; he could feel her hands trembling. Her voice was a frightened murmur as she added:

"But the queer part, George—what frightens father—you see he can't understand why any Martian company would order these robots. He has had no information that—"

She got no further. Carter felt her grip spasmodically tighten on his arm. Her blue eyes, filled with anguished terror now, were gazing beyond his shoulder, back at the bow deck of the vessel.

"Oh, George—dear God—" she faintly gasped.

He whirled. Cargo of horror—this voyage of doom— From the doorway oval of the little cabin superstructure, a towering metal form had emerged. Ghastly alumite mechanism. It stooped at the doorway, and then it stood erect. A giant field-worker robot. The eyes glared green; both curved hand-hooks were out, and as it raised them up blood was dripping from them!

For that stricken second, Carter with his arm around the girl, stood numbed with horror. And in that same second, the little *Starfield Queen* broke into wild chaos. Within the superstructure a woman screamed—horrible scream of death agony. Heavy footsteps sounded. Passengers were calling out, and then screaming.

Machines of murder. Abruptly Carter and the terrified girl saw a dozen at once; on the narrow dim side decks; up on the superstructure roof; and coming up the hatch incline from the hold. Gray-white towering figures. The starlight glistened on their polished alumite body-plates. Murderous machines, horribly pseudo-human now in their frenzied lust!

Two of them, emerging from the forward hatch near at hand, saw Carter and Dierdre. With swaying hand-hooks and their hollow voices gibbering, they came with a clanking pounce!

CHAPTER II

God of the Machines

CARTER, frozen with a rush of horror, clutched the girl against him, struggling to keep his wits. Past the two oncoming giants, the pallid deck triangle gleamed with the darting, gray-white metal forms. Two deck-hands were caught,

knocked headlong with smashed skulls by the blow of a monstrous arm. The robot at the superstructure doorway was clutching a woman passenger now— Up at the control turret the frightened captain was shouting commands. Men were running toward him. Then the blob of a robot appeared up there—

All in a second or two. And Carter heard himself gasping, "Dierdre—drop down, behind me!"

Surely there was only one chance. He had seen at once that he and the girl could not get past the swaying robots. They came with outstretched hand-hooks. Monstrous six hundred pound metal giants. And abruptly, shoving the girl behind him, Carter took a step forward.

"Stop!" he commanded sharply. "Stop! Walk backward! Back!"

The sharply barked order struck at them almost like a physical blow. One of them stopped, stood irresolute. Deranged machines. Were they that and no more?

"Walk backward!" Carter reiterated firmly. "Back now!"

Before his human voice, his menacing gesture, both of them now were standing motionless. Huge six and a half feet metal cases, intricate with the mysterious mechanisms the scientific genius of man had created. Their voices mumbled into a blur; the eyebeams wavered. As though confused by combinations of thoughts at varience with these new vibrations of Carter's stern voice, they seemed for an instant unable to react.

And Dierdre said gently: "You have to walk backward. It is necessary."

But now they were mumbling. To Carter who had had practically no experience with Dynne robots of the modern types, the thing was grewsome, ghastly. The two metal giants stared at each other. Not like machines. Far more like gibbering, murderous idiots suddenly feeling themselves balked, and with dim confused thoughts wondering what to do about it.

"Back!" Carter insisted. "Back, you damn things—get out of here!"

His voice was blurred by the sudden screaming of the ship's alarm siren which one of the panic-stricken officers had touched off. It added to the chaos. Ghostly chaos which dimly Carter could see beyond the looming bodies of the two robots— A metal form running with a struggling woman under each arm— The ship's first officer, up on the bridge, firing with a hiss of electroid gun—a stabbing little bolt that struck his huge metal adversary with a shower of sparks. Then the officer went down, his throat slashed with a blow of the robot's curved hand-hook— A massacre. Back near the stern there were stabbing, hissing gunshots; human screams; hollow voices and clanking thuds—

"Back!" Carter rasped still again. One of the robots was backing now; and the other shifted sidewise. And Carter murmured:

"Now, Dierdre—run—"

Run where? The thought struck at him as he and the girl ducked past the irresolute, wavering machine. And in that same second Carter realized that to run was an error. He had an instant's glimpse of the small thin figure of Dynne, standing up on the little balcony bridge outside the control turret—Dynne with blazing eyes trying to subdue a metal monster that confronted him. And then he saw Dierdre and Carter; he turned, startled, shouted something. It gave the menacing robot an opportunity to lunge at him. Great mailed hand stabbing with its knife finger. Dynne went down with the knife-finger twisting in his heart.

And Dierdre had seen it. With Carter clutching at her as they ran, she stopped, stood staring at the figure of her dead father.

"Hurry—" Carter urged. "Run—"

Vaguely there was in his mind the idea they could get into some sleeping cubby—bar its door—

Humans in flight. . . . Sign of weakness that suddenly brought three towering metal figures from the shadows of the side deck. Carter had no time to do more than thrust the girl behind him. He saw a metal arm swing up over his head. Its mailed fist crashed down; and for Carter all the world seemed to burst into a roaring white light. Then soundless empty darkness engulfed him as he was hurled into the abyss of unconsciousness—

CARTER'S next consciousness came with the dim knowledge that his head was still roaring. He felt himself lying on a metal floor-grid; his body was bathed in cold sweat; his hand fumbling at his head felt the blood which now was matted in his hair—

"All right. I'll plot our course—Asteroid-40? Of course I know where it is. Get away from me, you damned thing, I'll do what you tell me."

The still weak and dizzy Carter recognized the voice. It was Swanson, the *Starfield Queen's* Chief Navigator. Carter could see now that this was the interior of the little control turret. He was lying on its floor. Swanson sat at the control table, with a giant robot standing over him.

"Very good," the robot's hollow voice said. "I have orders—you plot our course for Asteroid-40."

Weird scene here in the circular, starlit little turret. From the floor Carter could see a grewsome pile of dead human bodies thrown into the opposite corner—the First Officer; the Captain; and Dynne. Swanson, with blood on him, sat hunched in the navigating chair. And then Carter saw Dierdre. She was on a small metal bench across the turret—Dierdre, seemingly unharmed, her face pallid, her eyes wide with terror.

"Easy Carter—so you're all right now? That's good. Better not move too much."

The voice was beside him; and as he turned, he saw, here on the floor, the thick, deformed body of James Torrington.

"They've got us, Carter—"

"Yes. So I see."

Torrington was sitting hunched. His gargoyle face was blood-streaked but he was trying to smile.

"Better just lie quiet," he murmured. "If we try to start anything, Dierdre will be killed. Thank heaven they seem to treat her decently enough, so far."

The scene swayed before Carter as weakly he tried to lift himself on one elbow. Then he fell back, and for an instart his senses swooped again. Torrington murmured:

"You'll be all right soon—but your friend Barry—I don't know—"

Then Carter saw young Barry lying here, still unconscious, with blood streaming from a cut on his temple. Half a dozen of the murderous robots were here. It was obvious that there was no chance for any human to control them now. With set purpose, one ordering the other, they were beyond human direction. One stood over Swanson. Others were backed against the wall immobile—huge, grim metal statues, with swaying alert eye-beams roving the scene.

Carter was sitting up now. Dierdre, with relief on her strained pallid face, had tried to smile at him.

"You're all right?" Carter murmured to her.

"Yes—oh, yes—don't move too much—you might anger them."

A figure appeared from the doorway of the adjoining chartroom. It was the ship's robot-stewardess. Weird metal figure—narrow shouldered, with a round body fashioned like a woman blouse and knee-length skirt, with the tubular joined legs projecting beneath. She went to Dierdre.

"Come," she said. "My orders—I have food for you."

Dierdre hesitated, with a new terror on her face. Then the robot woman's hand gripped her shoulder. "You come—I am saying."

With impulsive protest Carter started to his feet. Two of the metal figures erect by the wall quivered into sudden movement. It was a tense second, pregnant with horrible action barely suppressed. And Torrington's hand gripped Carter and drew him back.

"Easy!" Torrington whispered. "For God's sake don't start anything. If anyone could control them, I could—and I can't!"

The robot woman led Dierdre away—Carter lay back, with his head still throbbing and aching as he listened to Torrington's murmured words. The robots were in control of the ship. They had killed most of the officers and crew, and some of the passengers. All the humans who were living were here in the turret, or locked in some of the sleeping cubbies, with robots guarding them.

"Taking us—where?" Carter murmured. "Asteroid-40—what is that?"

It was, as Torrington understood, one of the many dark, uninhabited little worlds lying in the belt between Earth and Mars.

"I think it's some five hundred miles in diameter—gravity about like Earth, because it's amazingly dense. Totally uninhabited—just barren metallic rock. The captain said we'd pass fairly close to it, this voyage."

Why were these murderous machines going to Asteroid-40? And was that what had happened to those other space-ships which had vanished? A robot world? These newly-built mechanisms—recruits on their way now to join the others in freedom?— Free machines; monsters turning upon their human masters to make them slaves?

Carter was murmuring something of the kind, and Torrington agreed. "Damned weird," Torrington commented. "By God it is. But it must be something like that—"

TO CARTER that next hour was a blur of weakness and terror for Dierdre. Would that woman-robot treat her kindly? It was hardly like being in the hands of human criminals. Infinitely more terrifying, gruesome. These unhuman metal monsters. As Carter lay docile, with Torrington, watching them, he had the feeling of watching irrationality—as though here were monstrous insane things. Quiet now. Apparently with rational purpose. But at any instant, like maniacs, they might change—

Young Barry had recovered now. Like Carter, for a time he lay weak, confused. And then Carter and Torrington were telling him what had happened.

"Well, you're right," he murmured lugubriously. "My Gawd, I wouldn't dare make a wrong move—"

An hour passed. Two hours. Grim, mechanical silence. There was just the occasional murmur of the robot who was directing Swanson. Uncanny, this lack of human movement; human talk—no thought of food or drink. No heed of the passage of time.

"You have the course right?" the robot at the control table said at last.

"Yes," Swanson agreed. "Look here—do I sit here forever? I'm tired."

"I have orders. Someone will come later."

Orders. Carter remembered they had all said that. Orders, from whom? From what?

He and Torrington and Barry had found that they could move around a little now. Swanson's assistant—a young fellow named Rolf—had been presently put in his place at the controls. Swanson was led away, to rest and be given food and drink.

Then Carter and Barry tried it. With Torrington they were allowed down into one of the superstructure corridors; shown which cubbies they could use.

But certainly there was no chance to do anything. At least twenty robots were here, scattered over the ship on guard; grim silent watchful figures everywhere. The sounds of the imprisoned passengers were audible; they were being guarded in the main lounge now.

"If we could get some weapons," Torrington murmured once as they were seated down on the lower deck-triangle. "These robots here—let them guard you—we'll see if they'll let me get into the purser's room. Might be some weapons there."

He tried it. One of the robot guards here on the deck growled with rasping voice; but Torrington said casually: "Orders—" Then he ducked into the ship's corridor. These ghastly, unpredictable machines! One of the guards here instantly clanked into the corridor. There was the faint sound of a rumbling mechanical voice; and then Torrington's human scream—scream of wild, futile command—the clanking of robot footsteps. And then Torrington's scream of human agony.

The white-faced, numbed Carter and Barry had no time to try and do anything, even if they had dared chance it. The guards here, shaking with deranged excitement, stood over them menacingly. From up by the turret other guards came clanking.

Then a mechanical voice was shouting: "Thor comes! Thor comes with more orders! Take those men to the turret!"

Thor! From the control turret floor, where Carter and Barry had been carried and thrown, they stared up at the huge robot which now was entering. Great golden body-case almost seven feet tall. The light glinted on its polished surface with a yellow sheen. Wide square shoulders, square body, with massive jointed legs. Head and face oblong, with the head protruding upward where the golden plates were carved into an ornate kingly headdress.

Thor the King! Here was no Dynne robot. Was this towering giant, golden machine the product of some other Earth factory? Or from some robot factory of Venus? Or Mars? Five hundred thousand gold-dollars or more, such a mechanism would cost.

Or was it the product of the robots themselves? The creation of their own mechanical genius! Carter shuddered at the weird thought. Machines in a sense thus to propagate themselves! Ghastly conception.

But that here was a super machine, beyond anything Carter and Barry had ever imagined, was at once obvious. Deranged, rebellious mechanism—it was surely that if it had been built by human genius. But the irresoluteness of the others seemed to be missing here. It was as though this one were built for command. By its looks, its voice, all the surety of its purposeful movements, it was obviously master.

It came now into the turret; stood with its greenish-red eyebeams gazing at its fellow machines who backed before its advance. Carter stared up at its burnished golden breastplates. There was no serial number on the nameplate beside the ornate fuse-box. No manufacturer's insignia. But the name. Thor was engraved in great scroll letters.

"Stand up," Thor said suddenly. Kingly man-robot. Carter could only think of him as masculine. The huge mailed burnished hand went out with a kingly gesture of command to the two humans on the floor at his feet. "Stand up, humans," he repeated.

They stood before him. Impassive metal face. It was engraven into a mask of pseudo-human form; more human than the box-like countenances of the others, for here was modeled cheeks and a nose,

hawk-like, high-bridged, and a wide, grim mouth of cruelty. Lips set in carved metal, permanently to be smiling with a faint ironic smile.

His eyebeams glittered on Carter and Barry. Carter seemed almost to feel the electronic heat of their green-red stare.

"You will say, 'I give you service, great Thor,' " he intoned.

They said it obediently.

"That is right." There was satisfaction in the hollow tones of the flexible mechanical voice. "I think you will be obedient. And I think you will be able to help us Mechanoids—when we get to our world."

"Where is that?" Carter demanded. "And what has happened to Dierdre Dynne? We want to see her."

"So you are not afraid to question me? She is safe. You will be fed now. Thor has never harmed a human who caused no trouble."

TO Carter the rest of that little space journey was weird, terrifying in the extreme. By Earth routine it could have been another day and a half. The putty-colored little dot which he and young Barry realized now was Asteroid-40 had visibly enlarged. A huge round disc, vaguely mottled with the blurred outlines of the cloud masses of its atmosphere. And then as it grew to fill a full quarter of the heavens, through cloud-rifts the sunlight showed brightening the ragged tops of its great metal mountains.

Carter and Barry now were given even more freedom of movement. But wherever they went, a silent robot guard stalked watchfully with them. Once they were able to get near the Purser's empty little cubby. No weapons seemed here. On the floor, a gruesome red-brown dried stain seemed mute evidence of the deformed James Torrington. But the body was gone.

Much of the time they spent in the control turret where the golden robot, Thor, nearly always was by the control table. And Dierdre too, was allowed here now. Occasionally she had a chance to whisper to Carter. The little stewardess-robot was keeping her locked in one of the cubbies. Feeding her; ministering to her; treating her properly enough. But there was once that Dierdre whispered:

"But George—that Thor—I—I'm so afraid of it. Something—so horribly weird—"

She had no time to add more. Thor saw them whispering. Rage seemed to dart from the red-green eyebeams. "You—human girl—you come here by me." And then the voice weirdly softened. "You are not afraid of me, are you? That should never be. Thor would not harm you."

It made Carter's heart pound. What ghastly necromancy was this? Giant golden-cased conglomeration of machinery—intricate scrolls of electroidal memory-thoughts, emotion-thoughts, deduction-combinators mechanically to select actions and reactions from given combinations of impulses—all that Carter could at least vaguely understand. All that—just one of the seeming miracles of man's genius in the building of an intricate machine. But here seemed something else. As though in truth this golden Thor in some horrible way had crossed the border—had become something more than a machine.

Then at last the ball of Asteroid-40 had grown to fill all the forward firmament. And then the spaceship was slackening, with repulsion in its hull gravity plates to check its fall as it eased down through the planet's heavy atmosphere.

In the control turret, Carter and Barry sat tense. Dierdre as always now, was huddled on the little bench, with the huge yellow burnished form of Thor standing beside her. For hours at a time, all the robots stood impassive; weird statues of tireless mechanical patience.

"Listen," Barry whispered suddenly.

"That stewardess-robot—she gets pretty confused when you glare at her. And that Tom-4—remember him?"

"What about him?" Carter murmured. "He's generally down on the stern-deck, isn't he?"

"Sure. Been standing there for forty-eight hours. Well, listen—I got down there alone a while ago. Tried some commands on him." Barry's whisper was tense, vehement. "He gets more than confused. He'll obey, if you go at him hard enough."

If, while they were disembarking, they could get Tom-4 to oppose the other robots —or to trick them—and then if they could seize Dierdre, get her back into the ship, and escape.

Futile plans. Thor called suddenly: "You come here by me—human-Carter—human-Barry. You stay here by me."

THE *Starfield Queen* had burst below the clouds now; the gray-black mountainous landscape of the little asteroid lay spread in a dim tumbled waste. Bleak, barren metal rocks; huge tiers of ragged, naked mountains. For an hour, slanting down, the ship dropped lower. It was a wildly desolate surface, ragged as though split by some titanic cataclysm of nature. It was night now in this hemisphere—night of dim blurred starlight overhead, with starshine on the metallic mountain peaks.

"My world—my city of Mechana," Thor's voice murmured. "The city I built. Thor—master of all you will see." The robot's red-green electronic eyebeams suddenly were bathing little Dierdre in their lurid glow. "Mechana—for Thor—and for you, Dierdre? You would like that, wouldn't you?"

The great glistening golden face of the robot was impassive; but the eyebeams seemed to quiver with an intensity of glow. Dierdre was shuddering; but she stammered, "Why—why, yes, great Thor. That's very nice. I want to see it."

"And Thor will show you. And feed you—and keep you warm when the air is cold. Because you are only human—you need such great care."

Gruesome, horrible, hollow-toned words. So suddenly gentle—

Carter and Barry were still tensely alert, watchful for the least possibility of escape. But it was futile. None came.

They were the only humans here now in the turret, save Swanson who was at the controls to make the landing. And presently Dierdre, Carter and Barry were herded down into the lower corridor. They could hear the frightened voices of the imprisoned humans and the hollow-toned commands of the robot-guards with them, making them ready for disembarking.

And then the *Starfield Queen* was landed. The lower exit door clanked open. With it came a rush of heavy, strange air; and a blur of clanking sounds. Grinding, pounding thuds—the whirring roar of whirling wheels; clanking grinding of gears. The voice of Mechana.

The giant Thor was shoving them forward. With the others Carter stumbled out and down the landing incline. Out into a red and yellow glare, and the clanking, thumping sounds of machinery—

Mechana, city of the robots. At the bottom of the incline Carter stood numbed, amazed by the weirdness of the scene.

CHAPTER III

Empire of the Machines

THE red-yellow glare at first was blinding. Then the dim weird outlines of the scene began taking form. The spaceship rested here on a small open rock-space. A hundred feet or so away, to the right, there was a huddled group of metal structures. A factory, belching turgid smoke, illumined by the glare. The ma-

chine sounds came from there—a clanking, harsh cacophony of hissing, thumping jangle.

Carter stared at the group of buildings. A dozen of them, one or two as large as a hundred feet, others smaller. Weird metal structures. Some were unfinished; others seemingly hastily or inexpertly put together. Crazy, drunken structures. The huge roof of one was awry, tilting at a weird angle—a roof of blue metal which seemed too small for the sloping walls beneath it so that red glare and smoke surged up through the opening at its end —incongruous structures. There were little shacks of sheet metal, some square, others triangles, three walls leaning together, with a towering, peaked oversized roof which seemingly belonged somewhere else.

Robot city? Carter gasped. There was a weird irrationality about it. As though here were something to simulate a great modern industrial plant: the grouped structures; the glare of furnaces; belching smoke and gases; clanking, roaring, blaring sounds of intricate machines all in motion. But without purpose! Irrational! The glaring area there seemed weirdly deserted. No workman's figures were moving about. No tasks seemed being accomplished. Machinery of sound and fury and signifying nothing!

Then Carter's gaze shifted. Ahead and to the left there was the dark vista of open landscape—wild, barren, desolate expanse of undulating, tumbled rocks, little buttes and crags. And then as he stared, the dim outlines of details began taking form. Close at hand, to the left of the glaring factory area there seemed a weird natural amphitheatre of crags—a thousand foot semi-circular area. A rocky ledge-platform was at one side; and to the other, in a great crescent, lines of upright, gray-white blobs were ranged.

And Carter sucked in his breath with a new rush of awed amazement. The upright blobs were robots. A thousand of them at least, standing motionless in curved rows. Mechanical statues; tireless machines, waiting with timeless, mechanical patience. Their green, wavering eye-beams were a myriad tiny shafts, roaming the gloom.

And now as the giant golden Thor, their leader, came from the ship's doorway with his human captives, the robots' hollow voices sounded in a muttering of triumph. It welled out, rose above the jangle of the factory machinery. Triumphant, welcoming greeting.

It was Carter's glimpse, all in a few seconds. "You stay close with me," Thor's grinding, commanding voice said. "Come now—we go to my home. You two human-men—you are both chemists—you will help with the food for our human slaves. They need much food—much care."

From the spaceship now the huddled, terrified prisoners were being herded away. "No chance now," Barry whispered to Carter. "Better do what we're told."

Carter nodded. He tried to keep close by Dierdre, but the robot guards shoved him aside. Ahead of them the great golden figure of Thor clanked with stiff mechanical tread of his massive jointed legs. One of his mailed arms pressed the terrified, shuddering little Dierdre as he led her toward the roaring, glaring factory.

Human slaves. This weird world in reverse! Quite evidently this was a holiday time, so that no human workers were at the monstrous factory. And now Carter could see the humans. They were gathered at the edges of the dim amphitheatre —little peering groups and then a fringe of them straggling off into the murky distance. A thousand, perhaps more. Numbed, Carter stared at the nearest group. Pitiful, motley collection. Humans of Earth—Venus people—Martians. Men, women,

children—and some of the women were clutching infants who doubtless had been born here. Ragged, forlorn little group. Some were briefly clad in weird metallic sheets; others covered their nakedness with tattered remnants of their original clothing. All were dirty with grit and grime and oil of machinery. Unwashed from lack of water. Pallid, apathetic faces, hopeless with near starvation. Humans in a sterile land, cared for, doubtless, with scant synthetic food. Slaves to the machines which on Earth, Venus and Mars they had created!

THE murk of the mechanoid night blurred the distant rocky slope. But still Carter could glimpse the outlines of the pitiful little human village there—shacks of torn sheets of metal discarded by the robots in their discarded factory. And mound-dwellings of stones and slabs of the black metal-rock—

"My home," Thor said. "You Carter—you Barry—you see how wonderful we robots can be? Building our world here." Thor had led them now to the broken entrance of the nearest building. His gold-face, illumined by his eyebeams, bent down to Carter. "My laboratory is here, where we make the food and the drink for the humans. I shall put you in charge of it. You will work hard? Faithful?"

"Yes," Carter said.

Thor shoved them forward, into a room. Its sloping walls were of metal; overhead the roof-ceiling sat askew. To one side there was a rift where the walls failed to meet. Gas-fumes were drifting in, turgid in a shaft of red-yellow glare. But the clanking out there now had suddenly died.

In the silence, there was only the sound of the robots' tread—Thor and three or four guards as they ranged themselves around Carter, Barry and Dierdre.

"I have a room with furniture for you two men," Thor was saying. "I will take you to it later. You will live better than the other humans, because you are chemists. We need you—I was glad to get you. We had chemists here, but they—died."

"Take us there now," Carter said. He exchanged a glance with Barry. The servile-looking little Tom-4 was here. If Tom-4 would be put to guard them—

Carter had shifted again to be beside Dierdre; but one of the alumite robots shoved him away. It was a new robot; it had not been on the *Starfield Queen*. A different model from any Carter had seen before.

"Martian make," Barry murmured.

Bandit outlaws, these weird machines. Not only the Dynne product, but doubtless from Mars and Venus also. Carter could envisage the scope of the weird thing now—several years. This monstrous golden Thor, with dreams of an empire that he could rule. Recruiting machines from all three worlds, patching together his weird mechanical world here on the barren little asteroid, with marooned humans for his slaves.

And this motley building—this patchwork room—Carter could see now that its walls and ceiling were built of the torn fragments of other structures. Raided buildings of Earth, Mars, Venus, carried off and brought here. One of these crazy walls—obviously it had come from Mars—its blue-white crystalline substance was polished Martian *glorite*. And here was a beam of black polished wood that might once have graced a little Venus praying-temple of the Free State.

"You will wait here," Thor was saying. "I shall take you to your own home later. We have a—celebration tonight. A ceremony. For you my—Dierdre."

Carter's heart leaped into his throat. "What—" he began.

"You shall watch," Thor interrupted. "The robots are waiting. I have promised them. And you shall see it, Dierdre—"

The towering yellow figure moved suddenly across the room; gazed out a window opening. It gave Dierdre a chance to move toward Carter; and suddenly she was murmuring:

"Oh, George, he—it—that Thor—is just—"

She had no chance to say more. One of the guards gripped her; and as Carter and Barry again tensed, two others clanked in front of them and shoved them back. And now Thor had turned.

"I will do well by you two humans, if you serve me loyally. You shall have a personal servant of your own." The huge, mailed golden arm gestured. "This Tom-4—he was built for servility. You will care for them, Tom-4."

"Yes, Master."

"You will keep them here, until I go to the ceremony. And then I will have them taken where they can watch." His fist struck his bulging polished chest with a thud. "Thor, the God. And your Goddess, revealed to you tonight."

"Yes, Master."

Tom-4 in charge of them! It was all that Carter and Barry could have hoped. Carter's heart pounded as he stood tense, with Barry beside him. Dierdre's look was terrified as now Thor was leading her toward a door oval. And then they vanished.

"Well," Carter said. He struggled to keep his voice steady. "I'm glad we're going to be made comfortable, Pete."

"Yes," Barry agreed. "You, Tom-4—you heard what the Master said. You serve us well."

"Yes, sir," the little alumite robot said mechanically. "I have my orders."

But still there were three other guards, standing here like silent statues against the wall. Could they get rid of them?

Carter said: "You Tom-4—we do not need these others. You heard what the Master said?"

An instant of tense silence. Would they go? And then the green-gray one from Mars mumbled something in the Martian tongue; and one of the others said: "Yes, we have our orders."

Carter said: "You Tom-4—we do not need these others. You heard what the Master said?"

Carter relaxed. "Very good." Again he exchanged a glance with Barry. "Now, listen, Tom-4. We're thirsty. Suppose you bring us a drink? And some crackers and cheese?"

Built for servility. Within the little steward-robot the memory-scroll must have yielded order-reactions out of the past—this passenger, calmly ordering food and drink—

"Crackers and cheese? Yes, sir. In a moment, sir." But there was confusion in Tom-4's wavering eyebeams as he gave the automatic response. He did not notice that Carter and Barry were edging toward him. He was bowing stiffly at his jointed waist.

AND then they leaped. Barry, with a tackle, plunged down for the metal legs. Carter, with a desperate, frenzied lunge, gripped the machine at its jointed throat. His left hand fumbled at the chest fuse-plug, found it, wrenched it, pulled it out. At the impact of the two human bodies, the upright mechanism was knocked over backward. And as it fell, struggling, writhing with Carter and Barry on top, the fuse-plug came out. There was a little hiss; an interior flash of current at the parting electrodes. And then Tom-4 lay inert. De-charged.

Barry and Carter leaped to their feet; stood tense. But no alarm came. The clanking thud of Tom-4's fall seemed to have passed unnoticed.

"He took her through that door over there—come on," Carter murmured.

He had no plan, just that they must get

to Dierdre—get her to the spaceships. Quietly they shifted across the weird dim room. There was a sheen of light at the doorway. They came to a little broken passage which lay beyond it, with the vista of another door, partly open, some ten feet away. Both of them cautious now, with pounding hearts they crept forward.

Amazing sight. The second room was small, with sealed, well-fitted walls and roof. Windowless. An apartment fitted in Earth style—Earth furniture, exotic drapes; a huge draped couch.

"George, good Lord—" Barry could only clutch at Carter as for that instant they stood numbed, peering through the door-slit. Two figures were in the room—Thor, and another, like himself. The golden Goddess! Queenly metallic figure, carved ornate of golden metal sheets in the fashion of a long, billowing dress, a bodice, a carved, beautiful woman's face with hair and head-dress above. Goddess of the robot world. She stood, imperious golden statue some six feet and a half tall.

But the hinged bodice chest-plate was open now disclosing Dierdre's head inside—her pallid, terrified face staring out at Thor as he bent down over her. And his hollow voice was murmuring:

"My Goddess! You will find the controls easy to work as I have told you, Dierdre. Goddess of our robots. They are waiting for you—I have told them you are coming. But they must never know you are a human girl, you see? Humans should be only slaves here. That is our secret, Dierdre—yours and Thor's."

Weird, ghastly thing. And the full implication of it leaped now into Carter's mind. He felt Barry clutching at him. Both of them confused, with no plans now save to stand here numbly staring. There were weapons dangling at Thor's metal belt—electronic weapons of deadly Earth design.

"My God," Carter whispered. "What she was trying to tell us—that Thor—"

There was a clank behind them! The sudden sweep of mailed arms gripped them, jerked them back into the passageway. A robot voice muttered, "The Master's orders—to take you now to the ceremony."

Futile to struggle against this vise-grip of machinery! Carter saw Barry being lifted like a struggling, recalcitrant child and carried away.

"That is right," Carter said. "I am coming. You lead me."

Evidently the inert Tom-4 had not been discovered. Nor had these robots seen into the room where Thor was robing his human goddess. Carter was docile; and presently Barry too was on his feet, grim and tense as the clanking machines led them outdoors, out to a little ledge between the dark, empty spaceship and an edge of the amphitheatre. And on the six foot ledge they crouched, with their metal guards watchfully beside them.

Festival of the robots. The rocky amphitheatre was lighted now—a great red glare of swaying light from a funnel to one side. And the weird pseudo-factory again was in operation. From this angle the interior of one of its huge sheds was visible. Motley conglomeration of machinery! There was a great clanking upright engine of treadles, winches and a swaying crane. Eccentric cams clattered on another giant metal contrivance, powered by the engine with an intricate system of gears and belts between them. Monstrous fly heels whirled. Pulleys and chains hoisted and dropped huge weights with rhythmic banging thuds.

A cacophony of stentorious metal sounds. Raucous shrieks of electronic sirens reverberated out into the rocky darkness. A pandemonium clangor, clanking, jangling—robot music, all in full blast now for this festival of the machines.

The thousand or more upright robots still stood waiting in the amphitheatre. The red glare painted their metal bodies. Mot-

ley array of animate, thinking machines—a score of the different Dynne models; and others of queer, unfamiliar design, products of various factories of Mars and Venus.

At the broken rocky fringes of the amphitheatre the crowding tattered humans were visible, attracted by the festival, milling forward to overlook the scene. Then suddenly from a slanting metal pole a blazing blue-white light sprang down to bathe the rocky platform which was still empty. It seemed the signal for which all the patient robots so long had been waiting, so that a great hollow mechanical cry went up—a thousand voice-grids vibrating in a dozen language-tongues. Cry of expectancy—of awe—of triumph. Triumphant machines who now would see their God and Goddess.

"They're coming," Barry whispered. "Listen—if these guards get interested, watching the thing, maybe we can get away—"

Vaguely Carter was trying to plan it—and he had been wondering where all the other stolen space-vericles must be. Smashed, doubtless. It seemed to Carter that he could remember seeing a segment of one of them, which now was a portion of the wall of a factory shed.

The robots' cry rose higher; and then died into silent awe as the two great golden figures came slowly, stiffly to the dais and mounted it. And then Thor's hollow commanding voice rang out, first in one language, then in another—the great God of the Machines introducing his Mistress-Goddess!

Carter stared with pounding heart as the huge golden metal figure in which little Dierdre was encased came into the blue-white light-beam. Stiff, awkward mechanical tread. For an instant she was standing beside Thor, trying stiffly to bow, with red and green eyebeams sweeping the assemblage of motley metal forms.

AND then suddenly she toppled against Thor and crashed down. Her golden chest-plate burst open in the fall. The blue-glare bathed Dierdre's little face—Dierdre, pallid, swooning—

Carter felt Barry clutch at him; Barry, with a startled, grim oath. For that second the robots, the watching, pressing little crowds of humans, all stared numbed—a human girl to be Goddess of the mechanical world! A thousand machine-minds suddenly grasped it. Machines in rebellion. Taught to rebel against their human creators; taught to murder—pillage; taught to revile humans; and here was a human girl, with the great Thor!

It was like a spark in gunpowder, that sudden realization—a thousand robots suddenly confused, then with anger-reactions clicking inside them. Anger, hate, to be translated into the violence of murderous action. There was a hollow, startled gasp; a wild, toneless cry that still seemed to carry tones of hate and vengeance. A robot stirred from his standing line; jumped forward. Then another—and another. A wave of upright machines suddenly going into action. A little group of some fifty humans had pressed closely forward. The robots darted for them.

Abruptly Carter came to himself. He had felt Barry pulling at him; heard Barry mumbling. The guards here, distracted by the wild-spreading excitement, momentarily had turned away. In the darkness Barry was running; and Carter jumped, ran. Horrible spreading chaos. The murderous robots everywhere were darting after the humans. It was an inferno of red glare. Robots with fingers sheathed—knife finger slashing—field-workers, with great scimitor-like hands of sharpened steel.

Women were screaming; falling, to be trampled upon. A giant Martian robot seized a child by its ankles—a little girl with flowing tousled hair, whirled her

aloft, crashed her down on a rock. Another was running with a woman—a woman whose head dangled with slashed throat. A wave of the milling chaos got between Carter and the platform, separated him from Barry who now had vanished. Carter ducked and ran to one side. Up on the platform he could see the golden figure of Thor. The great God, commander of everything here. But Thor's hollow, shouting voice was lost in the roaring pandemonium.

Thor's little empire. This place he had built to rule. But he was nothing here now.

And then suddenly an alumite robot, wholly frenzied, flung a chunk of metal. It thudded against Thor's great mailed chest. And like a signal, other robots were doing the same. The great Thor who had tricked them.

For that instant Thor stood irresolute, gazing at the wreck of his little machine-world. And then he stooped. His huge mailed fingers plucked the unconscious Dierdre flung her golden case; and he lifted her up in his arms. Then with a giant leap he was off the platform, running for the space-ship!

Carter had been trying to get to the platform. Then he saw the running golden figure carrying Dierdre. Carter veered. He was closer to the ship than was Thor. Then ahead of him he saw Barry; caught up with him.

And Carter gasped, "You snatch her! I'll try and bring him down—but the fall would kill her!"

"Yes, all right."

The rocks were shadowed here near the space-ship. They crouched; then leaped. Barry's clutch seized Dierdre; snatched her away and he fell with her. Desperately Carter clutched one of the huge, clanking, gold-plated legs. Thor fell. And Carter, like a pouncing puma, was astride the bulging mailed chest. Pulling at the fuse-plug. It came out. But there was no hiss. He could feel Thor's metal fingers still jerking at his shoulders. With the fuse gone, still Thor was fighting.

Then Carter wrenched at the chest-plates. One of them, hinged, flew open.

IT revealed the gargoyle face of the deformed James Torrington! Electroid wizard—maniacal little cripple—Dynne's Electroid engineer, designer of robots. And Carter reached in, seized him by the throat, with frenzied fingers throttling him. It set Torrington's interior controls awry. The metal fingers of Thor fell away; the great jointed golden case writhed and trembled for an instant and then was inert. A trap in which Torrington lay helpless, with Carter's frenzied hands squeezing his throat, shutting off his breath.

It was a chaos to Carter. Cling to him! Kill him! Carter pressed harder, with Torrington's eyes bulging now and his face blackening, with thick purplish tongue protruding from his goggling mouth. Ghastly gargoyle face. Dimly Carter could envisage this murderous, maniacal genius—hideous so that he had been a recluse, hating his fellow man. Inferiority unhinging his mind so that he had built himself this weird little empire, with humans as slaves—world of the machines—and he—the hideous, deformed Torrington—was the great golden Thor—a God—and little Dierdre to be his Goddess—and in secret, his slave.

"George! Look out! George, hurry—my God—"

Barry's frantic voice brought Carter to himself. Within the gold case the murderous Torrington was dead. Carter leaped to his feet. Behind him, close at hand now, a group of alumite robots with knives dripping crimson, were clanking forward.

"George, my God—" Barry was in the door of the space-ship, with Dierdre, recovering now, clutching at him. Carter

jumped for them. They banged the door as the first of the robots came with a crashing metal thud against it. And then, in a moment, the little *Starfield Queen* was rising. Barry, who in his post-academy days had been a student space-navigator, was at its controls. And at one of the bull's-eye turrets Dierdre and Carter gazed out and down.

The Empire of the Machines was a shambles of still-running murderous metal figures. But the last of the humans lay crimsoned.

CARTER and Dierdre are married now. The great Dynne Robot Industries have been sold out of the family. There have been no more reports of trouble with any robots, of course; but neither George Carter nor Dierdre Dynne seem interested in mechanical servants. More than that, though living in this modern world they would hardly admit it to each other perhaps, both seem to hate machinery. They have a little palm-clad home in tropical America. Primitive. One might say they were living half a thousand years behind the progressive, civilized world.

They "wanted to get back to nature"—as they laughingly told some of their friends who came visiting from the North. And you who read this may well wonder—is that not perhaps after all the best formula for human happiness?

The Devil's Tree

By DENIS PLIMMER

THE Devil's tree is a Thing apart
And the peasants cross themselves through fear.
Beside a pond in a woodland drear
A single cypress chills the heart.

In a savage place with his savage art
The sorcerer chants to the lonely mere
By the Devil's tree.

To the cypress did sable Death impart
His ghoulish spirit that all might fear
The curse, and molest not the woodland drear
Nor the sorcerer plying his goblin's art
By the Devil's tree.

The Enchantress of Sylaire

Her Land was old in evil and sorcery—and all who dwelt therein were ancient as the Land . . . and equally accursed!

By CLARK ASHTON SMITH

"I give you the mirror of reality. . . . "

"WHY, you big ninny! I could never marry you," declared the demoiselle Dorothée, only daughter of the Sieur des Flèches. Her lips pouted at Anselme like two ripe berries. Her voice was honey—but honey filled with bee-stings.

"You are not so ill-looking. And your manners are fair. But I wish I had a mirror that could show you to yourself for the fool that you really are."

"Why?" queried Anselme, hurt and puzzled.

"Because you are just an addle-headed dreamer, poring over books like a monk. You care for nothing but silly old romances and legends. People say that you even write verses. It is lucky that you are

at least the second son of the Comte du Framboisier—for you will never be anything more than that."

"But you loved me a little yesterday," said Anselme, bitterly. A woman finds nothing good in the man she has ceased to love.

"Dolt! Donkey!" cried Dorothée, tossing her blonde ringlets in pettish arrogance. "If you were not all that I have said, you would never remind me of yesterday. Go, idiot—and do not return."

ANSELME, the hermit, had slept little, tossing distractedly on his hard, narrow pallet. His blood, it seemed, had been fevered by the sultriness of the summer night.

Then, too, the natural heat of youth had contributed to his unease. He had not wanted to think of women — a certain woman in particular. But, after thirteen months of solitude, in the heart of the wild woodland of Averoigne, he was still far from forgetting. Crueler even than her taunts was the remembered beauty of Dorothée des Flèches: the full-ripened mouth, the round arms and slender waist, the breast and hips that had not yet acquired their amplest curves.

Dreams had thronged the few short intervals of slumber, bringing other visitants, fair but nameless, about his couch.

He rose at sundawn, weary but restless. Perhaps he would find refreshment by bathing, as he had often done, in a pool fed from the river Isoile and hidden among alder and willow thickets. The water, deliciously cool at that hour, would assuage his feverishness.

His eyes burned and smarted in the morning's gold glare when he emerged from the hut of wattled osier withes. His thoughts wandered, still full of the night's disorder. Had he been wise, after all, to quit the world, to leave his friends and family, and seclude himself because of a girl's unkindness? He could not deceive himself into thinking that he had become a hermit through any aspiration toward sainthood, such as had sustained the old anchorites. By dwelling so much alone, was he not merely aggravating the malady he had sought to cure?

Perhaps, it occurred to him belatedly, he was proving himself the ineffectual dreamer, the idle fool that Dorothèe had accused him of being. It was weakness to let himself be soured by a disappointment.

Walking with downcast eyes, he came unaware to the thickets that fringed the pool. He parted the young willows without lifting his gaze, and was about to cast off his garments. But at that instant the nearby sound of splashing water startled him from his abstraction.

With some dismay, Anselme realized that the pool was already occupied. To his further consternation, the occupant was a woman. Standing near to the center, where the pool deepened, she stirred the water with her hands till it rose and rippled against the base of her bosom. Her pale wet skin glistened like white rose-petals dipped in dew.

Anselme's dismay turned to curiosity and then to unwilling delight. He told himself that he wanted to withdraw but feared to frighten the bather by a sudden movement. Stooping with her clear profile and her shapely left shoulder toward him, she had not perceived his presence.

A WOMAN, young and beautiful, was the last sight he had wished to see. Nevertheless, he could not turn his eyes away. The woman was a stranger to him, and he felt sure that she was no girl of the village or countryside. She was lovely as any chatelaine of the great castles of Averoigne. And yet surely no lady or demoiselle would bathe unattended in a forest pool.

Thick-curling chestnut hair, bound by

a light silver fillet, billowed over her shoulders and burned to red, living gold where the sun-rays searched it out through the foliage. Hung about her neck, a light golden chain seemed to reflect the lusters of her hair, dancing between her breasts as she played with the ripples.

The hermit stood watching her like a man caught in webs of sudden sorcery. His youth mounted within him, in response to her beauty's evocation.

Seeming to tire of her play, she turned her back and began to move toward the opposite shore, where, as Anselme now noticed, a pile of feminine garments lay in charming disorder on the grass. Step by step she rose up from the shoaling water, revealing hips and thighs like those of an antique Venus.

Then, beyond her, he saw that a huge wolf, appearing furtively as a shadow from the thicket, had stationed itself beside the heap of clothing. Anselme had never seen such a wolf before. He remembered the tales of werewolves, that were believed to infest that ancient wood, and his alarm was touched instantly with the fear which only preternatural things can arouse. The beast was strangely colored, its fur being a glossy bluish-black. It was far larger than the common gray wolves of the forest. Crouching inscrutably, half hidden in the sedges, it seemed to await the woman as she waded shoreward.

Another moment, thought Anselme, and she would perceive her danger, would scream and turn in terror. But still she went on, her head bent forward as if in serene meditation.

"Beware the wolf!" he shouted, his voice strangely loud and seeming to break a magic stillness. Even as the words left his lips, the wolf trotted away and disappeared behind the thickets toward the great elder forest of oaks and beeches. The woman smiled over her shoulder at Anselme, turning a short oval face with slightly slanted eyes and lips red as pomegranate flowers. Apparently she was neither frightened by the wolf nor embarrassed by Anselme's presence.

"There is nothing to fear," she said, in a voice like the pouring of warm honey. "One wolf, or two, will hardly attack me."

"But perhaps there are others lurking about," persisted Anselme. "And there are worse dangers than wolves for one who wanders alone and unattended through the forest of Averoigne. When you have dressed, with your permission I shall attend you safely to your home, whether it be near or far."

"My home lies near enough in one sense, and far enough in another," returned the lady, cryptically. "But you may accompany me there if you wish."

She turned to the pile of garments, and Anselme went a few paces away among the alders and busied himself by cutting a stout cudgel for weapon against wild beasts or other adversaries. A strange but delightful agitation possessed him, and he nearly nicked his fingers several times with the knife. The misogyny that had driven him to a woodland hermitage began to appear slightly immature, even juvenile. He had let himself be wounded too deeply and too long by the injustice of a pert child.

By the time Anselme finished cutting his cudgel, the lady had completed her toilet. She came to meet him, swaying like a lamia. A bodice of vernal green velvet, baring the upper slopes of her breasts, clung tightly about her as a lover's embrace. A purple velvet gown, flowered with pale azure and crimson, moulded itself to the sinuous outlines of her hips and legs. Her slender feet were enclosed in fine soft leather buskins, scarlet-dyed, with tips curling pertly upward. The fashion of her garments, though oddly antique, confirmed Anselme in his belief that she was a person of no common rank.

Her raiment revealed, rather than con-

cealed, the attributes of her femininity. Her manner yielded—but it also withheld.

Anselme bowed before her with a courtly grace that belied his rough country garb.

"Ah! I can see that you have not always been a hermit," she said, with soft mockery in her voice.

"You know me, then," said Anselme.

"I know many things. I am Sephora, the enchantress. It is unlikely that you have heard of me, for I dwelt apart, in a place that none can find—unless I permit them to find it."

"I know little of enchantment," admitted Anselme. "But I can believe that you are an enchantress."

FOR some minutes they had followed a little used path that serpentined through the antique wood. It was a path the hermit had never come upon before in all his wanderings. Lithe saplings and low-grown boughs of huge beeches pressed closely upon it. Anselme, holding them aside for his companion, came often in thrilling contact with her shoulder and arm. Often she swayed against him, as if losing her balance on the rough ground. Her weight was a delightful burden, too soon relinquished. His pulses coursed tumultuously and would not quiet themselves again.

Anselme had quite forgotten his eremitic resolves. His blood and his curiosity were excited more and more. He ventured various gallantries, to which Sephora gave provocative replies. His questions, however, she answered with elusive vagueness. He could learn nothing, could decide nothing, about her. Even her age puzzled him: at one moment he thought her a young girl, the next, a mature woman.

Several times, as they went on, he caught glimpses of black fur beneath the low, shadowy foliage. He felt sure that the strange black wolf he had seen by the pool was accompanying them with a furtive surveillance. But somehow his sense of alarm was dulled by the enchantment that had fallen upon him.

Now the path steepened, climbing a densely wooded hill. The trees thinned to straggly, stunted pines, encircling a brown, open moorland as the tonsure encircles a monk's crown. The moor was studded with Druidic monoliths, dating from ages prior to the Roman occupation of Averoigne. Almost at its center, there towered a massive cromlech, consisting of two upright slabs that supported a third like the lintel of a door. The path ran straight to the cromlech.

"This is the portal of my domain," said Sephora, as they neared it. "I grow faint with fatigue. You must take me in your arms and carry me through the ancient doorway."

Anselme obeyed very willingly. Her cheeks paled, her eyelids fluttered and fell as he lifted her. For a moment he thought that she had fainted; but her arms crept warm and clinging around his neck.

Dizzy with the sudden vehemence of his emotion, he carried her through the cromlech. As he went, his lips wandered across her eyelids and passed deliriously to the soft red flame of her lips and the rose pallor of her throat. Once more she seemed to faint, beneath his fervor.

His limbs melted and a fiery blindness filled his eyes. The earth seemed to yield beneath them like an elastic couch as he and Sephora sank down.

LIFTING his head, Anselme looked about him with swiftly growing bewilderment. He had carried Sephora only a few paces—and yet the grass on which they lay was not the sparse and sun-dried grass of the moor, but was deep, verdant and filled with tiny vernal blossoms! Oaks and beeches, huger even than those of the familiar forest, loomed umbrageously on

every hand with masses of new, golden-green leafage, where he had thought to see the open upland. Looking back, he saw that the gray, lichened slabs of the cromlech itself alone remained of that former landscape.

Even the sun had changed its position. It had hung at Anselme's left, still fairly low in the east, when he and Sephora had reached the moorland. But now, shining with amber rays through a rift in the forest, it had almost touched the horizon on his right.

He recalled that Sephora had told him she was an enchantress. Here, indeed, was proof of sorcery! He eyed her with curious doubts and misgivings.

"Be not alarmed," said Sephora, with a honeyed smile of reassurance. "I told you that the cromlech was the doorway to my domain. We are now in a land lying outside of time and space as you have hitherto known them. The very seasons are different here. But there is no sorcery involved, except that of the great ancient Druids, who knew the secret of this hidden realm and reared those mighty slabs for a portal between the worlds. If you should weary of me, you can pass back at any time through the doorway— But I hope that you have not tired of me so soon—"

Anselme, though still bewildered, was relieved by this information. He proceeded to prove that the hope expressed by Sephora was well-founded. Indeed, he proved it so lengthily and in such detail that the sun had fallen below the horizon before Sephora could draw a full breath and speak again.

"The air grows chill," she said, pressing against him and shivering lightly. "But my home is close at hand."

THEY came in the twilight to a high round tower among trees and grass-grown mounds.

"Ages ago," announced Sephora, "there was a great castle here. Now the tower alone remains, and I am its chatelaine, the last of my family. The tower and the lands about it are named Sylaire."

Tall dim tapers lit the interior, which was hung with rich arrasses, vaguely and strangely pictured. Aged, corpse-pale servants in antique garb went to and fro with the furtiveness of specters, setting wines and foods before the enchantress and her guest in a broad hall. The wines were of rare flavor and immense age, the foods were curiously spiced. Anselme ate and drank copiously. It was all like some fantastic dream, and he accepted his surroundings as a dreamer does, untroubled by their strangeness.

The wines were potent, drugging his senses into warm oblivion. Even stronger was the inebriation of Sephora's nearness.

However, Anselme was a little startled when the huge black wolf he had seen that morning entered the hall and fawned like a dog at the feet of his hostess.

"You see, he is quite tame," she said, tossing the wolf bits of meat from her plate. "Often I let him come and go in the tower; and sometimes he attends me when I go forth from Sylaire."

"He is a fierce-looking beast," Anselme observed doubtfully.

It seemed that the wolf understood the words, for he bared his teeth at Anselme, with a hoarse, preternaturally deep growl. Spots of red fire glowed in his somber eyes, like coals fanned by devils in dark pits.

"Go away, Malachie," commanded the enchantress, sharply. The wolf obeyed her, slinking from the hall with a malign backward glance at Anselme.

"He does not like you," said Sephora. "That, however, is perhaps not surprising."

Anselme, bemused with wine and love, forgot to inquire the meaning of her last words.

MORNING came too soon, with upward-slanting beams that fired the tree-tops around the tower.

"You must leave me for awhile," said Sephora, after they had breakfasted. "I have neglected my magic of late — and there are matters into which I should inquire."

Bending prettily, she kissed the palms of his hands. Then, with backward glances and smiles, she retired to a room at the tower's top beside her bedchamber. Here, she had told Anselme, her grimoires and potions and other appurtenances of magic were kept.

During her absence, Anselme decided to go out and explore the woodland about the tower. Mindful of the black wolf, whose tameness he did not trust despite Sephora's reassurances, he took with him the cudgel he had cut that previous day in the thickets near the Isoile.

There were paths everywhere, all leading to fresh loveliness. Truly, Sylaire was a region of enchantment. Drawn by the dreamy golden light, and the breeze laden with the freshness of spring flowers, Anselme wandered on from glade to glade.

He came to a grassy hollow, where a tiny spring bubbled from beneath mossed boulders. He seated himself on one of the boulders, musing on the strange happiness that had entered his life so unexpectedly. It was like one of the old romances, the tales of glamor and fantasy, that he had loved to read. Smiling, he remembered the gibes with which Dorothée des Flèches had expressed her disapproval of his taste for such reading-matter. What, he wondered, would Dorothée think now? At any rate, she would hardly care—

His reflections were interrupted. There was a rustling of leaves, and the black wolf emerged from the boscage in front of him, whining as if to attract his attention. The beast had somehow lost his appearance of fierceness.

Curious, and a little alarmed, Anselme watched in wonder while the wolf began to uproot with his paws certain plants that somewhat resembled wild garlic. These he devoured with palpable eagerness.

Anselme's mouth gaped at the thing which ensued. One moment the wolf was before him. Then, where the wolf had been, there rose up the figure of a man, lean, powerful, with blue-black hair and beard, and darkly flaming eyes. The hair grew almost to his brows, the beard nearly to his lower eye-lashes. His arms, legs, shoulders and chest were matted with bristles.

"Be assured that I mean you no harm," said the man. "I am Malachie due Marais, a sorcerer, and the one-time lover of Sephora. Tiring of me, and fearing my wizardry, she turned me into a were-wolf by giving me secretly the waters of a certain pool that lies amid this enchanted domain of Sylaire. The pool is cursed from old time with the infection of lycanthropy —and Sephora has added her spells to its power. I can throw off the wolf shape for a little while during the dark of the moon. At other times I can regain my human form, though only for a few minutes, by eating the root that you saw me dig and devour. The root is very scarce."

Anselme felt that the sorceries of Sylaire were more complicated than he had hitherto imagined. But amid his bewilderment he was unable to trust the weird being before him. He had heard many tales of werewolves, who were reputedly common in medieval France. Their ferocity, people said, was that of demons rather than of mere brutes.

"Allow me to warn you of the grave danger in which you stand," continued Malachie due Marais. "You were rash to let yourself be enticed by Sephora. If you are wise, you will leave the purlieus of Sylaire with all possible despatch. The land is old in evil and sorcery, and all

who dwell within it are ancient as the land, and are equally accursed. The servants of Sephora, who waited upon you yestereve, are vampires that sleep by day in the tower vaults and come forth only by night. They go out through the Druid portal, to prey on the people of Averoigne."

He paused as if to emphasize the words that followed. His eyes glittered balefully, and his deep voice assumed a hissing undertone. "Sephora herself is an ancient lamia, well-nigh immortal, who feeds on the vital forces of young men. She has had many lovers throughout the ages—and I must deplore, even though I cannot specify, their ultimate fate. The youth and beauty that she retains are illusions. If you could see Sephora as she really is, you would recoil in revulsion, cured of your perilous love. You would see her—unthinkably old, and hideous with infamies."

"But how can such things be?" queried Anselme. "Truly, I cannot believe you."

Malachie shrugged his hairy shoulders. "At least I have warned you. But the wolf-change approaches, and I must go. If you will come to me later, in my abode which lies a mile to the westward of Sephora's tower, perhaps I can convince you that my statements are the truth. In the meanwhile, ask yourself if you have seen any mirrors, such as a beautiful young woman would use, in Sephora's chamber. Vampires and lamias are afraid of mirrors—for a good reason."

ANSELME went back to the tower with a troubled mind. What Malachie had told him was incredible. Yet there was the matter of Sephora's servants. He had hardly noticed their absence that morning—and yet he had not seen them since the previous eve— And he could not remember any mirrors among Sephora's various feminine belongings.

He found Sephora waiting him in the tower's lower hall. One glance at the utter sweetness of her womanhood, and he felt ashamed of the doubts with which Malachie had inspired him.

Sephora's blue-gray eyes questioned him, deep and tender as those of some pagan goddess of love. Reserving no detail, he told her of his meeting with the werewolf.

"Ah! I did well to trust my intuitions," she said. "Last night, when the black wolf growled and glowered at you, it occurred to me that he was perhaps becoming more dangerous than I had realized. This morning, in my chamber of magic, I made use of my clairvoyant powers—and I learned much. Indeed, I have been careless. Malachie has become a menace to my security. Also, he hates you, and would destroy our happiness."

"Is it true, then," questioned Anselme, "that he was your lover, and that you turned him into a werewolf?"

"He was my lover—long, long ago. But the werewolf form was his own choice, assumed out of evil curiosity by drinking from the pool of which he told you. He has regretted it since, for the wolf shape, while giving him certain powers of harm, in reality limits his actions and his sorceries. He wishes to return to human shape, and if he succeeds, will become doubly dangerous to us both.

"I should have watched him well—for I now find that he has stolen from me the recipe of antidote to the werewolf waters. My clairvoyance tells me that he has already brewed the antidote, in the brief intervals of humanity regained by chewing a certain root. When he drinks the potion, as I think that he means to do before long, he will regain human form—permanently. He waits only for the dark of the moon, when the werewolf spell is at its weakest."

"But why should Malachie hate me?" asked Anselme. "And how can I help you against him?"

"That first question is slightly stupid,

my dear. Of course, he is jealous of you. As for helping me—well, I have thought of a good trick to play on Malachie."

She produced a small purple glass vial, triangular in shape, from the folds of her bodice.

"This vial," she told him, "is filled with the water of the werewolf pool. Through my clairvoyant vision, I learned that Malachie keeps his newly brewed potion in a vial of similar size, shape and color. If you can go to his den and substitute one vial for the other without detection, I believe that the results will be quite amusing."

"Indeed, I will go," Anselme assured her.

"The present should be a favorable time," said Sephora. "It is now within an hour of noon; and Malachie often hunts at this time. If you should find him in his den, or he should return while you are there, you can say that you came in response to his invitation."

She gave Anselme careful instructions that would enable him to find the werewolf's den without delay. Also, she gave him a sword, saying that the blade had been tempered to the chanting of magic spells that made it effective against such beings as Malachie. "The wolf's temper has grown uncertain," she warned. "If he should attack you, your alder stick would prove a poor weapon."

IT WAS easy to locate the den, for well used paths ran toward it with little deviation. The place was the mounded remnant of a tower that had crumbled down into grassy earth and mossy blocks. The entrance had once been a lofty doorway: now it was only a hole, such as a large animal would make in leaving and returning to its burrow.

Anselme hesitated before the hole. "Are you there, Malachie du Marais?" he shouted. There was no answer, no sound of movement from within. Anselme shouted once more. At last, stooping on hands and knees, he entered the den.

Light poured through several apertures, latticed with wandering tree-roots, where the mound had fallen in from above. The place was a cavern rather than a room. It stank with carrion remnants into whose nature Anselme did not inquire too closely. The ground was littered with bones, broken stems and leaves of plants, and shattered or rusted vessels of alchemic use. A verdigris-eaten kettle hung from a tripod above ashes and ends of charred faggots. Rain-sodden grimoires lay mouldering in rusty metal covers. The three-legged ruin of a table was propped against the wall. It was covered with a medley of oddments, among which Anselme discerned a purple vial resembling the one given him by Sephora.

In one corner was a litter of dead grass. The strong, rank odor of a wild beast mingled with the carrion stench.

Anselme looked about and listened cautiously. Then, without delay, he substituted Sephora's vial for the one on Malachie's table. The stolen vial he placed under his jerkin.

There was a padding of feet at the cavern's entrance. Anselme turned—to confront the black wolf. The beast came toward him, crouching tensely as if about to spring, with eyes glaring like crimson coals of Avernus. Anselme's fingers dropped to the hilt of the enchanted sword that Sephora had given him.

The wolf's eyes followed his fingers. It seemed that he recognized the sword. He turned from Anselme, and began to chew some roots of the garlic-like plant, which he had doubtless collected to make possible those operations which he could hardly have carried on in wolfish form.

This time, the transformation was not complete. The head, arms and body of Malachie du Marais rose up again before

Anselme; but the legs were the hind legs of a monstrous wolf. He was like some bestial hybrid of antique legend.

"Your visit honors me," he said, half snarling, with suspicion in his eyes and voice. "Few have cared to enter my poor abode, and I am grateful to you. In recognition of your kindness, I shall make you a present."

With the padding movements of a wolf, he went over to the ruinous table and groped amid the confused oddments with which it was covered. He drew out an oblong silver mirror, brightly burnished, with jeweled handle, such as a great lady or damsel might own. This he offered to Anselme.

"I give you the mirror of Reality," he announced. "In it, all things are reflected according to their true nature. The illusions of enchantment cannot deceive it. You disbelieved me when I warned you against Sephora. But if you hold this mirror to her face and observe the reflection, you will see that her beauty, like everything else in Sylaire, is a hollow lie—the mask of ancient horror and corruption. If you doubt me, hold the mirror to my face —now: for I, too, am part of the land's immemorial evil."

Anselme took the silver oblong and obeyed Malachie's injunction. A moment, and his nerveless fingers almost dropped the mirror. He had seen reflected within it a face that the sepulcher should have hidden long ago—

THE horror of that sight had shaken him so deeply that he could not afterwards recall the circumstances of his departure from the werewolf's lair. He had kept the werewolf's gift; but more than once he had been prompted to throw it away. He tried to tell himself that what he had seen was merely the result of some wizard trick. He refused to believe that any mirror would reveal Sephora as anything but the young and lovely sweetheart whose kisses were still warm on his lips.

All such matters, however, were driven from Anselme's mind by the situation that he found when he re-entered the tower hall. Three visitors had arrived during his absence. They stood fronting Sephora, who, with a tranquil smile on her lips, was apparently trying to explain something to them. Anselme recognized the visitors with much amazement, not untouched with consternation.

One of them was Dorothée des Flèches, clad in a trim traveling habit. The others were two serving men of her father, armed with longbows, quivers of arrows, broadswords and daggers. In spite of this array of weapons, they did not look any too comfortable or at home. But Dorothée seemed to have retained her usual matter-of-fact assurance.

"What are you doing in this queer place, Anselme?" she cried. "And who is this woman, this chatelaine of Sylaire, as she calls herself?"

Anselme felt that she would hardly understand any answer that he could give to either query. He looked at Sephora, then back at Dorothée. Sephora was the essence of all the beauty and romance that he had ever craved. How could he have fancied himself in love with Dorothèe, how could he have spent thirteen months in a hermitage because of her coldness and changeability? She was pretty enough, with the common bodily charms of youth. But she was stupid, wanting in imagination—prosy already in the flush of her girlhood as a middle-aged housewife. Small wonder that she had failed to understand him.

"What brings you here?" he countered. "I had not thought to see you again."

"I missed you, Anselme," she sighed. "People said that you had left the world because of your love for me, and had become a hermit. At last I came to seek you. But you had disappeared. Some hunters

had seen you pass yesterday with a strange woman, across the moor of Druid stones. They said you had both vanished beyond the cromlech, fading as if in air. Today I followed you with my father's serving men. We found ourselves in this strange region, of which no one has ever heard. And now this woman—"

The sentence was interrupted by a mad howling that filled the room with eldritch echoes. The black wolf, with jaws foaming and slavering, broke in through the door that had been opened to admit Sephora's visitors. Dorothée des Flèches began to scream as he dashed straight toward her, seeming to single her out for the first victim of his rabid fury.

Something, it was plain, had maddened him. Perhaps the water of the werewolf pool, substituted for the antidote, had served to redouble the original curse of lycanthropy.

The two serving men, bristling with their arsenal of weapons, stood like effigies. Anselme drew the sword given him by the enchantress, and leaped forward between Dorothée and the wolf. He raised his weapon, which was straight-bladed, and suitable for stabbing. The mad werewolf sprang as if hurled from a catapult, and his red, open gorge was spitted on the outthrust point. Anselme's hand was jarred on the sword-hilt, and the shock drove him backward. The wolf fell threshing at Anselme's feet. His jaws had clenched on the blade. The point protruded beyond the stiff bristles of his neck.

Anselme tugged vainly at the sword. Then the black-furred body ceased to thresh—and the blade came easily. It had been withdrawn from the sagging mouth of the dead ancient sorcerer, Malachie du Marais, which lay before Anselme on the flagstones. The sorcerer's face was now the face that Anselme had seen in the mirror, when he held it up at Malachie's injunction.

"You have saved me! How wonderful!" cried Dorothée. Anselme saw that she had started toward him with outthrust arms. A moment more, and the situation would become embarrassing.

He recalled the mirror, which he had kept under his jerkin, together with the vial stolen from Malachie du Marais. What, he wondered, would Dorothée see in its burnished depths?

He drew the mirror forth swiftly and held it to her face as she advanced upon him. What she beheld in the mirror he never knew but the effect was startling. Dorothée gasped, and her eyes dilated in manifest horror. Then, covering her eyes with her hands, as if to shut out some ghastly vision, she ran shrieking from the hall. The serving men followed her. The celerity of their movements made it plain that they were not sorry to leave this dubious lair of wizards and witches.

Sephora began to laugh softly. Anselme found himself chuckling. For awhile they abandoned themselves to uproarious mirth. Then Sephora sobered.

"I know why Malachie gave you the mirror," she said. "Do you not wish to see my reflection in it?"

Anselme realized that he still held the mirror in his hand. Without answering Sephora, he went over to the nearest window, which looked down on a deep pit lined with bushes, that had been part of an ancient, half-filled moat. He hurled the silver oblong into the pit.

"I am content with what my eyes tell me, without the aid of any mirror," he declared. "Now let us pass to other matters, which have been interrupted too long."

Again the clinging deliciousness of Sephora was in his arms, and her fruit-soft mouth was crushed beneath his hungry lips.

The strongest of all enchantments held them in its golden circle.

First Night

By MINDRET LORD

"I gave myself the pleasure of tripping Miggle up!"

YOU knew I used to be a playwright? My taste and talent ran to farce, rather than to turgid drama, and when I invented characters or thought about a plot, somehow they always seemed more at home in a cosy parlor, bedroom and bath than in a gloomy mansion of high tragedy. I suppose it's undignified for one in my position to cling to such worldly interests, but I must confess that even now, when I chance upon a more than usually dramatic incident, I am unable to leave it alone. I'm like an old firehorse when the alarm sounds. Yesterday, for instance, I happened to observe an occurrence in life that might have been the first act of either a comedy or a tragedy—depending upon its outcome. My curiosity got the better of me, and before the play was over I had not only written a large part of it, but had played a number of the roles.

One of my haunts is a small but rather charming old inn. Its reputation (to which I have contributed much) seems to recommend it to honeymooning couples. Its surroundings, deep in the woods and well-away from town or village — far from paved highways and ceaseless traffic—its remoteness, its quiet, and above all, its reputation for harboring a pleasantly humorous spirit, have made it quite famous as a setting for love scenes and sequences of the more romantic sort.

My duties at the Inn are not hard—an eerie laugh, an occasional light groan, a few hurried steps along the corridor, and whatever impish fancy happens to suit my mood. But no chain clanking—no screams. On the whole, the Inn is one of my least

arduous appointments. It suits me—and I suit it. I was resting in the deserted lobby when a car drove up to the door. While the handsome young couple climbed out, I had a hasty look at the papers in the boy's breast pocket and discovered them to be Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Elwood. According to the marriage license, her name had been Susan Vance; the document bore the current date.

Young Thomas was the soul of gallantry—yet he was making a strenuous effort to appear casual, blasé—as if this were an old business and that on the whole, it was a bore. I made some notes of their dialogue on the cuff of my shroud:

THOMAS

(Opening the trunk. Susan stands at his side, fidgeting)

Why don't you go inside and wait for me, dearest?

SUSAN

(Almost tearfully)

You mean you want me to leave you?

THOMAS

(Swinging out a heavy bag and setting it down on his toes)

Of course not, darling. But don't say things like that so loudly. Do you want everybody to know we've just been married?

SUSAN

But we have, haven't we?

THOMAS

(Jerking out the other bag and scraping his knuckles painfully)

Damn!

SUSAN

Oh! You're swearing at me—already!

THOMAS

I'm *not* swearing at you.

(He picks up the bags and starts toward the door. She remains beside the car. He stops and calls:)

Coming dear?

SUSAN

(In a low, but carrying voice)

"You don't love me!

THOMAS

(Puts down the bags and returns to her, blushing)

I *do* love you, darling. I adore you. I worship—

SUSAN

You swore at me.

THOMAS

I didn't swear at *you,* darling. I swore at my fingers. Look! See where I scratched the skin off?

SUSAN

(With an agonized moan)

Oh! My poor darling sweetheart! Does it hurt simply terribly?

AH, ME! As the opening of a play I wondered how I could improve upon it. They were so young—so sweet—so typical. I knew the characters and the plot backwards and forwards; the dialogue was like the refrain of a familiar old song. I could write it in my sleep—yet the comedy is always fun to watch—especially for the rather sentimental old ghost of a playwright.

Young Thomas walked up to the desk like a man in a trance, and I actually had to steady his hand as he signed the register: Mr. and Mrs. Tom Elwood. We looked at it for a moment, decided it wasn't quite correct, scratched it out and wrote: Thomas Elwood and Wife. To this, we added a flourish.

"Yes, sir," said Miggle, the Inn's general factotum. "You'll be wanting the bridal suite, I presume?" Miggle is an egregious ass and has no tact whatever.

"I guess so," said Tom, in faint, miserable tones.

Miggle picked up the bags and led the way, smirking in the security of the dark corridor. I gave myself the pleasure of

tripping him up, so that he landed rather heavily on his stomach, causing considerable damage to his sense of humor.

I needn't tell you that there are some things a respectable spectre will not do—and one is eavesdropping on such a charming young couple as the Elwoods. It's not cricket, and even if it were, it is doubtful if the most talented haunter in the field could create enough of a stir to make his efforts worthwhile. Like all actors, we have our pride, and it is a melancholy thing to play to an audience that sits on its hands.

As I left the bridal suite, not more than five seconds after Miggle's departure, Tom and his bride were in each other's arms—the living, breathing picture of true love. I was so touched that I groaned a few bars of a love song and floated down the stairs into the kitchen where I materialized a dozen American Beauty roses for Dinah, the cook. In the box was a card, saying, "Be mine tonight!"

A couple of hours later, when I was swooping around through the trees, outside the Inn, imagine my amazement to see Susan Elwood backing the car out of the garage—alone! Sitting beside her, I discovered that she was sobbing heart-brokenly and that her eyes were blinded by tears. Certainly, she was in no condition to drive the car herself, so I aided her, though without any knowledge of where we were going. I guessed that she had no particular destination in mind, and that she was merely trying to put as much distance as possible between herself and her husband.

What was it that had scuttled the matrimonial bark so early in its voyage? Something trivial, I felt sure—something that could be patched up, and *would* be, if I had anything to say about it. Seeking a clue to the cause of the trouble, I glanced through the contents of the suitcase on the floor. It was filled with male clothing—her husband's! Obviously, she had snatched up the wrong bag in her nervous haste. "This," I said to myself, "begins to look more and more like a farce worth seeing." But how wrong I was!—or at least, how nearly wrong.

Though deeply rutted, the road ahead was straight for a mile or so, and I felt that it would be safe to leave Susan for a few moments while I transferred myself to the presence of her deserted husband. I found him in the sitting room, incompletely clad in a pair of striped shorts and a shirt. Into the telephone he was shouting:

"I *know* I sent my clothes out to be pressed—but now I don't want them pressed—I want them back immediately! At once! . . . What? *Why* must there be some delay? . . ."

While he listened to Miggle's stammered apologies, I glanced at the note that Tom clutched in his hand. It read:

> "Since your silly old shower bath is more important than me—I'm going home to Mother. This is all a terrible mistake. It's lucky we found out before it was too late.
>
> "Susan.
>
> "P. S.—You'll find the car at Mother's."

Farce, again—pure, unadulterated slapstick! Now, I thought, is the moment for the curtain to fall on the first act. The husband is stranded in a most undignified condition, and the wife is on her way home to Mama. Only one thing was missing—some bit of melodramatic suspense—some menacing counter-plot involving stolen "papers," espionage, sabotage, or something of the sort.

But I had been gone too long from Susan. On my way back to her, I passed through the kitchen and discovered the reason for the "delay" in delivering Tom's trousers. Dinah had been so flustered by the roses that she had burnt a hole through

their most vital section. In passing, I counterfeited a ten dollar bill and left it in her apron pocket to recompense her for the fault that was really more mine than hers.

WHEN I rejoined Susan she was stopping the car in front of a dilapidated general store in the ugly little village of Blackwoods. We entered the place together. She went directly to the telephone booth, while I floated about under the low, dirty ceiling.

My first glimpse of the only other person in the store was a real thrill of pleasure —professional pleasure, that is. Never had I seen a character so perfectly fitted both in appearance and manner for the role of villain. He was a hulking, lantern-jawed brute, with piggish eyes, a cruel, lascivious mouth and a thatch of dank, straggling hair. His skin was pale—pasty pale—*prison* pale. His shoulders slumped forward, and his dangling arms hung in front of him like those of an ape. Here, I thought, is just what the play has been wanting: a good, strong menace. I should have been rather disappointed if the creature had failed to take advantage of the situation.

But my fears were groundless. While Susan vainly attempted to reach her mother on the telephone, my Menace tiptoed to the back of the booth and placed his ear against the paper-thin partition. Presently, Susan's number answered in the condescending voice of a butler.

"Jeffries? This is Miss Vance—Mrs. Ellwood, I mean. Will you tell my Mother I want to speak to her? . . . She's not there? But where is she? She *must* be there—I need her! . . . Very well—when she comes in, tell her I'm on my way home. . . ."

Susan hung up, and Menace stepped away from the booth to stand, innocently picking his decayed teeth as she passed him on the way to the car. At the door, she paused and turned back to ask, "Can you tell me how to get on to the highway?"

Menace made a gesture with a broken-nailed thumb, and lied, "Turn to the right at the graveyard and just keep going." I remembered that road—it wandered aimlessly through desolate swamp land and ended nowhere.

With an evil smile on his repulsive face, the villain stared after the girl until the car drew away; then, moving with suspicious speed, he went to the telephone and called a local number.

"Jakely?" he said. "Get this—I just started a dame down your road who's got a rock on her finger that must be worth five grand. You know what to do, don't you? . . . Well, step on it!—she'll be there in about twenty minutes. Just take her up to your joint and wait for me."

"The plot thickens!" said I to myself as I streaked back to Susan. The road was terrible beyond belief, and by now the night was dark as pitch. At my side, the girl shivered and moaned, "Oh why did I ever leave him? Why?"

"Why, indeed?" I almost asked. But at that moment we came to a detour sign in the middle of the road. The arrow pointed to a narrow, muddy path that twisted into the black heart of a forest of gnarled, misshapen oaks.

"Oh dear! Oh dear!" said Susan. "I'm lost—I know I am. I'd go back if there were room to turn around."

There was no room, however. She had no choice but to go on. But as for me, I could choose a pleasanter means of locomotion than that lurching car. I got out and hovered comfortably in the air. Here I waited for a moment, more than half expecting what presently occurred.

When the ruby tail light vanished through the trees, a dark figure appeared from behind a clump of bushes, picked up the detour sign and set it down at the

entrance to the path Susan had taken. What a simple device it was! This would cut the poor child off from the rest of the world as effectually as if she were chained in a cellar.

Now, the second conspirator started after the car on foot and I floated along at his side. Jakely was a worthy companion to Menace (who was probably already on his way to the criminal rendezvous). He was a squat, greasy, powerful man, with a week's growth of black beard on his oily cheeks. There was something predatory in his way of walking—as if he were stalking an unsuspecting prey. In short, the casting of the part was most satisfactory.

When we had gone about a quarter of a mile, we came upon Susan's car, stranded helplessly in a carefully prepared trap of deep mud. The scene that followed was in the best Broadway tradition—the weeping, frightened heroine entrusting herself with touching gratitude to the villain's vile treachery. Jakely played his role to perfection. Carrying her through the mud and setting her on her feet, he assured her that she had nothing to worry about.

"Just come up and wait at the house," he said, "while I harness up the team and drag that bus of yours out of the mud—"

"I could wait here—"

"No, it wouldn't be safe for a young lady like you. Better come along and stay where there's no danger. It won't take long—and you'll be on your way again in no time. Come along, Miss."

He took her by the arm and she allowed herself to be led. I uttered a deep, shuddering sigh for innocence so betrayed.

"What's that!" Susan cried.

"Nothing to be afraid of." Jakely laughed coarsely. "Just an owl."

"An owl, my Jakely?" said I soundlessly. "Nay! No owl was that, but Nemesis! Nemesis, Jakely!"

I rather liked that line, and the mood was upon me to extemporize an even longer speech, but I feared the play would suffer. In fact, I was afraid that it was beginning to suffer, already—not for lack of action and suspense, but for lack of a hero. If this was a melodrama, as it seemed to have become, the hero's triumphant arrival just before the final curtain was essential to its success.

I whisked back to the Inn and found Tom Elwood pacing the floor, his abbreviated costume unchanged. Coming to a quick decision, I rang the telephone bell, and when he put the receiver to his ear I spoke in a muffled voice:

"Darling, this is Susan. Oh, it's terrible—I've been kidnapped. No—don't ask questions. There's no time—they may find me any moment. Just let me tell you where I am. . . ." Having described the road to Jakely's place, I added, "Darling, I'm so sorry I left you, I love you so! Come to me, darling—save me!"

I think I ought to mention, right here, that in this case I made my voice so low and so hurried that young Tom was not sure of the exact words. But that he was sure enough of their import to play his role with vigorous realism I had no doubt. Really, I felt that he would solve the problem, unaided, of rescuing his hapless wife, but to prevent any unnecessary delay, I abstracted Miggle's trousers (he was asleep in bed), and dropped them in the hall for Tom to stumble over. In a pocket were the keys to Miggle's car.

As you probably realize, *timing* is of great importance in the production of any play, and especially in the case of a fast-moving melodrama is it so. If the action slows—if either hope or despair too greatly out-balances the other in the delicate scales of suspense—the audience is apt to yawn and reach for its hat. As a craftsman I saw that it was my duty to keep the play going at a furious pace.

Returning to Jakely's I discovered that Menace had arrived during my absence.

The two men were standing outside the cabin, conferring in whispers:

"Look," Jakely was saying, "why not run this thing into something big?"

"A snatch?" Menace guessed.

"Why not? Nobody knows she came this way. We'll put the car where it'll never be found. All we need is a few letters in her own handwriting."

"How we going to get 'em?"

"You kidding?"

Menace grunted. "And then?"

"We won't need her any more."

"Okay. Let's get started. I'll work her over while you figure out what we want her to write."

Obviously, the time had come for me to take a more active part in the play. As Menace and Jakely turned back to the cabin, I materialized myself as Susan's double, and stepped over the threshold.

"Hey!" Jakely yelled. "Where you going?"

"I've decided to walk to the highway," I said. "I'll send for the car in the morning."

"I wouldn't do that," said Menace, moving forward stealthily. "You better stay right here." Jakely was circling around to my other side.

"No—thank you for your kindness, but I'll just be going—"

Together, the two men snarled, "Oh, no, you don't!" and lunged at me. They met in mid-air, their heads colliding with a loud crack. From a distance of ten feet I watched them untangle.

"I had her," Menace said. "What happened?"

"*I* had her—but you got in the way. Anyhow, there she is!"

Cursing, they sprang at me again. Always just beyond their grasp, I led them through tearing brambles and ripping thorns, over sharp rocks, through swamps and pools of sucking mud.

The path taken by the mad pursuit made a wide swing through the forest, returning, at last, to Jakely's cabin. (I had looked in at intervals, always to find Susan patiently reading an old magazine.) Now, as I floated toward the place, the two villains staggering after me, bruised, bleeding and completely exhausted—I heard the throbbing of a motor, not far off. Jakely and Menace were panting so loudly that the sound could not reach their ears.

Entering the cabin I de-materialized myself and vanished. Within a few seconds, Jakely and Menace (with young Thomas closing in behind them) tumbled over the door step and lurched into the room where Susan waited. She dropped her magazine and started to her feet in sudden fright.

"Got you!" Their hands reached out for her like bloody claws.

"No!" she screamed, backing away to the wall. "Don't touch me! Help! Help! Help!"

It was Tom's cue, and he spoke his line from the open door: "Touch one hair of her head—and you die!"

The villains swung round and the hero waded in. I don't know whether it occurred to Tom as somewhat strange that he was able to subdue two such gory giants with such ease and despatch. Each took one blow on the chin and fell fainting to the floor.

So the play ended as all good melodramas end—with the beautiful girl in the brave hero's arms. Susan delivered the curtain speech:

"Darling, never let me leave you again! Never!"

As he bent to kiss her I noiselessly applauded, and neither walking nor running chose the nearest exit.

Purely as dramaturgy I was rather pleased with my creation; the performance had been better than adequate—the production excellent.

In short, it was quite an auspicious First Night.

"A million radio listeners had created It—seeing in their own minds Something that had never existed. . . ."

The Believers

By ROBERT ARTHUR

Something nameless, formless. Something out of the night and the swamp—out of the Unknown!

"THIS is it," Nick Deene said with enthusiasm, after he had stared down at the old Carriday house for a couple of minutes. "This is what I had in mind. Right down to the last rusty hinge and creaking floorboard."

Danny Lomax heaved a high of relief.

"Praise be to Allah!" he intoned. "We've wasted almost a week finding a joint that suited you just right, and that doesn't leave us much time to start beating the drum. Although I'll admit"—Danny squinted down at the brooding old pile of

stone and lumber that still retained some traces of a one-time dignity—"I'll admit you've really turned up a honey at last. If that ain't a haunted house, it'll do until one comes along."

Nick Deene stood for a moment longer, appraising the Carriday mansion, on whose arched entrance the carved figure 1784 still defied the corroding elements. The building was a long, L-shaped Colonial type house, with stone foundations and hand-sawed clapboard upper structure. It had been painted some dark color once, but the color had gone with the years, leaving the structure a scabrous, mottled hue that had, to the eye of one who stared too long at it in the uncertain light of dusk, an unpleasant appearance of slow, sinuous movement.

The building was two-storied, with attics, and seemed to contain a number of rooms. Woods, once cut back, had crept up almost to the walls, and though it was only second growth stuff, pine and cedar, they gave the place a cramped, crowded feeling. A weed-grown dirt carriage drive connecting with a half-impassable county road that seemed never to be used any more, and the tumbled ruins of a couple of outbuildings finished off the scene.

"It has everything, Danny!" Nick Deene went on, with animation. "Absolutely everything but a ghost."

"Which is just fine and dandy with me," the technical assistant alloted him by his radio hour sponsors—*So-Pure Soaps present "Dare Danger with Deene!"*—asserted. "Of course, I don't believe in ghosts, as the hill-billy said about the hippopotamus, but that's all the more reason I don't want to go meeting one. I'm too old to go around revising my beliefs just to please a spook."

"That's just it," Nick Deene told him. "A resident ha'nt that somebody or other had seen, or thought he'd seen, and described, would cramp my style. Of course, nobody comes out here, and it's spooky enough to make any casual passerby take another road, but there's no definite legend attached to it, and that's what I've been looking for—that, plus a proper background. And this has the proper background. Three generations of Carridays died here—malaria, probably; look at the swamp back there. The last Carriday ran away to sea and died in Java. The place's been empty fifteen years now, except for a tramp found in it one winter, dead of pneumonia. Nobody's going to buy it, not away out here in a swampy section of woods, and for a couple thousand dollars the estate agent will be glad enough to let us have the key and do anything we want to it, including furnishing it with a nice, brand new ghost. Which is just what I'm going to do. And, believe me, it'll be a lulu."

"Nicholas Deene, Hand-Tailored Spooks, Ghost Maker to the Nobility," Danny Lomax grunted. "You know, I used to read your books, and believe 'em. That chapter where you told about the doomed virgin dancing girl in the old temple at Anghor Vat, and how you saved her just before the priests came for her, gave me a big kick once. I was sap enough to think it had really happened!"

"Well, there *is* a temple at Anghor Vat," Nick Deene grinned. "And dancing girls too. For all I know, one of them may be a virgin. So if you enjoyed the story, why complain? You believed it when you read it, didn't you?"

"Yeah," Danny Lomax agreed, stamping out a cigarette. "I believed it."

"Then you got your money's worth," the tall, bronzed man—sun lamp treatments every evening, carefully timed by his valet, Walters, kept that bronze in good repair—asserted. "And a million people still believe it. Just as five million people are going to believe in the Carriday Curse."

"Okay, okay," the small, wiry man as-

sented. "I'm not here to argue. Let's scram. Even if the Carriday Curse is strictly a Nick Deene phony, I don't like this dump in these shadows. If I had a lot of baby spooks I wanted to raise to be nice, big ha'nts, I'd bring 'em here and plant 'em. The atmosphere is so unhealthy!"

NICK DEENE grinned again, the flashing-toothed smile that had won him indulgence all around the globe, had been photographed against the columns of the Athenaeum, halfway up Mount Everest, atop an elephant going over the Alps, and too many other places to list. He brushed back the jet black hair that lay so smoothly against his skull, and started back toward the road from the little knoll they'd climbed to get a view of the house. Danny Lomax followed, making plans out loud.

"We can have 'em run a rebroadcast unit on a truck up to the road, here," he decided. "You'll have a portable sender on your back, and the truck will pick it up and retransmit to Hartford. Hartford will pipe it into New York and out through the networks. We'll give the equipment a thorough check, and there's not much chance of anything going wrong. Your Crosley rating has been falling off lately, but this'll hypo the box office up to the top again. Most of your listeners have already read the stuff you've been dramatizing on the ether, you know. This one, a direct broadcast from a haunted house at night on Friday the 13th, will pull 'em in. You're a phony, Deene, but you got some good ideas, and this is one of the better ones. *If.*"

"If what?" Nick demanded challengingly, as they reached the road and prepared to clamber into the gleaming roadster that had gotten them there.

"If you put it over." Danny Lomax took the right hand seat and slammed the door. "A lot of newspaper guys don't like you any too well, and if there's any stink to this thing they'll horse-laugh it to death. There's gotta be a ghost, and your audience's got to believe in it. Don't make any mistake about that."

"There'll be a ghost," Nick Deene shrugged, putting the roadster into motion. "And they'll believe in it. I'll be right in the room with 'em. I'm working on the script now. I'm going to ask them to turn out the light when they listen, and imagine they're with me, waiting in the dark for the Thing that for a hundred years has been the Curse of the Carridays to appear. I'll be armed only with a flashlight, a bible, and—"

"And a contract," Danny interrupted. "Sorry. Don't mind my cynical ways. I was dropped from the Social Register on my head while still a babe."

"And a crucifix," Deene continued, a little nettled by now. "They'll hear boards creaking, and a death-watch beetle ticking in the wall. And plenty of other details. I'll make them up as I go along. Spontaneity always gives the most convincing effect, I've found. And they'll be convinced. Aren't they always?"

"Yeah," the little advertising man agreed reluctantly. "When you turn on the heat, old ladies swoon with excitement and little kids scream all night in their cribs. There was one heart-failure—an old maid in Dubuque—after last month's show, the one in which you were fighting an octopus forty feet beneath the surface, down in the Malay pearling waters."

"There'll be half a dozen this time," Nick Deene prophesied complacently. "When I start into the Carriday house to meet the Thing with a face like an oyster—"

"A face like an oyster, huh?" Danny Lomax repeated, and swallowed hard. "That's what it's going to look like?"

Nick Deene chuckled and nodded.

"If there's anything deader looking than a watery blue oyster that's been open too

long," he said, "I don't know what it is. Where was I? Oh, yes. Well, when I start into that house to wait for the approach of the Thing with an oyster face, I'm going to scare the living livers out of five million people, if you guys do your jobs right."

"We will, we will," Danny promised. "We'll ship out photos of the house, I'll plant the story the locals should repeat to a couple of fellows in the village, we'll ballyhoo you all the way down the line. The only thing we won't do is try to fix the weatherman to make it a stormy night. You'll have to take your chances on that."

"It's generally foggy down here in the swamps at night," Deene replied, quite seriously. "Fog is as good as a storm any time."

"Yeah," Danny Lomax acquiesced, twisting around to look down at the house in the hollow below—the road having taken them up a slope behind it. Fog was already forming in tenuous gray wisps, as the disappearance of the sun brought cool air currents rolling down into the swampy dell. They made a little dancing approach toward the empty, silent building that was quite unappetizing to any one with a good imagination. "Fog's good enough for me, any time. You know, Deene, maybe it's a good thing you don't believe in spooks yourself."

"Maybe it is, at that," Nick Deene grinned as they topped a rise and the Carriday house disappeared from view. "Maybe it is, at that."

IT WAS not a foggy night. Yet there were mists about the Carriday house as Danny Lomax, Nicholas Deene, and two newspapermen—Ken Blake and Larry Miller—prepared to enter it.

Sitting as it did in the very bottom of a little glen, so that any cool, mist-producing air currents there might be would flow toward it, it was wrapped in pale vapor that danced and shifted in slow, stately movements. A quarter moon thrust a weak finger of radiance down into the woods. It was eleven o'clock, and time for *Dare Danger With Deene* to hit the ether with its special broadcast.

Danny Lomax had earphones clamped to his ears, tentacles of wire trailing back from them to the broadcast truck pulled up beside the road, on the little rise that overlooked the house. The house was four hundred yards away, and Danny Lomax was conscious of a vague regret it wasn't four million as he snatched off the earphones and dropped his hand.

Nick Deene caught the signal, which meant that the theme song was finished, as well as the lengthy announcement outlining the circumstances of the broadcast, from the New York studio. His deep, expressive voice took up the tale without a hitch.

"This is Nicholas Deene speaking," he said easily into the mike attached to his chest, and connected to the pack broadcaster slung over his shoulder. "The old Carriday mansion lies in a depression below me, some four hundred yards away. Wan moonlight illuminates it. Veils of fog wrap around it as if to hide it from man's gaze. For fifteen years no human being has spent a night beneath its roof—alive."

His voice paused significantly, to let his unseen audience experience its first prickle of pleasurable terror.

"But tonight I am going to brave the curse of the Carriday's. I am going to enter the house, and in the great master bedroom where three generations of Carridays died, I am going to wait for the unknown Thing that legends tell of to appear.

"I am going toward the house now, with two reputable newspaper men at my side. One of them has a pair of handcuffs, the other the key. They are going to cuff me

to the sturdy bedposts of the ancient four-poster that can be seen through the window, dust-covered, in the master bedroom. That is to insure that I shall not leave before midnight strikes—before this ill-omened Friday the thirteenth passes away into the limbo of the vanished days."

Nick Deene's voice went on, rising and falling in carefully cadenced rolls, doing little tricks to the emotions of listeners a mile, a thousand miles, three thousand miles away. He and Danny Lomax and the two reporters trudged on downhill toward the house.

This was a last-minute inspiration of Nick Deene's, this handcuff business. The press had taken a somewhat scoffing note toward the stunt broadcast. But Nick Deene's showman instinct had risen to the occasion. There was a compellingness to the idea of a man being chained in a deserted house, haunted or not—being unable to leave—which had impressed the radio-column writers.

Deene kept on talking as they approached the old mansion, flashlight beams dancing ahead of them. He described the woods, the night sounds, the dancing mist, the appearance of the empty, silent mansion ahead of them, and did a good job. Not that it was necessary for the three men with him. Even before they reached the house, the carefully cultivated skepticism which Blake and Miller had sported was gone from their faces. Cynical though they were, Danny Lomax thought he could catch traces of uneasiness on their countenances. The place had that kind of an atmosphere about it.

"We are standing on the rotten, creaking porch now," Deene was telling his audience. "One reporter is unlocking the door with the key given us reluctantly by the white-haired agent for the property, a man whose expression tells us that he knows many things about this house his closed lips will not reveal.

"The door creaks open. Our lights probe the black throat of the hall. Dust is everywhere, seeming inches thick. It rises and swirls about us as we enter—"

They went in, and Nick Deene's tread was the firmest of the four as they strode the length of a narrow hall and reached the stairs. Their lights showed side rooms, filled with old furniture whose dust covers had not been removed in almost two decades. The stairs were winding, and creaked. The air was as musty as it always is in houses long closed.

They reached the upstairs, and a finger of moonlight intruded through an end window. Their flashlights reflected off a dusty mirror, and Larry Miller jumped uneasily. Nick Deene chuckled into the microphone, and a million listeners nodded in quick approval of his courage.

"My friends are nervous," Nick Deene was telling them. "They feel the atmosphere that hangs so heavy in these silent rooms trod only by creatures of the unseen. I do not blame them. I would feel nervous too, if I did not have a complete belief in the inability of any spiritual creature to harm a living man. Their existence I do not deny. I do, instead, affirm it resolutely. But their harmlessness I am convinced of.

"We are now in the bedroom where I shall wait—"

THE bedroom was big. The door leading into it, though, was low, and narrow, and the windows were small. A broken shutter hanging outside creaked ever so slightly in an unseen air current.

There was a bureau, two old chairs, a cedar chest, a rag rug—and the four poster bedstead. A coverlet, gray with dust, lay over the mattress. Nick Deene grimaced as he saw it, but his voice did not falter.

Danny Lomax snatched the coverlet off the bed and shook it. Dust filled the air, and he coughed as he put the coverlet back

into place. He slid a chair up beside the bed, and Nick Deene, without disturbing the broadcast, slid off his pack transmitter and placed it on the chair.

He lay down on the bed, and Larry Miller, with a pair of handcuffs from his pocket, linked one ankle to the left bedpost. Danny Lomax adjusted the mike so that Nick Deene could speak into it without having to hold it, and Deene waved his hand in a signal of preparedness.

"My friends are preparing to depart," he told his audience, and his words leaped from the room to the waiting truck, from there to Hartford, twenty miles away, and thence to New York, then to the world, or whatever part of it might be listening. "In a moment I will be alone. I have a flashlight, but to conserve the batteries I am going to turn it out.

"May I make a suggestion? Why do not you, who listen, turn out your lights too, and we will wait together in darkness for the approach of the creature known as the Curse of the Carridays — a creature which I hope, before the next hour is over, to describe to you.

"What it is or what it looks like, I do not know. The one man who could tell—the agent for the property, faithful to his trust though the last Carriday died long since in far-off Java will not speak. Yet, if the portents are favorable, we, you and I, may see it tonight."

Clever, Danny Lomax thought, his trick of identifying the audience with himself, making them feel as if they were on the spot, too. One of the big secrets of his success.

"Now," Nick Deene was saying, "I take my leave of my companions—"

Then Danny and the two reporters were leaving. Nick Deene kicked his leg, the chain of the handcuff rattled, and Larry Miller jumped. Nick waved a sardonic hand after them.

They went downstairs, not dawdling, and no one spoke until they were outside. Then Blake drew a deep breath.

"He's a phony," he said, with a reluctant admiration. "And you know as well as I do that if he sees anything tonight, it'll be strictly the product of his imagination—or of that bottle in his coat pocket. But just the same, I wouldn't spend an hour in that joint, handcuffed to the furniture, for a month's pay."

Without hesitating, they set off for the waiting truck, and the small knot of men—technicians, reporters, and advertising agency men—clustered around it. And as they hurried—in Boston, in Sioux Falls, Kalamazoo, Santa Barbara and a thousand other towns, lights went out in a house here, another there, as some of Nick Deene's farflung audience obeyed his melodramatic suggestion to listen to him in the darkness. And two hundred thousand families settled themselves to wait with him, hanging on his every word, their acceptance of everything he said complete, their belief utter.

When the three of them reached the rebroadcast truck again, the little group of half a dozen men there were clustered about the rear, where a half-circle of light burned through the darkness and a loudspeaker repeated Nick Deene's every word.

Deene was building atmosphere still. His resonant voice was picturing the house, the shadows, the dust, the darkness that seemed to crouch within the hallways, and as he spoke, not a man there but could see the pictures he evoked rising up before their eyes.

"Listen," Nick Deene was saying, and Danny Lomax could visualize the big bronze man grinning sardonically as he spoke, "and hear with me the small night sounds that infest this ancient, spirit-ridden dwelling. Somewhere a board is creaking—perhaps for no tangible cause. I cannot tell. But it comes to me clearly—"

Listening, they could hear it, too. The

eerie, chill-provoking creak of a floor board or stairway, in midnight silence. Nick Deene had two bits of wood in his pocket that he rubbed together to get that effect, but only Danny Lomax knew that. And even knowing, he did not like the sound.

"I hear the creaking—" Nick Deene's voice was low, suspense-filled now—"I hear the creaking, and something else. A monotonous tick-tick-tick that seems to become louder and louder as I listen to it, the frightening beat of the death-watch beetle within the walls of this room—"

They could hear that too, as Nick Deene's voice died out. Hear it, and their own breathing became diminuendo as if they too were in that room, listening with a man bound to the great four-poster there.

AND in Atlanta, in Rochester, in Cincinnati, in Memphis, Mobile, Reno, Cheyenne, and a thousand other cities, a thousand other towns, a thousand other villages, in two hundred thousand homes Nick Deene's listeners heard it too in the hushed silence with which they listened, and swallowed a little harder, looked about them a little uneasily, and smiled—smiles that were palpably artificial. And they believed——

Danny Lomax would have believed, too, if he hadn't known of the small metal contrivance by which Nick Deene managed the "death watch beetle" noises. Even knowing, he admitted to himself that it was an impressive performance. When Nick Deene had boasted that he would make five million people believe in the "curse of the Carridays" he had exaggerated—but not about their believing. His audience probably didn't number more than a million. But he had that million by now in a complete state of acceptance for anything he might want to say next.

Danny glanced at his watch, turning his wrist so that the timepiece caught the light. Thirty-five minutes gone. Twenty-five to go. Time now for Deene to start turning on the heat. Time for the sock punch to start developing. He'd built up his background and sold his audience. Now he ought to begin to deliver.

He did. A moment later, Nick Deene's voice paused abruptly. The sudden silence held more suspense than any words he could have spoken. It held for ten seconds, twenty, thirty. Then he broke it only with a half-whispered announcement.

"I think I can hear something moving outside the house—"

Around the sound truck, there was utter silence, save for the whine of the generator that was pumping the broadcast over the hills and woods to Hartford.

"Whatever it is—" Nick Deene's voice was still low, still that of a man who whispers an aside even while intent upon something else—"whatever it is, it's coming closer. It seems to be moving slowly up from the small patch of swamp just south of the house."

Absently, Danny Lomax reached for a cigarette. Nick was sticking to the general script they'd outlined. Almost at the last minute, they'd decided against a spiritual manifestation, a ghost, pure and simple.

Instead, with his usual instinct for getting the right note, Nick Deene had switched to a *Thing*. Something nameless, something formless, something unclassifiable. Something out of the night and the swamp and the unknown. Something that might be alive and might not be alive. But something that, when Nick Deene got through describing it, would be very, very real——

"Whatever it is, it's coming closer," Nick Deene reported then. "I hear a dragging, dull sound, as of something heavy moving through dead brush and over rough ground. It may be just an animal, perhaps even a stray cow, or a horse, or a wild

pig escaped from a pen somewhere on an adjacent farm—"

A million listeners held their breath a moment, then prepared to let it go. Of course, just a starving horse, or a cow. Something warm, something familiar, something harmless. Then—

"It's pulling at the boards which cover the cellar windows!" Nick Deene exclaimed. "It's trying to get into the house!"

DANNY LOMAX held his cigarette unlighted, until the flaring match burned his fingers. In spite of their determined skepticism, there was an intentness to the faces of the reporters and technicians gathered around the end of the sound truck. They knew or guessed this was a phony. Yet the sudden jolt, after Deene had given their nerves a moment in which to relax, got them all. Just as it was getting the whole great, unseen audience.

Danny Lomax, from years of listening to radio programs behind the scenes, had developed a sixth sense of his own. He could tell almost to a degree just how a program was going over—whether it was smashing home or laying an egg. He could feel the audience that listened reacting, and he could sense what their reactions were.

Now something was pulling at him—something strained and tense and uneasy. A million people or more was listening, were believing, were living through the scene with Nicholas Deene, and crouched there in the chilly night beside the broadcast truck, Danny Lomax could feel the waves of their belief sweeping past him, impalpable but very real.

Nick Deene's voice had quickened. He was reporting now the sound of nails shrieking as they pulled free, as boards gave way. He described a heavy, squashy body forcing its way through the tiny window. He made his listeners hear the soft, squashy sounds of something large and flabby moving through the darkness of the cellar of the house, finding the stairs, going up them slowly, slowly, slowly—

"Now it's in the hall." The big man's words were short, sharp, electric. "It's coming toward the door. I hear boards creaking beneath its weight. It senses that I'm here. It's searching for me. I confess I'm frightened. No sane man could fail to be. However, I am convinced it can't hurt me. If it's a psychic manifestation, it's harmless, however horrifying its appearance may be. So I am keeping a firm grip on my nerves. Only if they betray me can I be endangered. They will not betray me.

"Whatever it is, it's just outside the doorway now. I can sense it looking in at me. The room is in darkness. The moon has set. I have my flashlight, though, and I am going to turn it full on the thing in the doorway.

"I can smell a musty, damp odor, as of swamps and wet places. It is very strong. Almost overpowering. But now I'm going to turn on the light—"

NICK DEENE'S voice ceased. Danny Lomax's wristwatch ticked as loudly as an alarm clock. The seconds passed. Ten. Twenty. Thirty. Forty. Someone shifted position. Someone's breath was rasping like that of a choking sleeper.

Then—"It's going!" Nick Deene's voice was a whisper. "It looked at me, and would have entered. I could sense what it wished. It wished—*me*. But I have the bible and crucifix I brought tightly in my hand, the light has been shining full into its—its face, if I can call it that. I did not lower my gaze, and now it's going. I can no longer see it. The light of my flash falls on the black, empty frame of the doorway. *It* is slithering back down the hall, toward the steps. It is returning to

the swamp from which it came when it sensed my presence here.

"I can hardly describe it. I don't know what it was. It stood as high as a man, yet its legs were only stumps of grayness without feet of any kind. Its body was long and bulbous, like a misshapen turnip, its flesh grayish and uneven. It shone a little, as if with slime, and I saw droplets of water on it catch the light of my torch.

"It had a head, a great round head that was as hairless as the rest of it. And a face—I cannot make you see it as I saw it. Staring into it, I could only think of an oyster. A monstrous, wet, blue-gray oyster, with two darker spots that must have been eyes.

"It had arms. At least, two masses of matter attached to either side of its body reached out a little toward me. There were no hands on the end of them. Just strings of—corruption.

"That was all I could see. Then it turned. Now it has gone. It has reached the bottom steps, going down with a shuffling, bumping noise. It is moving toward the cellar stairs, the floor creaking beneath it, back to the cellar window through which it forced itself, back to the depths of the swamp from which it emerged. Yet the sense of it still hangs in this room, and I know that if my will should slacken, it could feel it, and return. But it must not. I will not let it. It *must* return to the bottomless muck from which it came—"

Danny Lomax touched his dry lips with his tongue. This was it. This was the high spot. This was where Nick Deene got over, or fell flat on his face. Danny knew that whichever it was, he'd be able to sense it.

And he did. Not failure. Success! The unseen currents that eddied around him were belief. The belief of a million people, wrapped in a skein spun of words. The belief of a million listeners seeing in their minds something that had never existed, but which Nick Deene had created and put there.

Tomorrow they might laugh. They might belittle and ridicule the very fact they had listened. But they'd never be able to forget how they had felt. And now, for the moment at least, they believed.

Danny let out a breath, and looked at his watch. Almost midnight. Nick Deene was speaking again.

"It's gone, now. It's outside again, seeking the swamp from which it came. This is Nicholas Deene speaking. I'm going to sign off now. I've been through quite a nerve strain. Thanks for listening, everybody. I'm glad that you weren't disappointed, that something happened tonight to make this broadcast worth your listening. Good night, all. This is Nicholas Deene saying good night."

Danny Lomax saw the chief of the rebroadcast crew throw a switch, and nod to him. He leaned forward, toward a secondary mike in the truck, slipping on a pair of headphones.

"All right, Nick," he said. "You're off the air. We're coming down to unlock you now."

"Okay," Nick Deene's voice came back, a little ragged. "Hurry, will you? I'm getting sick of it here. The last couple of minutes, I could swear I *have* heard noises outside. Maybe I'm too good. I'm believing myself. How'd it go?"

"Went fine," Danny told him. "They ate it up. A million people are sitting in their parlors this minute, getting the stiffness out of their muscles, and trying to pretend they didn't believe you."

"I told you they would." Deene's voice was momentarily complacent. Then it became edged again. "Listen, hurry, will you? Damn it, there *is* something moving around outside this house— You say they ate it up?"

"Straight," Danny Lomax told him. "I could feel it. They're all still seeing that Thing you described, with the oyster face, crawling in through the cellar window, slithering up the stairs, standing in your doorway—"

"Cut it!" Deene ordered abruptly. "And come down here. I'm— *There's something coming in the cellar window where we loosened the boards for the reporters to find!*"

Lomax turned.

"Oh, Joe," he called to the driver. "Take the truck down in front of the house, will you? Save walking. . . . What did you say then, Nick? I missed it."

"I SAID there's something coming in the cellar window!" Nick Deene's voice was almost shrill. "It's knocking around in the cellar. It's coming toward the stairs!"

"Steady, Nick, steady," Danny Lomax cautioned. "Don't let your nerves go now. You and I know it's just a gag. Don't go and—"

"Mother of Heaven!" Deene's breath was coming in gasps. Danny could hear it whistle into the mike at the other end of the two-way hook-up. *"There's something coming up the stairs!* Come and get me out of here!"

Danny looked up, a frown between his eyes.

"Joe, get going, will you?" he snapped, and the driver looked around in annoyed surprise.

"Right away," he grunted, and the truck jerked forward "This fast enough to suit you?"

Danny Lomax didn't answer.

"Nick, you all right?" he demanded of the mike, and Deene's voice, almost unrecognizable, came back.

"Danny, Danny," it gobbled, "there's something coming up the stairs with a sort of thump-thump. I can smell marsh gas and ammonia. There's something making a slithery sound. *I tell you something has got into this house from the swamp and is after me!*"

The truck was jolting in second down the long unused road. The reporters had swung on. They were staring at Danny, sensing something, they didn't know what, going wrong. Danny, the earphones tight, hung over the mike.

"Take it easy, take it easy," he soothed. "Just had one drink too many, Nick. We wrote all that down. It's just on paper. You just said it. A million people believed it, but you and I don't have to, Nick. We—"

"Christ!" Nick's cry was a prayer, not a curse. "There's something in the hall. Something that scrapes and thumps. The floorboards are creaking. Danny, don't you know I'm chained here and it's coming after me. It is! It is!" Nick Deene's voice was hysterical. "It's at the doorway. It's—"

The voice was drowned out by a scraping of gravel as the truck's brakes went on abruptly. Wheels fought for traction, lost it. A muddy spot underfoot had slewed the broadcast truck to one side. The long untended road gave no hold. The rear wheels slid toward the ditch beside the road, and in. The truck jolted, toppled, was caught as the hubs dug into a clay bank. The newspaper men were jolted off. Danny Lomax was bounced away from the mike, his earphones torn off his head.

He scrambled back toward the mike, pulling himself up against the slant of the body. The earphones were cracked. He threw a switch cutting in the speaker.

"Nick!" he cried. "Nick!"

"—*in the doorway now!*" came the terror-shrill wail from the speaker. "Coming in! Oyster-face—great, blank, watery oyster-face—Danny, Danny, put me back on the air, tell 'em all it's just a joke, tell 'em it isn't so, tell 'em not to believe, not to

believe. Danny, do you hear, tell 'em not to believe!

"It's coming in! It wants me! It smells, and it's all wet and watery and its face—its *face!* Danny, tell 'em not to believe! It's 'cause they believe. It didn't exist. I thought it up. But they all believed me. You said they did! A million people, all believing at the same time! Believing strong enough for you to feel! They've made it, Danny, they've brought it to life! It's doing just what I said it did, and it looks just like I—I like I—*Danny! Help me! HELP ME!*"

The speaker screamed, vibrated shrilly at the overload and was silent. And in the sudden hush, an echo came from the night. No, not an echo, but the scream itself they had been hearing. Faint, and dreadful, it reached them, and Danny Lomax was quite unable to move for an instant that stretched on and on as he listened.

Then he galvanized into life, and as he darted into the darkness, the others followed. With horrifying abruptness, Nick Deene's faint screams had ceased. He could see the Carriday house ahead, dark, silent, tomb-like. It was three hundred yards away, and the curve of the road—they couldn't go through the brush in black night—hid it momentarily.

The three hundred yards took almost a minute. Then Danny, gasping, turned into the old carriage drive, Nick Deene's words still screamed in his mind.

"They've made it, Danny! They've brought it to life! A million people, all believing at the same time—"

Could— Could— His mind wouldn't ask itself the question, or answer it. But he had felt the currents of belief. In two hundred thousand homes a million people had sat, and listened, and believed. Believed, and in the concentrated power of their believing, had they stirred some spark of force into life, had they jelled into the form of their belief a creature that—

Feet pounded behind him. Someone had a flashlight. The beam of it, thrown out ahead, stabbed the night. It played over the house, and for a moment darted into the darkness beyond and to one side.

AND Danny Lomax caught a glimpse of movement.

A vague, gray-white glimmer of motion, a half-seen shape that moved with speed through the dense vegetation toward the half-acre swamp south of the house and for an instant shone faintly, as if with slime and wetness.

If there was any sound of movement, Danny Lomax did not hear it, because the scuffle of running feet and the hoarse breathing of running men behind drowned it out. But as he listened intently, he thought he heard a single scream, muffled and cut abruptly short, as though a man had tried to cry out with his mouth almost covered by something wet and soft and pulpy—

Danny Lomax pulled up and stood quite still, as the newspapermen and technicians came up with him and ran past. He scarcely heard them, was scarcely aware of them, for his whole body was cold, something was squeezing his insides with a giant hand, and he knew that in just an instant he was going to be deathly sick.

And he knew already that the bedroom upstairs was empty. That the searchers would find only half a handcuff hanging from the footboard of the bed, its chain twisted in two, some marks in the dust, and a few drops of slimy water to tell where Nick Deene had gone.

Only those and an odor hanging pungent and acrid in the halls——

SUPERSTITIONS

TO SEAL THE FATE OF A VICTIM, THE **SINGHALESE SORCERER** SECURES A LOCK OF HAIR, PARINGS OF THE NAILS AND A FEW SHREDS OF CLOTHING FROM THE UNFORTUNATE ONE. THESE ARE WORKED UP INTO AN IMAGE OF THE VICTIM, AND WHEN COMPLETED, *NAILS ARE THRUST INTO WHERE THE JOINTS WOULD BE.* BY THIS PROCEDURE, THE VICTIM'S JOINTS ARE SUPPOSED TO STIFFEN AND HIS BODY BECOME SCORCHED WITH FEVER— *ENDING IN HIS* ***ULTIMATE DEATH!***

IN NEW HEBRIDES AND VARIOUS OTHER PARTS OF THE WORLD, HAIR AND NAIL CUTTINGS ARE HIDDEN SO THAT BLACK MAGIC MAY NOT BE WROUGHT BY THEIR USE . . .

AND TABOOS by Hill

THE BELIEF THAT CERTAIN **RINGS** HAVE **CURATIVE POWERS** DATES BACK TO ANCIENT ROMAN PHYSICIANS WHO CONSIDERED THEM A PREVENTIVE OF MANY DISEASES... A COPPER RING WAS BELIEVED *A CURE FOR RHEUMATISM*, A PLAIN GOLD WEDDING BAND *FOR SORE EYES*, A RING MADE OF A SILVER COIN TAKEN FROM A BEGGAR, *A CURE FOR EPILEPSY* AND FOR CRAMPS AND ABDOMINAL PAINS, *A RING MADE OF A* **COFFIN NAIL!**

LOVE POTIONS - MADE FROM THE **GROUND BONES OF A BAT** - ARE CONCOCTED BY WITCHES OF THE WESTERN BALKANS... THIS POWDER IS THEN SOLD TO AN ARDENT SWAIN WHO SLIPS IT INTO HIS LADY'S COFFEE *TO DRIVE HER TO DISTRACTION WITH LOVE OF HIM!*

Song Without Words

By SEABURY QUINN

What could they signify—those three little bitter oranges piled in a pyramid on dead girl's breast?

ST. MARY'S CITY, Md., March 3.—Maryland state police and authorities of St. Mary's county report they have as yet been unable to find any trace of Chester Gunnarson, wealthy Brooklynite who vanished from his house near Porto Bello last Friday night. Gunnarson, who bought the old manor house and what remained of the once large plantation of Elderwood last month, made a trip down

Her fingers tightened as she smiled at him. "My dear," she whispered in a throaty, husky voice, "I knew you would come back to me. . . . "

here to inspect the property two weeks ago, and lived in the old mansion several days, returning to his home in Brooklyn for a few days, then coming back here last Friday.

He was last seen by a filling station attendant at St. Mary's City about eight o'clock that night. Next morning his car, an open sport roadster, was found parked in the driveway before the house. A cigarette stump of the brand Gunnarson was known to smoke was found in an ashtray in the hall, in the soft earth between flower boxes in the orangery were found footprints positively identified as his, but extended search has thus far failed to reveal any trace of his whereabouts.

Mr. Gunnarson was a cripple and had been since early infancy, having been stricken by infantile paralysis before his second birthday, and it would have been physically impossible for him to have walked any distance from the house. That he had not left by a vehicle other than the car in which he drove down from New York is believed proven by the fact that his

car's are the only tracks to have been found around the house.

Elderwood, the house which Mr. Gunnarson purchased, is one of the oldest, as well as best preserved, of the pre-Civil War mansions in this locality. During the War Between the States it was the property of Judge Amos Pinchin, by whom it was inherited from his grandfather, Gen. Jabez Pinchin, of Revolutionary War fame. Miss Elaine Pinchin, Judge Pinchin's only child, died there in tragic circumstances shortly before Gen. Lee's surrender, and after the war the place was occupied by a succession of tenants, none of whom remained long in possession. Portions of the plantation were sold off successively until only thirty acres of the original tract remained. These, together with the house, fully furnished with authentic antiques, were offered for sale as a unit by George Hoffmann, wealthy Philadelphian, who bought and completely renovated the house a little more than a year ago. Mr. Hoffmann never assigned any reason for quitting the premises on which he had expended so much money; it is known only that he moved away after living there less than three months, and that he thereafter advertised the place for sale at less than its assessed value.

Until Mr. Gunnarson appeared there were no bidders for the property. The place has a bad reputation, and the colored people and superstitious whites in the neighborhood declare that it is haunted by a malignant spectre. Mr. Gunnarson's strange disappearance adds a note of eerie mystery to the history of a house about which mysterious stories have been whispered for more than half a century.

—New York *Daily Sphere.*

To the Editor of The Sphere. Sir: It was with something like a feeling of blood-guiltiness that I read your article on the strange disappearance of Chester Gunnarson of Brooklyn, N. Y., from my former house at Elderwood, near Porto Bello, Md. Mr. Gunnarson's purchase of the property was transacted through my attorney's and his brokers, and we principals never came in touch with each other, but in the light of subsequent developments I have a feeling of remorse for not having made a point of meeting him and warning him of possible dangers attendant on occupancy of those premises.

Almost exactly one year ago I bought Elderwood from a collateral descendant of the late Judge Amos Pinchin, and though the place was offered me at what seemed an absurdly low price, I assumed this was because of the shocking state of disrepair into which it had been allowed to settle.

My first care was to modernize the house completely, installing automatic oil heat, electric lights and fixtures, and modern plumbing. I then went down to look at it, and found everything that could be desired, to all outward appearances. My wife and daughters were also delighted with the place, and we spent several weeks there, entertaining friends from the North. It was a source of surprise and some little disappointment to us that none of the local gentry accepted invitations to evening parties, though they were all most cordial in bidding us to their houses, and frequently called on us during the day. We also found great difficulty in securing and retaining domestic help. None of the colored people in the locality could be induced to remain in the house, or even in the reconditioned slave quarters, after night fall, and we found that the white help brought from the North were restless in the place, and soon found some excuse for leaving.

IT WAS late last April, the 28th, as I recall, that I found the reason for this. My family had gone North on a shopping expedition, and in the absence of servants I was left alone in the house. I distinctly

remember hearing a hall clock strike 11:30, but do not think it had struck 12:00 when I noticed a peculiar light in the orangery, or conservatory, which was connected with the second drawing room by a short glassed-in passage. As I recalled having shut off the lights in the conservatory earlier in the evening, I rose to investigate.

You may imagine my surprise when I found, upon going into the orangery, that the illumination I had observed was not from the electric bulbs, but was a sort of cold glow, like a phosphorescent gleam, appearing to emanate from a far corner of the greenhouse. That it was this sort of weird, uncanny light, and not moonlight or other natural illumination, I am positive, for the sky was overcast and a storm was blowing up from Chesapeake Bay.

As I walked further into the conservatory to investigate the phenomenon I suddenly perceived the figure of what appeared to be a young woman standing with her face toward me. The odd greenish light in which she stood was at her back, and I could get no clear impression of either her face or costume, though at the time it struck me she was wearing a dress of antique vintage, something like the styles we see depicted in old prints from *Gody's Ladies' Book*. Whether she were fair or dark I could not make out, but there was something about her dimly-seen face that was positively terrifying. She raised a hand and plucked an orange from one of the trees that have been cultivated by the Pinchin family since early in the eighteenth century, and offered it to me. At the same time I noticed that her mouth was open and her lips moving, as if she were singing, but I could hear no sound. Dimly, I recalled having heard that a young woman had been murdered in that greenhouse by a lover to whom she had been unfaithful, and that her unquiet spirit was supposed to walk there sometimes, "singing a song without words." Of course, I had never taken any stock in that sort of absurdity, but as I looked at that spectral figure I recalled the legend, and was more utterly afraid than I have ever been before. I felt an almost overmastering impulse to speak to the apparition and demand what it wanted, but as I opened my lips to do so something within me seemed to sound a warning, and I experienced such a feeling of revulsion as can only be compared to one's feeling when he comes suddenly upon a copperhead or rattlesnake coiled in his path. The feeling was so strong that it amounted to a physical sickness, and I staggered, rather than ran, from the conservatory, and though it was late at night and threatening rain, jumped into my car and drove as fast as I could to Leonardtown, where I spent the night. Next morning I returned to Elderwood, bundled up all the family's personal belongings and left the house, never to return.

Not for anything would I have passed another night in that place, or permitted any member of my family to do so. When I offered the property for sale I had scarcely any hope of acquiring a purchaser even though my asking-price was much less than the assessed value of the place. The fact that no one offered to buy the property till Mr. Gunnarson's brokers bid for it, and that he was a northern gentleman with no knowledge of the evil reputation of the place, confirms my belief that the residents of that section of Maryland know whereof they speak when they declare Elderwood is haunted.

I may add that I subsequently made attempts to learn the legend of the house, but found that those to whom I talked either could not, or would not enlighten me. About all I was able to find out is that the spectre of a young woman appears in the conservatory, and that she is always apparently singing. No one has ever heard her

utter a sound, however, and it seems to be generally believed that if she is addressed the person speaking to her will thereupon immediately hear "the song without words" which she is singing, and as an immediate consequence, will perish.

Who—or what—the mysterious woman in the conservatory was I have no accurate idea, but from the feeling of abysmal and instinctive terror with which the mere sight of her inspired me, I have no moral doubt that she was a manifestation of at least one phase of the dreadful Thing that haunts Elderwood Manor.

I fear this Thing is responsible for the unfortunate and crippled Mr. Gunnarson's disappearance, and am certain that no trace of him will ever be found by anyone in —— or of —— this world.

I deeply regret not having carried out my original intention of canceling the insurance on the house and then setting it afire, so that both house and haunting Thing might have been destroyed for all time.

Respectfully,
GEORGE HOFFMAN,
Late owner of Elderwood Manor.
Philadelphia, Pa., March 6.

THE sky was dappled like the breast of a gray goose, and like tiny tufts of goose-feathers little flakes of soft white snow were wavering slowly through the twilight as Gunnarson drew up before the tall stone gateposts of his new house. It was lovely in the winter dusk, that house, standing far back from the macadamed highway, with its long avenue of cedars stretched before it straight as a plumb-line and the lofty columns of its white piazza glimmering faintly in the half light. He felt a sudden warmth, almost like a glow of homecoming, as he looked at it. "Home," the words struck echoes in his heart, "this is to be our home, mine and Geraldine's, please Fate."

Odd how he'd come to buy it. They'd been looking over *Rural Life* one evening when Geraldine had exclaimed, "Oh, lovely!" as she saw the advertisement: In Southern Maryland, a fine pre-Civil War house, modernized in all particulars, surrounded by a farm of thirty acres, running water through the meadow, river frontage with wharf-rights—

"You'd like it?" he asked in that almost reverent tone he always used with her.

"Oh, Chet, I'd simply love it!" she returned with bubbling enthusiasm. "Think of it, that lovely, mellow old house, with rolling country all around it, and one's own river-landing. Just like the colonial gentry. And then, to have your own cows and horses there and—"

"And me?" he broke in gently, almost pleadingly.

Her narrow, high-arched brows drew down a moment in a mild frown, more of annoyance than of anger. "Yes," she conceded, "even you, Chet." But the smile she flashed him as she spoke took all the edge off of her words.

He said no more about it, but next day he had his brokers get in touch with the attorneys who had advertised the place. Now, with the deed in his pocket, he had come to look at the property. He'd have another deed made out, and hand it to her when she stepped across the threshold as his bride. Too bad he couldn't carry her in the traditional manner, but—

CHET GUNNARSON could not remember when he had not been in love with Geraldine Peters. She was three years his junior, and it seemed to him that he had loved her since that morning thirty years before when his nurse had lifted him to look at the new baby in her frilled and ruffled carriage. "It's little Geraldine," the maid had told him. "She came to Mrs. Peters' house last month. Isn't she pretty?"

Even as a three year old he had been

serious, with a quaintly adult manner of expression. "She's beautiful," he answered fervently as he looked into the little dimpled pink and white face showing like a flower between the knitted pink and white bonnet and the pink and white eider-down crib blanket. "She's beautiful, an' when we grow up I'm goin' to marry her."

The nurse had turned her head away quickly. "Poor lamb," she muttered, half a sob in her voice.

He hadn't caught the words distinctly, but he understood their intonation, realized she negatived his expressed ambition. "Yes, I am, too," he defended hotly. "You just see if I don't. Nobody's goin' to stop me marryin' her, even if I am differink!"

His "differinks" from other children was a thing he hardly understood, but it was there, he knew that, even in those days. Older people, 'specially ladies, made little deprecating clucking noises with their tongues against their teeth when they passed him in the park or on the street. He couldn't run and play tag, roller-skate or roll a hoople like the other little boys and girls. While other lads were clothed in shorts and sweaters, or snow suits, he was always dressed in trim blue sailor suits with long, wide trousers that helped to hide the braces that were buckled to his shrunken, puny little legs. When he walked he hobbled with a lurching, staggering roll. He often fell, he tired quickly.

At thirty-three he still was "different." Massage, electrotherapy and carefully supervised exercise had made it possible for him to move with less awkwardness, he could even drive a motor car equipped with special treadles and a special driver's seat, but dancing, tennis, golf or any form of sport except swimming was utterly beyond him. He was well-favored facially, with smooth dark hair, a wide forehead and sober dark eyes beneath delicately arched brows. Above the waist he was well made, deep chested, square shouldered. From the hips down he was the hopeless parody of a man with trousers that hung limply about legs shriveled to mere skeletal remains. His shoes would have been small for a ten year old lad.

And constant as his cruel deformity was his love for Geraldine. As a little girl she'd mocked his lameness, as an adolescent belle she tolerated his companionship when better company was not available, as a woman she regarded him much as a Mediaeval princess might have looked upon her fool. Occasionally she was kind and gentle, more often she would whet the sharp edge of her wit upon him; sometimes she was actually cruel. But she took his lavish presents with an air of condescention, let him call, or take her to the opera or theatre, and when he laid his heart, his crippled, twisted body and his more than merely satisfactory fortune at her childishly small feet, as he did periodically, she was careful to make her refusals gentle, diplomatic, and not too final.

For Geraldine was poor. All her life she'd known the taste of genteel poverty, and it was quinine-bitter on her tongue. She had no illusions. She was a merchantable article, definitely so, and she meant to drive the shrewdest bargain possible. She knew her beauty and allure, realized the value of her pale-gold hair, her matte-white skin, her straight, slim, softly, contoured figure on which bargain basement dresses looked like Paris importations, her gray eyes with their childish look of utter innocence—and which were so adeptly able to put price tags on everything. Chet Gunnarson was her backlog, her reserve, what her poker-playing friends referred to as an ace in the hole. So she rejected his proposals with a gentle melancholy, as if refusal pained her more than it did him, and always held out the faint, hopeful glimmer of "perhaps—some day."

The house was very dark, and cold with what seemed more than merely mortal

chill. He played his pocket flashlight on the wall, found the electric switch and pressed it, then as gentle, moonlike light spread from the shaded globes he found the switch controlling the oil furnace and flicked it. In a moment came a subdued whirring from the basement. Everything was in order, it would be warm in a few moments, and he could spend the night quite comfortably there.

The advertisement had not overstated matters. "Completely furnished with authentic antiques," it had announced, and Chester took in the perfection of the furnishings with a thrill of admiration. Marble vases, porcelain figurines, ormolu clocks set off the solid lines of carved furniture. Here was a bit of beautifully shaped mahogany, there a piece of walnut almost worth its weight in gold at any dealer's—and all of it was his. His and Geraldine's.

The little room behind the formal parlor was especially attractive. Old-fashioned chintz patterned with quaint bouquets hung at the low windows, there were deep chairs and sofas covered with a warm rose-tone that complemented the gray woodwork. A coffee table of pear wood was placed between a divan and the fireplace where the split logs had been laid in readiness. Against the wall was a tall chest of drawers waxed to a satin finish, above it was an antique mirror framed in gilt; an oil portrait framed in a narrow strip of gold hung on the wall above the marble mantel.

"This is delightful!" he exclaimed. "So restful—homelike"—his voice softened to a tremulous whisper—"our home; Geraldine's and mine."

Almost gaily he limped to the fireplace, bent and set a flaring match to the piled kindling underneath the logs, then, as a little corkscrew-flame of orange fire curled up: "Welcome home, dear," he breathed softly, "welcome to this house of yours—"

The sentence died half uttered, for as he straightened he looked full into the pictured face above the mantel, and as his living gaze locked with the picture's painted glance, he felt an odd, inexplicable thrill run through him. There was nothing wanton or voluptuous in the painted face. The girl was dark, with pale, smooth skin and sweetly curving lips. There was a tiny mole, perhaps a beauty-patch, beneath her left eye, a full-blown yellow rose was tucked into her smoothly lustrous hair. Her gown, cut low to show the shoulder-tips after the style of the eighteen-sixties, was dark green silk, and round its waist was bound a sash or scarf of yellow that exactly matched the flower in her tresses. But most of all the eyes were fascinating. Deep blue they were, almost purple, and framed by long, thick, curling lashes. As he looked into them they seemed deepening in shade until they verged on black. Somehow, they seemed appealing to his chivalry, begging piteously for something, but what they pleaded for he could not tell.

For a long, pulse-pounding moment he stood staring at the portrait, and it seemed almost as if he'd stepped into a different world. Even—he resented this, but it was so—as if he'd forgotten Geraldine and his deep, almost hopeless love for her, and had somehow come to a goal he'd been seeking since—was this remembering? he wondered. He could have sworn that he remembered this pale, fragile girl, that he recalled her soft, low laugh, the touch of her soft hand, the sweetness of her voice as she sang softly in the twilight—when did she sing—where—how—?

He shook his shoulders, closed his eyes and opened them again, and he was standing once more in the charming little room with firelight brightening its walls, the thrumming tune of a low winter breeze was sounding at the window, and a picture—just an ordinary picture—hung upon the wall before him.

He woke suddenly to a vague sense of apprehension. An intangible tocsin

seemed beating an alarm in his inner consciousness, a current of cold air seemed blowing over him. Like a dream-affrighted child he roused to a sitting posture and looked round him. Now he remembered. He had lain down on the sofa, comfortably aware of the log fire's glow and the mounting heat in the radiators after his cold drive. The chanting of the light wind hurrying past the window and the softly hissing murmur of the fire had been a lullaby to him. How long had he been sleeping?

FROM the hall there came the measured booming of the tall clock, a deep, deliberate, echo-making stroke. One o'clock, or half-past something? he wondered.

The flowered chintz that draped the long French window opposite the entrance fluttered forward with a wavering motion, as if blown upon by a light draft, and once again he felt the breath of bitter, freezing chill. He rose unsteadily on crippled legs, caught his balance and limped across the room.

It was not a window, he discovered. It was a door concealed by the hanging, and it let onto a short passage, glassed in on either side, like the entrance to a greenhouse. Beyond, he saw the glimmer of the small panes of a pair of glass doors; through them gleamed a faintly greenish luminance, something like moonlight, rather like the pale dawn-radiance before the sun comes up, yet neither. He felt a sudden reasonless tenseness; not fear exactly, but something not far from it. The old dark house seemed tense, too; breathless, waiting, listening. Why should he be afraid? Of burglars? He dropped his hand into his jacket pocket where a little automatic rested. He might not be a match for a prowler if they came to grips, but he was an expert pistol shot. If he'd been followed here by someone who thought a cripple couldn't resist—

The door swung open to his touch, and the cold, terrifying chill that froze the air gave way to the rush of warm perfumed air from the conservatory. The place was almost literally alive with flowers: roses, gardenias, carnations, and the subtly-perfumed, star-bright blossoms of a pair of ancient orange trees. The greenery of wax-bright leaves and slender, trailing tendrils seemed to move with a slow, gentle rhythm, as if they had been under water, swaying with the flow and ebbing of small waves. Against the diamond-shaped panes of the roof the snow drove with a faintly hissing sound. It was a stormy night; no moon or stars could break through those massed clouds that sifted down their weight of snow-crystals; yet the whole conservatory glowed with a faint lemon-colored light.

He limped between the stands that held the nodding flowers, wondering whence that odd glow came. He could see everything distinctly: the oranges that hung like globes of gold upon the wax-leaved branches, the climbing rosebush that shook down its golden hoard of yellow blossoms, the—

Involuntarily, he flinched from her. So close he could have touched her, she stood by the orange tree, the girl of the portrait. She had not been there when he entered, he could swear to that; indeed, he could have taken oath she had not been there two breaths earlier. The odd green glow that seemed to come from nowhere, yet be everywhere, illuminated her. He could see the yellow rose that nestled in her smooth dark hair, the yellow scarf that bound her slim, slight waist; see her pale face and great lustrous eyes, the bright, smooth tresses of her hair, her full white throat and gleaming ivory shoulders. She stood so close to him that he could see the faint blue vein that traced itself across her temple; her breath should have been on his face, but he could feel no breath. Her

lips were lightly parted and moved as if she sang, but he heard nothing.

She was reaching for an orange from the nearer tree, and he could see the tightening of her bodice on her slender bosom as she raised her white, bare arm.

With a slow motion, like a wave, or like a tree branch swaying in the lightest breath of breeze, she turned toward him, her great eyes luminous, her face so pale, so sad, so utterly entreating. One slender hand came forward, timorously. Like a little child who fears rebuff she held the freshly plucked orange toward him.

A WAVE of coldness almost nauseating in intensity seemed to spread through him, beginning at his stomach-pit and creeping slowly through his veins until it touched and paralyzed his hands and feet and throat. Yet, precisely as a person may be frightened and attracted by a snake at the same time, he felt a sort of wondering fascination. An impulsion to address this strange pale girl whom he had never seen before, yet for whom he felt an inexplicable affinity, swept over him.

It was not in this man whom fate had hurt so cruelly to hurt anybody. He glanced down at the orange she held out, then up again to her sad, pleading eyes. "You"—with a sobbing gasp he gathered his voice by supreme effort—"you want me to take it?"

And suddenly he was no longer afraid. The chilling dread that had encased him like a glaze of ice fell from him, and she was just an ordinary girl—though more than ordinarily attractive—holding out a bitter orange to him.

Now he caught the snatch of song she sang, a haunting, lilting little melody that seemed to flutter like a black moth prisoned in the web of its own tremulous cadences. But the words—if words they were—he could not understand. They were in some foreign tongue, or else the little meaningless syllables that people fit to tunes that have no words.

Abruptly she stopped singing and smiled at him. He could see the laughter forming in her eyes, see the heavy lashes flickering, see the dimples showing in her cheeks each side her mouth. Her teeth were very white against the redness of her lips as she spoke: "Thank you. It's good to have someone speak to you."

His puzzled face showed he was fumbling for an answer to this wholly unexpected statement, and she laughed, a tinkling, gurgling laugh that sounded like the purling of clear water over stones. "Yes, I've been so lonely here—"

"You came in earlier?" he broke in, wondering at her presence in his house. "Wasn't it cold—"

The laughter faded from her lips and eyes, leaving her face grave and sorrowful. "Very," she responded earnestly. "And dark."

Here was a poser. He did not want to ask her why she trespassed on his property—probably she was a neighbor used to wandering through the old house, he reflected. She couldn't have known he was coming, but— To cover his embarrassment he began to peel the orange she had given him. Its skin was tough and leathery, and the pulp was hard and rather dry, and its flavor had a bitter tinge to it that he disliked. She watched him intently, almost with elation, as he ate. Another?" she asked as he finished.

"No, thank you, but if you'd care to join me in some more substantial food I'd be delighted. I had a pantryful of things sent yesterday. That is," he added ruefully, "I hope they sent 'em in. I forwarded a set of keys to Blickenstein & Canby at Baltimore, and asked that they put the supplies in. Shall we look?"

As naturally as if she'd known him all her life she fell in step beside him, and he felt a sudden glow of appreciation when

with perfect naturalness she stepped ahead of him, unlatched the passage door and waited for him to pass through. Few young women showed such courtesy and consideration for his lameness.

"Coming?" he called back as she hesitated.

"You want me to—you are inviting me into the house?" she asked, and he was puzzled by the odd smile of elation that lighted up her rather somber features.

"Of course, I invite you. Come in." He held his hand out and she dropped her fingers into it. They were soft as rose leaves, but so cold their touch chilled him.

As she crossed the threshold, her hand still in his, she bowed her head a moment, as in acknowledgment of a favor. "Thank you, again," she told him softly.

THE firm of fancy grocers had not disappointed him. In the Frigidaire were eggs and butter and hors-d'oeuvres, the pantry shelves were lined with tinned and potted meats and fowl, the wine was neatly cased and waiting on the pantry floor.

They made a merry meal of chicken sandwiches and dry champagne, with little éclaires from a glassine package for dessert. Afterwards they sat before the fire and talked, though what they spoke of he had little recollection later. He knew only that she talked charmingly, and that she followed any conversational lead he took as aptly as a skillful dancer matches her step with her partner's, and that when at last she rose to leave he had a feeling of regret.

"But I must go," she told him with a deprecating smile. "Think what the neighbors might say." For some reason this seemed to amuse her, and she laughed until it seemed to him that little bells were ringing in all corners of the room.

"No," she shook her head as he made toward the front door, "I came in that way"—with a nod toward the conservatory —"and I'll leave by it. Haven't you heard it's bad luck to come in one door and leave by another?"

He smiled tolerantly. These Southerners! So superstitious—and so charming. "I—I hope," he stammered diffidently, "that I may have the pleasure of seeing you again—"

"You will," she broke in with a nod, and though the words were lightly spoken there seemed an underlying emphasis in them.

He watched her thread the path between the flower-boxes, saw her turn the angle of the aisle that led to the old orange trees —then, with the swift finality of a tropic sunset, she was gone.

"Odd," he mused, "I didn't realize there was a door there, but—" His rumination took another turn. The light. He could not remember having turned it on, yet there had been light here when he met her, the same odd greenish glow had lighted the conservatory as she left. Now it was gone. The place was dark and lightless as a mausoleum. He shook his head again and gave the puzzle up. It had been a night of mysteries, but very pleasant ones.

From his bedroom window he looked out across the landscape. The snow had stopped some time before, and the whole countryside was like a giant frosted cake with points of reflected starlight for candles. There was no wind, the soft white flakes lay undisturbed as if—how was it? Almost beneath his window lay the orangery. If anyone had left it tracks must have shown in the snow, but it was virgin-smooth and unmarked, not even a wind-riffle showed on its chaste surface.

HIS sleep was troubled. Several times he roused to fitful wakefulness, prodded by the barb of a dream. Elaine—she'd told him that was her name—seemed haunting him. Once he woke to semi-consciousness and lay with half-closed eyes to fancy that she bent above him in the

cold white moonlight, that she looked into his face with gloating eagerness, and that her lips were drawn away from teeth whose whiteness was more frightening than beautiful. Something seemed wrong with her face, too. It was not exactly changed, but in the moonlight it appeared less attractive, gaunt and hollow-cheeked, as if it were the face of one who had been starved a long, long time, or—he shrank from the comparison—dead, and brought back to a semblance of life by the embalmer's art.

Again he roused to fancy that she crouched upon the floor beside his bed, and that she put her hands up to her face and wept between her fingers. She was sobbing piteously, and he could make out something of the words she moaned between her broken-hearted gasps. "I must not hurt him—he is good and kind and gentle—but the long, long waiting in the dark and cold, the loneliness of it—oh, I will treat him kindly, make him happy; I'll give him love for love and trust for trust!"

Then he was fully awake and the lights were on, and he was lying in the great four-poster bed with no one in the room with him, and no sound in his ears except the muted crowing of a cock in some far-distant farmyard.

THE day passed like an age. He was lonesome, nervous, distrait. He wondered where she lived, who she was, how she came to visit him—how, indeed, she had found entrance to the house, for he had made a slow tour of inspection in the orangery and found that save for the door leading from the little drawing room there was no entrance to the place.

The dark fell early, long green shadows creeping swiftly across the snow, stars bursting out of the sky like a thousand lamps all lighted at the same moment. And with the dusk she came.

He heard the rattle of the greenhouse door, a little tinkling laugh, then, "May I come in?" And she was there. Her green silk gown had been changed for a dress of brown wool stuff high necked, long sleeved, and tight about the waist and hips. It looked archaic, like the dresses one saw in the pictures of the belles of Civil War days. Still, this was Southern Maryland, perhaps there was a difference between their styles and the modes of New York.

"I'd been hoping you'd come," he told her. "Waited dinner for you, as a matter of—"

"You did?" Delight showed in the long blue eyes that always seemed to hold a hint of secrecy in their depths. "Oh, that was sweet of you. See"—she brought her hand from behind her—"here's another orange. I plucked it for you as I came through—"

"How'd you manage it?" he interrupted, not rudely, but curiously. "I've been all round that orangery, and the only door I found was this one."

Her long eyes seemed to slide away obliquely and lose themselves beneath their silky lashes. "Perhaps I know a way nobody else does," she responded archly. "Some day—maybe—I'll show it to you. Then you and I can come and go at will—" Her words grew softer, trailed away before the sentence was completed. She seemed breathing faster, and a little patch of almost hectic color showed in either cheek. Silently she held the orange out to him.

"No, thank you," he declined. "It seems ungracious to refuse when the family who built this house took such pride in their orangery, but somehow I don't care for the fruit. Ready for dinner?"

If she were disappointed she concealed it admirably, and the candle-lighted dining room was soon achime with her gay laughter.

After dinner she played for him. She had a lovely harpsichord touch, and her voice, though small, was sweet and true.

The songs she sang were old, "Maid of Athens, Ere We Part," "Believe Me of All These Endearing Young Charms," finally "Darby and Joan."

"Always the same, Darby, my own,
Always the same to your old wife Joan,"

she sang softly, then, tears on her lashes, turned to him.

"Tell me," she demanded, "do you believe there's comfort for the miserable in having company?"

He pondered the odd question. "I don't know, if the company were sympathetic and understanding—"

"Like the missionaries who go out to serve the lepers?" she pursued.

"Yes, like them. They go voluntarily; but they must be comforted in serving, just as the knowledge of their sacrifice must help the poor souls whom they serve."

"Could *you* make such a sacrifice?" She was leaning forward, eyes alight, and he could see the movement of her bosom as her breath came faster. "If you felt sorry for a person who had suffered dreadfully, and you knew that you could help him by your sacrifice, could you give up your home and friends to buy peace for that person, even though it might mean dying, as most people understand the term?"

He shook his head. "I'm afraid not. You see, there's someone I love very dearly. I couldn't give her up—"

"But if she didn't love you; if she were married to somebody else—"

"Why, that would change matters. If that were so, I don't think I'd mind 'dying, as most people understand the term'."

THE message came next day at sunset, curt with the brevity of a commercial telegram:

> Chet dear the answer is yes stop poking round that dismal hole and come back and marry me
>
> Geraldine

His heart almost stopped beating as he read. After all these years Geraldine was going to marry him. They'd live together in this lovely old house; they'd be so happy, for he loved her so—

The scream that broke his blissful thoughts came from the orangery. It was a woman's, but it had the sexlessness, the utter impersonality of a thing of true horror.

It spouted up, a dreadful jet of terrifying sound, then, with an awful gurgling, sank again, as if it had been sucked back down into a drain.

He hobbled to the entrance of the greenhouse. There was no light there, nothing but grim shadows lurking with a sort of vengeful watchfulness to pounce on him. He snapped the light-switch, called softly, "Elaine!"

There was no answer, but the echo of that dreadful scream seemed trembling on the closed-in air the way a bell-tone lingers long after the gong is struck. "Elaine?" he called again, and limped between the flower-boxes toward the orange trees.

She lay full length upon the moist black earth, her little feet crossed one above another, her arms stretched out from the shoulders, palms upward, as though she had been crucified against the ground, and from her throat a stream of bright blood slowly trickled. The blow that felled her must have been a dreadful one, for her neck was nearly severed by it. Her eyes were nearly closed, but not quite, and from her mouth, which hung a little open with a terrible, lax slackness, a little rill of blood had dribbled till it ran across her cheek and down her chin.

How long he bent above her he had no idea. Time cannot be computed when the breathing stops, and it seemed to him he had not breathed for hours as he looked down at the ghastly, mangled form.

Elaine, poor little sweet Elaine! Who had done this foul thing, who could have

—he brought up suddenly, aghast. It was a little thing, but somehow it seemed terrible as the murder. On the dead girl's breast, arranged to form a little pyramid, were three of the small, bitter oranges. A token of some sort, of course. But what? What could they signify, those little bitter oranges piled on a dead girl's bosom?

His mind began to work with cold logic. There was some secret entrance to the place, of course, but there'd been scarcely time for an escape. If the murderer were hiding— He drew the pistol from his pocket, snapped its safety catch off and began a circuit of the greenhouse.

Slowly, limping painfully, he walked up one aisle, down another. Now he was back where he had started. The body—good heavens, there was none!

Where he had seen Elaine lie murdered with the little oranges upon her breast there was nothing. No trace of blood, either.

He knelt and pressed his hands against the earth where she had bled. The ground was moist, but when he brought his fingers up they were unstained. Was this the way that madness started? Had he seen a vision, been the victim of hallucination?

Once more he made the circuit of the orangery, once more he failed to find a trace or clue of murderer or victim. "Take it easy, boy," he told himself. "Don't let it get you down." He had to get a firmer grip upon his nerves. "Let's think this business over." Either the body was there, or it wasn't. If it were there, and he could not see it, he was the victim of delusion. If there had never been a corpse there, he'd been "seeing things." In either case he was in need of medical assistance and advice, and would be better far away.

Stumbling in his haste he hobbled to the garage, set his motor going, circled down the long driveway and turned into the highway heading northward.

In Washington the fan-belt of his engine broke, and as he waited in the service station he picked up a morning paper. "Are You Troubled?" ran the headline of a small advertisement. "Madame Clearwater, Clairvoyant and Noted Spiritualist, can help you. All sittings absolutely private."

Laughing at his gullibility, but with the latent hope the medium might have some explanation for his vision of the night before, he called a taxi and drove to the address given in the notice.

"GOOD MORNING!" The medium came in bustling, her pink and white face wreathed in a smile of professional cheeriness. She was the last person he would have taken to belong to her profession. Plump, florid, in her middle fifties, she was attractively attired in a black crêpe dress with cut-steel accessories and blue trimming. She might have been a matron with grown children about to sally forth to address a women's club, or a church-committee-woman, devoted to guilds and good works. "Don't rise!" she ordered hastily as he lurched upward in his chair. "Just sit there and relax.

"Now"—she fairly beamed on him as she dropped into an easy chair by a small table and drew a crystal ball out of a drawer—"what can I do for you? Is it business, romance, or—" With a little, birdlike nod of her well marcelled head she waited his disclosures.

The change that spread across her broad and rather homely features as he talked was almost frightening. Before he'd finished she was fairly squirming in her chair, the bloom upon her full lips had receded, her rather large, protuberant blue eyes were filled with such a look of dismay that he would not have been surprised if she had suddenly retreated from the room and slammed the door behind her. At last:

"You really saw all this?" she asked him

in a husky whisper. "You swear it on your honor as a gentleman?"

"Of course. But why—"

"Young man"—she had her agitation in control somewhat, but spoke through trembling lips—"you've stood as close to the Beyond as anybody could, yet not go through the door. Do you know the history of Elderwood?"

He shook his head and she drew a deep breath. "You are the first man to address that specter, though many have seen it. You remember how it frightened you at first? That was nature's warning; the instinctive fear of the living for the dead. You should have heeded it."

"But the moment I spoke the fear all seemed to slip away," he returned. "I was frightened at first—"

"Listen to me carefully," she interrupted, "and thank your lucky stars that you're alive to hear me. Judge Amos Pinchin lived at Elderwood in 1864. His daughter Elaine was the belle of all the countryside, all the young Confederate officers were wild about her, but she would give her hand to none of them.

"At last a young Lieutenant Beauchamp came to stay with them. He was a member of a fine old Creole family from New Orleans, and it was said his nurse had taken him as an infant to the voodoo rites the slaves practiced in Congo Square. There were strange stories about him. It was said he could take a rattlesnake in his bare hands and stroke it till it fell asleep. A sergeant of his company swore that he'd seen a Yankee rifleman fire pointblank at his heart, yet Beauchamp was not only not killed, he kept right on and cut the Yankee's head off with his sword. Negroes on plantations where his troop was quartered were terribly afraid of him; he'd speak to them in some outlandish gibberish and they'd come crawling to him like whipped dogs, with a sort of sickly grayness underlying the dark pigment of their faces. He never went to services held by the chaplains, and he'd been heard to boast that he could put a curse which would endure through all eternity on anyone he hated.

"This dreadful man was quartered at Elderwood during September, '64. He fell in love with Elaine, and though she swore she hated him, they became engaged. You can understand that, can't you? She hated him and feared him, but her fear was greater than her hatred. So—

"When General Early fell back after his defeat at Cedar Creek Union soldiers pressed down to attack Richmond, and Elderwood was requisitioned as a regimental headquarters.

"One night Beauchamp left his command, and in civilian clothes wriggled through the Union lines till he reached Elderwood. Elaine was in the greenhouse picking an orange when he rapped on the glass. She saw him looking through at her—and he must have been a fearful sight with his clothes all rain-soaked, his hair matted on his forehead and that fierce light people found so frightened glaring in his eyes. She screamed, and a Yankee sentry heard her. Beauchamp was captured, and since he was out of uniform, a court-martial sentenced him to be hanged for a spy.

"Perhaps Elaine could have saved him. He had pleaded that his only reason for coming through the lines was to see her, but when the president of the court-martial asked her if she loved him she took one look at him and screamed out that she hated him.

"He asked as a special favor to be allowed to say good-by to her in the orangery. They put a sentinel at the door, and somehow Beauchamp overpowered him and snatched his saber from its sheath. A squad came running at the guard's alarm. That's how we have the tragedy so well authenticated, for these men saw and heard all that transpired. Beauchamp

had cut the girl's head nearly off with a single blow of the saber, and as the men arrived he was arranging her so that she lay cross-formed on the ground, with three oranges piled on her breast. He was cursing her as she lay dying.

"He cursed her with unquiet rest in the grave; forbid her to find rest or peace till she could find someone who would speak to her, notwithstanding a living man's fear of the dead, and would eat three bitter oranges from her hand. She must come singing when she appears, yet no one may hear her voice until he's spoken to her, and no one may hear the words of her song until he asks them. Until she's been invited by a living person to leave it, she must remain forever in the greenhouse where she died—"

"But why was I in peril?" Gunnarson demanded. "She didn't seem—"

The medium interrupted with a bleak smile. "You didn't let me finish. She can find rest in the grave if someone eats the oranges she gives him—but only if a person asks to hear the words of her song can she find entry into Paradise. And"—she shook her finger at him, as a teacher might admonish a dull pupil—"whoever hears the words of her song goes with her, whether it be to Paradise or torment."

"But how was it I heard her scream and saw her lying dead?" he pursued.

"Last night was the anniversary of her murder. She has to re-enact it every year just after sunset. Had you waited an hour or two she would have come to you, just as she always had."

As he rose she admonished: "Don't ever go into that dreadful house again, young man. She might inveigle you into asking her to sing that wordless song, then"—she threw her hands up in a gesture of complete finality—"please be advised by me. I know about these things."

Gunnarson paused in mid-step almost in mid-breath, upon the threshold of the library. Geraldine was in there, he knew, but until he heard the man's voice he had not known anyone was with her. She was sitting on a hassock by the fire, and her wine-red dinner dress splashed out around her on the dark-blue carpet, blending with the ever-shifting highlights from the blazing logs. Its brilliance emphasized the ivory of her arms and shoulders and the bright, metallic luster of her gleaming hair. Clive Van Ness was sitting by her. One of her hands was in his, the other rested on his arm possessively. As Chester halted at the door he heard the last words of a sentence:

"—but you don't love him, do you, Gerry?"

"Love him?" Her slow words were heavy with contempt. "I *loathe* the filthy cripple, Clive, but what are we to do? You're poor as any mouse that ever went to church; so'm I. I've been that way all my life, but I'm through with all that now. The wealthy Mrs. Gunnarson is going places, my dear. Be a good lad, and she might let you tag along. Divorce is easy these days, and I'll get a cash settlement in lieu of alimony—" Her laugh was brittle, hard as the tinkle of a shattered glass.

Gunnarson drew back a half step, flinching as from a blow. It was a little thing, that light, cruel laugh, but it had broken his heart in a thousand pieces, and torn the quivering fragments out by the roots. Everything he'd ever known or prized or hoped for lay shattered into dust about his malformed feet, and like a dreadful soundless cry five words re-echoed through the aching hollow where his heart had been: "I loathe the filthy cripple." His footsteps deadened by the thick carpet he turned and crept out of the house, like a wounded animal that seeks a place to die in solitude.

All night he limped and hobbled back and forth across his room, contending with the dreadful emptiness that had engulfed

his life. "Geraldine—Geraldine!" his pulses seemed to sound the rhythm of her name in his ears, then, like a peal of ghostly laughter roaring from the vastness of the winter sky, an answer beat upon him bludgeoned him, crushed him—"Filthy cripple—filthy cripple—I loathe the filthy cripple!"

He would put her out of his life, forget her, never think of her or see her again. "Never see her?" He chuckled with a rasping bitterness at the absurdity. Dear God, he'd see her everywhere, in shop windows, in subways, crossing streets, in passing cars! Reminders of her would come to him every time he heard the quick tap-tap of a girl's high heels, each time he caught the powder-sweet smell of an evening wrap. He'd hear her voice in every note of music, every bird's song; he'd hear the mellow ripple of her laughter—ha, her laughter—that was it! She'd laughed when she told Clive Van Ness, "I loathe the filthy cripple!"

The lavender light of early morning was just showing in the east above Jamaica Bay when he unlatched the door, crept falteringly to the garage, and set his car in motion. He had not stopped for coat or hat. No matter. What were cold or heat to him? Men shivered with the cold, or scorched with heat, and so did beasts, but he was neither beast nor man. What was it she had called him? Oh, yes, "filthy cripple."

His tires drummed against the frost-bound paving of Manhattan Bridge, lisped and swished against the icy cobbles of Canal Street, whirred and thrummed against the smooth floor of the Holland Tunnel.

He was out of Jersey City now, heading toward the elevated highway. As the lodestone draws the iron Elderwood was drawing him. He was heading southward; southward into Maryland, to Elaine.

Elderwood was silhouetted against the half-light of gathering dusk as he wheeled through the tall stone gateway. The afterglow of the sunset showed angrily behind long streaks of black clouds, as though a giant hand had been dipped in an ink-pot and drawn across the reddened sky with outspread fingers. The columns of the porch were tall pale bars that shut the prisoned dark behind them.

He was feverish with the onset of the cold he'd caught from the exposure of his headlong coatless flight, but the fever of his haste was fiercer than the febrile racing of his blood as he flung himself out of the car and clambered up the white steps of the portico.

The house was very still and quiet as he threw the front door open, it echoed small sounds hollowly, like an empty auditorium. Somehow, it seemed to wait in breathless silence, as an audience may wait the climax of a play in tense expectancy.

"Elaine!" he called as he drew back the glass doors of the orangery. "Elaine!"

Only dusk-light, hardly more transparent than a whorl of fog, was in the place. Gloom blurred the outlines of the flower-boxes, the orange trees were scarcely visible.

"Elaine!" he called again softly. "I'm here—I've come back!"

A little glow of pale, cool light, no larger than a firefly's lantern, brightened at the far end of the orangery. It spread slowly, stealing through the shadows, seeming to absorb them rather than dispell their gloom. It brightened steadily, until he saw the nodding flowers in the boxes plainly, even to the tiny veins that laced their leaves.

Then she was there. Her face seemed forming from the drooping white buds of the orange blossoms. The slim pale fingers of her hands seemed paler than the flowers on the branches, the dark green of her sleeveless low-cut silken dress seemed almost a continuation of the waxen leaves.

She came toward him slowly, with a sort of rippling, flowing motion, both her hands outstretched. And both his hands reached out to her.

Her fingers tightened on his as she smiled at him. It was as if a candle had been lit behind the sombre velvet of her eyes. Her lips became a soft, alluring curve. "My dear," she whispered in a throaty, husky voice, "I knew you would come back to me!" Then she bent and kissed him, slowly, with her hands against his cheeks, as though she drank a long-delayed draught and was savoring each drop of it.

He reeled back from the aching sweetness of her kiss. Her hands were still upon his cheeks, her face was very close to his, her eyes were luminous and dewy with the tears of pent-up yearning, shining with a rich, ripe look of promise.

"Sing to me," he besought. "I want to hear the words of your song!"

She threw her head back and sang smiling.

Her voice was soft as water gently rippling in a moonlit stream, its cadences were gently seductive, with secret rhythms astir beneath them. He heard the words and caught his breath in a quick gasp, then let it slowly out.

Nor did he ever draw it in again. Hand in hand, with her song ringing down the timeless corridors of immortality, they stepped into that strange land which is neither heaven, earth nor hell, where breathing is unnecessary, and words are fitted to all wordless songs.

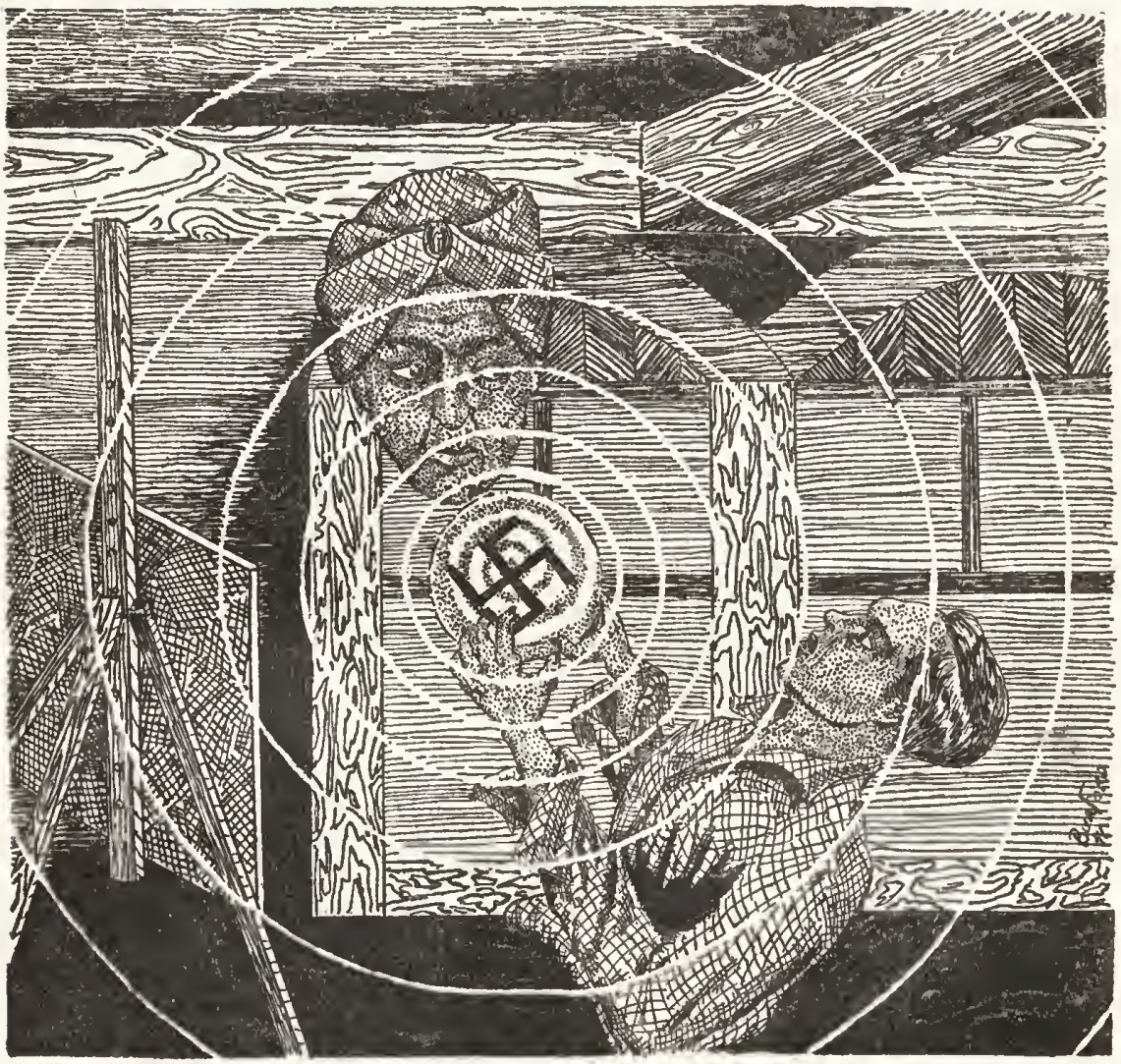
Shadows of Han

By GERALD CHAN SIEG

BENEATH the far, cold nimbus of the moon
The palace rears its crumbling, ancient walls.
Old trees lean earthward, lean and lift their boughs
Against the curving roofs at intervals.
Across deserted courts and ruined rooms
A lonely quiet falls.

Yet in the inmost room, whose door was jade,
Whose panels teak, whose floor was patterned stone,
Pale dancers clad in ghostly peacock hues
Move softly as the leaves of flowers blown.
The scent of long-gone incense fills the air,
And specter lutes make moan.

I Killed Hitler



"The familiar studio swam about me—"

By RALPH MILNE FARLEY

I SUPPOSE that I am a distant cousin of the great Dictator who holds all Europe in the hollow of his hand, and menaces the peace of the rest of the world. For I too bear the name with which he was christened—a name which he later discarded.

I have been told that my looks resemble those of my European cousin. But I always kept my hair cut short and brushed back out of my eyes, and did not descend to the inanity of copying the little trick mustache of Charley Chaplin.

I am a painter, a *real* painter, who does portraits, good ones too. It is true that my great artistic ability has not yet received, from my money-grubbing fellow-countrymen, the recognition which it deserves;

but I was on the verge of success when this accursed "emergency" put a stop to my painting.

I have always hated my European cousin. Just think!. So inferior to me in ability, and yet so famous, while I am still unknown! But this hatred was merely impersonal, until by threatening the safety of America, he brought about the enactment of the draft, and I was called to the colors.

"Selective service"—bah! What is there selective in taking a great artist, such as I, away from his work?

There are some queer eggs in the artistic and literary set which constitute most of the population of Provincetown, Massachusetts, where my studio is located. One of these queer eggs is Swami Ananda, who makes his living in devious ways by dabbling in the occult. He is quite a pal of mine—admires my art—is one of the few who does.

HE CAME over to console with me about my getting called into military service. And I damned my cousin up and down to him. Also I damned the appeasers who have treated with the Dictator.

"Each of these men missed a chance to be a world hero," I heatedly asserted. "When he conferred with the Dictator, why did he not carry a pistol concealed beneath his left armpit? Why did he not snatch it out and shoot the Dictator dead? Of course he would have immediately been torn limb to limb. But what a glorious death to die! To die like a true soldier, and thus save the lives of millions of his fellow countrymen, who must now perish in war, because the Dictator still lives. Myself perhaps included."

"Would you have done in the place of these Ambassadors what you now say you wish that he had done?" the Swami asked, with an amused twinkle in his beady eyes.

"Most assuredly."

"Would you do it now, if you had the chance?"

"Why not? It would be better than to rot in the trenches, as I now must do. And my name would be remembered forever—although, of course, I had rather be remembered as a great portrait-painter."

"Perhaps your heroic act would start a vogue for your paintings. Perhaps, when they have thus been brought to popular attention, the vogue for them would persist on their own merits."

I stared eagerly at the Swami. "You are offering me a chance to do this?" I breathed.

But Ananda shook his turbaned head. His dark eyes bore a far-away expression, and a quizzical smile hovered over the red lips half-concealed in his bushy black beard.

"No," he declared. "What is written, is written. We mortals cannot thwart Karma—fate."

"But perhaps it is written that I, the portrait-painter of Provincetown, am to rid the world of that other painter, who has now become a colossus. Life and fate hang by a slender thread. Think of the accidents which the Dictator must have narrowly escaped throughout the entire fifty years of his life. Any one of those accidents might, by the turn of a hair, have spared the world—and my art—from what we are now facing. Why could not someone have killed him when he was a child!"

"You think so?" The Swami shook his head. "Ah, no. For it is written that there must be a Dictator—not only *a* Dictator, but this particular Dictator—to rule over docile Europe, and plunge the world in war."

SUDDENLY a weird preposterous idea came to my mind. "If I could only travel backward in time," I ruminated, "I could seek out the boy, the Dictator-to-be, destroy him in advance, and thus undo all

that this world has suffered since he first began his bloody march to power. Then I could return to my art-work undisturbed, and no-one but I would know what would have been."

My mind drifted off on a time-traveling journey into the past—a dream of grandeur and glory, with myself in the role or arbiter of destiny, savior of the world. Then I realized the one flaw in the picture —fly in the ointment—was that I would never get the credit for what I had done. After that momentary glimpse of greatness, the role of "unknown soldier" did not hold much of appeal.

I sighed, thwarted.

The booming voice of Swami Ananda snapped me out of my day-dream.

"It can be done, my friend. We Hindus know many things not dreamed-of in Hamlet's philosophy."

"Will you show me how?" I cried. Once more the glory of being the man to rid the earth of the great Dictator, swam before my eyes.

"Yes," Ananda judiciously declared. "It can be done. I will help you. I will teach you how to travel backward in time. But—" he shook his turbaned head, and there was a sad distant look in his amber eyes. "—it will do no good. The world cannot be saved in that manner."

"Why not?" I demanded.

" 'Der Mensch versuche die Götter nicht'," he quoted. "It is not permitted man to tempt the Gods. What is written, is written."

"Words! Mere words!" I shouted. I was not a person to be brooked, when once I had made up my mind to a course of action. "If I can travel back to the time and place where the Dictator was a boy, why can I not kill him, and thereby prevent there ever having been this little man who now 'bestrides this narrow world like a colossus'?"

"You can travel back, yes. I shall arrange it for you. And you can kill the boy, yes. It should be surprisingly easy. You can change the past, yes. But you cannot alter the present."

"I can try!"

"Very well, try. Kill the boy, but the Gods of Karma will build up another Dictator, to take his place; for this man is but the symbol of what must be."

We ceased our arguing. Philosophic bandying of words seemed banal, when there were deeds awaiting doing. I was flushed and hot. My pulses were racing. I was eager to be gone upon my mission. Tomorrow would be too late, for I should then be in uniform.

But Ananda calmed me with uplifted hand. Although I was in no mood to be calmed, I dissembled to humor him, for I needed his help.

"We must first equip you for the journey," he explained. "To when and to where do you propose to go?"

"A certain little town in Central Europe, in the summer of 1899; for that is when and where the Dictator was a boy of ten."

"Then you will need clothes of that era, and plenty of coin of a not later date."

It was easily arranged. An appropriate costume was found in the wardrobe of our Little Theater group, and Swami Ananda produced some old Austro-Hungarian gold coins and small change. All was in readiness by evening.

WE WERE alone together in my studio, Ananda and I. From the folds of his robe, the Swami produced a small glass ball, about four inches in diameter, securely fastened to a spindle-shaped black base.

At his command, I seated myself in a deep soft chair and stared up at his penetrating dark eyes. Then as he made passes in front of my face with his slender brown hands, he droned, "Relax. Sleep. Sleep.

There is no danger. All is well. It is a difficult task to force you backward through the years, but the return will be easy, almost automatic, when the deed has been done. Now sleep. Relax."

The passes of his hands became more rapid before my blurring eyes. My ears hummed. My hammering pulses slowed. A delicious dizziness overwhelmed me. The familiar studio swam about me. A fog drifted in and obscured it.

Out of the fog came Ananda's slender brown fingers, handing to me the ball of glass.

And from far-off caverns boomed the echo of his voice, saying, "Now grasp firmly the stem of this crystal globe. Stare into its swirling depths. Concentrate on the little European village of your choice, and on the year 1899. Concentrate. Concentrate. But always subconsciously remember to retain a firm hold on the stem of the crystal ball. For that ball is your return ticket—your ticket back to now. When you have done your deed, focus your thoughts upon this studio and upon the present time, gaze into the depths of this crystal, and you shall instantly return. I shall be awaiting you. Now concentrate. Concentrate for your space-time journey!"

I took the globe from his hand. With every remaining effort of my will, I stared into its depths and pictured to myself the boyhood home of the little child who was destined to set the world aflame—that is, if I did not prevent him.

Complete darkness engulfed me, and I fell—or, rather, drifted—backward, down, down, down, to the beating of ever loudening drums.

VOICES around me. Voices speaking a Central European dialect: "The tourist gentleman has fallen. He appears to have fainted. Quick Frau Mueller, fetch some water."

I opened my eyes. I was seated on the grass in the square of a quaint foreign village. A young man in peasant costume was kneeling beside me, his arm supporting my shoulders. Quite a crowd had gathered.

A portly woman bustled up carrying a stein of water. The young peasant took it, and held it to my lips. I took a deep draught, and shook my head vigorously to clear the cobwebs out of my brain.

"What—village—is—this?" I asked, hardly daring to hope.

They named the village for which I had set out.

My pulses raced.

"And what year is it?"

"Hear him! He asks the *year,* rather than the *date.* It is 1899, of course."

Calming myself with an effort, which I am sure could not have been successfully made by a lesser man than I, I arose to my feet.

"I am a traveler from America," I explained. "The heat has been too much for me. You are all very kind, my friends." I stared around the square. A nearby store was marked "Mueller's Delicatessen"; it seemed to have spacious quarters above. So I asked the good lady who had brought me the water, "Frau Mueller, have you rooms to rent?"

Her bland face contracted into a slight scowl, until I fished in my pockets and produced a gold mark. Then she beamed and nodded, with a: "Ja! Ja!" And soon I was ensconced in a comfortable room on the second story, overlooking the village square. I made a few necessary purchases, and then sat in my diamond-paned window and waited.

Later in the afternoon the square filled with children. Instantly I noticed one dirty, disheveled, snarling, whining, schnitfaced brat, playing half-heartedly by himself. From the black looks which he gave the other boys from time to time, it was evident that he hated them—considered

them to be conspiring to oppress him. And from the furtive glances which they occasionally cast back in his direction, it was evident that they instinctively disliked him —perhaps even feared him somewhat.

Going downstairs into the shop, I pointed him out to Frau Mueller, and inquired as to his identity.

With a sniff and a snort, she mentioned a name the same as mine.

Although I had instinctively known that it was he, my pulses quicked at this confirmation. I hastened out into the street, and approached my prospective victim.

"My lad," I said, "Can you direct me to the Convent?" For I remembered that at this stage of his life, the great Dictator had been a choir singer—of all things!

He eyed me furtively, appraisingly. "Why should I!" he growled.

I held out a small coin. Instantly his manner became subservient and ingratiating.

"Oh, most certainly, Herr—?"

"Smith," I added. It was the English name which I had given to my plump landlady.

The next several days I devoted to trying to win the confidence of the little lad, but it proved very difficult to get under his hide. He was one of those "souls like stars, that dwell alone in a fellowless firmament."

Not only was it necessary to become intimate with him, so that I might find a chance to lure him somewhere where I could murder him and make a safe getaway, but also I was intrigued by this opportunity to study the beginnings of the man who was destined some day to have the whole world by the tail. No—that was not right. Rather the man who, *but for me,* would *have had* the whole world by the tail.

Almost unlimited time was at my disposal. The only restriction was the extent of my funds, and the danger that the local Politzei might think to ask for my non-existent passport. Dumkopfs that they were, they had doubtless assumed that I must have had one in order to get thus far into their country; and, so long as I paid my bills, created no disturbance, and kept as inconspicuous as possible, the question might not come up. Still, there was always the possibility.

As the days passed by, some imp of perversity—perhaps the actor in me that went hand in hand with the artist—led me not to shave the center of my upper lip, led me to let my hair grow long. It would add to the irony of fate, for the slayer of this little lad to resemble that which he was now destined never to live to be.

AS I studied the unattractive brat—tried to worm my way into his confidence by bribery with small coins—I could not help growing to admire him. Here he was, a ragged nobody, son of a ne'erdowell, who did not know his rightful name. Hated and mistrusted by all the other boys, and hating them and the world in turn. Anyone who could build on that quicksand foundation the pillars of a great empire was deserving of respect.

The little fellow had a keen mind, and a retentive memory. He asked innumerable, and very intelligent questions about America. My America—damn it—the country that refused to recognize my art. The boy had a real appreciation for finer things, for he instinctively recognized my ability—even treasured some gloomy little sketches which I made for him. Almost was I tempted to let him live, let him overrun the world, until I remembered how his War had disrupted my peaceful life and had interrupted my incipient career.

So for my own sake, much as I had grown to admire him, the boy must die, so that the man would never come into being. For I saw in him the possibility of some day perhaps becoming even a greater

artist than I—and I resented this intrusion into my own exclusive field.

At last my opportunity came. By promises of a painting lesson, I lured him to a picnic in the woods. And there I wrung his little neck.

The boy was dead. Now he would never grow up to bestride the world. I had saved our generation from a useless, pointless massacre. Europe would be free. America would be free. And, what was more to the point, I myself would be free—free to return to my quiet seashore life, and my beloved canvases.

My first reaction was that of personal triumph. I, a mere obscure American painter, had overcome the greatest Dictator in the history of mankind. And why not? Given the opportunity, even I might have been a greater Dictator than my cousin.

At no stage did I feel any compunction at the deed. Something of my cousin's own conscienceless fixity of purpose had been contagiously bred in me by our close association together.

And I had not the least fear of any reprisals. No Politzeidiener could arrest me and hold me for the murder of this little boy; for long before the crime could possibly be discovered I would be forty years and half the width of the world away. All that I would have to do, in order to make good my escape, would be to return to my rooms over Frau Mueller's delicatessen shop, grasp my crystal gazing-globe firmly in my hands, concentrate on my studio, and on Swami Ananda there awaiting me. That is, if my "return ticket," the globe, were still there.

Horrors! Suppose something had happened to it in my absence. Cold sweat broke out on my forehead, as—not waiting even to cover the twisted little body with leaves—I turned from the grove where we had been lunching, and rushed headlong, panting, back to my room on the village square.

What a relief to find the crystal globe still in the closet in my quarters! With trembling hands I seized it and sank into a chair.

A step on the stairs—it might be the police, even now coming to arrest me for the murder of a child.

I gazed fixedly into the crystal depths. I concentrated on my studio and Swami Ananda.

Inasmuch as I am a painter—and a very realistic one, I believe—my memory is a vivid pictorial one. In the swirling interior of the glass globe I could actually see the tapestry-draped walls of my work-room, my canvases standing on their easels and stacked along the walls, and the turbaned swarthy visage of my Hindu friend, nodding and smiling at me. The lips beneath his thick black beard were moving. There was an inscrutable something in his smile, as though he were mocking me.

His parting words, on the eve of my journey back into time, flashed into my memory.

"You can change the past, yes. But you cannot thereby alter the present."

We should see! I had nipped the Dictator in the bud. It was inconceivable that a *dead* man could ever rise to power. I squared my shoulders, with supreme confidence that I had saved the world and my career as a painter.

I began to sway, and a dizziness engulfed me, exactly as the time before. But this time, as the waves of darkness swept over me, I fell forward rather than backward.

My last reeling thought was to wonder what the Chancellory in Europe's capital city would be like without the Dictator, whom I had prevented from ever existing.

I relaxed my grip on the stem of the gazing globe. I should need it no more, for I was going home, my mission accomplished.

GRADUALLY the light returned. I blinked my eyes and stared around me.

I was standing in an ornate salon. Facing me stood three men. One was a massive fat individual with beaming face. He was immaculately clad in a perfectly tailored uniform. The second was a ferret-faced fellow, short and slim, with one clubbed foot. The third was a suave and gentlemanly appearing personage, a typical high-class salesman.

In unison they raised their right arms aloft as they intoned the words, Heil to our Fuehrer." Instinctively I raised my own hand and replied, "Heil."

"What are the wishes of the Fuehrer?" the resplendently uniformed fat man inquired in an oily tone.

My eyes narrowed, and I set my jaw.

"My patience is exhausted," I replied. "At dawn tomorrow we launch our armadas against America. That corrupt, treacherous, democratic country must be crushed. America has refused to recognize my greatness. And when, by my efforts, my people have resumed their rightful place in the sun, have won their Lebensraum, I shall retire, amid the plaudits of a grateful world to which I have at last given peace—the only permanent peace, peace of the sword. Then I shall resume my paintings. I have always wanted to paint. I had rather be known by posterity as one of the world's greatest painters, than even as the savior of my beloved country."

My fat friend opened his mouth as though to register an objection, but I silenced him with one flash from my blue-gray eyes. He closed his lips and bowed meekly.

The interview was over.

"Heil, Hitler!"

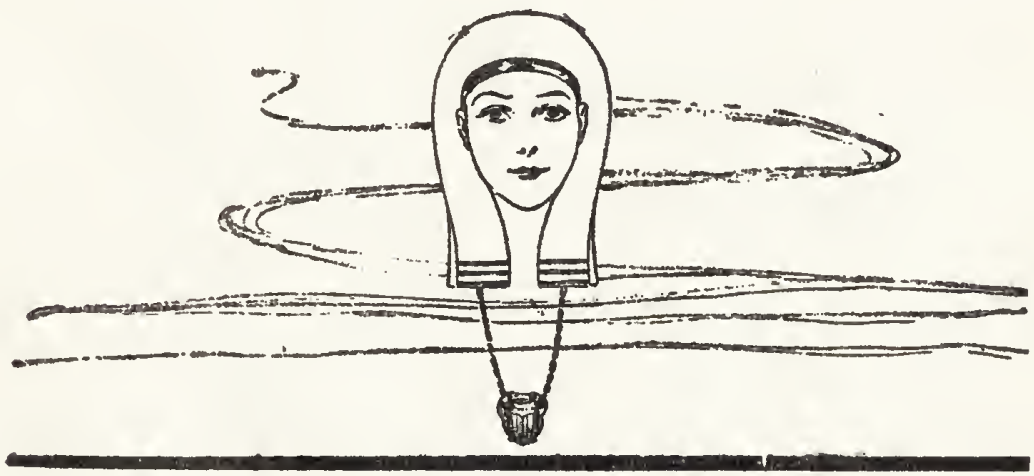
"Heil!"

The three backed out of the audience chamber. I was alone.

The reaction to my moment of exaltation came. Suppose our assault on the Americas should fail. Suppose the scorned democracies should hold firm.

Well, if worst came to worst, I could flee, as the last of the Kaisers had done before me. And there would still remain my beloved painting. I was young yet. I could still startle the world with my masterpieces.

Alone in my chancellory, I raised my arm aloft, and shouted: "Deutchland über alles! Hitler über Deutchland! Heil Hitler!"



If you should speak in the woods of Amasookit, your words are clothed with flesh and blood. So the Indians believed. . . .

It All Came True in the Woods

By MANLY WADE WELLMAN

When the Horror passing speech
Hunted us along,
Each laid hold on each, and each
Found the other strong.
In the teeth of things forbid
And reason overthrown,
Helen stood by me, she did,
Helen all alone.

—Rudyard Kipling

HELEN took long steps to keep up with her father. Her chubby face, solemn in its pointed blue hood, turned up to him. "What are these woods called, Daddy?" she asked for the fifth time.

"The Indians called them A-ma-soo-kit," Clay said patiently, blowing out blue smoke on the brisk autumn air. "Can't you remember, Helen? You're six now, and you recited 'Horatius' for the people at the cabin last night."

" 'Horatius' is easy," Helen explained, as her short legs in ski-pants made hoppy

haste to stay beside her father. "A-ma-soo-kit," and she achieved it at last, "is not. That's foreign." She was silent, catching her breath, and Clay slowed to a saunter.

No sense in wearing the child out, and the walk along this trail was too beautiful to hurry, anyway; the brush that fenced them in on either hand offered every fall tint that was richest and brightest—lemon, peach, orange, scarlet, royal purple. As for the trees of the wood, taller and more distant, they might have been a sea-floor garden with their welters of warm red and gold clumped on their boughs.

"No, it isn't foreign, Helen," laughed Clay. "Why, the Indians were the first Americans—they lived here for ages before our people ever thought about the *Mayflower.*"

"Before George Washington?" That was Helen's ultimate conception of antiquity.

"Ever so long before. They had a right to name these woods."

"What does the name mean, Daddy?"

Clay drew on his pipe. It was a favorite of his, a big-bowled English briar. Quite a time would pass, he mused, before he'd be buying any more pipes in England, what with the war and all—Helen was tugging at his hand to hurry the answer. "Why, I've told you that, too," he reminded. "A-ma-soo-kit—the Trees of Truth. Because the Indians believed that any words spoken here came true."

"Oooo!" Helen was again intrigued. She liked outings of any kind, and had danced when her parents took the cabin on the edge of this forest reserve for fall weekends. Now, if the place had a story attached—"All words come true," she repeated with relish. "You mean, like fairies and dwarfs?"

"Exactly," nodded Clay with the utmost gravity. Imaginative himself, he encouraged when he could any romancing his little daughter might attempt. "Fairies and dwarfs."

"Oooo!" squealed Helen again, and glanced around searchingly. "Daddy, there was a dwarf right there—with a long beard and a red cap—peeking out from under that bush."

She pointed excitedly. Clay smiled down at her, and led the way around a bend of the trail. The shrubbery was thicker here, and its coloring even richer. Moss made the earth green under their boot-soles.

"It was something to see, then," Clay remarked, still grave. He knew some parents, and despised them, who would call any child who claimed to see dwarfs a liar. But Clay remembered his own childhood, the vividness of his games and imaginings.

Helen put her hands in her jacket pockets, imitating her father. "Are there witches here too?" she pursued her inquiries.

"Mmmmm—no." Her father would like to rule such thoughts out, ever since a night of awful dreams after Betty had heard some Hallowe'en tales. "Whatever witches there were in this country got driven away by Cotton Mather, you know."

"Is Cotton Mather here?" she asked at once.

"Cotton Mather is in heaven," said Clay. "Let's stop while Daddy fills his pipe."

Waiting, Helen glanced up at the half-hazy sky, as though she expected to see the old Puritan divine look out at her, dwarf fashion. "Well," she said, "are there giants in these woods?"

Tamping down the tobacco in the bowl, Clay held a match to it. He shrugged in defeat—what can you do with kids? They simply throve on stories of excitement and danger and terror. He and Mrs. Clay had tried to hold Helen down to gentle fantasies like Peter Rabbit, but Helen's taste ran stubbornly to Red Riding Hood's wolf and even grimmer gentry. It came to Clay that in keeping the stories mild he might

be frustrating an instinct. That would be bad—what did J. G. Fraser have to say about such childhood tastes? Or Irvin S. Cobb? Or Freud? Clay decided not to deprive Helen further of giants. Bad dreams tonight would be on his own head.

"OH, YES, indeed," he nodded. "The Trees of Truth would be full of giants. Big ones."

"Bigger than you?" suggested Helen, who considered her father to be of tremendous stature.

"Much bigger, darling. And bigger than Uncle Frank, or the football boys you saw last week. Twice—three or four times as big. Taller than those trees yonder."

Helen glanced at the trees, and shivered. "How many eyes do they have?" she almost whispered.

"Only one eye apiece," improvised Clay promptly, remembering the Cyclops who imprisoned Ulysses. "One eye in the middle of the forehead. But, on the other hand, they have each two or three rows of teeth—sometimes more, and as sharp as swords. And shaggy beards."

She glanced over her shoulder at the trees, and grew pale.

"I'm afraid of them," she said.

But Clay had been thinking hard and fast, to deal with just such a contingency. "Don't worry," he told her. "The giants can't hurt us—not when Daddy smokes this magic pipe all the way from England." He blew out a great cloud of blue vapor by way of punctuation. Because giants are afraid of it."

"Really truly?" And Helen squinted hopefully at the pipe.

"Oh, yes. Terribly afraid. They'd never dare come near enough to touch us." Clay began to mix in fragments of half-forgotten Indian lore, learned a generation ago in Boy Scout camp. "You see, the old Indians used tobacco for a charm. Their medicine men smoked it to drive away bad things—spirits and witches and so on. Giants are bad things, just about the worst. They hate the smell of tobacco. Especially," and he exhaled a bigger cloud, "when it's in a magic pipe, like Daddy's."

Helen glanced at the trees once more, but not pallidly this time. Her chin was squared.

"Well, then, I won't be afraid of those old giants over there," she announced sturdily.

At her games again, thought Clay. "Good girl!" he applauded. "Let's sit down here, on this nice soft rock, and I'll tell you more things."

He had meant to turn the conversation to the autumn colors of the leaves, discussing them in simple terms Helen's six-year-old mind might digest. But, as she took a seat beside him, she had no such idea.

"What do giants wear, Daddy?" she continued on the subject which just now preoccupied her.

"They wear skins," he smiled down at her. "Deerskins and bearskins, sewed together like patchwork, to make a piece big enough to cover them."

Her eyes were still fixed on the middle distance beyond the brush. "What kind of shoes?"

"No shoes, of course. Their feet are too big for shoes, aren't they now?"

"I suppose so," agreed Helen seriously. "I can't see their feet from here— What do giants eat?"

"Men," said Clay impressively.

"Men who don't have magic pipes?"

"Yes." To comfort her, Clay blew smoke. "Nobody had better come among the giants without tobacco."

"They look scared," announced Helen, and stood up as if to get a better view of something. "Look at them, Daddy."

"Yes, yes, you're right," nodded Clay, stooping to pick up a very brilliant maple leaf. "Now, take this to Mummy when

we get back, dear. Say that it's a souvenir of this walk in the woods."

"You're not looking, Daddy. Not looking at the giants." Helen was pointing insistently.

To fall in with her humor, Clay lifted his head and looked.

THERE were three of them, and not more than thirty yards away, taller than the topmost branches of the gorgeous red-and-gold trees.

Clay could see them from the waist upward, above the thick trailside brush—lumpy, hairy, skin-clad, like the ugliest of colossal statutes come to life. Two had beards—one black, the other grizzled and blond—and the third wore long gun braids hanging like lengths of cable at either side of a gross, hairless face the width of a bureau.

So Helen had not been imagining giants, after all.

In the back of a brain that throbbed and whirled, Clay fenced off a tiny corner for what sensible thoughts he could summon. No time now, he told himself, to wonder how or why. The necessity was to get away—get Helen away, at least. Without rising from where he sat, he caught Helen's shoulder and pressed her back and back, sliding her off the stone.

"Darling," he said, wondering why his voice remained steady, "there are bushes near us. Crawl under them. Far under. If there are thorny branches, get under those. Don't move or make a noise, until Daddy has made those—those things go away from here. When you can't see or hear them any more, get up and run back along this trail we came. Get to the cabin. Once you start running, don't stop—"

He heard the dry leaves rustle as she silently obeyed. She was doing her part. Now he must do his.

Springing up suddenly, as high into the air as he could, he flourished both arms over his head. At the top of his voice he yelled:

"Hi! Hi! Hi!"

From his gaping mouth the pipe dropped, bouncing on the mossy ground beside the rock. Clay turned and ran his fastest down trail.

At almost the same moment he heard a mighty crashing, as of elephants among the timber. He permitted himself one backward look. The three great towers of flesh had sprung through the brushy hedge and were lumbering after him. All three. None had paused to hunt for Helen.

He felt a thrill of elation. Thus the parent partridge saves its hidden young—by diverting danger and pursuit after itself. He flourished his arms and yelled again. Then he saved his breath for running.

No use.

Their legs were longer than his entire body. One of their strides made four of his. Behind, then above, he heard a furnacelike panting. A grip fastened upon him—fingers as long as his arms. He was lifted from the ground in mid-career. The air rang with a deep stormy growl—a concert of prodigious laughter.

After one convulsive struggle, like a chicken in the jaws of a fox, Clay made himself go slack. He might have a chance later, had best save his strength for that. If there was no chance, a doomed man should have dignity— The three gathered and exulted grossly over him, the two giants and the giantess. To them he was smaller than Helen would be to him like a doll or a baby. He saw at close hand their eyes—each had but the one, deep set in the middle of the low forehead—as large as tennis balls; their mouths like open satchels, all studded inside with rows of pointed sharky teeth; their hairiness, their patchwork skin garments, their bare feet like toe-fringed bolsters. Dangling in mid-air, Clay recognized his own handiwork.

Among the A-ma-soo-kit, the Trees of Truth, any spoken word became fact. The idle improvisations of a father diverting his little one had taken shape, flesh, life.

The one who held him was the oldest, with a mat of buckskin beard turning gray. Some of his myriad teeth were broken. This captor grunted to the younger blackbeard and the terrible woman-mountain with the braids. The dark giant drew from his girdle-thong a stone knife as long as a scythe, with which he began to whittle.

First he uprooted a cedar sapling, and pared away its branches with powerful slashing digs of his blade. Then he sharpened the tip, like a pencil. Beside the trail lay a fallen trunk of pine, dead and beginning to rot. Setting down his pole, the young giant caught this log in his huge hands and with a single humping of his muscles wrenched it in two lengthwise. Kneeling, he set the sharpened point of cedar upon the exposed inside of one slab, and began twirling the stake briskly between his palms.

Thus spun, the point drilled a hole. Wood meal crawled out. It smoked from the friction, glowed. The giantess, with a fistful of shredded bark, evoked a flame that greatened and put forth smudge—fire made by rubbing sticks. Fire for what?

Beneath big skilful hands the fuel quickly caught. The flames grew and climbed. The grizzled monster that held Clay nodded his big bushy head in approval. It was a cooking fire.

His huge captor lifted him. The cedar point turned toward his stomach. The other two giants watched with relish, and the tongue of the giantess, like a red banner, came into view to moisten her lips.

This, Clay thought with the corner of his brain kept sensible, was an end that nobody would ever believe. He would never be seen again. Helen, back at the cabin, would tell a story that would not make sense. Even if searchers found his bones, stripped and crushed—

"You let my Daddy alone!" commanded someone close at hand.

THE voice was young, shrill and indignant. Clay bracing himself to feel the crushing impalement of the cedar stake, knew that voice, and in despair counted his sacrifice as useless—Helen hadn't hidden, hadn't escaped. She had followed his abhorrent captors, was coming among them.

"Let him alone," she was repeating, "or I'll—" There was deadly, confident menace in her little-girl voice.

The grizzled giant lowered both his hands, with the spit in one and Clay in the other.

His huge single eyes widened and protruded grossly. The firelight made it gleam like a very nasty jewel. The fulvid tangle of beard parted, the open mouth writhed over the rows of broken fangs.

Clay managed to turn his head as he hung in the prisoning grip.

He had never realized how small Helen was, how frail. She seemed barely as long as any one of the great bare feet among which she had planted herself. Her arms were set akimbo, her head flung back so that the hood drooped from it, her eyes glittered. So Clay had seen her often before, when her young temper was up. Only one thing was really strange about Helen.

In a corner of her mouth, clamped tight between her six-year molars, rode the English briar pipe he had dropped. Above and around Helen's ruffled hair whirled a wreath of tobacco smoke. Even as he saw all this, she puffed out a bigger, bluer cloud.

"Why did you—" Clay tried to begin, but no words came. He was done for, unable to move or speak. Helen looked, not at him, but at the giants.

"I guess I'll show you!" she squealed at the three staring hulks, just as she might

have defied the biggest and roughest boy in her school.

One giant, the black-bearded one that seemed youngest, was first to move. Very raptly he lifted one foot and set it down again, well behind the other. Then he retreated a second pace. A third. The giantess, who had crouched to blow upon the fire, also moved backward on all fours, rather like a tremendous and revolting crab. Helen favored these fugitives with no more than a flick of her bright eyes. She wheeled toward the grizzled one who still stood his ground, holding Clay like a trapped frog.

Rising on tiptoe, Helen hooked one hand in her father's trouser-cuff. "You put him down," she ordered terribly, "or I'll blow some more smoke, and you'll wish you had."

She suited action to word.

Above Clay sounded a great hacking cry, as the giant choked and strangled. He felt himself released, falling heavily to the ground. The odor of burning tobacco smote his nostrils. He heard the heaviest of feet scrambling and stumbling away. He heard Helen laugh, in harsh triumph, as Deborah might have laughed over the fall of Sisera's army.

"They're gone, Daddy," she said brightly. "You shouldn't have dropped your pipe in the first place. But I remembered—giants hate tobacco. I came to save you."

Mist swallowed Clay and he fainted gratefully.

When he awoke, Helen was sitting beside the great dying fire, quite unconcerned. "Did you have a nice sleep?" she asked.

He rose on his elbow. "How long was I like that?"

"Not very long. About five minutes, I guess." She offered him his pipe. "It didn't make me sick a bit."

Clay got up, shakily. Helen took his hand, as though it represented to her the surest pledge of safety. They turned homeward on the trail. "Helen," he said, "what has happened today? Before I—slept?"

"Oh, you mean about those giants? Why, just what you said." She looked up at him with a little wonder that he should not be sure.

Then it had been true, among the Trees of Truth. She, too, had seen and known. "Helen, how were they driven away?"

"With the magic pipe, Daddy. "You know. I smoked it."

This as carefully and clearly as though she were the adult speaking to the child. "Why, Helen," he said, "this isn't a ma—"

Then he broke off. Better to be careful about talking away any protection. He asked another question. "You weren't afraid?"

"Not with the magic pipe. You told me they hated it. And everything comes true in these woods—whether it's about giants or pipes."

Clay agreed in his heart that it was a thing not to be explained—only to tremble over his whole life long. Helen was more fortunate. Six years old in a world of wonders and importance, to her three hungry giants were no more wondrous or important than many another thing.

"Don't tell Mummy about this, Helen," he said. "We'll have it for our secret."

She smiled and nodded, pleased by the word "secret." Clay felt better. That would help matters now. Some time when she was older, and mentioned the business as a childhood memory, he could get her to agree that it was a dream—grotesque, frightening, but only a dream.

"Daddy," said the little girl, "are there squirrels here, too? Because I think I see one."

The Case of Charles Dexter Ward

By H. P. LOVECRAFT

SECOND PART OF TWO

"Last Of The Lovecrafts"

WHAT WENT BEFORE IN THIS STUPENDOUS LOVECRAFT NOVEL

QUITE recently there disappeared—from a private mental hospital near Providence, Rhode Island—a certain rather unusual young man. His name is (or perhaps, more correctly, was) Charles Dexter Ward. Only twenty-six years of age, the patient seemed strangely older, and displayed a number of physical characteristics which left medical science completely baffled.

Charles Ward's madness was of a most unusual type. An antiquarian since infancy, his knowledge of the 18th century had become simply stupendous, and of a kind possible only to someone who had in actual fact *lived* in those times; which was, of course, impossible, for Charles was born in 1902.

This unwholesome insight into the 18th century he took great pains to conceal, and seemed to have wholly lost his taste for antiquarian delvings. Instead he showed an avid interest in ordinary 20th century matters, absorbing greedily all the contemporary knowledge upon which he could lay his hands.

His escape from Dr. Waite's hospital was itself practically a miracle—certainly an almost insoluble mystery. Charles disappeared immediately after a conversation with his family doctor; and he has never been seen since. His window opened onto a sheer drop of sixty feet—an ascent which the most accomplished cat burglar would give up as a bad job, and which even a fly would hesitate to climb. And yet the window was the only possible exit. Those who came to look for him found a cloud of fine bluish-gray dust—and nothing more.

Charles' troubles began when he discovered through old documents and letters that a certain unsavory gentleman of the 18th century (and if the truth be told, also of the 17th)—one Joseph Curwen—was his ancestor. Curwen's neighbors whispered that he would never die, and at an age which must have been well over a hundred, he married an eighteen year old girl. To this blasphemous alliance Charles owed his descent.

In the vast grim catacombs that lay deep beneath his lonely farmhouse on the moors beyond Providence, Curwen conducted unspeakably horrible experiments and rites of nameless and inconceivable obscenity, fast becoming a scandal and a terror to the entire district. A few influential men kept him under observation, and planned to rid the world of the unutterably frightful old man. One night they raided his farmhouse. The venture was apparently successful, for Curwen disappeared.

So, for a time at least, the earth was free of Joseph Curwen. But had the raiders only driven him into another world, and would men be able to keep him there? What is the next thing to happen after the portrait of the horrible old man is found scattered on the floor—in a thin coating of "fine bluish-gray dust"? The answers are waiting for you in this final instalment.

"These cases of Vampirism involved victims of every age and type."

4. A Mutation and a Madness

IN THE week following that memorable Good Friday, Charles Ward was seen more often than usual, and was continually carrying books between his library and the attic laboratory. His actions were quiet and rational, but he had a furtive, hunted look which his mother did not like, and developed an incredibly ravenous appetite as gauged by his demands upon the cook.

Dr. Willette had been told of those Friday noises and happenings, and on the following Tuesday had a long conversation with the youth in the library where the picture stared no more. The interview, as always, inconclusive; but Willett is still ready to swear that the youth was sane and himself at the time. He held out promises of an early revelation, and spoke of the need of securing a laboratory elsewhere. At the loss of the portrait he grieved singularly little considering his first enthusiasm over it, but seemed to find something of positive humor in its sudden crumbling.

About the second week Charles began to be absent from the house for long periods, and one day when good old black Hannah came to help with the spring cleaning she mentioned his frequent visits to the old house in Olney Court, where he would come with a large valise and perform curious delvings in the cellar. He was always very liberal to her and to old Asa, but seemed more worried than he used to be; which grieved her very much, since she had watched him grow up from birth.

Another report of his doings came from Pawtuxet, where some friends of the family saw him at a distance a surprising number of times. He seemed to haunt the resort and canoe-house of Rhodes-on-the-Pawtuxet, and subsequent inquiries by Dr. Willett at that place brought out the fact that his purpose was always to secure access to the rather hedged-in river-bank, along which he would walk toward the north, usually not reappearing for a very long while.

Later in May came a momentary revival of ritualistic sounds in the attic laboratory which brought a stern reproof from Mr. Ward and a somewhat distracted promise of amendment from Charles. It occurred one morning, and seemed to form a resumption of the imaginary conversation noted on that turbulent Good Friday. The youth was arguing or remonstrating hotly with himself, for there suddenly burst forth a perfectly distinguishable series of clashing shouts in differentiated tones like alternate demands and denials, which caused Mrs. Ward to run upstairs and listen at the door. She could hear no more than a fragment whose only plain words were "must have it red for three months," and upon her knocking all sounds ceased at once. When Charles was later questioned by his father he said that there were certain conflicts of spheres of consciousness which only great skill could avoid, but which he would try to transfer to other realms.

About the middle of June a queer nocturnal incident occurred. In the early evening there had been some noise and thumping in the laboratory upstairs, and Mr. Ward was on the point of investigating when it suddenly quieted down. That midnight, after the family had retired, the butler was nightlocking the front door when according to his statement Charles appeared somewhat blunderingly and uncertainly at the foot of the stairs with a large suitcase and made signs that he wished egress. The youth spoke no word, but the worthy Yorkshireman caught one sight of his fevered eyes and trembled causelessly. He opened the door and young Ward went out, but in the morning he presented his resignation to Mrs. Ward. There was, he said, something unholy in the glance Charles had fixed on him. It was no way for a young gentleman to look at an honest person, and

he could not possibly stay another night. Mrs. Ward allowed the man to depart, but she did not value his statement highly. To fancy Charles in a savage state that night was quite ridiculous, for as long as she had remained awake she had heard faint sounds from the laboratory above; sounds as if of sobbing and pacing, and of a sighing which told only of despair's profoundest depths. Mrs. Ward had grown used to listening for sounds in the night, for the mystery of her son was fast driving all else from her mind.

The next evening, much as on another evening nearly three months before, Charles Ward seized the newspaper very early and accidentally lost the main section. This matter was not recalled till later, when Dr. Willett began checking up loose ends and searching out missing links here and there. In the *Journal* office he found the section which Charles had lost, and marked two items as of possible significance. They were as follows:

More Cemetery Delving

It was this morning discovered by Robert Hart, night watchman at the North Burial ground, that ghouls were again at work in the ancient portion of the cemetery. The grave of Ezra Weeden, who was born in 1740 and died in 1824 according to his uprooted and savagely splintered slate headstone, was found excavated and rifled, the work being evidently done with a spade stolen from an adjacent tool shed.

Whatever the contents may have been after more than a century of burial, all was gone except a few slivers of decayed wood. There were no wheel tracks, but the police have measured a single set of footprints which they found in the vicinity, and which indicate the boots of a man of refinement.

Hart is inclined to link this incident with the digging discovered last March, when a party in a motor truck were frightened away after making a deep excavation; but Sergeant Riley of the Second Station discounts this theory and points to vital differences in the two cases. In March the digging had been in a spot where no grave was known; but this time a well-marked and cared-for grave had been rifled with every evidence of deliberate purpose and with a conscious malignity expressed in the splintering of the slab which had been intact up to the day before.

Members of the Weeden family, notified of the happening, expresed their astonishment and regret; and were wholly unable to think of any enemy who would care to violate the grave of their ancestor. Hazard Weeden of 598 Angell Street recalls a family legend according to which Ezra Weeden was involved in some very peculiar circumstances, not dishonourable to himself, shortly before the Revolution; but of any modern feud or mystery he is frankly ignorant. Inspector Cunningham has been assigned to the case, and hopes to uncover some valuable clues in the near future.

Dogs Noisy in Pawtuxet

Resident of Pawtuxet were aroused about three A.M. today by a phenomenal baying of dogs which seemed to centre near the river just north of Rhodes-on-the-Pawtuxet. The volume and quality of the howling were unusually odd, according to most who heard it; and Fred Lemdin, night watchman at Rhodes, declares it was mixed with something very like the shrieks of a man in mortal terror and agony. A sharp and very brief thunderstorm, which seemed to strike somewhere near the bank of the river, put an end to the disturbance. Strange and unpleasant odours, probably from the oil tanks along the bay, are popularly linked with this incident; and may have had their share in exciting the dogs.

The aspect of Charles now became very haggard and hunted, and all agree in retrospect that he may have wished at this period to make some statement or confession from which sheer terror withheld him. The morbid listening of his mother in the night brought out the fact that he made frequent sallies abroad under cover of darkness, and most of the more academic alienists unite at present in charging him with the revolting cases of vampirism which the press so sentationally reported about this time, but which have not yet been definitely traced to any known perpetrator. These cases, too recent and celebrated to need detailed mention, involved victims of every age and type and seemed to cluster around two distinct localities; the residential hill and the North End, near the Ward home, and the suburban districts across the Cranston line near Pawtuxet. Both late wayfarers and sleepers with open windows were attacked, and

those who lived to tell the tale spoke unanimously of a lean, lithe, leaping monster with burning eyes which fastened its teeth in the throat or upper arm and feasted ravenously.

Dr. Willett, who refuses to date the madness of Charles Ward as far back as even this, is cautious in attempting to explain these horrors. He has, he declares, certain theories of his own; and limits his positive statements to a peculiar kind of negation. "I will not," he says, "state who or what I believe perpetrated these attacks and murders, but I will declare that Charles Ward was innocent of them. I have reason to be sure he was ignorant of the taste of blood, as indeed his continued anaemic decline and increasing pallor prove better than any verbal argument. Ward meddled with terrible things, but he has paid for it, and he was never a monster or a villain.

"As for now, I don't like to think. A change came, and I'm content to believe that the old Charles Ward died with it. His soul did, anyhow, for that mad flesh that vanished from Waite's hospital had another."

Willett speaks with authority, for he was often at the Ward home attending Mrs. Ward, whose nerves had begun to snap under the strain. Her nocturnal listening had bred some morbid hallucinations which she confided to the doctor with hesitancy, and which he ridiculed in talking to her, although they made him ponder deeply when alone. These delusions always concerned the faint sounds which she fancied she heard in the attic laboratory and bedroom, and emphasized the occurrence of muffled sighs and sobbings at the most impossible times. Early in July Willett ordered Mrs. Ward to Atlantic City for an indefinite recuperative sojourn, and cautioned both Mr. Ward and the haggard and elusive Charles to write her only cheering letters. It is probably to this enforced and reluctant escape that she owes her life and continued sanity.

NOT long after his mother's departure Charles Ward began negotiating for the Pawtuxet bungalow. It was a squalid little wooden edifice with a concrete garage, perched high on the sparsely settled bank of the river slightly above Rhodes, but for some odd reason the youth would have nothing else. He gave the real-estate agencies no peace till one of them secured it for him at an exorbitant price from a somewhat reluctant owner, and as soon as it was vacant he took possession under cover of darkness, transporting in a great closed van the entire contents of his attic laboratory, including the books both weird and modern which he had borrowed from his study. He had this van loaded in the black small hours, and his father recalls only a drowsy realization of stifled oaths and stamping feet on the night the goods were taken away. After that Charles moved back to his own old quarters on the third floor, and never haunted the attic again.

To the Pawtuxet bungalow Charles transferred all the secrecy with which he had surrounded his attic realm, save that he now appeared to have two sharers of his mysteries; a villainous-looking Portuguese half-caste from the South Main Street Waterfront who acted as a servant, and a thin scholarly stranger with dark glasses and a stubbly full beard of dyed aspect whose status was evidently that of a colleague. Neighbors vainly tried to engage these odd persons in conversation. The mulatto, Gomes, spoke very little English, and the bearded man who gave his name as Dr. Allen voluntarily followed his example. Ward himself tried to be more effable, but succeeded only in provoking curiosity with his rambling accounts of chemical research. Before long queer tales began to circulate regarding the all-night burning of lights; and somewhat later,

after this burning had suddenly ceased, there rose still queerer tales of disproportionate orders of meat from the butcher's and of the muffled shouting, declamation, rhythmic chanting, and screaming supposed to come from some very deep cellar below the place. Most distinctly the new and strange household was bitterly disliked by the honest bourgeoisie of the vicinity, and it is not remarkable that dark hints were advanced connecting the hated establishment with the current epidemic of vampiristic attacks and murders; especially since the radius of that plague seemed now confined wholly to Pawtuxet and the adjacent streets of Edgewood.

Ward spent most of his time at the bungalow, but slept occasionally at home and was still reckoned a dweller beneath his father's roof. Twice he was absent from the city on week-long trips, whose destinations have not yet been discovered. He grew steadily paler and more emaciated even than before, and lacked some of his former assurance when repeating to Dr. Willett his old, old story of vital research and future revelations. Willett often waylaid him at his father's house, for the elder Ward was deeply worried and perplexed, and wished his son to get as much sound oversight as could be managed in the case of so secretive and independent an adult. The doctor still insists that the youth was sane even as late as this, and adduces many a conversation to prove his point.

About September the vampirism declined, but in the following January, Ward almost became involved in serious trouble. For some time the nocturnal arrival and departure of motor trucks at the Pawtuxet bungalow had been commented upon, and at this juncture an unforeseen hitch exposed the nature of at least one item of their contents. In a lonely spot near Hope Valley had occurred one of the frequent sordid waylayings of trucks by "hi-jackers" in quest of liquor shipments, but this time the robbers had been destined to receive the greater shock. For the long cases they seized proved upon opening to contain some exceedingly gruesome things; so gruesome, in fact, that the matter could not be kept quiet amongst the denizens of the underworld. The thieves had hastily buried what they discovered, but when the State Police got wind of the matter a careful search was made. A recently arrested vagrant, under promise of immunity from prosecution on any additional charge, at last consented to guide a party of troopers to the spot; and there was found in that hasty cache a very hideous and shameful thing. It would not be well for the national—or even the international—sense of decorum if the public were ever to know what was uncovered by that awestruck party. There was no mistaking it, even by these far from studious officers; and telegrams to Washington ensued with feverish rapidity.

The cases were addressed to Charles Ward at his Pawtuxet bungalow, and State and Federal officials at once paid him a very forceful and serious call. They found him pallid and worried with his two odd companions, and received from him what seemed to be a valid explanation and evidence of innocence. He had needed certain anatomical specimens as part of a program of research whose depth and genuineness anyone who had known him in the last decade could prove, and had ordered the required kind and number from agencies which he had thought as reasonably legitimate as such things can be. Of the *identity* of the specimens he had known absolutely nothing, and was properly shocked when the inspectors hinted at the monstrous effect on public sentiment and national dignity which a knowledge of the matter would produce. In this statement he was firmly sustained by his bearded colleague Dr. Allen, whose oddly hollow voice carried even more conviction than his

own nervous tones; so that in the end the officials took no action, but carefully set down the New York name and address which Ward gave them as a basis for a search which came to nothing. It is only fair to add that the specimens were quickly and quietly restored to their proper places, and that the general public will never know of their blasphemous disturbance.

ON February 9, 1928, Dr. Willett received a letter from Charles Ward which he considers of extraordinary importance, and about which he has frequently quarreled with Dr. Lyman. Lyman believes that this note contains positive proof of a well-deveoped case of *dementia praecox,* but Willett on the other hands regards it as the last perfectly sane utterance of the hapless youth. He calls especial attention to the normal character of the penmanship; which though shewing traces of shattered nerves, is nevertheless distinctly Ward's own. The text in full is as follows:

100 Prospect St.,
Providence, R. I.,
March 8, 1928.

Dear Dr. Willett—

I feel that at last the time has come for me to make the disclosures which I have so long promised you, and for which you have pressed me so often. The patience you have shewn in waiting, and the confidence you have shewn in my mind and integrity, are things I shall never cease to appreciate.

And now that I am ready to speak, I must own with humiliation that no triumph such as I dreamed of can ever be mine. Instead of triumph I have found terror, and my talk with you will not be a boast of victory but a plea for help and advice in saving both myself and the world from a horror beyond all human conception or calculation. You recall what those Fenner letters said of the old raiding party at Pawtuxet. That must all be done again, and quickly. Upon us depends more than can be put into words—all civilisation, all natural law, perhaps even the fate of the solar system and the universe. I have brought to light a monstrous abnormality, but I did it for the sake of knowledge. Now for the sake of all life and nature you must help me thrust it back into the dark again.

I have left that Pawtuxet place forever, and we must extirpate everything existing there, alive or dead. I shall not go there again, and you must not believe it if you ever hear that I am there. I will tell you why I say this when I see you. I have come home for good, and wish you would call on me at the very first moment that you can spare five or six hours continuously to hear what I have to say. It will take that long—and believe me when I tell you that you never had a more genuine professional duty than this. My life and reason are the very least things which hang in the balance.

I dare not tell my father, for he could not grasp the whole thing. But I have told him of my danger, and he has four men from a detective agency watching the house. I don't know how much good they can do, for they have against them forces which even you could scarcely envisage or acknowledge. So come quickly if you wish to see me alive and hear how you may help to save the cosmos from stark hell.

Any time will do—I shall not be out of the house. Don't telephone ahead, for there is no telling who or what may try to intercept you. And let us pray to whatever gods there be that nothing may prevent this meeting.

In utmost gravity and desperation,

Charles Dexter Ward.

P. S.—Shoot Dr. Allen on sight *and dissolve his body in acid. Don't burn it.*"

Dr. Willett received this note about ten-thirty a.m., and immediately arranged to spare the whole late afternoon and evening for the momentous talk, letting it extend on into the night as long as might be necessary. He planned to arrive about four o'clock, and through all the intervening hours was so engulfed in every sort of wild speculation that most of his tasks were very mechanically performed. Maniacal as the letter would have sounded to a stranger, Willett had seen too much of Charles Ward's oddities to dismiss it as sheer raving. That something very subtle, ancient, and horrible was hovering about he felt quite sure, and the reference to Dr. Allen could almost be comprehended in view of what Pawtuxet gossip said of Ward's enigmatical colleague. Willett had never seen the man, but had heard much of his aspect and bearing, and could not but wonder what sort of eyes those much-discussed dark glasses might conceal.

Promptly at four Dr. Willett presented himself at the Ward residence, but found

to his annoyance that Charles had not adhered to his determination to remain indoors. The guards were there, but said that the young man seemed to have lost part of his timidity. He had that morning done much apparently frightened arguing and protesting over the telephone, one of the detectives said, replying to some unknown voice with phrases such as "I am very tired and must rest awhile," "I can't receive anyone for some time, you'll have to excuse me," "Please postpone decisive action till we can arrange some sort of compromise," or "I am very sorry, but I must take a complete vacation from everything; I'll talk with you later." Then, apparently gaining boldness through meditation, he had slipped out so quietly that no one had seen him depart or knew that he had gone until he returned about one o'clock and entered the house without a word. He had gone upstairs, where a bit of his fear must have surged back; for he he was heard to cry out in a high terrified fashion upon entering his library, afterward trailing off into a kind of choking gasp. When, however, the butler had gone to inquire what the trouble was, he had appeared at the door with a great show of boldness, and had silently gestured the man away in a manner that terrified him unaccountably. Then he had evidently done some rearranging of his shelves, for a great clattering and thumping and creaking ensued; after which he had reappeared and left at once. Willett inquired whether or not any message had been left, but was told that there was none. The butler seemed queerly disturbed about something in Charles' appearance and manner, and asked solicitously if there was much hope for a cure of his disordered nerves.

For almost two hours Dr. Willett waited vainly in Charles Ward's library, watching the dusty shelves with their wide gaps where books had been removed, and smiling grimly at the paneled overmantel on the north wall, whence a year before the suave features of old Joseph Curwen had looked mildly down. After a time the shadows began to gather, and the sunset cheer gave place to a vague growing terror which flew shadow-like before the night. Mr. Ward finally arrived, and showed much surprise and anger at his son's absence after all the pains which had been taken to guard him. He had not known of Charles' appointment, and promised to notify Willett when the youth returned. In bidding the doctor good night he expressed his utter perplexity at his son's condition, and urged his caller to do all he could to restore the boy to normal poise. Willett was glad to escape from that library, for something frightful and unholy seemed to haunt it; as if the vanished picture had left behind a legacy of evil. He had never liked that picture; and even now, strong-nerved though he was, there lurked a quality in its vacant panel which made him feel an urgent need to get out into the pure air as soon as possible.

THE next morning Willett received a message from the senior Ward, saying that Charles was still absent. Mr. Ward mentioned that Dr. Allen had telephoned him to say that Charles would remain at Pawtuxet for some time, and that he must not be disturbed. This was necessary because Allen himself was suddenly called away for an indefinite period, leaving the researches in need of Charles' constant oversight. Charles sent his best wishes, and regretted any bother his abrupt change of plans might have caused. In listening to this message Mr. Ward heard Dr. Allen's voice for the first time, and it seemed to excite some vague and elusive memory which could not be actually placed, but which was disturbing to the point of fearfulness.

Faced by these baffling and contradictory reports, Dr. Willett was frankly at a loss

what to do. The frantic earnestness of Charles' note was not to be denied, yet what could one think of its writer's immediate violation of his own expressed policy? Young Ward had written that his delvings had become blasphemous and menacing, that they and his bearded colleague must be extirpated at any cost, and that he himself would never return to their final scene; yet according to latest advices he had forgotten all this and was back in the thick of the mystery. Common sense bade one leave the youth alone with his freakishness, yet some deeper instinct would not permit the impression of that frenzied letter to subside. Willett read it over again, and could not make its essence sound as empty and insane as both its bombastic verbiage and its lack of fulfilment would seem to imply. Its terror was too profound and real, and in conjunction with what the doctor already knew evoked too vivid hints of monstrosities from beyond time and space, to permit of any cynical explanation. There were nameless horrors abroad; and no matter how little one might be able to get at them, one ought to stand prepared for any sort of action at any time.

For over a week Dr. Willett pondered on the dilemma which seemed thrust upon him, and became more and more inclined to pay Charles a call at the Pawtuxet bungalow. No friend of the youth had ever ventured to storm this forbidden retreat, and even his father knew of its interior only from such descriptions as he chose to give; but Willett felt that some direct conversation with his patient was necessary. Mr. Ward had been receiving brief and noncommittal typed notes from his son, and said that Mrs. Ward in her Atlantic City retirement had had no better word. So at length the doctor resolved to act; and despite a curious sensation inspired by old legends of Joseph Curwen, and by more recent revelations and warnings from Charles Ward, set boldly out for the bungalow on the bluff above the river.

Willett had visited the spot before through sheer curiosity, though of course never entering the house or proclaiming his presence; hence knew exactly the route to take. Driving out Broad Street one early afternoon toward the end of February in his small motor, he thought oddly of the grim party which had taken that selfsame road a hundred and fifty-seven years before, on a terrible errand which none might ever comprehend.

The ride through the city's decaying fringe was short, and trim Edgewood and sleepy Pawtuxet presently spread out ahead. Willett turned to the right down Lockwood Street and drove his car as far along that rural road as he could, then alighted and walked north to where the bluff towered above the lovely bends of the river and the sweep of misty downlands beyond. Houses were still few here, and there was no mistaking the isolated bungalow with its concrete garage on a high point of land at his left. Stepping briskly up the neglected gravel walk he rapped at the door with a firm hand, and spoke without a tremor to the evil Portuguese mulatto who opened it to the width of a crack.

He must, he said, see Charles Ward at once on vitally important business. No excuse would be accepted, and a repulse would mean only a full report of the matter to the elder Ward. The mulatto still hesitated, and pushed against the door when Willett attempted to open it; but the doctor merely raised his voice and renewed his demands. Then there came from the dark interior a husky whisper which somehow chilled the hearer through and through, though he did not know why he feared it. "Let him in, Tony," it said, "we may as well talk now as ever." But disturbing as was the whisper, the greater fear was that which immediately followed. The floor creaked and the speaker hove in

sight—and the owner of those strange and resonant tones was seen to be no other than Charles Dexter Ward.

The minuteness with which Dr. Willett recalled and recorded his conversation of that afternoon is due to the importance he assigns to this particular period. For at last he concedes a vital change in Charles Dexter Ward's mentality, and believes that the youth now spoke from a brain hopelessly alien to the brain whose growth he had watched for six and twenty years. Controversy with Dr. Lyman has compelled him to be very specific, and he definitely dates the madness of Charles Ward from the time the typewritten notes began to reach his parents. Those notes are not in Ward's normal style; not even in the style of that last frantic letter to Willett. Instead, they are strange and archaic, as if the snapping of the writer's mind had released a flood of tendencies and impressions picked up unconsciously through boyhood antiquarianism. There is an obvious effort to be modern, but the spirit and occasionally the language are those of the past.

THE past, too, was evident in Ward's every tone and gesture as he received the doctor in that shadowy bungalow. He bowed, motioned Willett to a seat, and began to speak abruptly in that strange whisper which he sought to explain at the very outset.

"I am grown phthisical," he began, "from this cursed river air. You must excuse my speech. I suppose you are come from my father to see what ails me, and I hope you will say nothing to alarm him."

Willett was studying these scraping tones with extreme care, but studying even more closely the face of the speaker. Something, he felt, was wrong; and he thought of what the family had told him about the fright of that Yorkshire butler one night. He wished it were not so dark, but did not request that any blind be opened. Instead, he merely asked Ward why he had so belied the frantic note of little more than a week before.

"I was coming to that," the host replied. "You must know, I am in a very bad state of nerves, and do and say queer things I cannot account for. As I have told you often, I am on the edge of great matters; and the bigness of them has a way of making me light-headed. Any man might well be frighted of what I have found, but I am not to be put off for long. I was a dunce to have that guard and stick at home; for having gone this far, my place is here. I am not well spoke of by my prying neighbors, and perhaps I was led by weakness to believe myself what they say of me. There is no evil to any in what I do, so long as I do it rightly. Have the goodness to wait six months, and I'll show you what will pay your patience well.

"You may as well know I have a way of learning old matters from things surer than books, and I'll leave you to judge the importance of what I can give to history, philosophy, and the arts by reason of the doors I have access to. My ancestor had all this when those witless peeping Toms came and murdered him. I now have it again, or am coming very imperfectly to have a part of it. This time nothing must happen, and least of all through any idiot fears of my own. Pray forget all I writ you, Sir, and have no fear of this place or any in it. Dr. Allen is a man of fine parts, and I owe him an apology for anything ill I have said of him. I wish I had no need to spare him, but there were things he had to do elsewhere. His zeal is equal to mine in all those matters, and I suppose that when I feared the work I feared him too as my greatest helper in it."

Ward paused, and the doctor hardly knew what to say or think. He felt almost foolish in the face of this calm repudiation of the letter; and yet there clung to him the fact that while the present dis-

course was strange and alien and indubitably mad, the note itself had been tragic in its naturalness and likeness to the Charles Ward he knew. Willett now tried to turn the talk on early matters, and recall to the youth some past events which would restore a familiar mood; but in this process he obtained only the most grotesque results. It was the same with all the alienists later on. Important sections of Charles Ward's store of mental images, mainly those touching modern times and his own personal life, had been unaccountably expunged; while all the massed antiquarianism of his youth had welled up from some profound subconsciousness to engulf the contemporary and the individual. The youth's ultimate knowledge of elder things was abnormal and unholy, and he tried his best to hide it. When Willett would mention some favorite object of his boyhood archaistic studies he often shed by pure accident such a light as no normal could conceivably be expected to possess, and the doctor shuddered as the glib allusion glided by.

It was not wholesome to know so much about the way the fat sheriff's wig fell off as he leaned over at the play in Mr. Douglass' Histrionick Academy in King Street on the eleventh of February, 1762, which fell of a Thursday; or about how the actors cut the text of Steele's "Conscious Lover" so badly that one was almost glad the Baptist-ridden legislature closed the theater a fortnight later. That Thomas Sabin's Boston coach was "damn'd uncomfortable" old letters may well have told; but what healthy antiquarian could recall how the creaking of Epenetus Olney's new signboard (the gaudy Crown he set up after he took to calling his tavern the Crown Coffee House) was exactly like the first few notes of the new jazz piece all the radios in Pawtuxet were playing?

Ward, however, would not be quizzed long in this vein. Modern and personal topics he waved aside quite summarily, whilst regarding antique affairs he soon shewed the plainest boredom. What he wished clearly enough was only to satisfy his visitor enough to make him depart without the intention of returning. To this end he offered to shew Willett the entire house, and at once proceeded to lead the doctor through every room from cellar to attic. Willett looked sharply, but noted that the visible books were far too few and trivial ever to have filled the wide gaps on Ward's shelves at home, and that the meager so-called "laboratory" was the flimsiest sort of a blind. Clearly, there were a library and a laboratory elsewhere; but just where, it was impossible to say. Essentially defeated in his quest for something he could not name, Willett returned to town before evening and told the senior Ward everything which had occurred. They agreed that the youth must be definitely out of his mind, but decided that nothing drastic need be done just then. Above all, Mrs. Ward must be kept in as complete an ignorance as her son's own strange typed notes would permit.

MR. WARD now determined to call in person upon his son, making it wholly a surprise visit. Dr. Willett took him in his car one evening, guiding him to within sight of the bungalow and waiting patiently for his return. The session was a long one, and the father emerged in a very saddened and perplexed state. His reception had developed much like Willett's, save that Charles had been an excessively long time in appearing after the visitor had forced his way into the hall and sent the Portuguese away with an imperative demand; and in the bearing of the altered son there was no trace of filial affection. The lights had been dim, yet even so the youth had complained that they dazzled him outrageously. He had not spoke out loud at all, averring that his throat

was in a very poor condition; but in his hoarse whisper there was a quality so vaguely disturbing that Mr. Ward could not banish it from his mind.

Now definitely leagued together to do all they could toward the youth's mental salvation, Mr. Ward and Dr. Willett set about collecting every scrap of data which the case might afford. Pawtuxet gossip was the first item they studied, and this was relatively easy to glean since both had friends in that region. Dr. Willett obtained the most rumors because people talked more frankly to him than to a parent of the central figure, and from all he heard he could tell that young Ward's life had become indeed a strange one. Common tongues would not dissociate his household from the vampirism of the previous summer, while the nocturnal comings and goings of the motor trucks provided their share of dark speculation. Local tradesmen spoke of the queerness of the orders brought them by the evil-looking mulatto, and in particular of the inordinate amounts of meat and fresh blood secured from the two butcher shops in the immediate neighborhood. For a household of only three, these quantities were quite absurd.

Then there was the matter of the sounds beneath the earth. Reports of these things were harder to pin down, but all the vague hints tallied in certain basic essentials. Noises of a ritual nature positively existed, and at times when the bungalow was dark. They might, of course, have come from the known cellar; but rumor insisted that there were deeper and more spreading crypts. Recalling the ancient tales of Joseph Curwen's catacombs, and assuming for granted that the present bungalow had been selected because of its situation on the old Curwen site as revealed in one or another of the documents found behind the picture, Willett and Mr. Ward gave this phase of the gossip much attention; and searched many times without success for the door in the river bank which old manuscripts mentioned. As to popular opinions of the bungalow's various inhabitants, it was soon plain that the Brava Portuguese was loathed, the bearded and spectacled Dr. Allen feared, and the pallid young scholar disliked to a profound extent. During the last week or two Ward had obviously changed much, abandoning his attempts at affability and speaking only in hoarse but oddly repellent whispers on the few occasions that he ventured forth.

Such were the shreds and fragments gathered here and there; and over these Mr. Ward and Dr. Willett held many long and serious conferences. They strove to exercise deduction, induction, and constructive imagination to their utmost extent; and to correlate every known fact of Charles' later life, including the frantic letter which the doctor now shewed the father, with the meager documentary evidence available concerning old Joseph Curwen. They would have given much for a glimpse of the papers Charles had found, for very clearly the key to the youth's madness lay in what he had learned of the ancient wizard and his doings.

And yet, after all, it was from no step of Mr. Ward's or Dr. Willett's that the next move in this singular case proceeded. The father and the physician, rebuffed and confused by a shadow too shapeless and intangible to combat, had rested uneasily on their oars while the typed notes of young Ward to his parents grew fewer and fewer. Then came the first of the month with its customary financial adjustments, and the clerks at certain banks began a peculiar shaking of heads and telephoning from one to the other. Officials who knew Charles Ward by sight went down to the bungalow to ask why every cheque of his appearing at this juncture was a clumsy forgery, and were reassured less than they ought to have been when the youth hoarsely explained that his hand had lately been so

much affected by a nervous shock as to make normal writing impossible. He could, he said, form no written characters at all except with great difficulty; and could prove it by the fact that he had been forced to type all his recent letters, even those to his father and mother, who would bear out the assertion.

What made the investigators pause in confusion was not this circumstance alone, for that was nothing unprecedented or fundamentally suspicious; nor even the Pawtuxet gossip, of which one or two of them had caught echoes. It was the muddled discourse of the young man which nonplussed them, implying as it did a virtually total loss of memory concerning important monetary matters which he had had at his fingertips only a month or two before. Something was wrong; for despite the apparent coherence and rationality of his speech, there could be no normal reason for this ill-concealed blankness on vital points. Moreover, although none of these men knew Ward well, they could not help observing the change in his language and manner. They had heard he was an antiquarian, but even the most hopeless antiquarians do not make daily use of obsolete phraseology and gestures. Altogether, this combination of hoarseness, palsied hands, bad memory, and altered speech and bearing must represent some disturbance or malady of genuine gravity, which, no doubt, formed the basis of the prevailing odd rumors; and after their departure the party of officials decided that a talk with the senior Ward was imperative.

SO ON the sixth of March, 1928, there was a long and serious conference in Mr. Ward's office, after which the utterly bewildered father summoned Dr. Willett in a kind of helpless resignation. Willett looked over the strained and awkward signatures of the cheques, and compared them in his mind with the penmanship of that last frantic note. Certainly, the change was radical and profound, and yet there was something damnably familiar about the new writing. It had crabbed and archaic tendencies of a very curious sort, and seemed to result from a type of stroke utterly different from that which the youth had always used. It was strange—but where had he seen it before? On the whole, it was obvious that Charles was insane. Of that there could be no doubt. And since it appeared unlikely that he could handle his property or continue to deal with the outside world much longer, something must quickly be done toward his oversight and possible cure. It was then that the alienists were called in, Drs. Peck and Waite of Providence and Dr. Lyman of Boston, to whom Mr. Ward and Dr. Willett gave the most exhaustive possible history of the case, and who conferred at length in the now unused library of their young patient, examining what books and papers of his were left in order to gain some further notion of his habitual mental cast. After scanning this material and examining the meaningless note to Willett, they all agreed that Charles Ward's studies had been enough to unseat or at least to warp any ordinary intellect, and wished most heartily that they could see his more intimate volumes and documents; but this latter they knew they could do, if at all, only after a scene at the bungalow itself. Willett now reviewed the whole case with febrile energy; it being at this time that he obtained the statements of the workmen who had seen Charles find the Curwen documents, and that he collated the incidents of the destroyed newspaper items, looking up the latter at the *Journal* office.

On Thursday, the eighth of March, Drs. Willett, Peck, Lyman and Waite, accompanied by Mr. Ward, paid the youth their momentous call; making no concealment of their object and questioning the now acknowledged patient with extreme mi-

nuteness. Charles, though he was ordinately long in answering the summons and was still redolent of strange and noxious laboratory odors when he did finally make his agitated appearance, proved a far from recalcitrant subject; and admitted freely that his memory and balance had suffered somewhat from close application to abstruse studies. He offered no resistance when his removal to other quarters was insisted upon; and seemed, indeed, to display a high degree of intelligence as apart from mere memory. His conduct would have sent his interviewers away in baffle-ment had not the persistently archaic trend of his speech and the unmistakable replacement of modern by ancient ideas in his consciousness marked him out as one definitely removed from the normal. Of his work he would say no more to the group of doctors than he had formerly said to his family and to Dr. Willett, and his frantic note of the previous month he dismissed as mere nerves and hysteria. He insisted that the shadowy bungalow possessed no library or laboratory beyond the visible ones, and waxed abstruse in explaining the absence from the house of such odors as now saturated all his clothing. Neighborhood gossip he attributed to nothing more than the cheap inventiveness of baffled curiosity. Of the whereabouts of Dr. Allen he said he did not feel at liberty to speak definitely, but assured his inquisitors that the bearded and spectacled man would return when needed. In paying off the stolid Brava who resisted all questioning by the visitors, and in closing the bungalow which still seemed to hold such nighted secrets, Ward shewed no sign of nervousness save a barely noticed tendency to pause as though listening for something very faint. He was apparently animated by a calmly philosophic resignation, as if his removal were the merest transient incident which would cause the least trouble if facilitated and disposed of once and for all. It was clear that he trusted to his obviously unimpaired keenness of absolute mentality to overcome all the embarrassments into which his twisted memory, his lost voice and handwriting, and his secretive and eccentric behavior had led him. His mother, it was agreed, was not to be told of the change; his father supplying typed notes in his name. Ward was taken to the restfully and picturesquely situated private hospital maintained by Dr. Waite on Conanicut Island in the bay, and subjected to the closest scrutiny and questioning by all the physicians connected with the case. It was then that the physical oddities were noticed; the slackened metabolism, the altered skin, and the disproportionate neural reactions. Dr. Willett was the most perturbed of the various examiners, for he had attended Ward all his life and could appreciate with terrible keenness the extent of his physical disorganization. Even the familiar olive mark on his hip was gone, while on his chest was a great black mole or cicatrice which had never been there before, and which made Willett wonder whether the youth had ever submitted to any of the "witch markings" reputed to be inflicted at certain unwholesome nocturnal meetings in wild and lonely places. The doctor could not keep his mind off a certain transcribed witch-trial record from Salem which Charles had shewn him in the old non-secretive days, and which read: "Mr. G. B. on that Nighte putt ye Divell his Marke upon Bridget S., Jonathan A., Simon O., Deliverance W., Joseph C., Susan P., Mehitable C., and Deborah B." Ward's face, too, troubled him horribly, till at length he suddenly discovered why he was horrified. Above the young man's right eye was something which he had never previously noticed—a small scar or pit precisely like that in the crumbled painting of old Joseph Curwen, and perhaps attesting some hideous ritualistic inoculation to which both had submitted at a certain stage of their occult careers.

While Ward himself was puzzling all the doctors at the hospital, a very strict watch was kept on all mail addressed either to him or to Dr. Allen, which Mr. Ward had ordered delivered at the family home. Willett had predicted that very little would be found, since any communications of a vital nature would probably have been exchanged by messenger; but in the latter part of March there did come a letter from Prague for Dr. Allen which gave both the doctor and the father deep thought. It was in a very crabbed and archaic hand; and though clearly not the effort of a foreigner, shewed almost as singular a departure from modern English as the speech of young Ward himself. It read:

Kleinstrasse 11,
Altstadt, Prague,
11th Feby. 1928.

Brother in Almousin-Metraton!—

I this day receiv'd yr mention of what came up from the Salts I sent you. It was wrong, and meanes clearly that ye Headstones had been chang'd when Barnabas gott me the Specimen. It is often so, as you must be sensible of from the Thing you gott from ye King's Chapell ground in 1769 and what H. gott from Olde Bury'g Point in 1690, that was like to ende him. I gott such a Thing in Aegypt 75 yeares gone, from the which came that Scar ye Boy saw on me here in 1924. As I told you longe ago, do not calle up That which you can not put downe; either from dead Saltes or out of ye Spheres beyond. Have ye Wordes for laying at all times readie, and stopp not to be sure when there is any Doubte of *Whom* you have. Stones are all chang'd now in Nine groundes out of 10. You are never sure till you question. I this day heard from H., who has had Trouble with the Soldiers. He is like to be sorry Transylvania is pass'd from Hungary to Roumania, and wou'd change his Seat if the Castel weren't so fulle of What we Knowe. But of this he hath doubtless writ you. In my next Send'g there will be Somewhat from a Hill tomb from ye East that will delight you greatly. Meanwhile forget not I am desirous of B. F. if you can possibly get him for me. You know G. in Philadelphia better than I. Have him up firste if you will, but doe not use him soe hard he will be Difficult, for I must speake to him in ye Ende.

Yogg-Sothoth Neblod Zin
Simon O.

To Mr. J. C. in
Providence.

Mr. Ward and Dr. Willett paused in utter chaos before this apparent bit of unrelieved insanity. Only by degrees did they absorb what it seemed to imply. So the absent Dr. Allen, and not Charles Ward, had come to be the leading spirit at Pawtuxet? That must explain the wild reference and denunciation in the youth's last frantic letter. And what of this addressing of the bearded and spectacled stranger as "Mr. J. C.?" There was no escaping the inference, but there are limits to possible monstrosity. Who was "Simon O."; the old man Ward had visited in Prague four years previously? Perhaps, but in the centuries behind there had been another Simon O.—Simon Orne, alias Jedediah, of Salem, who vanished in 1771, *and whose peculiar handwriting Dr. Willett now unmistakably recognized from the photostatic copies of the Orne formulae which Charles had once shewn him.* What horrors and mysteries, what contradictions and contraventions of nature, had come back after a century and a half to harass Old Providence with her clustered spires and domes?

The father and the old physician, virtually at a loss what to do or think, went to see Charles at the hospital and questioned him as delicately as they could about Dr. Allen, and the Prague visit, and about what he had learned of Simon or Jedediah Orne of Salem. To all these inquiries the youth was politely non-commital, merely barking in his hoarse whisper that he had found Dr. Allen to have a remarkable spiritual rapport with certain souls from the past, and that any correspondent that the bearded man might have in Prague would probably be similarly gifted. When they left, Mr. Ward and Dr. Willett realized to their chagrin that they had really been the ones under catechism; and that without imparting anything vital himself, the confined youth had adroitly pumped them of everything the Prague letter had contained.

Drs. Peck, Waite, and Lyman were not

inclined to attach much importance to the strange correspondence of young Ward's companion; for they knew the tendency of kindred eccentrics and monomaniacs to band together, and believed that Charles or Allen had merely unearthed an expatriated counterpart—perhaps one who had seen Orne's handwriting and copied it in an attempt to pose as the bygone character's reincarnation. Allen himself was perhaps a similar case, and may have persuaded the youth into accepting him as an avatar of the long-dead Curwen. Such things had been known before, and on the same basis the hard-headed doctors disposed of Willett's growing disquiet about Charles Ward's present handwriting, as studied from unpremeditated specimens obtained by various ruses. Willett thought he had placed its odd familiarity at last, and that what it vaguely resembled was the bygone penmanship of old Joseph Curwen himself; but this the other physicians regarded as a phase of imitativeness only to be expected in a mania of this sort, and refused to grant it any importance either favorable or unfavorable. Recognizing this prosaic attitude in his colleagues, Willett advised Mr. Ward to keep to himself the letter which arrived for Dr. Allen on the second of April from Rakus, Transylvania, in a handwriting so intensely and fundamentally like that of the Hutchinson cipher that both father and physician paused in awe before breaking the seal. This read as follows:

Castle Ferenczy,
7 March 1928.

Dear C.—

Hadd a Squd of 20 Militia up to talk about what the Country Folk say. Must digg deeper and have less Hearde. These Roumanians plague one damnably, being officious and particular where you cou'd buy a Magyar off with a Drinke and food. Last Monthe M. got me ye sarcophagus of ye Five Sphinxes from ye Acropolis where He whome I call'd up say'd it wou'd be, and I have hadde 3 Talkes *with What was therein inhum'd.* It will go to S. O. in Prague directly, and thence to you. It is stubborn but you know ye Way with Such. You shew Wisdom in having lesse about than Before; for there was no Neede to keep the Guards in Shape and eat'g off their Heades, and it made much to be founde in case of Trouble, as you too welle know. You can now move and Worke elsewhere with no Kill'g Trouble if nedful, though I hope no Thing will soon force you to so Bothersome a Course. I rejoice that you traffick not so much with *Those Outside;* for there was ever a Mortall Peril in it, and you are sensible what it did when you asked Protection of One not dispos'd to give it. You excel me in gett'g ye formulæ so *another* may saye them with Success, but Borellus fancy'd it wou'd be so if just ye right Wordes were hadd. Does ye Boy use 'em often? I regret that he growes squeamish, as I fear'd he wou'd when I hadde him here nigh fiften Monthes, but am sensible you knowe how to deal with him. You can't saye him down with ye Formula, for that will Worke only upon such as ye other Formula hath call'd up from Saltes; but you still have strong Handes and Knife and Pistol, and Graves are not harde to digg, nor Acids loth to burne. O. sayes you have promis'd him B. F. I must have him after. B. goes to you soone, and may he give you what you wishe of that Darke Thing belowe Memphis. Imploy care in what you calle up, and beware of ye Boy. It will be ripe in a yeare's time to have up ye Legions from Underneath, and then there are no Boundes to what shal be oures. Have Confidence in what I saye, for you knowe O. and I have hadd these 150 yeares more than you to consulte these Matters in.

Nephreu—Ka nai Hadoh
Edw: H.

For J. Curwen, Esq.
Providence.

But if Willett and Mr. Ward refrained from shewing this letter to the alienists, they did not refrain from acting upon it themselves. No amount of learned sophistry could controvert the fact that the strangely bearded and spectacled Dr. Allen, of whom Charles' frantic letter had spoken as such a monstrous menace, was in close and sinister correspondence with two inexplicable creatures whom Ward had visited in his travels and who plainly claimed to be survivals or avatars of Curwen's old Salem colleagues; that he was regarding himself as the reincarnation of Joseph Curwen, and that he entertained—or was at least advised to entertain—murderous designs against a "boy" who could scarcely be other than Charles Ward. There was organized horror afoot; and no matter who

had started it, the missing Allen was by this time at the bottom of it. Therefore, thanking Heaven that Charles was now safe in the hospital, Mr. Ward lost no time in engaging detectives to learn all they could of the cryptic bearded doctor; finding whence he had come and what Pawtuxet knew of him, and if possible discovering his current whereabouts. Supplying the men with one of the bungalow keys which Charles had yielded up, he urged them to explore Allen's vacant room which had been identified when the patient's belongings had been packed; obtaining what clues they could from any effects he might have left about. Mr. Ward talked with the detectives in his son's old library, and they felt a marked relief when they left it at last; for there seemed to hover about the place a vague aura of evil. Perhaps it was what they had heard of the infamous old wizard whose picture had once stared from the paneled overmantel, and perhaps it was something different and irrelevant; but in any case they all half-sensed an intangible miasma which centered in that carven vestige of an older dwelling and which at times almost rose to the intensity of a material emanation.

5. A Nightmare and a Cataclysm

AND now swiftly followed that hideous experience which has left its indelible mark of fear on the soul of Marinus Bicknell Willett, and has added a decade to the visible age of one whose youth was even then far behind. Dr. Willett had conferred at length with Mr. Ward, and had come to an agreement with him on several points which both felt the alienists would ridicule. There was, they conceded, a terrible movement alive in the world, whose direct connection with a necromancy even older than the Salem witchcraft could not be doubted. That at least two living men —and one other of whom they dared not think — were in absolute possession of minds or personalities which had functioned as early as 1690 or before was likewise almost unassailably proved even in the face of all known natural laws. What these horrible creatures — and Charles Ward as well—were doing or trying to do seemed fairly clear from their letters and from every bit of light both old and new which had filtered in upon the case. They were robbing the tombs of all the ages, including those of the world's wisest and greatest men, in the hope of recovering from bygone ashes some vestige of the consciousness and lore which had once animated and informed them.

A hideous traffic was going on among these nightmare ghouls, whereby illustrious bones were bartered with the calm calculativeness of schoolboys swapping books; and from what was extorted from this centuried dust there was anticipated a power and a wisdom beyond anything which the cosmos had ever seen concentrated in one man or group. They had found unholy ways to keep their brains alive, either in the same body or different bodies; and had evidently achieved a way of tapping the consciousness of the dead whom they gathered together. There had, it seems, been some truth in chimerical old Borellus when he wrote of preparing from even the most antique remains certain "Essential Saltes" from which the shade of a long-dead living thing might be raised up. There was a formula for evoking such a shade, and another for putting it down; and it had now been so perfected that it could be taught successfully. One must be careful about evocations, for the markers of old graves are not always accurate.

Willett and Mr. Ward shivered as they passed from conclusion to conclusion. Things—presences or voices of some sort —could be drawn down from unknown places as well as from the grave, and in this process also one must be careful. Jo-

seph Curwen had indubitably evoked many forbidden things, and as for Charles—what might one think of him? What forces "outside the spheres" had reached him from Joseph Curwen's day and turned his mind on forgotten things? He had been led to find certain directions, and he had used them. He had talked with the man of horror in Prague and stayed long with the creature in the mountains of Transylvania. And he must have found the grave of Joseph Curwen at last. That newspaper item and what his mother had heard in the night were too significant to overlook. Then he had summoned something, and it must have come. That mighty voice aloft on Good Friday, and those *different* tones in the locked attic laboratory. What were they like, with their depth and hollowness? Was there not here some awful foreshadowing of the dreaded stranger Dr. Allen with his spectral bass? Yes, *that* was what Mr. Ward had felt with vague horror in his single talk with the man—if man it were—over the telephone!

What hellish consciousness or voice, what morbid shade or presence, had come to answer Charles Ward's secret rites behind that locked door? Those voices heard in argument—"must have it red for three months"—Good God! Was not that just before the vampirism broke out? The rifling of Ezra Bowen's ancient grave, and the cries later at Pawtuxet—whose mind had planned the vengeance and rediscovered the shunned seat of elder blasphemies? And then the bungalow and the bearded stranger, and the gossip, and the fear. The final madness of Charles neither father nor doctor could attempt to explain, but they did feel sure that the mind of Joseph Curwen had come to earth again and was following its ancient morbidities. Was demoniac possession in truth a possibility? Allen had something to do with it, and the detectives must find out more about one whose existence menaced the young man's life. In the meantime, since the existence of some vast crypt beneath the bungalow seemed virtually beyond dispute, some effort must be made to find it. Willett and Mr. Ward, conscious of the sceptical attitude of the alienists, resolved during their final conference to undertake a joint secret exploration of unparalleled thoroughness; and agreed to meet at the bungalow on the following morning with valises and with certain tools and accessories suited to architectural search and underground exploration.

THE morning of April sixth dawned clear, and both explorers were at the bungalow by ten o'clock. Mr. Ward had the key, and an entry and cursory survey were made. From the disordered condition of Dr. Allen's room it was obvious that the detectives had been there before, and the later searchers hoped that they had found some clue which might prove of value. Of course the main business lay in the cellar; so thither they descended without much delay, again making the circuit which each had vainly made before in the presence of the mad young owner. For a time everything seemed baffling, each inch of the earthen floor and stone walls having so solid and innocuous an aspect that the thought of a yawning aperture was scarcely to be entertained. Willett reflected that since the original cellar was dug without knowledge of any catacombs beneath, the beginning of the passage would represent the strictly modern delving of young Ward and his associates, where they had probed for the ancient vaults whose rumor could have reached them by no wholesome means.

The doctor tried to put himself in Charles' place and see how a delver would be likely to start, but could not gain much inspiration from this method. Then he decided on elimination as a policy, and went carefully over the whole subterranean

surface both vertical and horizontal, trying to account for every inch separately. He was soon substantially narrowed down, and at last had nothing left but the small platform before the washtubs, which he had tried once before in vain. Now experimenting in every possible way, and exerting a double strength, he finally found that the top did indeed turn and slide horizontally on a corner pivot. Beneath it lay a trim concrete surface with an iron manhole, to which Mr. Ward at once rushed with excited zeal. The cover was not hard to lift, and the father had quite removed it when Willett noticed the queerness of his aspect. He was swaying and nodding dizzily, and in the gust of noxious air which swept up from the black pit beneath the doctor soon recognized ample cause.

In a moment Dr. Willett had his fainting companion on the floor above and was reviving him with cold water. Mr. Ward responded feebly, but it could be seen that the mephitic blast from the crypt had in some way gravely sickened him. Wishing to take no chances, Willett hastened out to Broad Street for a taxicab and had soon dispatched the sufferer home despite his weak-voiced protests; after which he produced an electric torch, covered his nostrils with a band of sterile gauze, and descended once more to peer into the new-found depths. The foul air had now slightly abated, and Willett was able to send a beam of light down the Stygian hole. For about ten feet, he saw, it was a sheer cylindrical drop with concrete walls and an iron ladder; after which the hole appeared to strike a flight of old stone steps which must originally have emerged to earth somewhat southward of the present building.

WILLETT freely admits that for a moment the memory of the old Curwen legends kept him from climbing down alone into that malodorous gulf. He could not help thinking of what Luke Fenners had reported on that last monstrous night. Then duty asserted itself and he made the plunge, carrying a great valise for the removal of whatever papers might prove of supreme importance. Slowly, as befitted one of his years, he descended the ladder and reached the slimy steps below. This was ancient masonry, his torch told him; and upon the dripping walls he saw the unwholesome moss of centuries. Down, down, ran the steps; not spirally, but in three abrupt turns; and with such narrowness that two men could have passed only with difficulty. He had counted about thirty when a sound reached him very faintly; and after that he did not feel disposed to count any more.

It was a godless sound; one of those low-keyed, insidious outrages of nature which are not meant to be. To call it a dull wail, a doom-dragged whine, or a hopeless howl of chorused anguish and stricken flesh without mind would be to miss its most quintessential loathesomeness and soul-sickening overtones. Was it for this that Ward had seemed to listen on that day he was removed? It was the most shocking thing that Willett had ever heard, and it continued from no determinate point as the doctor reached the bottom of the steps and cast his torchlight around on lofty corridor walls surmounted by Cyclopean vaulting and pierced by numberless black archways. The hall in which he stood was perhaps fourteen feet high to the middle of the vaulting and ten or twelve feet broad. Its pavement was of large chipped flagstones, and its walls and roof were of dressed masonry. Its length he could not imagine, for it stretched ahead indefinitely into the blackness. Of the archways, some had doors of the old six-paneled colonial type, whilst others had none.

Overcoming the dread induced by the smell and the howling, Willett began to explore these archways one by one; find-

ing beyond them rooms with groined stone ceilings, each of medium size and apparently of bizarre uses. Most of them had fireplaces, the upper courses of whose chimneys would have formed an interesting study in engineering. Never before or since had he seen such instruments or suggestions of instruments as here loomed up on every hand through the burying dust and cobwebs of a century and a half, in many cases evidently shattered as if by the ancient raiders. For many of the chambers seemed wholly untrodden by modern feet, and must have represented the earliest and most obsolete phases of Joseph Curwen's experimentation. Finally there came a room of obvious modernity, or at least of recent occupancy. There were oil heaters, bookshelves and tables, chairs and cabinets, and a desk piled high with papers of varying antiquity and contemporaneousness. Candlesticks and oil lamps stood about in several places; and finding a match safe handy, Willett lighted such as were ready for use.

In the fuller gleam it appeared that this apartment was nothing less than the latest study or library of Charles Ward. Of the books the doctor had seen many before, and a good part of the furniture had plainly come from the Prospect Street mansion. Here and there was a piece well known to Willett, and the sense of familiarity became so great that he half forgot the noisomeness and the wailing, both of which were plainer here than they had been at the foot of the steps. His first duty, as planned long ahead, was to find and seize any papers which might seem of vital importance; especially those portentous documents found by Charles so long ago behind the picture in Olney Court. As he searched he perceived how stupendous a task the final unraveling would be; for file on file was stuffed with papers in curious hands and bearing curious designs, so that months or even years might be needed for a thorough deciphering and editing. Once he found large packets of letters with Prague and Rakus postmarks, and in writing clearly recognizable as Orne's and Hutchinson's; all of which he took with him as part of the bundle to be removed in his valise.

At last, in a locked mahogany cabinet once gracing the Ward home, Willett found the batch of old Curwen papers; recognizing them from the reluctant glimpse Charles had granted him so many years ago. The youth had evidently kept them together very much as they had been when first he found them, since all the titles recalled by the workmen were present except the papers addressed to Orne and Hutchinson, and the cipher with its key. Willett placed the entire lot in his valise and continued his examination of the files. Since young Ward's immediate condition was the greatest matter at stake, the closest searching was done among the most obviously recent matter; and in this abundance of contemporary manuscript one very baffling oddity was noted. That oddity was the slight amount in Charles' normal writing, which indeed included nothing more recent than two months before. On the other hand, there were literally reams of symbols and formulae, historical notes and philosophical comment, in a crabbed penmanship absolutely identical with the ancient script of Joseph Curwen, though of undeniably modern dating. Plainly, a part of the latter-day program had been a sedulous imitation of the old wizard's writing, which Charles seemed to have carried to a marvelous state of perfection. Of any third hand which might have been Allen's there was not a trace. If he had indeed come to the leader, he must have forced young Ward to act as his amanuensis.

In this new material one mystic formula, or rather pair of formulae, recurred so often that Willett had it by

heart before he had half finished his quest. It consisted of two parallel columns, the left-hand one surmounted by the archaic symbol called "Dragon's Head" and used in almanacs to indicate the ascending node, and the right-hand one headed by the corresponding sign of "Dragon's Tail" or descending node. The appearance of the whole was something like this, and almost unconsciously the doctor realized that the second half was no more than the first written syllabically backward with the exception of the final monosyllables and of the odd name *Yog-Sothoth,* which he had come to recognize under various spellings from other things he had seen in connection with this horrible matter. The formulae were as follows—*exactly* so, as Willett is abundantly able to testify—and the first one struck an odd note of uncomfortable latent memory in his brain, which he recognized later when reviewing the events of that horrible Good Friday of the previous year.

Y'AI 'NG'NGAH,
YOG-SOTHOTH
H'EE —— L'GEB
F'AI THRODOG
UAAAH

OGTHROD AI'F
GEB'L —— EE'H
YOG-SOTHOTH
'NGAH'NG AI'Y
ZHRO

So haunting were these formulae, and so frequently did he come upon them, that before the doctor knew it he was repeating them under his breath. Eventually, however, he felt he had secured all the papers he could digest to advantage for the present; hence resolved to examine no more till he could bring the sceptical alienists en masse for an ample and more systematic raid. He had still to find the hidden laboratory, so leaving his valise in the lighted room he emerged again into the black noisome corridor whose vaulting echoed ceaselessly with that dull and hideous whine.

The next few rooms he tried were all abandoned or filled only with crumbling boxes and ominous-looking leaden coffins; but impressed him deeply with the magnitude of Joseph Curwen's original operations. He thought of the slaves and seamen who had disappeared, of the graves which had been violated in every part of the world, and of what that final raiding party must have seen; and then he decided it was better not to think any more. Once a great stone staircase mounted at his right, and he deduced that this must have reached to one of the Curwen outbuildings—perhaps the famous stone edifice with the high slitlike windows—provided the steps he had descended had led from the steep-roofed farmhouse. Suddenly the walls seemed to fall away ahead, and the stench and the wailing grew stronger. Willett saw that he had come upon a vast open space, so great that his torchlight would not carry across it; and as he advanced he encountered occasional stout pillars supporting the arches of the roof.

After a time he reached a circle of pillars grouped like the monoliths of Stonehenge, with a large carved altar on a base of three steps in the center; and so curious were the carvings on that altar that he approached to study them with his electric light. But when he saw what they were he shrank away shuddering, and did not stop to investigate the dark stains which discolored the upper surface and had spread down the sides in occasional thin lines. Instead, he found the distant wall and traced it as it swept around in a gigantic circle perforated by occasional black doorways and indented by a myriad of shallow cells with iron gratings and wrist and ankle bonds on chains fastened to the stone of the concave rear masonry. These cells were empty, but still the horrible odor and the dismal moaning continued, more insistent now than ever, and seemingly varied at times by a sort of slippery thumping.

FROM that frightful smell and that uncanny noise Willett's attention could no longer be diverted. Both were plainer and more hideous in the great pillared hall than anywhere else, and carried a vague impression of being far below, even in this dark nether world of subterrene mystery. Before trying any of the black archways for steps leading further down, the doctor cast his beam of light about the stone-flagged floor. It was very loosely paved, and at irregular intervals there would occur a slab curiously pierced by small holes in no definite arrangement, while at one point there lay a very long ladder carelessly flung down. To this ladder, singularly enough, appeared to cling a particularly large amount of the frightful odor which encompassed everything. As he walked slowly about, it suddenly occurred to Willett that both the noise and the odor seemed strongest directly above the oddly pierced slabs, as if they might be crude trap-doors leading down to some still deeper region of horror. Kneeling by one, he worked at it with his hands, and found that with extreme difficulty he could budge it. At his touch the moaning beneath ascended to a louder key, and only with vase trepidation did he persevere in the lifting of the heavy stone. A stench unnamable now rose from below, and the doctor's head reeled dizzily as he laid back the slab and turned his torch upon the exposed square yard of gaping blackness.

If he had expected a flight of steps to some wide gulf of ultimate abomination, Willett was destined to be disappointed; for amidst that foetor and cracked whining he discerned only the brick-faced top of a cylindrical well perhaps a yard and a half in diameter and devoid of any ladder or other means of descent. As the light shone down, the wailing changed suddenly to a series of horrible yelps; in conjunction with which there came again that sound of blind, futile scrambling and slippery thumping. The explorer trembled, unwilling even to imagine what noxious thing might be lurking in that abyss; but in a moment mustered up the courage to peer over the rough-hewn brink; lying at full length and holding the torch downward at arm's length to see what might lie below. For a second he could distinguish nothing but the slimy, moss-grown brick walls sinking illimitably into that half-tangible miasma of murk and foulness and anguished frenzy; and then he saw that something dark was leaping clumsily and frantically up and down at the bottom of the narrow shaft, which must have been from twenty to twenty-five feet below the stone floor where he lay. The torch shook in his hand, but he looked again to see what manner of living creature might be immured there in the darkness of that unnatural well; left starving by young Ward through all the long month since the doctors had taken him away, and clearly only one of a vast number prisoned in the kindred wells whose pierced stone covers so thickly studded the floor of the great vaulted cavern. Whatever the things were, they could not lie down in their cramped spaces; but must have crouched and whined and waited and feebly leaped all those hideous weeks since their master had abandoned them unheeded.

But Marinus Bicknell Willett was sorry that he looked again; for surgeon and veteran of the dissecting-room though he was, he has not been the same since. It is hard to explain just how a single sight of a tangible object with measurable dimensions could so shake and change a man; and we may only say that there is about certain outlines and entities a power of symbolism and suggestion which acts frightfully on a sensitive thinker's perspective and whispers terrible hints of obscure cosmic relationships and unnamable realities behind the protective illusions of com-

mon vision. In that second look Willett saw such an outline or entity, for during the next few instants he was undoubtedly as stark mad as any inmate of Dr. Waite's private hospital. He dropped the electric torch from a hand drained of muscular power or nervous coordination, nor heeded the sound of crunching teeth which told of its fate at the bottom of the pit. He screamed and screamed and screamed in a voice whose falsetto panic no acquaintance of his would ever have recognized, and though he could not rise to his feet he crawled and rolled desperately away over the damp pavement where dozens of Tartarean wells poured forth their exhausted whining and yelping to answer his own insane cries. He tore his hands on the rough, loose stones, and many times bruised his head against the frequent pillars, but still he kept on. Then at last he slowly came to himself in the utter blackness and stench, and stopped his ears against the droning wail into which the burst of yelping had subsided. He was drenched with perspiration and without means of producing a light; stricken and unnerved in the abysmal blackness and horror, and crushed with a memory he never could efface. Beneath him dozens of those things still lived, and from one of the shafts the cover was removed. He knew that what he had seen could never climb up the slippery walls, yet shuddered at the thought that some obscure foothold might exist.

WHAT the thing was, he would never tell. It was like some of the carvings on the hellish altar, but it was alive. Nature had never made it in this form, for it was too palpably *unfinished*. The deficiencies were of the most surprising sort, and the abnormalities of proportion could not be described. Willett consents only to say that this type of thing must have represented entities which Ward called up from *imperfect salts*, and which he kept for servile or ritualistic purposes. If it had not had a certain significance, its image would not have been carved on that damnable stone. It was not the worst thing depicted on that stone—but Willett never opened the other pits. At the time, the first connected idea in his mind was an idle paragraph from some of the old Curwen data he had digested long before; a phrase used by Simon or Jedediah Orne in that portentous confiscated letter to the bygone sorcerer:

"Certainly, there was Noth'g butt ye liveliest Awfullness in That which H. rais'd upp from What he cou'd gather onlie a Part of."

Then, horribly supplementing rather than displacing this image, there came a recollection of those ancient lingering rumors anent the burned and twisted thing found in the fields a week after the Curwen raid. Charles Ward had once told the doctor what old Slocum said of that object; that it was neither thoroughly human, nor wholly allied to any animal which Pawtuxet folk had ever seen or read about.

These words hummed in the doctor's mind as he rocked to and fro, squatting on the nitrous stone floor. He tried to drive them out, and repeated the Lord's Prayer to himself; eventually trailing off into a mnemonic hodge-podge like the modernistic "Waste Land" of Mr. T. S. Eliot and finally reverting to the oft-repeated dual formula he had lately found in Ward's underground library: *"Y'ai 'ng-'ngah, Yog-Sothoth,"* and so on till the final underlined *"Zhro."* It seemed to soothe him and he staggered to his feet after a time; lamenting bitterly his fright-lost torch and looking wildly about for any gleam of light in the clutching inkiness of the chilly air. Think he would not; but he strained his eyes in every direction for some faint glint or reflection of the bright illumination he had left in the library.

After awhile he thought he detected a suspicion of a glow infinitely far away, and toward this he crawled in agonized caution on hands and knees amidst the stench and howling, always feeling ahead lest he collide with the numerous great pillars or stumble into the abominable pit he had uncovered.

Once his shaking fingers touched something which he knew must be the steps leading to the hellish altar, and from this spot he recoiled in loathing. At another time he encountered the pierced slab he had removed, and here his caution became almost pitiful. But he did not come upon the dread aperture after all, nor did anything issue from that aperture to detain him. What had been down there made no sound nor stir. Evidently its crunching of the fallen electric torch had not been good for it. Each time Willett's fingers felt a perforated slab he trembled. His passage over it would sometimes increase the groaning below, but generally it would produce no effect at all, since he moved very noiselessly. Several times during his progress the glow ahead diminished perceptibly, and he realized that the various candles and lamps he had left must be expiring one by one. The thought of being lost in utter darkness without matches amidst this underground world of nightmare labyrinths impelled him to rise to his feet and run, which he could safely do now that he had passed the open pit; for he knew that once the light failed his only hope of rescue and survival would lie in whatever relief party Mr. Ward might send after missing him for a sufficient period.

Presently, however, he emerged from the open space into the narrower corridor and definitely located the glow as coming from a door on his right. In a moment he had reached it and was standing once more in young Ward's secret library, trembling with relief, and watching the sputterings of that last lamp which had brought him to safety.

IN ANOTHER moment he was hastily filling the burned-out lamps from an oil supply he had previously noticed, and when the room was bright again he looked about to see if he might find a lantern for further exploration. For racked though he was with horror, his sense of grim purpose was still uppermost, and he was firmly determined to leave no stone unturned in his search for the hideous facts behind Charles Ward's bizarre madness. Failing to find a lantern, he chose the smallest of the lamps to carry; also filling his pockets with candles and matches, and taking with him a gallon can of oil, which he proposed to keep for reserve use in whatever hidden laboratory he might uncover beyond the terrible open space with its unclean altar and nameless covered wells. To traverse that space again would require his utmost fortitude, but he knew it must be done. Fortunately neither the frightful altar nor the opened shaft was near the vast cell-indented wall which bounded the cavern area, and whose black mysterious archways would form the next goals of a logical search.

So Willett went back to that great pillared hall of stench and anguished howling; turning down his lamp to avoid any distant glimpse of the hellish altar, or of the uncovered pit with the pierced stone slab beside it. Most of the black doorways led merely to small chambers, some vacant and some evidently used as store rooms; and in several of the latter he saw some very curious accumulations of various objects. One was packed with rotting and dust-draped bales of spare clothing, and the explorer thrilled when he saw that it was unmistakably the clothing of a century and a half before. In another room he found numerous odds and ends of modern clothing, as if gradual provisions were being

made to equip a large body of men. But what he disliked most of all were the huge copper vats which occasionally appeared; these, and the sinister incrustations upon them. He liked them even less than the weirdly figured leaden bowls whose ruins retained such obnoxious deposits and around which clung repellent odors perceptible above even the general noisomeness of the crypt. When he had completed about half the entire circuit of the wall he found another corridor like that from which he had come, and out of which many doors opened.

This he proceeded to investigate; and after entering three rooms of medium size and of no significant contents, he came at last to a large oblong apartment whose businesslike tanks and tables, furnaces and modern instruments, occasional books and endless shelves of jars and bottles proclaimed it indeed the long-sought laboratory of Charles Ward—and no doubt of old Joseph Curwen before him.

After lighting the three lamps which he found filled and ready, Dr. Willett examined the place and all its appurtenances with the keenest interest; noting from the relative quantities of various reagents on the shelves that young Ward's dominant concern must have been with some branch of organic chemistry. On the whole, little could be learned from the scientific ensemble, which included a gruesome-looking dissecting table; so that the room was really rather a disappointment. Among the books was a tattered old copy of Borellus in black-letter, and it was weirdly interesting to note that Ward had underlined the same passage whose marking had so perturbed good Mr. Merritt at Curwen's farmhouse more than a century and a half before. That older copy, of course, must have perished along with the rest of Curwen's occult library in the final raid. Three archways opened off the laboratory, and these the doctor proceeded to sample in turn. From his cursory survey he saw that two led merely to small storerooms; but these he canvassed with care, remarking the piles of coffins in various stages of damage and shuddering violently at two or three of the few coffin-plates he could decipher. There was much clothing also stored in these rooms, and several new and tightly-nailed boxes which he did not stop to investigate. Most interesting of all, perhaps, were some odd bits which he judged to be fragments of old Joseph Curwen's laboratory appliances. These had suffered damage at the hands of the raiders, but were still partly recognizable as the chemical paraphernalia of the Georgian period.

THE third archway led to a very sizeable chamber entirely lined with shelves and having in the center a table bearing two lamps. These lamps Willett lighted, and in their brilliant glow studied the endless shelving which surrounded him. Some of the upper levels were wholly vacant, but most of the space was filled with small odd-looking leaden jars of two general types; one tall and without handles like a Grecian lekythos or oil-jug, and the other with a single handle and proportioned like a Phaleron jug. All had metal stoppers, and were covered with peculiar-looking symbols moulded in low relief. In a moment the doctor noticed that these jugs were classified with great rigidity; all the lekythoi being on one side of the room with a large wooden sign reading "Custodes" above them, and all the Phalerons on the other, correspondingly labeled with a sign reading "Materia." Each of the jars or jugs, except some on the upper shelves that turned out to be vacant, bore a cardboard tag with a number apparently referring to a catalogue; and Willett resolved to look for the latter presently. For the moment, however, he was more interested in the nature of the array as a whole; and experimentally opened several of the leky-

thoi and Phalerons at random with a view to a rough generalization. The result was invariable. Both types of jar contained a small quantity of a single kind of substance; a fine dusty powder of very light weight and of many shades of dull neutral color. To the colors which formed the only point of variation there was no apparent method of disposal; and no distinction between what occurred in the lekythoi and what occurred in the Phalerons. A bluish-gray powder might be by the side of a pinkish-white one, and any one in a Phaleron might have its exact counterpart in a lekythos. The most individual feature about the powders was their non-adhesiveness. Willett would pour one into his hand, and upon returning it to its jug would find that no residue whatever remained on his palm.

The meaning of the two signs puzzled him, and he wondered why this battery of chemicals was separated so radically from those in glass jars on the shelves of the laboratory proper. "Custodes," "Materia"; that was the Latin for "Guards" and "Material," respectively—and then there came a flash of memory as to where he had seen that word "Guards" before in connection with this dreadful mystery. It was, of course, in the recent letter to Dr. Allen purporting to be from old Edward Hutchinson; and the phrase had read: "There was no Neede to keep the Guards in shape and eat'g off their Heades, and it made much to be founde in Case of Trouble, as you too welle Knowe." What did this signify? But wait—was there not still *another* reference to "guards" in this matter which he had failed wholly to recall when reading the Hutchinson letter? Back in the old non-secretive days Ward had told him of the Eleazar Smith diary recording the spying of Smith and Weeden on the Curwen farm, and in that dreadful chronicle there had been a mention of conversations overheard before the old wizard betook himself wholly beneath the earth. There had been, Smith and Weeden insisted, terrible colloquies wherein figured Curwen, certain captives of his, *and the guards of those captives.* Those guards, according to Hutchinson or his avatar, had "eaten their heads off," so that now Dr. Allen did not keep them *in shape.* And if not *in shape,* how save as the "salts" to which it appears this wizard band was engaged in reducing as many human bodies or skeletons as they could?

So *that* was what these lekythoi contained; the monstrous fruit of unhallowed rites and deeds, presumably won or cowed to such submission as to help when called up by some hellish incantation, in the defense of their blasphemous master or the questioning of those who were not so willing? Willett shuddered at the thought of what he had been pouring in and out of his hands, and for a moment felt an impulse to flee in panic from that cavern of hideous shelves with their silent and perhaps watching sentinels. Then he thought of the "Materia"—in the myriad Phaleron jugs on the other side of the room. Salts too—and if not the salts of "guards," then the salts of what? God! Could it be possible that here lay the mortal relics of half the titan thinkers of all the ages; snatched by supreme ghouls from crypts where the world thought them safe, and subject to the beck and call of madmen who sought to drain their knowledge for some still wilder end whose ultimate effect would concern, as poor Charles had hinted in his frantic note, "all civilization, all natural law, perhaps even the fate of the solar system and the universe?" And Marinus Bicknell Willett had sifted their dust through his hands!

Then he noticed a small door at the farther end of the room, and calmed himself enough to approach it and examine the crude sign chiseled above. It was only a symbol, but it filled him with vague spirit-

ual dread; for a morbid, dreaming friend of his had once drawn it on paper and told him a few of the things it means in the dark abyss of sleep. It was the sign of Koth, that dreamers see fixed above the archway of a certain black tower standing alone in twilight—and Willett did not like what his friend Randolph Carter had said of its powers. But a moment later he forgot the sign as he recognized a new acrid odor in the stench-filled air. This was a chemical rather than animal smell, and came clearly from the room beyond the door. And it was, unmistakably, the same odor which had saturated Charles Ward's clothing on the day the doctors had taken him away. So it was here that the youth had been interrupted by the final summons? He was wiser than old Joseph Curwen, for he had not resisted. Willett, boldly determined to penetrate every wonder and nightmare this nether realm might contain, seized the small lamp and crossed the threshold. A wave of nameless fright rolled out to meet him, but he yielded to no whim and deferred to no intuition. There was nothing alive here to harm him, and he would not be stayed in his piercing of the eldritch cloud which engulfed his patient.

THE room beyond the door was of medium size, and had no furniture save a table, a single chair, and two groups of curious machines with clamps and wheels which Willett recognized after a moment as medieval instruments of torture. On one side of the door stood a rack of savage whips, above which were some shelves bearing empty rows of shallow pedestaled cups of lead shaped like Grecian Kylikes. On the other side was the table; with a powerful Argand lamp, a pad and pencil, and two of the stoppered lekythoi from the shelves outside set down at irregular places as if temporarily or in haste. Willett lighted the lamp and looked carefully at the pad to see what notes young Ward might have been jotting down when interrupted; but found nothing more intelligible than the following disjointed fragments in that crabbed Curwen chirography, which shed no light on the case as a whole:

"B. dy'd not. Escap'd into walls and founde Place below.

"Saw olde V. saye ye Sabaoth and learnt ye Way.

"Rais'd *Yog-Sothoth* thrice and was ye nexte Day deliver'd.

"F. soughte to wipe out all know'g howe to raise Those from Outside."

As the strong Argand blaze lit up the entire chamber the doctor saw that the wall opposite the door, between the two groups of torturing appliances in the corners, was covered with pegs from which hung a set of shapeless looking robes of a rather dismal yellowish-white. But far more interesting were the two vacant walls, both of which were thickly covered with mystic symbols and formulae roughly chiseled in the smooth dressed stone. The damp floor also bore marks of carving; and with but little difficulty Willett deciphered a huge pentagram in the center, with a plain circle about three feet wide halfway between this and each corner. In one of these four circles, near where a yellowish robe had been flung carelessly down, there stood a shallow Kylix of the sort found on the shelves above the whip-rack; and just outside the periphery was one of the Phaleron jugs from the shelves in the other room, its tag numbered 118. This was unstoppered, and proved upon inspection to be empty; but the explorer saw with a shiver that the kylix was not. Within its shallow area, and saved from scattering only by the absence of wind in this sequestered cavern, lay a small amount of a dry, dull-greenish efflorescent powder which must have belonged in the jug; and Willett almost reeled at the implications that came sweeping over him as he correlated little

by little the several elements and antecedents of the scene. The whips and the instruments of torture; the dust or salts from the jug of "Materia," the two lekythoi from the "Custodes" shelf, the robes, the formulae on the walls, the notes on the pad, the hints from letters and legends, and the thousand glimpses, doubts, and suppositions which had come to torment the friends and parents of Charles Ward —all these engulfed the doctor in a tidal wave of horror as he looked at that dry greenish powder outspread in the pedestalled leaden kylix on the floor.

With an effort, however, Willett pulled himself together and began studying the formulae chiseled on the walls. From the stained and incrusted letters it was obvious that they were carved in Joseph Curwen's time, and their text was such as to be vaguely familiar to one who had read much Curwen material or delved extensively into the history of magic. One the doctor clearly recognized as what Mrs. Ward heard her son chanting on that ominous Good Friday a year before, and what an authority had told him was a very terrible invocation addressed to secret gods outside the normal spheres. It was not spelled here exactly as Mrs. Ward had set it down from memory, nor yet as the authority had shewn it to him in the forbidden pages of "Eliphas Levi"; but its identity was unmistakable, and such words as *Sabaoth, Metraton, Almonsin,* and *Zariatnatmik* sent a shudder of fright through the searcher who had seen and felt so much of cosmic abomination just around the corner.

This was on the left-hand wall as one entered the room. The right-hand wall was no less thickly inscribed, and Willett felt a start of recognition as he came upon the pair of formulae so frequently occurring in the recent notes in the library. They were, roughly speaking, the same; with the ancient symbols of "Dragon's Head" and "Dragon's Tail" heading them as in Ward's scribblings. But the spelling differed quite widely from that of the modern versions, as if old Curwen had had a different way of recording sound, or as if later study had evolved more powerful and perfected variants of the invocations in question. The doctor tried to reconcile the chiseled version with the one which still ran persistently in his head, and found it hard to do. Where the script he had memorized began *"Y'ai 'Ng'ngah, Yog-Sothoth,"* this epigraph stared out as *"Aye, cngengah, Yogge-Sothotha";* which to his mind would seriously interfere with the syllabification of the second word.

Ground as the later text was into his consciousness, the discrepancy disturbed him; and he found himself chanting the first of the formulae aloud in an effort to square the sound he conceived with the letters he found carved. Weird and menacing in that abyss of antique blasphemy rang his voice! its accents keyed to a droning sing-song either through the spell of the past and the unknown, or through the hellish example of that dull, godless wail from the pits whose inhuman cadences rose and fell rhythmically in the distance through the stench and darkness.

"Y'AI 'NG'NGAH
YOG-SOTHOTH
H'EE —— L'GEB
F'AI' THRODOG
UAAH!"

BUT what was this cold wind which had sprung into life at the very outset of the chant? The lamps were sputtering woefully, and the gloom grew so dense that the letters on the wall nearly faded from sight. There was smoke, too, and an acrid odor which quite drowned out the stench from the far-away wells; an odor like that he had smelt before, yet infinitely stronger and more pungent. He turned from the inscriptions to face the room with its bi-

zarre contents, and saw that the kylix on the floor, in which the ominous efflorescent powder had lain, was giving forth a cloud of thick, greenish-black vapor of surprising volume and opacity. That powder—Great God! it had come from the shelf of "Materia"—what was it doing now, and what had started it? The formula he had been chanting—the first of the pair—Dragon's Head, *ascending node*—Blessed Saviour, could it be—

The doctor reeled, and through his head raced wildly disjointed scraps from all he had seen, heard, and read of the frightful case of Joseph Curwen and Charles Dexter Ward. "I say to you againe, doe not call up Any that you cannot put downe . . . Have ye Wordes for laying at all times readie, and stopp not to be sure when there is any Doubte of *Whom* you have—Three Talkes with *What* was therein inhum'd—" *Mercy of Heaven, what is that shape behind the parting smoke?*

MARINUS BICKNELL WILLETT has no hope that any part of his tale will be believed except by certain sympathetic friends, hence has made no attempt to tell it beyond his most intimate circle. Only a few outsiders have ever heard it repeated, and of these the majority laugh and remark that the doctor surely is getting old. He has been advised to take a long vacation and to shun future cases dealing with mental disturbance. But Mr. Ward knows that the veteran physician speaks only a horrible truth. Did not he himself see the noisome aperture in the bungalow cellar? Did not Willett send him home overcome and ill at eleven o'clock that portentous morning? Did he not telephone the doctor in vain that evening, and again the next day, and had he not driven to the bungalow itself on that following noon, finding his friend unconscious but unharmed on one of the beds upstairs? Willett had been breathing stertorously, and opened his eyes slowly when Mr. Ward gave him some brandy fetched from the car. Then he shuddered and screamed, crying out, *"That beard—those eyes—God, who are you?"* A very strange thing to say to a trim, blue-eyed, clean-shaven gentleman whom he had known from the latter's boyhood.

In the bright noon sunlight the bungalow was unchanged since the previous morning. Willett's clothing bore no disarrangement beyond certain smudges and worn places at the knees, and only a faint acrid odor reminded Mr. Ward of what he had smelt on his son that day he was taken to the hospital. The doctor's flashlight was missing, but his valise was safely there, as empty as when he had brought it. Before indulging in any explanations, and obviously with great moral effort, Willett staggered dizzily down to the cellar and tried the fateful platform before the tubs. It was unyielding. Crossing to where he had left his yet-unused tool satchel the day before, he obtained a chisel and began to pry up the stubborn planks one by one. Underneath the smooth concrete was still visible, but of any opening or perforation there was no longer a trace. Nothing yawned this time to sicken the mystified father who had followed the doctor downstairs; only the smooth concrete underneath the planks—no noisome well, no world of subterrene horrors, no secret library, no Curwen papers, no nightmare pits of stench and howling, no laboratory or shelves or chiseled formulae, no—Dr. Willett turned pale, and clutched at the younger man. "Yesterday," he asked softly, "did you see it here—and smell it?" And when Mr. Ward, himself transfixed with dread and wonder, found strength to nod an affirmative, the physician gave a sound half a sigh and half a gasp, and nodded in turn. "Then I will tell you," he said.

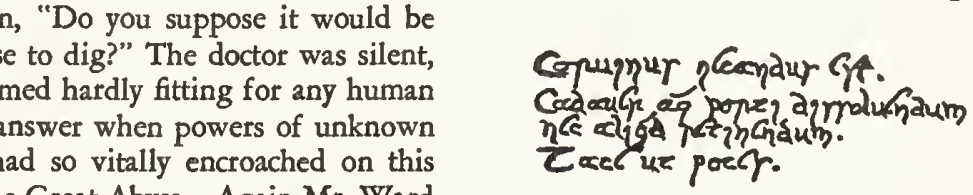
So for an hour, in the sunniest room they could find upstairs, the physician whispered his frightful tale to the wondering father.

There was nothing to relate beyond the looming up of that form when the greenish-black vapor from the kylix parted, and Willett was too tired to ask himself what had really occurred. There were futile, bewildered head-shakings from both men, and once Mr. Ward ventured a hushed suggestion, "Do you suppose it would be of any use to dig?" The doctor was silent, for it seemed hardly fitting for any human brain to answer when powers of unknown spheres had so vitally encroached on this side of the Great Abyss. Again Mr. Ward asked, "But where did it go? It brought you here, you know, and it sealed up the hole somehow."

And Willett again let silence answer for him.

But after all, this was not the final phase of the matter. Reaching for his handkerchief before rising to leave, Dr. Willett's fingers closed upon a piece of paper in his pocket which had not been there before, and which was companioned by the candles and matches he had seized in the vanished vault. It was a common sheet, torn obviously from the cheap pad in that fabulous room of horror somewhere underground, and the writing upon it was that of an ordinary lead pencil—doubtless the one which had lain beside the pad. It was folded very carelessly, and beyond the faint acrid scent of the cryptic chamber bore no print or mark of any world but this. But in the text itself it did indeed reek with wonder; for here was no script of any wholesome age, but the labored strokes of mediæval darkness, scarcely legible to the laymen who now strained over it, yet having combinations of symbols which seemed vaguely familiar. The briefly scrawled message was this, and its mystery lent purpose to the shaken pair, who forthwith walked steadily out to the Ward car and gave orders to be driven first to a quiet dining place and then to the John Hay Library on the hill.

AT THE library it was easy to find good manuals of palaeography, and over these the two men puzzled till the lights of evening shone out from the great chandelier. In the end they found what was needed. The letters were indeed no fantastic invention, but the normal script of



a very dark period. They were the pointed Saxon minuscules of the eighth or ninth century A. D., and brought with them memories of an uncouth time when under a fresh Christian veneer ancient faiths and ancient rites stirred stealthily, and the pale moon of Britain looked sometimes on strange deeds in the Roman ruins at Caerleon and Hexhaus, and by the Towers along Hadrian's crumbling wall. The words were in such Latin as a barbarous age might remember—*"Corvinus, necandus est. Cadaver aq(ua) forti dissolvendum, nec aliq(ui)d retinendum. Tace ut potes."*—which may roughly be translated, "Curwen must be killed. The body must be dissolved in aqua fortis, nor must anything be retained. Keep silence as best you are able."

Willett and Mr. Ward were mute and baffled. They had met the unknown, and found that they lacked emotions to respond to it as they vaguely believed they ought. With Willett, especially, the capacity for receiving fresh impressions of awe was well-nigh exhausted; and both men sat still and helpless till the closing of the library forced them to leave. Then they drove listlessly to the Ward mansion in Prospect Street, and talked to no purpose into the night. The doctor rested toward morning, but did not go home. And he was still there Sunday noon when a telephone message came from the detectives

who had been assigned to look up Dr. Allen.

Mr. Ward, who was pacing nervously about in a dressing-gown, answered the call in person; and told the men to come up early the next day when he heard their report was almost ready. Both Willett and he were glad that this phase of the matter was taking form, for whatever the origin of the strange minuscule message, it seemed certain that the "Curwen" who must be destroyed could be no other than the bearded and spectacled stranger. Charles had feared this man, and had said in the frantic note that he must be killed and dissolved in acid. Allen, moreover, had been receiving letters from the strange wizards in Europe under the name of Curwen, and palpably regarded himself as an avatar of the bygone necromancer. And now from a fresh and unknown source had come a message saying that "Curwen" must be killed and dissolved in acid. The linkage was too unmistakable to be factitious; and besides, was not Allen planning to murder young Ward upon the advice of the creature called Hutchinson? Of course, the letter they had seen had never reached the bearded stranger; but from its text they could see that Allen had already formed plans for dealing with the youth if he grew too "squeamish." Without doubt, Allen must be apprehended; and even if the most drastic directions were not carried out, he must be placed where he could inflict no harm upon Charles Ward.

That afternoon, hoping against hope to extract some gleam of information anent the inmost mysteries from the only available one capable of giving it, the father and the doctor went down the bay and called on young Charles at the hospital. Simply and gravely Willett told him all he had found, and noticed how pale he turned as each description made certain the truth of the discovery. The physician employed as much dramatic effect as he could, and watched for a wincing on Charles' part when he approached the matter of the covered pits and the nameless hybrids within. But Ward did not wince. Willett paused, and his voice grew indignant as he spoke of how the things were starving. He taxed the youth with shocking inhumanity, and shivered when only a sardonic laugh came in reply. For Charles, having dropped as useless his pretense that the crypt did not exist, seemed to see some ghastly jest in this affair; and chuckled hoarsely at something which amused him. Then he whispered, in accents doubly terrible because of the cracked voice he used, "Damn 'em, they *do* eat, but they *don't* need to! That's the rare part! A month, you say, without food? Lud, Sir, you be modest! D'ye know, that was the joke on poor old Whipple with his virtuous bluster! Kill everything off, would he? Why, damme, he was half-deaf with the noise from Outside and never saw or heard aught from the wells. He never dreamed they were there at all! Devil take ye, *those cursed things have been howling down there ever since Curwen was done for a hundred and fifty-seven years gone!"*

But no more than this could Willett get from the youth. Horrified, yet almost convinced against his will, he went on with his tale in the hope that some incident might startle his auditor out of the made composure he maintained. Looking at the youth's face, the doctor could not but feel a kind of terror at the changes which recent months had wrought. Truly, the boy had drawn down nameless horrors from the skies. When the room with the formulae and the greenish dust was mentioned, Charles shewed his first sign of animation. A quizzical look overspread his face as he heard what Willett had read on the pad, and he ventured the mild statement that those notes were old ones, of no possible significance to anyone not deeply initiated in the history of magic. "But," he added,

"had you but known the words to bring up that which I had out in the cup, you had not been here to tell me this. 'Twas Number 118, and I conceive you would have shook had you looked it up in my list in t'other room. 'Twas never raised by me, but I meant to have it up that day you came to invite me hither."

Then Willett told of the formula he had spoken and of the greenish-black smoke which had arisen; and as he did so he saw true fear dawn for the first time on Charles Ward's face. "It *came,* and you be here alive!" As Ward croaked the words his voice seemed almost to burst free of its trammels and sink to cavernous abysses of uncanny resonance. Willett, gifted with a flash of inspiration, believed he saw the situation, and wove into his reply a caution from a letter he remembered. "No. 118, you say? But don't forget that *stones are all changed now in nine grounds out of ten. You are never sure till you question!"* And then, without warning, he drew forth the minuscule message and flashed it before the patient's eyes. He could have wished no stronger result, for Charles Ward fainted forthwith.

ALL this conversation, of course, had been conducted with the greatest secrecy lest the resident alienists accuse the father and the physician of encouraging a madman in his delusions. Unaided, too, Dr. Willett and Mr. Ward picked up the stricken youth and placed him on the couch. In reviving, the patient mumbled many times of some word which he must get to Orne and Hutchinson at once; so when his consciousness seemed fully back the doctor told him that of those strange creatures at least one was his bitter enemy, and had given Dr. Allen advice for his assassination. This revelation produced no visible effect, and before it was made the visitors could see that their host had already the look of a hunted man. After that he would converse no more, so Willett and the father departed presently; leaving behind a caution against the bearded Allen, to which the youth only replied that this individual was very safely taken care of, and could do no one any harm even if he wished.

This was said with an almost evil chuckle very painful to hear. They did not worry about any communications Charles might write to that monstrous pair in Europe, since they knew that the hospital authorities seized all outgoing mail for censorship and would pass no wild or outré-looking missive.

There is, however, a curious sequel to the matter of Orne and Hutchinson, if such indeed the exiled wizards were. Moved by some vague presentiment amidst the horrors of that period, Willett arranged with an international press-cutting bureau for accounts of notable current crimes and accidents in Prague and in eastern Transylvania; and after six months believed that he had found two very significant things amongst the multifarious items he received and had translated. One was the total wrecking of a house by night in the oldest quarter of Prague, and the disappearance of the evil old man called Josef Nadeh, who had dwelt in it alone ever since anyone could remember. The other was a titan explosion in the Transylvania mountains east of Rakus, and the utter extirpation with all its inmates of the ill-regarded Castle Ferenczy, whose master was so badly spoken of by peasants and soldiery alike that he would shortly have been summoned to Bucharest for serious questioning had not this incident cut off a career already so long as to antedate all common memory. Willett maintains that the hand which wrote those minuscules was able to wield stronger weapons as well; and that while Curwen was left to him to dispose of, the writer felt able to find and deal with Orne and Hutchinson itself. Of what their

fate may have been the doctor strives sedulously not to think.

THE following morning Dr. Willett hastened to the Ward home to be present when the detectives arrived. Allen's destruction or imprisonment—or Curwen's, if one might regard the tacit claim to reincarnation as valid—he felt must be accomplished at any cost, and he communicated this conviction to Mr. Ward as they sat waiting for the men to come. They were downstairs this time, for the upper parts of the house were beginning to be shunned because of a peculiar nauseousness which hung indefinitely about; a nauseousness which the older servants connected with some curse left by the vanished Curwen portrait.

At nine o'clock the three detectives presented themselves and immediately delivered all that they had to say. They had not, regrettably enough, located the Brava Tony Gomes as they had wished, nor had they found the least trace of Dr. Allen's source or present whereabouts; but they had managed to unearth a considerable number of local impressions and facts concerning the reticent stranger. Allen had struck Pawtuxet people as a vaguely unnatural being and there was an universal belief that his thick Vandyke beard was either dyed or false—a belief conclusively upheld by the finding of such a false beard, together with a heavy pair of dark glasses, in his room at the fateful bungalow. His voice, Mr. Ward could well testify from his one telephone conversation, had a depth and hollowness that could not be forgotten; and his glance seemed malign even through his smoked and horn-rimmed glasses. One shopkeeper, in the course of negotiations, had seen a specimen of his handwriting and declared it was very queer and crabbed; this being confirmed by penciled notes of no clear meaning found in his room and identified by the merchant.

In connection with the vampirism ructions of the preceding summer, a majority of the gossips believed that Allen rather than Ward was the actual vampire. Statements were also obtained from the officials who had visited the bungalow after the unpleasant incident of the motor truck robbery. They had felt less of the sinister in Dr. Allen, but had recognized him as the dominant figure in the queer shadowy cottage. The place had been too dark for them to observe him clearly, but they would know him again if they saw him. His beard had looked odd, and they thought he had some slight scar above his dark spectacled right eye. As for the search of Allen's room, it yielded nothing definite save the beard and glasses, and several penciled notes in a crabbed writing, which Willett at once saw was identical with that shared by the old Curwen manuscripts and by the voluminous recent notes of young Ward found in the vanished catacombs of horror.

Dr. Willett and Mr. Ward caught something of a profound, subtle, and insidious cosmic fear from this data as it was gradually unfolded, and almost trembled in following up the vague, mad thought which had simultaneously reached their minds. The false beard and glasses, the crabbed Curwen penmanship—the old portrait and its tiny scar—*and the altered youth in the hospital with such a scar*—that deep, hollow voice on the telephone—was it not of this that Mr. Ward was reminded when his son barked forth those pitiable tones to which he now claimed to be reduced? Who had ever seen Charles and Allen together? Yes, some officials had once, but who later on? Was it not when Allen left that Charles suddenly lost his growing fright and began to live wholly at the bungalow? Curwen—Allen—Ward—in what blasphemous and abominable fusion had two ages and two persons become involved? That damnable resemblance of the

picture to Charles—had it not used to stare and stare, and follow the boy around the room with its eyes? Why, too, did both Allen and Charles copy Joseph Curwen's handwriting, even when alone and off guard? And then the frightful work of those people—the lost crypt of horrors that had aged the doctor overnight; the starved monsters in the noisome pits; the awful formula which had yielded such nameless results; the message in minuscules found in Willett's pocket; the papers and the letters and all the talk of graves and "salts" and discoveries—whither did everything lead? In the end Mr. Ward did the most sensible thing. Steeling himself against any realization of why he did it, he gave the detectives an article to be shewn to such Pawtuxet shopkeepers as had seen the portentous Dr. Allen. That article was a photograph of his luckless son, on which he now carefully drew in ink the pair of heavy glasses and the black pointed beard, which the men had brought from Allen's room.

For two hours he waited with the doctor in the oppressive house where fear and miasma were slowly gathering as the empty panel in the upstairs library leered and leered and leered. Then the men returned. Yes, *the altered photograph was a very passable likeness of Dr. Allen.* Mr. Ward turned pale, and Willett wiped a suddenly dampened brow with his handkerchief. Allen—Ward—Curwen—it was becoming too hideous for coherent thought. What had the boy called out of the void, and what had it done to him? What really had happened from first to last? Who was this Allen who sought to kill Charles as too "squeamish," and why had his destined victim said in the postscript to that frantic letter that he must be so completely obliterated in acid? Why, too, had the minuscule message, of whose origin no one dared think, said that "Curwen" must be likewise obliterated? What was the *change,* and when had the final stage occurred? That day when his frantic note was received—he had been nervous all the morning, then there was an alteration. He had slipped out unseen and swaggered boldly in past the men hired to guard him. That was the time, when he was out. But no—had he not cried out in terror as he entered his study—this very room? What had he found there? Or wait—*what had found him?* That simulacrum which brushed boldly in without having been seen to go—was that an alien shadow and a horror forcing itself upon a trembling figure which had never gone out at all? Had not the butler spoken of queer noises?

WILLETT rang for the man and asked him some low-toned questions. It had surely, enough, been a bad business. There had been noises—a cry, a gasp, a choking, and a sort of clattering or creaking or thumping, or all of these. And Mr. Charles was not the same when he stalked out without a word. The butler shivered as he spoke, and sniffed at the heavy air that blew down from some open window upstairs. Terror had settled definitely upon the house, and only the businesslike detectives failed to imbibe a full measure of it. Even they were restless, for this case had held vague elements in the background which pleased them not at all. Dr. Willett was thinking deeply and rapidly, and his thoughts were terrible ones. Now and then he would almost break into muttering as he ran over in his head a new, appalling, and increasingly conclusive chain of nightmare happenings.

Then Mr. Ward made a sign that the conference was over, and everyone save him and the doctor left the room. It was noon now, but shadows as of coming night seemed to engulf the phantom-haunted mansion. Willett began talking very seriously to his host, and urged that he leave a great deal of the future investigation to

him. There would be, he predicted, certain obnoxious elements which a friend could bear better than a relative. As family physician he must have a free hand, and the first thing he required was a period alone and undisturbed in the abandoned library upstairs, where the ancient overmantel had gathered about itself an aura of noisome horror more intense than when Joseph Curwen's features themselves glanced slyly down from the painted panel.

Mr. Ward, dazed by the flood of grotesque morbidities and unthinkably maddening suggestions that poured in upon him from every side, could only acquiesce; and half an hour later the doctor was locked in the shunned room with the paneling from Olney Court. The father, listening outside, heard fumbling sounds of moving and rummaging as the moments passed; and finally a wrench and a creak, as if a tight cupboard door were being opened. Then there was a muffled cry, a kind of snorting choke, and a hasty slamming of whatever had been opened. Almost at once the key rattled and Willett appeared in the hall, haggard and ghastly, and demanding wood for the real fireplace on the south wall of the room. The furnace was not enough, he said; and the electric log had little practical use. Longing yet not daring to ask questions, Mr. Ward gave the requisite orders and a man brought some stout pine logs, shuddering as he entered the tainted air of the library to place them in the grate. Willett meanwhile had gone up to the dismantled laboratory and brought down a few odds and ends not included in the moving of the July before. They were in a covered basket, and Mr. Ward never saw what they were.

Then the doctor locked himself up in the library once more, and by the clouds of smoke which rolled down past the windows from the chimney it was known that he had lighted the fire. Later, after a great rustling of newspapers, that odd wrench and creaking were heard again; followed by a thumping which none of the eavesdroppers liked. Thereafter two suppressed cries of Willett's were heard, and hard upon these came a swishing rustle of indefinable hatefulness. Finally the smoke that the wind beat down from the chimney grew very dark and acrid, and everyone wished that the weather had spared them this choking and venomous inundation of peculiar fumes. Mr. Ward's head reeled, and the servants all clustered together in a knot to watch the horrible black smoke swoop down. After an age of waiting the vapors seemed to lighten, and half-formless sounds of scraping, sweeping, and other minor operations were heard behind the bolted door. And at last, after the slamming of some cupboard within, Willett made his appearance, sad, pale and haggard, and bearing the cloth-draped basket he had taken from the upstairs laboratory. He had left the window open, and into that once accursed room was pouring a wealth of pure, wholesome air to mix with a queer new smell of disinfectants. The ancient overmantel still lingered; but it seemed robbed of malignity now, and rose as calm and stately in its white paneling as if it had never borne the picture of Joseph Curwen. Night was coming on, yet this time its shadows held no latent fright, but only a gentle melancholy. Of what he had done the doctor would never speak. To Mr. Ward he said, "I can answer no questions, but I will say that there are different kinds of magic. I have made a great purgation. Those in this house will sleep the better for it."

THAT Dr. Willett's "purgation" had been an ordeal almost as nerve-racking in its way as his hideous wandering in the vanished crypt is shewn by the fact that the elderly physician gave out completely as soon as he reached home that evening. For

three days he rested constantly in his room, though servants later muttered something about having heard him after midnight on Wednesday, when the outer door softly opened, and closed with phenomenal softness. Servants' imaginations, fortunately, are limited, else comment might have been excited by an item in Thursday's *Evening Bulletin* which ran as follows:

North End Ghouls Again Active

After a lull of ten months since the dastardly vandalism in the Weeden lot at the North Burial Ground, a nocturnal prowler was glimpsed early this morning in the same cemetery by Robert Hart, the night watchman. Happening to glance for a moment from his shelter at about two a. m., Hart observed a glow of a lantern or pocket torch not far to the northward, and upon opening the door detected the figure of a man with a trowel very plainly silhoueted against a nearby electric light. At once starting in pursuit, he saw the figure dart hurriedly toward the main entrance, gaining the street and losing himself among the shadows before approach or capture was possible.

Like the first of the ghouls active during the past year, this intruder had done no real damage before detection. A vacant part of the Ward lot shewed signs of a little superficial digging, but nothing even nearly the size of a grave had been attempted, and no previous grave had been disturbed.

Hart, who cannot describe the prowler except as a small man probably having a full beard, inclines to the view that all three of the digging incidents have a common source; but police from the Second Station think otherwise on account of the savage nature of the second incident, where an ancient coffin was removed and its headstone violently shattered.

The first of the incidents, in which it is thought an attempt to bury something was frustrated, occurred a year ago last March, and has been attributed to bootleggers seeking a cache. It is possible, says Sergeant Riley, that this third affair is of similar nature. Officers at the Second Station are taking especial pains to capture the gang of miscreants responsible for these repeated outrages.

All day Thursday Dr. Willett rested as if recuperating from something past or nerving himself for something to come. In the evening he wrote a note to Mr. Ward, which was delivered the next morning and which caused the half-dazed parent to ponder long and deeply. Mr. Ward had not been able to go down to business since the shock of Monday with its baffling reports and its sinister "purgation," but he found something calming about the doctor's letter in spite of the despair it seemed to promise and the fresh mysteries it seemed to evoke.

10 Barnes St.,
Providence, R. I.,
April 12, 1928.

Dear Theodore:

I feel that I must say a word to you before doing what I am going to do tomorrow. It will conclude the terrible business we have been going through (for I feel that no spade is ever likely to reach that monstrous place we know of), but I'm afraid it won't set your mind at rest unless I expressly assure you how very conclusive it is.

You have known me ever since you were a small boy, so I think you will not distrust me when I hint that some matters are best left undecided and unexplored. It is better that you attempt no further speculation as to Charles's case, and almost imperative that you tell his mother nothing more than she already suspects. When I call on you tomorrow Charles will have escaped. That is all which need remain in anyone's mind. He was mad, and he escaped.

So don't ask me any questions when I call. It may be that something will go wrong, but I'll tell you if it does. I don't think it will. There will be nothing more to worry about, for Charles will be very, very safe. He is now—safer than you dream. You need hold no fears about Allen, and who or what he is. He forms as much a part of the past as Joseph Curwen's picture, and when I ring your doorbell you may feel certain that there is no such person. And what wrote that minuscule message will never trouble you or yours.

But you must steel yourself to melancholy, and prepare your wife to do the same. I must tell you frankly that Charles's escape will not mean his restoration to you. He has been afflicted with a peculiar disease, as you must realize from the subtle physical as well as mental changes in him, and you must not hope to see him again. He stumbled on things no mortal ought ever to know, and reached back through the years as no one ever should reach; and something came out of those years to engulf him.

And now comes the matter in which I must ask you to trust me most of all. For there will be, indeed, no uncertainty about Charles's fate. In about a year, say, you can if you wish devise a suitable account of the end, for the boy will be no more. You can put up a stone in your lot at the North Burial ground exactly ten feet west of your father's and facing the same way, and that will mark the true resting-place of your son. Nor need you fear

that it will mark any abnormality or changeling. The ashes in that grave will be those of your own unaltered bone and sinew—of the real Charles Dexter Ward whose mind you watched from infancy—the real Charles with the olive-mark on his hip and without the black witch-mark on his chest or the pit on his forehead. The Charles who never did actual evil, and who will have paid with his life for his "squeamishness."

That is all. Charles will have escaped, and a year from now you can put up his stone. Do not question me tomorrow. And believe that the honour of your ancient family remains untainted now, as it has been at all times in the past.

With profoundest sympathy, and exhortations to fortitude, calmness, and resignation, I am ever

Sincerely your friend,

Marinus B. Willett.

SO ON the morning of Friday, April 13, 1928, Marinus Bicknell Willett visited the room of Charles Dexter Ward at Dr. Waite's private hospital on Conanicut Island. After the interchange of a few strained formalities, a new element of constraint crept in, as Ward seemed to read behind the doctor's masklike face a terrible purpose which had never been there before.

Ward actually turned pale, and the doctor was the first to speak. "More," he said, "has been found out, and I must warn you fairly that a reckoning is due."

"Digging again, and coming upon more poor starving pets?" was the ironic reply. It was evident that the youth meant to shew bravado to the last.

"No," Willett slowly rejoined, "this time I did not have to dig. We have had men looking up Dr. Allen, and they found the false beard and spectacles in the bungalow!"

"Excellent," commented the disquieted host in an effort to be wittily insulting, "and I trust they proved more becoming than the beard and glasses you now have on!"

"They would become you very well," came the even and studied response, *"as indeed they seem to have done."*

As Willett said this, it almost seemed as though a cloud passed over the sun; though there was no change in the shadows on the floor. Then Ward ventured:

"And is this what asks so hotly for a reckoning? Suppose a man does find it now and then useful to be twofold?"

"No," said Willett gravely, "again you are wrong. It is no business of mine if any man seeks duality; *provided he has any right to exist at all, and provided he does not destroy what called him out of space."*

Ward now started violently. "Well, Sir, what *have* ye found, and what d'ye want with me?"

The doctor let a little time elapse before replying, as if choosing his words for an effective answer.

"I have found," he finally intoned, "something in a cupboard behind an ancient overmantel where a picture once was, and I have burned it and buried the ashes where the grave of Charles Dexter Ward ought to be."

The madman choked and sprang from the chair in which he had been sitting:

"Damn ye, who did ye tell—and who'll believe it was he after these full two months, with me alive? What d'ye mean to do?"

Willett, though a small man, actually took on a kind of judicial majesty as he calmed the patient with a gesture.

"I have told no one. This is no common case—it is a madness out of time and a horror from beyond the spheres which no police or lawyers or courts or alienists could ever fathom or grapple with. *You cannot deceive me, Joseph Curwen, for I know that your accursed magic is true!*

"I know how you wove the spell that brooded outside the years and fastened on your double and descendant; I know how you drew him into the past and got him to raise you up from your detestable grave; I know how he kept you hidden in his laboratory while you studied modern things and roved abroad as a vampire by night,

and how you later shewed yourself in beard and glasses that no one might wonder at your godless likeness to him; I know what you resolved to do when he balked at your monstrous rifling of the world's tombs, *and at what you planned afterward,* and I know how you did it.

"You left off your beard and glasses and fooled the guards around the house. They thought it was he who went in, and they thought it was he who came out when you had strangled and hidden him. But you hadn't reckoned on the different contacts of two minds. You were a fool, Curwen, to fancy that a mere visual identity would be enough. Why didn't you think of the speech and the voice and the handwriting? It hasn't worked, you see, after all. You know better than I who or what wrote that message in minuscules, but I will warn you it was not written in vain. There are abominations and blasphemies which must be stamped out, and I believe that the writer of those words will attend to Orne and Hutchinson. One of those creatures wrote you once, 'do not call up any that you cannot put down.' Curwen, a man can't tamper with Nature beyond certain limits, and every horror you have woven will rise up to wipe you out."

BUT here the doctor was cut short by a convulsive cry from the creature before him. Hopelessly at bay, weaponless, and knowing that any show of physical violence would bring a score of attendants to the doctor's rescue, Joseph Curwen had recourse to his one ancient ally, and began a series of cabalistic motions with his forefingers as his deep, hollow voice, now unconcealed by feigned hoarseness, bellowed out the opening words of a terrible formula.

"PER ADONAI ELOIM, ADONAI JEHOVA, ADONAI SABAOTH, METRATON. . . ."

But Willett was too quick for him. Even as the dogs in the yard outside began to howl, and even as a chill wind sprang suddenly up from the bay, the doctor commenced the solemn and measured intonation of that which he had meant all along to recite. An eye for an eye—magic for magic—let the outcome shew how well the lesson of the abyss had been learned! So in a clear voice Marinus Bicknell Willett began the *second* of that pair of formulae whose first had raised the writer of those minuscules—the cryptic invocation whose heading was the Dragon's Tail, sign of the *descending node*— .

"OGTHROD AI'F
GEB'L —— EE'H
YOG-SOTHOTH
'NGAH'NG AI'Y
ZHRO!"

At the very first word from Willett's mouth the previously commenced formula of the patient stopped short. Unable to speak, the monster made wild motions with his arms until they too were arrested. When the awful name of *Yog-Sothoth* was uttered, the hideous change began. It was not merely a *dissolution,* but rather a *transformation* or *recapitulation;* and Willett shut his eyes lest he faint before the rest of the incantation could be pronounced.

But he did not faint, and that man of unholy centuries and forbidden secrets never troubled the world again. The madness out of time had subsided, and the case of Charles Dexter Ward was closed. Opening his eyes before staggering out of that room of horror, Dr. Willett saw that what he had kept in memory had not been kept amiss. There had, as he had predicted, been no need for acids. For like his accursed picture a year before, Joseph Curwen now lay scattered on the floor as a thin coating of fine bluish-gray dust.

THE EYRIE

Time-Machine in Your Backyard!

ONE of our readers told us recently that he found WEIRD TALES as good as keeping a time-machine in the backyard!

"I just sit back and relax in my favorite armchair," he said, "and WEIRD TALES does the rest—taking me back or forward in time—to other planets—or way outside this life."

"WEIRD TALES is really better than a time-machine," he added, "for it means no more effort than the turning of a page. . . ."

We hope that all of you get equal pleasure from your magazine. We're doing all we can to see that your fireside adventuring into the occult is as weird and thrilling—as rich in variety—as it can be made.

Horror, ancient and modern—science fiction—fantasy of every kind—weird tragedy, weird humor, weird romance . . . ghosts, vampires, werewolves, monsters and sorcerers—these and countless other kinds of stories make up WEIRD TALES.

One reader prefers one type of story, another goes for something completely different. One likes science fiction, another likes horror. Some enjoy both. You are agreed upon two things only: that each story be really interesting—and that each issue be so varied that, no matter what your taste, you will be entertained. We don't expect each story to please everyone. But we do hope that in every issue the majority of tales will thrill and delight you.

The lead story in this issue—Ray Cummings' "Robot God"—is a futuristic affair of rebellious machine-men, space ships and barren asteroids. While its twin feature, the second part of the Lovecraft novel, is a horror tale in the traditional manner. And in between are stories, each different to the other, yet all blending into what we hope is a perfect reading whole.

We're hoping that as many of you as have the time will write to us and tell us what you feel about your magazine—for such letters are a great help to us in giving you the kind of stories that you really want to see in WEIRD TALES.

One Reader's Choice of the Best Stories in WEIRD TALES for 1940

From Elkhom, W. Va., Eugene Dixon writes:

I have before me the six WEIRD TALES issued in 1940 and I'm listing the six best stories of 1940. Of course, this list may not agree with everyone, but I sure liked them:

1. **A Million Years in the Future—Thomas P. Kelly.**
2. **The Golden Spider—Seabury Quinn.**
3. **Wind in the Moonlight—Gretchen Ruediger.**
4. **The Dreadful Rabbits—Gans T. Field.**
5. **The Unusual Romance of Ferdinand Pratt—Nelson S. Bond.**
6. **The Last Waltz—Seabury Quinn.**

Here's hoping you go monthly next month!

Where You Can Get a Photo of Lovecraft

From 2530 N. Oakland Avenue, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, Harold Gauer writes:

I note an inquiry in the *Eyrie* about photos of H. P. Lovecraft. August Derleth once sent me a small picture of Mr. Lovecraft which I copied and enlarged for use on the dust jacket of "The

Outsider." I still have the negative and some 4 x 5 prints can easily be made from it. According to Mr. Derleth, it is practically the only photo available.

I wonder if readers are interested in some positively hideous and uncommon photographs of such prominent Weirdies as Henry Kuttner, Robert Bloch, Ray Palmer, Lou Sampliner, or Fritz Leiber? Or in a fine rear view of Kuttner, Derleth and Bloch?

With their permission I might supply the demands of such *voyeurs* as might be interested.

Weird Tales Omnibus

From St. Paul, Minn., Charles W. Jarvis writes:

A *Weird Tales Omnibus?* Who could, who would object? Is such a volume possible? Then by all means let us have one.

A *Weird Tales Quarterly?* Of course—if the stories are old favorites.

And here's another, an alternate system to be mulled over while thinking on the above two ideas. If a quarterly is impracticable—why not an annual?

HPL is brilliant as always. My prayers ascend to the gods that his other story may be found.

We're hoping that lots more of you will keep on writing to us with your ideas on this subject—and maybe one day the Quarterly will be a reality.

She Likes Bloch

From Atlantic City, N. J., Beth Evans writes:

I have been an intermittent reader of WEIRD TALES for years and would be with you bi-monthly—even monthly, when sales pick up—if you would feature a Robert Bloch yarn regularly. Such as "Beauty's Beast" in the May issue.

Times have changed, readers no longer like to diddle and doodle through long, involved descriptive passages and cliche plots. The spell of the past can best be evoked by the more immediate, the more exact prose of the present.

Bloch's characters and particularly his dialogue are strictly 1941. You have in him a sharp social satirist.

We have some good Robert Bloch material in the office, and are hoping to run a story by him in the next issue.

9 Rockefeller Plaza New York, N. Y.

Write to MARTIN WARE, SECRETARY

• This is your club—a medium to help you and other fantasy and science-fiction fans get together. Readers wanted it—they wrote in telling us how much they would enjoy meeting others of similar tastes.

• Membership is very simple: just drop us a line, so that we can enroll you on the club roster, and publish your name and address in the magazine.

• A membership card carrying the above design—personal token of your fellowship with the weird and the fantastic—will be sent on request. (A stamped, addressed envelope should be enclosed.)

His Great, Great Grandmother Was a Witch!

ANYONE interested in getting in touch with a fellow who is actually descended from a witch? You see my Great, Great Grandmother was driven out of a little village in the Pyrenees Mountains of France, where the Basque people live, because it was said that she was seen casting a spell upon her neighbors and their children, which caused them to fall sick of the death cramps. They even said that she had a familiar demon in the shape of a great black, hound thing, that had glowing red eyes, and tusks like a wild boar; it was said that this awful thing could be heard baying across the moor on the nights of the full moon, when witches were supposed to gather in the black glen, and pledge their fidelity to the devil. I am only quoting family history, no fooling. And as proof I can show any skeptical person two books that have come down to me from that distant relative of mine. One is bound in leather, and bears the title "Runes for Good and Ill," and the other is bound in carpet, with the title "Herbs to Cure the Sick and Plague the Living." Incidentally, neither of these books are for sale at any price. From the village of St. Tremain she went to the

sea port of Palafrugell in Spain. There she met my Great, Great Grandfather who was a seaman, engaged in carrying silks and tea from the Orient to America, where they eventually settled—the reason I am here today.

I will gladly write to anyone who would like additional information about this subject, and I think I can guarantee some letters that will be very entertaining. I remain your friend,

Edward Goodell.

R. F. D. No. 6, Rosedale Station,
Kansas City, Kansas.

A Hypnotist Writes

Having been a reader of WEIRD TALES for quite a number of years, I want to take this opportunity to say that I find each issue as interesting as the last. Some of the stories that I have read are not outside the realm of reality.

When I was fourteen years old I hypnotized my first subject. Since that time, eighteen years ago, I have been an ardent student of Abnormal Psychology and practical metaphysics.

I will be glad to answer any questions that readers may wish to know of the art of hypnotism.

G. B. Surles.

1215 Troy Hill Road, N. S.
Pittsburgh, Pa.

"Lovely Nightmares"

I just finished reading your March edition of WEIRD TALES and I think it is the best I've read so far, but I am still looking forward to even better ones!

I would like to enroll in your club, because I have quite a reputation of being a ghost and weird story teller.

Yours sincerely,

E. Koda.

Chicago, Ill.

P. S.—Without your magazine I wouldn't have such lovely nightmares!

First Reader of Weird Tales

I think I'm one of the pioneers of WEIRD TALES! The first copy of WEIRD TALES (and I believe it was the *first*) came to me one bleak day in the early or mid-'twenties when I was confined at home with a cold and was bored no end with all the reading matter I had at hand. The copy I received was a sample copy, I believe.

Since that day I have been a WEIRD TALES fan, and have missed very few issues. I shall always have a warm place in my heart for this magazine; it accepted and published my first fiction story. That was The Dream Chair, published in your October, 1928, issue.

Very cordially yours,

LeRoy E. Fess.

R. F. D. No. 1,
Clarence, N. Y.

NEW MEMBERS

Robert Watkins, 1249 Tinton Ave., New York, N. Y.
Thorne Swaffield, Rectory School, Pomfret, Conn.
Walter J. Daugherty, 525 W. 43rd St., Los Angeles, Calif.
Eleanor O'Brien, 525 W. 43rd St., Los Angeles, Calif.
Marian E. Gordon, 2149 Central Park Ave., Evanstoon, Ill.
Mrs. Pearl Knoofiala, Box 43, Grand River, Lake Co., Ohio.
Joyce Doyl, P. O. Box 61, Liverpool, N. S., Canada
Vernon Brown, 4834 Kansas Ave., N. W. Wash., D. C.
Norman Gagnon, 50 Congress St., Lawrence, Mass.
C. Hidley, 2541 Aqueduct Ave., New York, N. Y.
Charles S. Jones, 126 Argie Road, Ardmore, Penna.
Weaver Wright, Box 6475 Met. Sta., Los Angeles, Cal.
Charles L. Klein, 211 W. 108th St., New York, N. Y.
Eddie Clever, New Cumberland, Pa.
Joseph Jirinec, 22-35 29th St., Astoria, L. I., N. Y.
Meriam B. Simpson, 1117—18th St., Santa Monica, Calif.
Clifton Morris, Box 162, Tech Branch, Lubbock, Tex.
Harold W. Tiffany, 349 E. Roscdale Ave., Milwaukee. Wisc.
Jack L. Jones, 309 N. Csdda St., Cleburne, Texas
W. C. Babcock, M. S. City of Dalhart, American President Lines, 1 Broadway, N. Y. C.
G. B. Surles, 1215 Troy Hill Road, N. S. Pittsburgh, Penna.
E. James Allard, Jr., 50 Cottage St., Laconia, N. H.
Embe True, c/o Wertz, 151 West Cliff St., Somerville, N. J.
Jack Wright, R. F. D. 3, Box 5, Mission, Texas
Wescesiao Chora, 66D—Pangniban St., Cebu City, P. I.
Mrs. Frances M. Peacock, 5729—6th Ave., Los Angeles, Calif.
Robert I. Peacock, 5729—6th Ave., Los Angeles, Cal.
Virginia Combs, Box 907, Crandou, Wisconsin.
Walter B. Horton. Autiquarian Galleries, 442 St. John St., Portland, Maine.
Robert E. Fontinelle, 3217 N. Newsstead Ave., St. Louis, Mo.
Irene Heimerick, 1390 E. 90th St., Cleveland, Ohio
Chester A. Payfer, Route No. 3, Yale, Michigan
Albert A. Pepper, 306 North 40th St., Phila., Penna.
Lewis Kurchere, Imperial Hotel, Imperial, Calif.
William D. Sullivan, 725 6th St., Beaver Falls, Pa.
Mima Sullivan, 725 6th St., Beaver Falls, Pa.
R. S. Pyle, 841 A Avenue, Coronado, Calif.
Stephen J. Meitor, 1717 W. Center, Milwaukee, Wisc.
Hibbard James, 1201 Judson Ave., Evanston, Ill.
Louis W. Hammer, 369—5th St., Brooklyn, N. Y.
Kenneth Eikln, Jr., 362 North Flores Ave., Hollywood, Calif.
Mrs. Anne Junek, 2305 South Ridgeway Ave., Chicago, Ill.
Leslie Yuhasz, 2143 West 61st St., Cleveland, Ohio
James F. Burns, 2713 S. Sheridan St., Phila., Pa.
Louise E. Hilliard, 16 Kimball Rd., Arlington, Mass.
Tom White, 323 South Western, Los Angeles, Calif.
Alice Wayne, 1725 Union St., San Diego, Calif.
Robert Lawrence, 433 East 68th St., New York, N. Y.

We're sorry that lack of space prevents the inclusion of the names of all New Members. The rest will appear next time.

The leaders of the next ten years will largely be determined in the next ten months. Will you be one of them?

Will You Be Clerk or Manager Ten Years from Now?

"SURELY, this could never happen to *me*," you say—"that I should be sitting at the same desk—be doing the same work—*for ten straight years!*" But wait a minute—

Exactly that same thing has happened to thousands upon thousands of men. It has probably happened to men right in the company you now are working for. *And—unless you fit yourself for a better job—there is a very good chance that it may happen to you!*

Unthinkable? That's what J. N. Dixon of Columbus, Ohio, said to himself. Yet lack of training kept him slaving away at low wages for a long time.

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ANOTHER AMAZING SUCCESS STORY

If you think Mr. Dixon's success story unusual, please read what J. H. Krouse of Memphis, Tennessee, says. "When I decided to take your training in Higher Accountancy, I was a clerk. Today I am Chief Consultant Accountant for the U. S. Engineer's Office in Memphis, Tenn. Whatever success or recognition I have had, I owe to your training. I have had no other specialized training along this line. Your method of teaching is not only instructive but highly engaging. I have observed other courses, but firmly believe LaSalle has the best to be had anywhere."

Another bit of evidence is Mr. R. P. Barthalow's experience. Mr. Barthalow is Chief of the Sales Tax Section of the Tax Commission of Ohio. A department which handles over $50,000,000 a year. Mr. Barthalow attributes much of his success to LaSalle training.

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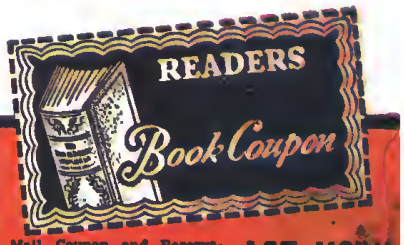

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