A NELSON BOND Thriller

JANUARY

Weird Tales

15¢

"The Golden Goblins"

by MANLY WADE WELLMAN

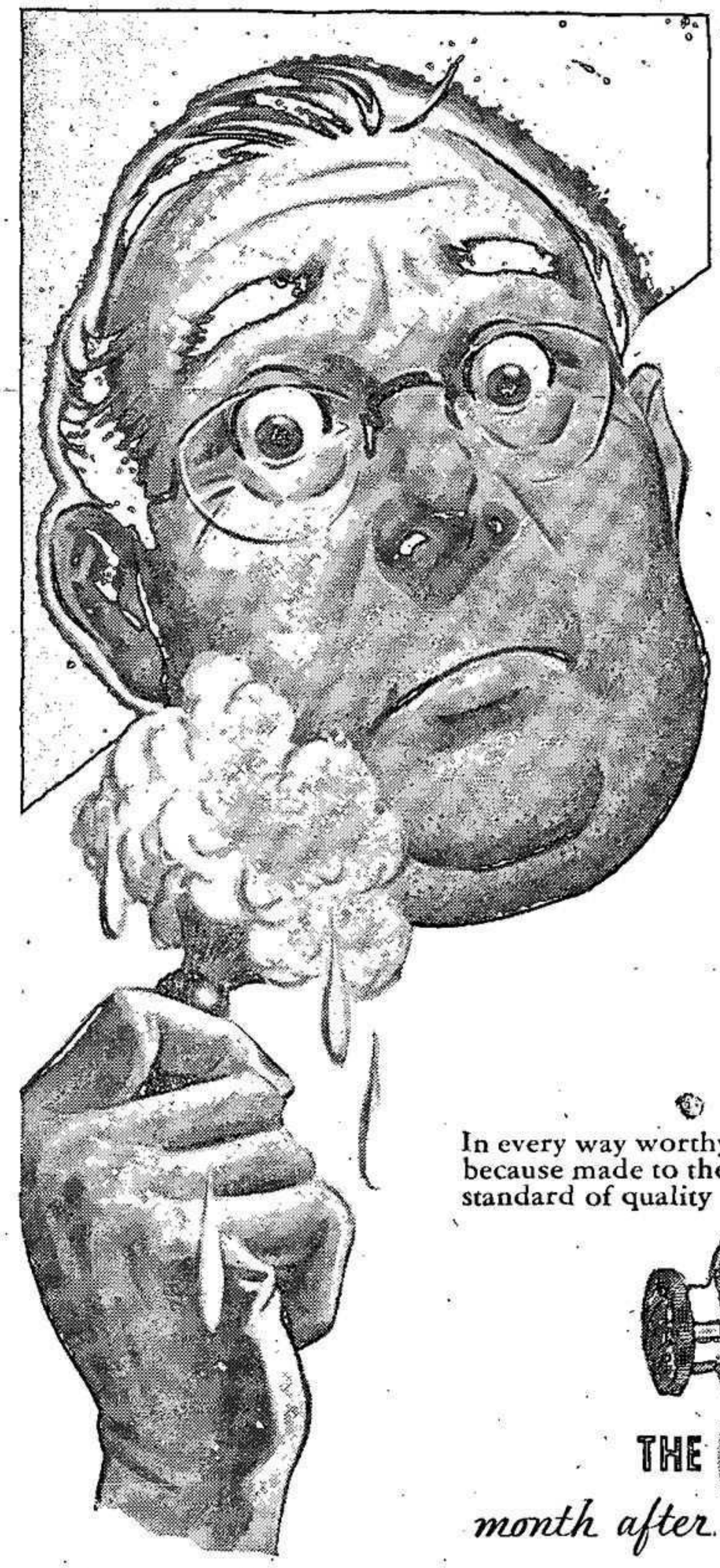
The Werewolf Scourge

"Bon Voyage, Michele"

SEABURY QUINN

Are you interested in a **SHAVING CREAM**

Guaranteed not to make Shaving a Pleasure?



Men, here is a product dedicated to the proposition that shaving is a nuisance and a bore!

Sure, there is solace and comfort for shavers, in the big sea-green and white tube of Listerine Shaving Cream. But *not* pleasure.

Pleasure is too much to ask of any shaving cream . . . because no matter how you slice 'em, whisking off the whiskers is no fun.

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It is a *sensible* shaving aid. In every fractional inch of its quality cream, there is lots and lots of good, rich lather. And every moist billow which you brush-up is crammed with coolness, packed with what it takes to make shaving as painless as possible.

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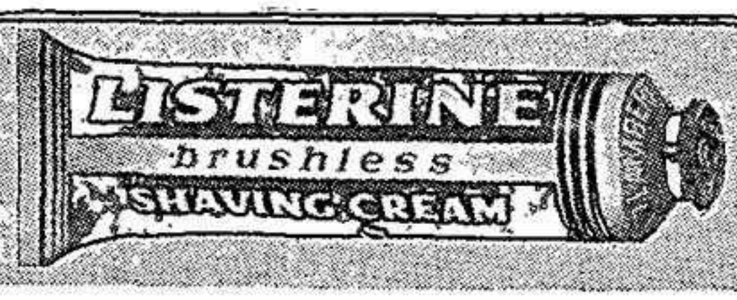
LAMBERT PHARMACAL COMPANY, *St. Louis, Mo.*

In every way worthy of the name, because made to the Listerine standard of quality

THE 35¢ TUBE THAT LASTS AND L-A-S-T-S

month after month after month



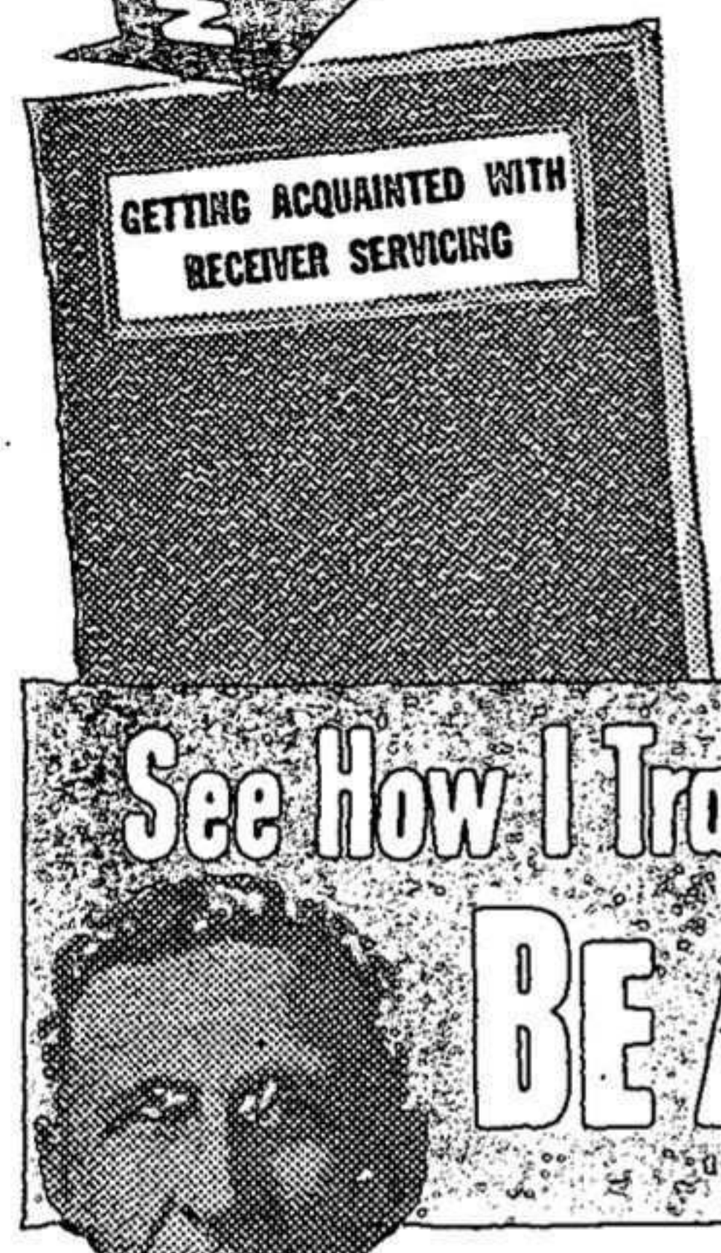
REMEMBER, THERE ARE 2 TYPES OF LISTERINE SHAVING CREAM

Out of this tube come swell shaves for men who prefer no-brush cream

GET BOTH FREE

SAMPLE LESSON

RADIO'S OPPORTUNITY BOOK



I will send you this FREE Lesson, "Getting Acquainted With Receiver Servicing," to show you how practical it is to train for Radio in spare time. It's a valuable lesson. Study it—*keep it—use it—without obligation!* Tells how "Superhet" Receivers work, gives hints on Receiver Servicing, Locating Defects, Repair of Loudspeaker, I. F. Transformer, Gang Tuning Condenser, etc. 31 illustrations. And with it I'll send my FREE 64-page book, "Win Rich Rewards in Radio." It describes many fascinating jobs Radio offers, explains how N.R.I trains you at home for good pay in Radio.

See How I Train You at Home in Spare Time to

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J. E. SMITH
President
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Established
29 Years

I Trained These Men

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"I repaired some Radio sets when I was on my tenth lesson. I really don't see how you can give so much for such a small amount of money. I made $600 in a year and a half, and I have made an average of $10 a week—just spare time." JOHN JERRY, 1337 Kalamath St., Denver, Colo.

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By the time you've built this Superheterodyne and many other Radio circuits with the six big kits of Radio parts I send, you will have valuable experience.

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Fixing Radios pays better now than for years. With new Radios out of production, *fixing old sets, which were formerly traded* in, adds greatly to the normal number of servicing jobs.

Broadcasting stations, Aviation and Police Radio, and other Radio branches are scrambling for Operators and Technicians. Radio Manufacturers, now working on Government orders for Radio equipment, employ trained men. The Government, too, needs hundreds of competent civilian and enlisted Radio men and women. You may never see a time again when it will be so easy to get started in this fascinating field.

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The moment you enroll for my Course I start sending you EXTRA MONEY JOB SHEETS that show how to earn EXTRA money fixing Radios. Many make $5, $10 a week extra in spare time while learning. I send you SIX big kits of real Radio parts. You LEARN Radio fundamentals from my lessons—PRACTICE what you learn by building typical circuits—PROVE what you learn by interesting tests on the circuits you build.

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Men likely to go into military service, soldiers, sailors, marines, should mail the Coupon now! Learning Radio helps Service men get extra rank, extra prestige, more interesting duties, much higher pay. Also prepares for good Radio jobs after service ends. Over 1,700 Service men now enrolled.

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Think of the NEW jobs that Television, Frequency Modulation, Electronics, and other Radio developments will open after the war! You have a real opportunity. Get into Radio NOW and be ready to cash in when Victory releases these amazing wartime Radio developments for peacetime uses!

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TRAINING MEN FOR VITAL RADIO JOBS

GOOD FOR BOTH 64-PAGE BOOK SAMPLE LESSON FREE

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Mail me FREE, without obligation, your Sample Lesson and 64-page book, "Win Rich Rewards in Radio." *(No Salesman will call. Please write plainly.)*

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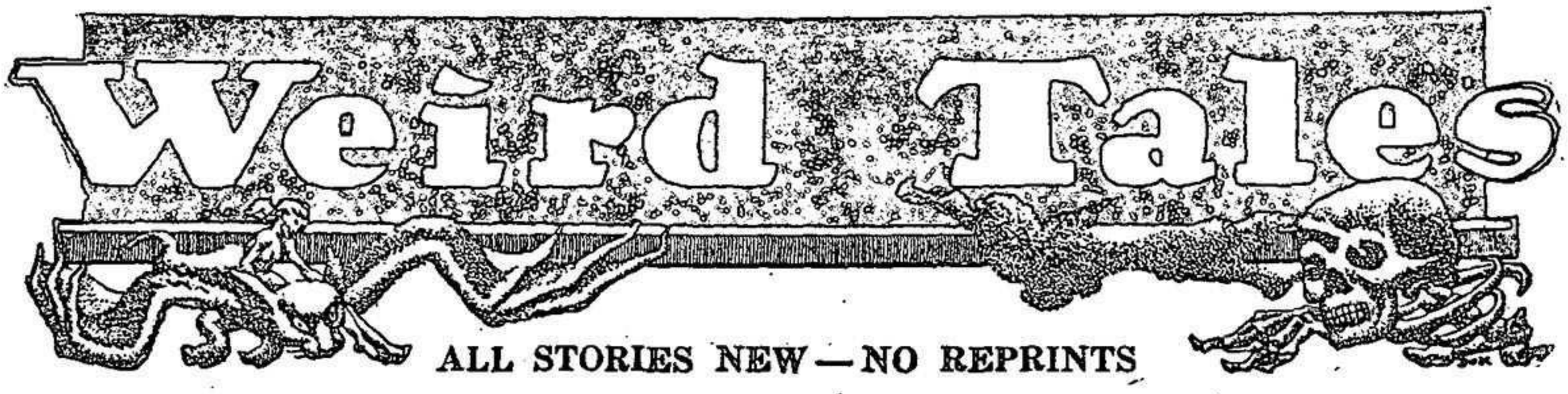

ALL STORIES NEW—NO REPRINTS

January, 1944 Cover by Harold S. De Lay

LONG NOVELETTE

NOVELETTES

SHORT STORIES

Except for personal experiences the contents of this magazine is fiction. Any use of the name of any living person or reference to actual events is purely coincidental.

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Vol. 37, No. 3

D. McILWRAITH, *Editor.* LAMONT BUCHANAN, *Associate Editor.*

The Shape of Thrills to Come

THE TRAIL OF CTHULHU

A Long Novelette By August Derleth

A tale of the Deep Ones . . . those great, dread beings who forever walk in the watery places under the earth!

FROM THE HOUSE OF THE RAT CATCHER

H. Bedford-Jones

+

THE UNBELIEVER

Seabury Quinn

+

HOOFS

Manly Wade Wellman

+

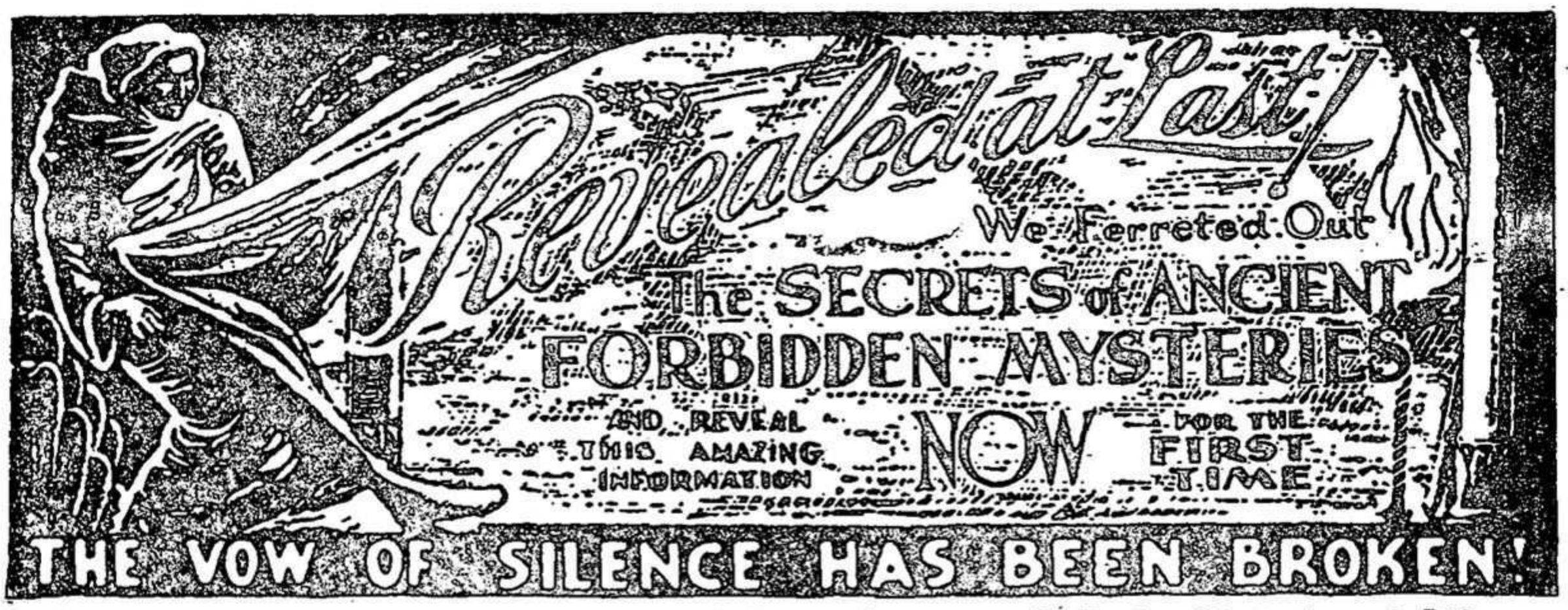
These are a few of the top-notch stories in your March issue.

MAN must be prepared to accept notions of the cosmos, and of his own place in the seething vortex of time, whose merest mention is paralyzing. He must, too, be placed on guard against a specific, lurking peril which may impose monstrous and unguessable horrors upon certain venturesome members of the human race.

WEIRD TALES

FOR MARCH

Out January First



"The 7 Keys to Power alleges to teach," the author says, "All the Mysteries of Life from the Cradle to the Grave—and Beyond. It tells you the particular day and hour to do anything you desire, whether it be in the light of the moon, sun, or in total darkness."

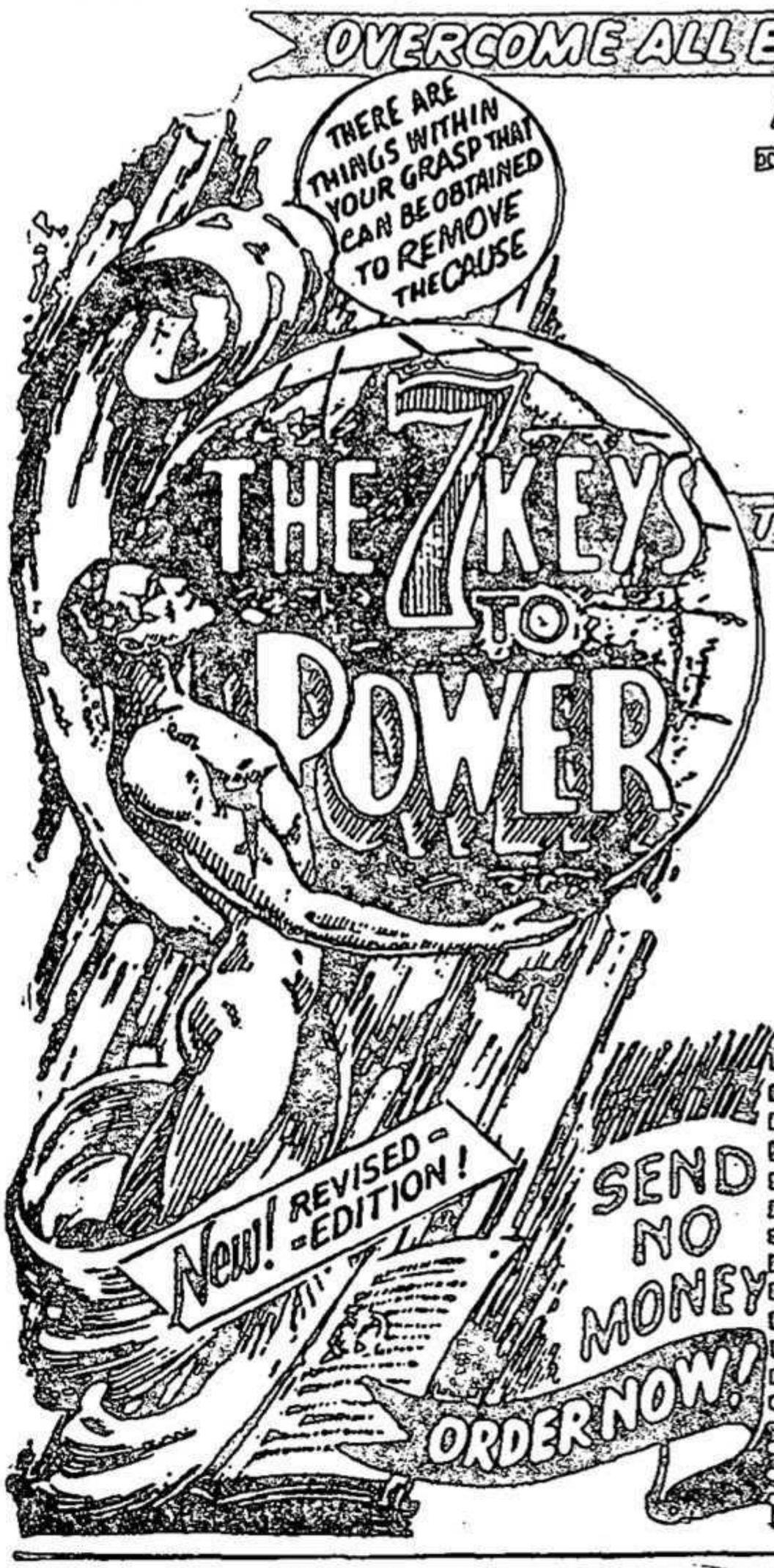
He claims, "The power to get what you want revealed at last, for the first time since the dawn of creation. The very same power which the ancient Chaldeans, Cuthic, Priests, Egyptians, Babylonians, and Sumerians used is at our disposal today."

He says, "Follow the simple directions, and you can do anything you desire. No one can tell how these Master Forces are used without knowing about this book, but with it *you can mold anyone to your will.*"

From this book, He says, "You can learn the arts of an Old Science as practiced by the Ancient Priestly Orders. Their marvels were almost beyond belief. You, too, can learn to do them all with the instructions written in this Book," Lewis de Claremont claims. "It would be a shame if these things could all be yours and you failed to grasp them."

He claims, "It is every man's birthright to have these things of life: MONEY! GOOD HEALTH! HAPPINESS! If you lack any of these, then this book has an important message for you. *No matter what you need,* there exists a spiritual power which is abundantly able to bring you whatever things you need."

OVERCOME ALL ENEMIES, OBSTACLES & HIDDEN FEARS



ARE YOU CROSSED IN ANY WAY?

The Seven Keys to Power, Lewis de Claremont says, shows you how to remove and cast it back.

The Book Purports to Tell You How to—

- Gain the love of the opposite sex.
- Unite people for marriages.
- Obtain property.
- Make people do your bidding.
- Make any person love you.
- Make people bring back stolen goods.
- Make anyone lucky in any games.
- Cure any kind of sickness without medicine.
- Get any job you want.
- Cast a spell on anyone, no matter where they are.
- Get people out of law suits, courts, or prison.
- Banish all misery.
- Gain the mastery of all things.
- Regain your youth and vigor.
- Choose words according to ancient, holy methods.

THE ONLY TRUE BOOK OF SUPREME MASTERSHIP!

This is the Power, He says, from which the old masters gained their knowledge and from which they sold limitless portions to certain favored Kings, Priests, and others at high prices, but never to be revealed under a vow, the violation of which entailed severe punishment.

THE VOW HAS NOW BEEN BROKEN

This book, he claims, shows you the secrets of old which when properly applied makes you able to control the will of all without their knowing it. If you have a problem and you wish to solve it, he says, don't hesitate. Advertisements cannot describe nor do this wonderful book justice. You must read it and digest its meaning, to really appreciate its worth.

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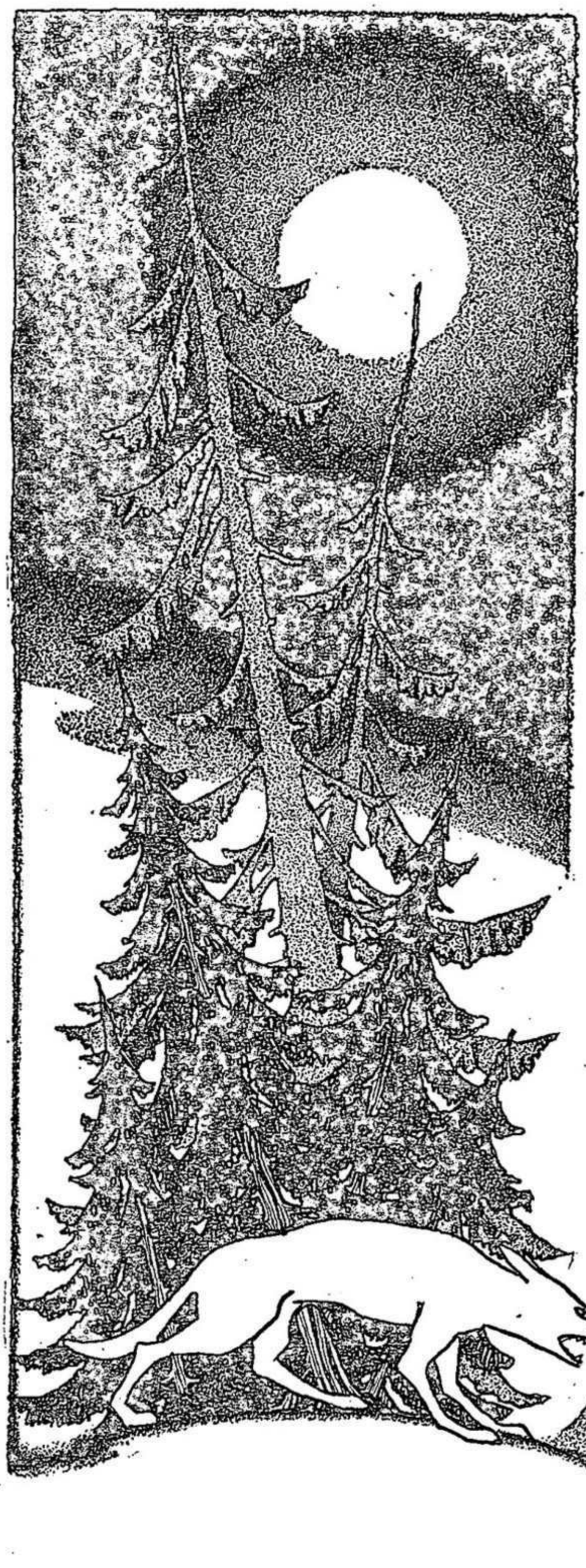
If you wish we Trust You. . . . Pay Postman $1 on delivery plus a few pennies Postage. Check here ( ).

Bon Voyage, Michele



"YOU lugs can stick around if you want to; I'm goin' back to quarters and get drunk," Fontenoy apKern nodded a morose farewell to Amberson and me. "Of all the—"

"What's biting you?" grinned Amberson. "The Old Man did us proud with the eats, didn't he? And even you can't kick about the quantity and quality of the champagne—"

"That's just what gripes me so," apKern broke in. "Music—food—champagne—it makes me so dam' homesick. We've beat the Heinies to a pulp an' fixed 'em so they'll never dare to break the peace again, haven't we? We've set the Frogs up in business at the old stand, haven't me? All right, then, why don't they ship us home? I joined the army for a scrap, not to police a country that's as calm an' law-abidin' as a village on Long Island. I'm honin' for a sight o' Broadway an' the lights o' Herald Square. If I don't get home toot sweet I'll—for Gawd's sake, fellers—*look!*"

The regimental band commandeered for the general's party at the Bückensdorfferschloss was swinging into a one-step riotous with rhythm and nostalgically reminiscent of America:

On cold, snowy nights in certain sections of the world it is more the surprise not *to meet a werewolf than otherwise.*

Wait'll you see me with my-y-y sweetie,
Showin' him off to the crowd.
He makes a specialty of lookin' good to me . . .

The castle hall had been transformed into a ballroom, its oak floors polished to a satin finish, flowers and green branches festooned round the walls. Beneath the spiral of the grand staircase the musicians were ensconced in a bower of green, and about the great baronial apartment dancing couples glided. The men, of course, were in their olive drab, but the girls—Red Cross workers, U. S. O. aides and a few civilian Signal Corps employees—had welcomed the occasion to put off working clothes and blossom out in formal evening frocks. It was amazing how much the change did for them. Most women are not built to wear men's clothes or even "mannish" garments. The jackets put undue and unkind emphasis on hips; if they wore breeches we were unhappily aware that nature had designed feminine knees with a tendency to exchange greetings at each step and that the percentage of nonparallel shins is depressingly high. But swathed in flat-

By SEABURY QUINN

Heading by BORIS DOLGOV

tering folds of evening dresses, highlighted by the brilliance of bright colors and a-twitter with the novelty of going utterly, completely feminine after months of masquerading in semi-masculine attire, the girls were as alluring as a garden of fresh flowers. Those who had seemed plain and commonplace in everyday uniform looked positively pretty in their party dresses, the merely pretty ones seemed beautiful, and those few who had more than their share of good looks were positively ravishing. Then in an instant, as if at the wave of a wizard's wand, all the glamor dissolved, and as a flock of sparrows becomes dull and lack-luster at the advent of a cardinal or tanager, every flush-faced, starry-eyed girl in the ballroom seemed to sink into a dull mauve background to accentuate the exquisiteness of the woman on the stairs.

SHE stood at the top platform of the grand staircase, a vision in matte white—a white crêpe evening gown without the slightest trace of ornament was drawn glove-tight about her almost incredibly slim waist, moulding shapely hips and falling in a soft curve to her silver-slippered feet. Across her shoulders draped a cloak of platinum-gray fur hiding one arm in its folds. Her other hand put back the cape and we caught the gleam of a great cartouche emerald set in green gold against the white perfection of her forefinger.

But if her form and costume were arresting her face was absolutely breath-taking. Without a touch of color save for the bright rouge upon her lips, it had delicate hollows beneath high cheekbones, eyes smoky-gray and holding a far-off vision as if she seemed to see the sufferings of the hidden places of the world in retrospect, and over all a wealth of bright hair piled high upon her head like an imperial crown. In the glow of the tall candles burning in tall standards each side of the stairway it shone like minted silver.

"My Gawd!" repeated apKern more devoutly than profanely. "Who *is* she?"

"Michele Mikhailovitch," I answered, adding quite gratuitously, "she's Russian."

For once apKern had no acid rejoinder to my banality. "You know her?" he asked almost tremulously.

"U'h-h'm. Slightly. She's a White Russian refugee, an M. D. from the University of St. Petersburg who transferred from the British to our Red Cross in Paris and just came up from Treves. Like to meet her?"

"Wi—will you introduce me?" he asked almost bashfully.

I glanced at him in surprise. His boiling point was always low where women were concerned, but the Russian girl's blond beauty had not so much dazzled as consumed him. Amberson winked at me. "Hooked," he whispered. "Throw him up on the bank and light a fire."

She came slowly down the winding stairway as if making a triumphal entrance, svelte, amazingly graceful, mysteriously beautiful with that thin white face and scarlet lips so like a mask.

The band swung into the Missouri Waltz as we dodged through the dancers to the stairway where Michele Mikhailovitch stood poised, a figure such as the Greeks loved to think of.

A little smile of recognition kindled in her smoke-gray eyes as I bowed before her. *"Tiens, cher collègue,"* she greeted, *"c'est véritablement vous?"*

The slender hand she held out to me was almost colorlessly white as if carved out of ivory, and the great emerald in its green gold frame was even more vivid by contrast. As I raised her fingers to my lips I caught the perfume of wild carnation on her skin.

"May I present Major Amberson—Captain apKern?" I asked as I stepped back and nodded to my companions.

"How d'ye do?" asked Amberson coolly. Amberson did not like Russians.

But apKern! "*Enchanté, Mademoiselle,*" he assured her as he bent above the hand she gave him and deliberately turned it over to press his lips against its palm. He did not ask her to dance, just held his arms out, and she melted naturally into his embrace as a bird settles in its nest.

"Humph. Looks like our young friend's got hit hard—again," said Amberson as they glided away from us. In civil life he'd been a police lieutenant in New York and had brought the cynicism of his calling into the army with him. He was apKern's superior in police administration and the frequent and deplorably thorough love affairs of his young assistant drove him almost to the verge of suicide, or mayhem. "I s'pose I'll have a steady diet of Michele Mikhailovitch for the next month—or till the next one comes along," he added gloomily. "Can't you fix the young pup up with a dose of something, Doc?"

"I don't think there's much need," I grinned back. "They say the only cure for love is matrimony, and it looks to me as if apKern's about to take the treatment."

"Good Lord, you don't think the young fool's going to *marry* her? Why, he's only just met her, and—"

"It looks to me as if it's the real thing this time, and I'd say she's got it, too. Neither of them knows there's another person in the castle right now."

THEY were dancing cheek to cheek, which in those days was considered about the last word in abandon. The girl's eyes were closed and her long lashes traced crescents of shadow on her pale cheeks. Her lips were slightly parted and her mouth was soft and tender. apKern wore that peculiarly imbecile expression seen only on the faces of congenital idiots and young men in love. I had a feeling they were drawing out the moment as long as they could because they knew instinctively there might never be another like it in their whole lives—none so tenuously clothed in ecstasy.

The waltz came to an end and in the silence following the spatter of applause there came from outside the castle a mourning, vibrant call: *O-u-o—o-u-oo—o-u-o!* It rose against the stillness of the snow-carpeted night, crescendoed to a wail, from a wail to a howl, despairing, pleading, longing as the cry of a damned spirit, fierce and wild as the rally-call of the fiends of hell.

"Sounds like a starvin' hound," said Amberson. "Why doesn't someone shoot the thing an' put it out of its misery—what the devil!"

The Bückensdorfferschloss was far from modern, candles and a few oil lamps were its sole source of illumination, and as the doleful wail rose quaveringly a party of departing guests swung the great entrance door open, letting in a sudden draft of snow-chilled wind that snuffed the candles of the ballroom out as if a multiple extinguisher had been clapped on them.

Ensuing darkness was utter, abysmal. The logs that blazed in the huge fireplace lashed whips of yellow light across the flagstone hearth, but the gloom that gathered just beyond the wavering edge of firelight seemed all the blacker by contrast.

"Lights! For God's sake, someone strike a light!" I heard apKern's frenzied plea.

A dozen matches scratched and sputtered and as the relit candles blossomed once more into orange flame we saw him in the center of the hall supporting Michele Mikhailovitch. She lay senseless in his arms with the flacidity of a rag doll, her head dropped back, her arms trailed limply toward the floor, her silver-gilt hair like a pale flame round her absolutely bloodless face.

"Take over, will you, Major?" he asked as he bore her to the stairs. "She fainted in my arms just as that dog howled, and—"

"Go on," I motioned him to precede me. "Take her to the first bedroom you come to

and run and fetch some brandy. I'll see to her."

Her pulse was racing like an airplane engine and when I folded back her lids I saw her eyes were turned so sharply up the irises —were hidden. "Now, just what happened?" I asked as he came back with the cognac.

"I don't quite know, sir. She was waltzin' like an angel out o' heaven when that dam' dog howled and she began to tremble and went cold as if she'd had a sudden chill —or died. She whispered something like *'mon rêve,'* then something else that sounded like *'óborten.'* What d'ye s'pose she meant?"

"What does anything we say when we're about to lose consciousness mean?" I countered. *"Rêve* is French for dream, but—"

"Le rêve, le rêve terrible!" the girl on the bed moaned. *"Mon Dieu, le rêve des loups!"*

She clutched my blouse like a drowning woman grasping at a rope. "Has it gone?" she besought piteously. "The *volkodlák—"*

"Everything's all right," I soothed, as I put one hand behind her and held the brandy to her lips with the other. "You're at the general's ball in the Bückensdorffer castle, the house is full of officers, and there are soldiers all around. There's nothing here to hurt you."

Her tense hold on my tunic slackened. "It was so stupid of me to swoon," she apologized, "but that dreadful howling—*comme un loup mourant de faim*—and the sudden darkness . . ."

"It was a gruesome sound," I agreed, " 'like a starved wolf,' as you say. Rather gave me the horrors, too."

A little laugh, forced, but a tolerable imitation of the real thing, answered me. "Michele Mikhailovitch is a great fool, *cher Majeur.* She begs your pardon for the trouble she has caused."

apKern held a hand out to her. "Better get back to quarters and rest," he advised. "I'll have a staff car for you in half a moment, and see that you get safely home—"

"It will not be too great a trouble?" her great eyes turned on him, begging pardon for the imposition.

"Trouble? Ha!" His short laugh was a reproof. "If ridin' with you is trouble, *Mademoiselle,* I'd like nothin' better than a lifetime of it."

"La, la, flatteur méchant!" she censured gaily. "Come, *Monsieur le Capitaine,* your arm, if you will be so gallant to a silly *infirme."*

THE general's ball had celebrated Washington's Birthday and six days later March came in like the proverbial lion with an influenza epidemic and an almost epidemic incidence of gastric and intestinal disorders as its unholy attendants. The wind howled like a banshee day and night and drove a lash-sharp cloud of sleet before it, the cold gnawed at our bones like a starved dog. I was working sixteen, sometimes eighteen hours a day; the ambulances stalled with their loads of the stricken, hospitals bulged with fresh cases till we set cots in the halls and cellars and still required room for more beds.

Michele Mikhailovitch worked like a Trojan with the women and sometimes lent a hand with the men, and through it all, through sickness, surgery and death, she kept her calm, assured poise as if sustained by something greater than her natural strength.

apKern and Amberson I saw occasionally and the younger man's changed manner struck me forcibly. He seemed older somehow, as if he had grown suddenly to full maturity from adolescence. "Yep, he's a changed man, and all for the better," his chief told me during one of my rare intervals of leisure. "That Roosian gal's worked wonders for him. Wish I could import a

dozen more like her to take care of those lame-brains they've given me for officers. I take back everything I ever thought about her. Only"—he drew the corners of his mouth down in serio-comic prophecy—I'm afraid it's too dam' good to last. If he gives her the go-by I'll—I'll massacree the young pup, and I don't mean maybe."

Three weeks later I ran into him in the lobby of the Metropole, scowling poisonously and gnawing at his cigar as if he had a grudge against it. "What's the matter, Major?" I asked.

He favored me with a black look. "It's that young fool apKern."

"Good Lord, what's he been up to now? Got another girl—"

"I told you nothing good would come of his philanderin' with that Roosian dame. She's given him the bum's rush, and he can't take it. Sulks in the office all day and gets pickled every night. He's in the bar right now, drinkin' himself into a case o' D. T.'s. Go in and see what you can do with him, will you? If I go in I'll slug him, sure as God made little apples."

"You're his commanding officer. If you'd give him a straight talking to—"

"What the fat-head does off duty is none of my official business. Besides, I haven't the heart to get rough with him." The somber, concerned look he gave me told more than his words. "The poor kid's got a broken heart, and what he needs is a physician—I hope. Go in and try to talk some sense into him, will you, Doc?"

apKern sat at a little table in the bar, a tall glass of *wein und branntwein* before him. *Wein und branntwein,* equal parts of sherry and cognac, is a mixture beside which the "boiler maker" of our Prohibition days is as milk compared to whiskey, and there was ample evidence that this was not his first drink of the evening.

"Hullo," he greeted listlessly as he tossed off the final inch of potent mixture in his glass at a gulp. "Have a drink?"

"Just one," I agreed. "A glass of Gertwiller. Then let's go home. You're drinking too much, son, and—"

His eyes challenged me. "I like licker. Why shouldn't I? A man can love his licker an' be sensible sometimes; but if he loves a woman—hic—never!

"Hey, Fritz, or whatever your dam' name is"—he hailed a waiter hurrying past with a snap of his fingers—"*zwei wein und branntwein,* and make it fast, you bow-legged son of a sea-cook!"

"*Ist gut, Herr Hauptmann,*" the waiter answered with an obsequious smirk, but the hatred in his eyes was like a suddenly bared knife.

That was my chance. "See here"—I laid my hand on his elbow—"general orders forbid fraternizing with the enemy, but they also forbid giving offense to the population. You're drunk and insulting German civilians. Get up and go to your quarters."

He drew his hand down his face from brow to chin and looked at me with lackluster, rebellious eyes. "Staff officers can't command line soldiers," he reminded. "I'm Infantry, you're Medical. Got no jurisdiction over me."

"Precisely," I agreed. "I'm in the Medical Corps, and you're a psychopathic case if ever I saw one."

He shook my hand off his arm. "I'm goin' to stay here an' get drunk, an' you or anybody else can't stop me. Turn me in for insubordination if you want."

"All right." I got to my feet. "If you want to stay here and make a fool of yourself—disgrace the American uniform before enemy civilians—I can't stop you. But—"

"Get out!" he snarled. "Get the hell out of here. I'm sick of bein' preached at!"

IT WAS sometime after midnight when the clamorous knocking at my door roused me. "Go away!" I called sleepily.

"Go back to the hospital and tell 'em I said—"

"It's apKern, Major," came the answer from beyond the panels. "May I come in?"

There was no one in all Germany I wanted to see less than Fontenoy apKern right then. "If you're looking for trouble you've come to the right shop," I assured him as I undid the bolts. "As if it weren't enough for you to make a spectacle of yourself at the Metropole—"

"I know, sir. I was a dam' fool, an' I've come to apologize—"

"And had to knock me up from the first decent sleep I've had in two weeks," I interrupted tartly. "Couldn't it have waited till tomorrow—"

"Please, sir," there was real contrition in his voice and face, "it wasn't just to beg your pardon I came. I'd like to have a talk with someone and you're the only one I could think of."

This was a sick man, I realized. Heart-sick, nerve-sick and on the verge of breakdown. "All right," I agreed grudgingly. "Come in and spin your yarn, son. Have a shot of brandy?" I added as he eyed the decanter thirstily. "Just one, though.

"Now," as he took a gulp of cognac and set the glass down unsteadily, "just what's gnawing at you?"

The diffidence in his manner was foreign to his character as I knew it as ribaldry would have been to a chaplain. "What do you know about me, sir?" he asked at length.

"U'm." I stuffed my pipe deliberately, not so much that I wanted to smoke as that I wanted time to organize my answer. "I know you were wounded at Catigny. I fished enough slugs to sink a rowboat out of you at the base hospital. You have the Croix de Guerre with palms and the Médaille Militaire. It's a good record. I hate to see you spoil it."

He waved my compliments aside with a cynical grin. "I wasn't speaking of my army record, sir. What d'ye know about *me?*"

"Well, since you put it that way, nothing. You speak like a New Yorker with an overlie of Harvard—"

"Yale," he corrected. "And Phillips Andover before that. I was born with a diamond horseshoe round my neck—"

"Indeed?" I rejoined ironically. "I've delivered several hundred infants in my medical career, but never one with jewelry—"

"Oh, please, sir! I meant I was the son of wealthy parents — apKern's Apple Aperient, you know—and never saw either of them. My father was killed in a motor wreck three months before I was born, my mother died two hours after, and as far as I know I haven't a relative in the world. Guardians and servants brought me up, saw I knew the right people, went to the right schools, did the right thing. They wouldn't let me go to a training camp and finally I was drafted. Luckiest break I ever had. Till I was just a plain buck private in the army I'd known only two kinds of people, those who did things for me because they got paid for it, and those who expected to be paid. But I was just another rookie at Camp Upton, and, thank God, I got my commission the hard way, instead of having it handed to me because I was the heir of Morgan and Fiona apKern."

HE REACHED for his glass, half raised it to his lips, and set it down untasted. "I know you and Amberson and the rest of 'em think I'm nutty as a fruitcake, takin' up with one Jane after another, buyin' 'em extravagant presents, an' ravin' over 'em. You think I'm a fat-head or a weak, susceptible fool. Man, can't you realize I was lonely; that I craved love as a plant does rain an' sunshine, and was as grateful for a little disinterested kindness as a stray dog is for a pat on the head?

"But it never lasted, did it? In love, out

of love, in love again—that was old soft-headed apKern, wasn't it? Sure, it was. And d'ye know why? Because sooner or later, and generally sooner, the girls found out I was the heir to apKern's Apple Aperient an' started in to do some plain an' fancy gold-diggin'. I didn't want to buy love—I could have all that I wanted from the cocottes of Montmartre. Love ain't worth a tinker's dam unless it's given; given freely, with no strings on it; d'ye understand?"

I looked at him with renewed interest. I could vision the long vista of his loveless, empty childhood and his young manhood served by mercenaries. No wonder he was cynical.

"Then I met Michele." The expression on his face was like a breaking dawn after a night of storm. "She was a refugee from the revolution. Everything she'd had was gone, home, parents, fortune—all. I'd never known a mother's love or father's confidence. We were like two people wandering in a dark wood. It was lonely and terrifying. And then we met and suddenly we weren't lonely any more, or afraid. I didn't let her know who I was in civil life—not that apKern's Apple Aperient would mean anything to her anyway—and she took me on faith; just Fontenoy apKern, Captain of Infantry, U. S. A., and with no prospect of a job when he gets out of service. Man, I'd found it at last, what I'd been searching for since I was just a little tyke crying himself to sleep for loneliness in a dark nursery, or waking up afraid of the dark and knowing there was no one he could call to for comfort."

"I see," I nodded.

"And then"—the eyes were sick and desperate in his drawn face—"she sent me this just ten days ago."

He reached into his blouse pocket and drew out a slip of folded paper.

My dear friend [it read]—I think it better that we do not see each other any more. Please do not think that I am angry with you or that you are in any way to blame, but it would be better if we did not let our intimacy ripen.

Sincerely,
Michele Mikhailovitch.

I read and reread the brief missive. There was a note of finality about it as definitely and unanswerably conclusive as the act of drawing the sheet over a corpse's face.

"That's that." He broke through my perusal of the message. "She won't see me or talk to me. Won't answer my letters. She's just dropped me like a cold potato, and there's no explanation."

"There must be," I protested. "I know her only slightly, but she's no flirt. If she's decided to break off your friendship—"

"Friendship be hanged! It's love. And on her side, too. My God, man, if you'd felt her lips part slowly under your kiss, felt her body trembling against yours—"

"Maybe that's it. Perhaps you were too ardent—"

"Ardent, ha"—his short laugh was like a bark—"nobody brought up at a loose end as I was can fail to get about among the girls, and I'm here to tell you that never in my life have I experienced a kiss like hers—it shakes me clear through just to think of it."

"Then see here—I'm a fool to take this John Alden rôle on, but I'll see her at the hospital tomorrow or the day after, and try to find out just what's wrong. She's not the sort of girl into whose privacy you can pry, but perhaps she'll tell a fellow doctor things she wouldn't tell a lover. Besides, I'm almost old enough to be her father."

"Will you, sir?" Hope came to life in his dull eyes again. "That'll make two uncancelable debts I owe you. One for introducin' me to her, the other for—"

"Never mind the thanks in advance, son. She'll probably freeze up like the snowdrifts of her native steppes, or slap my face for my impertinence. You may have another drink. Just one finger, mind you. Then off and to bed with you."

"THERE'S a memo for you, Major Carmichael," said Tillary, the ground floor supervisor, as I got into my white jacket and prepared to start my rounds next morning. "Captain apKern wants to see you. He's in G wing."

G wing was emergency. "What's he doing there?" I demanded. "He seemed well enough when I—" I broke off abruptly. Perhaps it might be just as well if no one knew about our midnight confab at my quarters.

"I don't know, sir." Tillary consulted her docket. "They brought him in at one-ten suffering from multiple incised wounds of face and hands. Dog bite, it seems to be. Blood specimens have been taken and the first Pasteur inoculation given—"

"Good Lord, I'm off!" I interrupted. "Call me in G wing if anything urgent comes up."

"But I tell you that's exactly what happened," I heard apKern's voice raised argumentatively as I pushed back the door to his room, and Weinberg's sarcastic rejoinder:

". . . and then the big bad wolf said to Little Red Riding Hood—"

"Major!" apKern appealed to me as I returned Weinberg's salute. "Was I drunk when I left you last night?"

"No-o," I answered. "You'd been drinking earlier in the evening, but you were sober—at least approximately so—when we said good night."

"Then he was just plain coocoo," Weinberg announced. "I've had my doubts about him for a long time"—he tapped his brow significantly. "Now—tell Carmichael just what you've told me, apKern."

"Just what happened?" I asked. "Your face—"

"Yeah, I know. My dearest maiden aunt, if I had one, wouldn't know me through these bandages. A dog bit me; dam' near finished me, too.

"I'd walked about four blocks down the Kommandanten-Strasse when I heard something behind me, and just as I turned round to see what it was a great police dog jumped on me. It hadn't barked or growled or given any sort of warning. Just leaped at me and slashed at my throat. I flung my hands up to protect my neck, and it fastened on my sleeve, but luckily I was wearing my sheepskin and it was tough enough to keep the brute's teeth from tearing my wrist.

"I never saw such a beast, sir. I've had a tussle or two with savage dogs before, and they always jumped away and rushed in again each time I beat 'em off, but this thing stood on its hind legs and fought me, like a man, clawing at my face with his forepaws—that's where I got most of my mauling. It never backed away or sank down to its all-fours once.

"I was still a little woozy"—he grinned apologetically—"and the brute was big and heavy as a man, so it wasn't long before it had me down. Every time it snapped at me I managed to get my arms in its way, so it really did more damage to my coat than me with its teeth, but I was beginning to tire when—"

"Here it comes!" grinned Weinberg. "This doesn't take the cake; it cops the whole dam' bakery!"

"Another dog came rushing up," apKern went on, heedless of the interruption. "It wasn't more than half as big as the brute that attacked me, and was the loveliest silver-gray shade you've ever seen. Must have been a collie, I think. But what it lacked in size and weight it made up in ferocity, for it jumped on the beast worrying me like a fury. It sank its teeth in the brute's stifle-joint and growled and dragged at it

like a pup dragging at a root. The other one turned from me for an instant and slashed at the collie, but she held on like grim death, growling all the time, and just then I heard someone coming and let out a yelp for help.

"It was a provost patrol, and as they pounded up both dogs made off into the darkness. Whew! I thought I was due for harp-lessons, I tell you."

"Tell the nice major what the big dog said to you," Weinberg urged, and winked at me.

"I didn't say it talked to me," apKern defended. "I said it *seemed* as if its snarls were words while it was worrying at my throat."

"All right, sonny boy, have it your way. What did it *seem* to say?"

apKern gazed stubbornly before him, and I could see a flush of resentment mounting to his cheeks between the bandages. "It seemed as if it kept snarling, *'Amerikander schwein'!"*

"What'd I tell you?" chuckled Weinberg. "If you say this guy wasn't drunk you must have been in a deplorable condition yourself, Carmichael."

THE call bell in the corridor outside rang six times, my signal. "Take the matter up with the General Board," I grinned. "I gotta see a man about a dog."

My jest came nearer truth than I realized. It was not a man, but Michele Mikhailovitch who had just been taken to the dressing room, her shoulder blue and swollen from four perforated wounds which any layman could have recognized as the bite of a large dog. The nurse had applied potassium permanganate, but the matter of cautery puzzled her. "Should we use silver nitrate or the electric hot-point, Major?" she asked.

"When did this happen?" I asked Michele.

"Shortly after midnight in the Kommandanten-Strasse. I couldn't sleep and had gone for a walk—"

"Was it a police dog?"

"Yes. Very large."

"The deuce it was! Captain apKern was attacked by just such a beast—in the Kommandanten-Strasse about the same time."

"Yes, I know—I mean I'd heard so"—she corrected herself hastily. "Perhaps it was the same animal."

"U'm. I'm afraid so. This doesn't look too good. It's possible the beast was rabid. Nurse," I turned to the assistant, "take a blood specimen and send it to the laboratory, then prepare the Pasteur serum."

"Yes, Major. Shall I also—*oh!"* She broke off on a sharp exclamation, for Michele had fallen from her chair in a dead faint.

"Easy on," I ordered as I laid her on the examination table, elevating her feet slightly. She was breathing stertorously, but even as I bent over her the deep, rapid respirations became shallow and less frequent, finally seemed to stop altogether. I took her wrist. Her pulse was almost imperceptible, but in a moment she drew a short, shuddering breath and gradually commenced to breathe more deeply. Cheyne-Stokes respiration might mean a grave heart or lung affection, intoxication or badly shocked nerves. Involvement of the heart or lungs to such an extent was clearly impossible. I knew a rigid physical examination had preceded her acceptance for duty. Certainly she was not drunk, and that left only nervous shock as a disposing cause.

"What?" I asked as she gasped something between labored breaths.

"Je suis perdue—mon rêve affreux—volkodlák—"

The French I understood: "I am lost—my frightful dream—" But the Russian, if it were Russian, was meaningless to me. And why should she say—I brought up with a start. She'd said almost the same

thing the night she fainted in apKern's arms while dancing at the general's party.

Something festered like a septic splinter in her subconscious; probably it had some bearing on her dismissal of apKern. It was a case for a psychiatrist, and a good one. Well, I was no psychiatrist, but I meant to get at the bottom of this. "This patient is more gravely ill than we'd thought," I told the nurse. "Have her put to bed and see that she is not disturbed. See I'm notified immediately if she asks for me."

"DO YOU speak Russian?" I asked Weinberg at luncheon. "I've heard you say your father came from Kiev."

"A little." He snapped back the pewter cap of his seidel and took a long, appreciative draught of the rich, frothy *bier.* "What d'ye want me to translate?"

"What do *óborten* and *volkodlák* mean?"

The smile left his intelligent dark eyes and his lids narrowed. "Where'd you hear 'em?"

"I've heard the terms twice lately, both times from Michele Mikhailovitch." Briefly I told him of her exclamation when she fainted at the general's party and when she'd swooned in the hospital that morning.

"The devil! And apKern swore the thing talked to him while it attacked him."

"What the hell're you drivin' at?" I demanded testily. "I ask you what a pair o' Russian words mean and you go wandering off—"

He outlined his chin with thumb and forefinger, frowning as if trying to see something just beyond his vision. "It could be," he murmured. "Conditions today simulate those of the Thirty Years War sufficiently—"

"Will you stop maundering and tell me what those words mean?" I demanded.

"Eh?" He seemed emerging from a brown study. "Oh, yes; *óborten* is a little hard to translate literally. It signifies a change, as of form or shape or nature. *Volkodlák* is more simple. It means werewolf. That's what makes it so interestin'."

"Interesting?"

"Precisely. I think we've stumbled right into the middle of a psychiatrist's dream, Carmichael. What have we got?" He spread his fingers fanwise and checked the items off: "First, a dog howls on a cold and snowy night, precisely the sort o' night on which werewolves are supposed to prowl. A girl—a Russian, remember, and belief in werewolves is as widespread and implicit in Russia as faith in the banshee is in Ireland—faints at the sound of it, and mumbles something about a bad dream and werewolves. Next we have a police dog, which is first cousin to a wolf, attacking a man in a dark street, and the man declares it *talked* to him. Werewolves are supposed to be able to talk as well as bark and growl, you know. Finally we have the same girl bitten by a dog, probably the same one that attacked the man, and again she raves about a terrifying dream and werewolves. The set-up seems ideal. Made to order."

I looked at him in frank bewilderment. "You may know what you're talking about, but—"

He shook his head impatiently. "I'm not so sure I do, old feller, but I'm tryin' to see light through the fog. Russia, even more than the Hartz Mountain district, is the native heath of werewolves. They're as common there as panhandlers on the Bowery. Everyone believes in 'em, whether he admits it or not. That means Michele Mikhailovitch has the infection in a latent or unrecognized form, so to speak. Somewhere, sometime, in her childhood, probably, she was frightened by a wolf, or perhaps by terrifying stories about werewolves. That's given her a psychic trauma—caused the growth of scar tissue in her subconscious mind.

"Her duty has been onerous; she's al-

most at the physical and nervous snapping point when the general throws his brawl. You know how it is: A man can work all day and night and not be conscious of fatigue, but the moment he sits down his muscles start to stiffen, and he falls into a sleep like a coma. It's that way with our nerves, too. The let-down caused by being off duty, getting into party clothes and in general reverting to civilian life was all she needed to push her over the edge. When that dog howled in the castle court it struck vibrations that shocked her memory; threw her mentally off balance temporarily, and—well, you saw her faint and apKern told you what she said."

"Yes, but—"

"I'm comin' to that. She and apKern have been that way about each other. Undoubtedly she's told him something of her childhood and the phobia she has for wolves—or howling dogs. When a man's in love his senses are abnormally alert. The slightest word from his inamorata is important as the Law and Prophets to him. He's stored up and treasured everything she's said, whether he remembers it consciously or not. So"—he nodded solemnly as a china mandarin on a mantelpiece—"when the dog attacks apKern the memory of the story of her frightening dream—her *rêve affreux*, as she called it—boils up from his subconscious and he's sure the thing talks to him as it tries to tear his throat.

"It's one of those amazing things that happen sometimes, not often, happily. A sort of mental contagion like the mass witchcraft delusion that swept Salem in 1692 or the epidemic of hysteria that engulfed all Europe during the Thirty Years War when people psychically and physically tired to exhaustion believed they saw werewolves behind every bush. There was a perfect plague of lycanthropy in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. Looks like we've run into the same thing on a small scale here. Want to follow it through?"

Weinberg and I had dinner with Michele in her room that night. It was a rather festive menu brought in from the nearby Café zur Nekke: pickled oysters, salt rolls, salmon en gelee, chicken and dumplings, small frosted cakes and, to top it all, a bottle of Roederer.

SHE clapped her hands like a delighted child on Christmas morning when the waiter spread the cloth and brought forth item after item from his hamper. Now, the meal done, we lighted cigarettes and I watched her covertly while Weinberg poured a half-inch of Meukow brandy into tall bell-shaped glasses. Despite her extreme slenderness—she was as slight as almost fleshless bones could make her—she was lovely with a fragile Dresden-china sort of loveliness. She wore a negligée of ivory crêpe with long sleeves gathered at the wrists like bishops' cuffs but cut sufficiently low at the front to show the shadowed hollow at the base of her throat and the slight concavities beneath her clavicles. Her gorgeous hair was loosely gathered to lie in a thick coil at the back of her neck and looped up to disclose her beautifully formed ears in which a pair of aquamarine studs were set. The gems seemed to affect the color of her eyes so that instead of smoky-gray they showed a violet-green like the shallower parts of the sea. Yet there was something more to her appeal than mere fragility and beauty. Innately she possessed that strange and undefinable seductiveness which Eleanor Glynn was later to call "It" and a still younger generation refer to as "oomph."

The brandy put the faintest trace of color in her pale cheeks and added luminance to her strange Slavic eyes. "I think that I am almost happy now, *mes amis*," she told us with a soft-lipped smile as she leant back on her pillows.

"Almost?" repeated Weinberg softly. "Why not entirely, *Mademoiselle la Doctreuse?* You have youth and—no compliment is intended, I am merely saying what you know already—a great deal of beauty, and the devoted love of a brave, good man—"

"*Hélas!*" The smile drained from her face like a wave sliding off the beach, and as if a quick shadow had fallen the violet circles reappeared beneath her eyes. "It is not so, my friend. I am one of those doomed to braid Saint Catherine's tresses. Marriage is denied me, and what use is love if not to give oneself wholly and take wholly—"

Weinberg shook his head impatiently. He was more the doctor than the man right then, and dispensed with ceremony. "Why shouldn't you be married? apKern's madly in love with you and anyone can see that you're in love with him. You're no snow image, no *femme glacial*—"

Her exclamation was like the cry of a hurt animal. "I cold—frigid? *Bon Dieu,* would that I were!" She struck her breast dramatically with clenched fists. "I love—I am consumed with love of him. Can't you see how this denial crucifies me—see how my palms are torn by the cruel nails of love abjured?" She held her trembling hands out to us as if she would exhibit bleeding wounds. "But what have I to do with love and marriage, I whom am mad?" Her voice grated on the word as though there were grit in her throat.

Weinberg looked at me with raised brows, nodding briefly. To her he said softly: "Tell us what it is that troubles you. Perhaps we can help."

"Nobody can help me," she sobbed miserably. "I didn't study medicine for nothing. I recognize dementia praecox when I see it, either in another or myself. Visual hallucinations, voices—"

Weinberg caught her up abruptly. "Major Carmichael and I are also doctors, and know more of your case than you think. The line between hallucination and induced fantasy is often a fine one, but it's there nevertheless, and sometimes only an expert can say on which side of it a patient stands.

"You have been working very hard. You are very tired, almost in a state of semi-anesthesia at times. And at such times the subconscious takes the upper hand—makes us dream with our eyes open, and you know how real and vivid dreams can be. There are strange and dreadful skeletons locked in the closet of our subconscious, memories of frights in childhood, psychic scars we think time has obliterated, even memories of horrifying dreams. We shut the door on them and deny their existence, but sometimes they break down the locked door. Sometimes they are too strong. . . ."

"Could it"—hope struggled with desperation in her voice—"could it be that what I thought hallucinations were just dreams?"

"It could, indeed. And very probably it is. Tell us about them, won't you?"

"IT COMMENCED on the night of the general's ball," she began, speaking with that slow perfection of pronunciation and absence of accent which alone proclaimed that English was not her mother tongue. "I had bought an evening gown but had no wrap to go with it. You know where my billet is in the Breitauer-Strasse. The house belongs to the von Kechele family, a mother and her two sons, both of whom were Prussian Guards officers. Gustav is a waiter at the Metropole, Rudi stays home with his mother, and all of them have been most courteous to me. Too courteous, I think sometimes. It isn't natural for conquered people to treat their conquerors that way.

"But as I was saying, I was standing before the mirror, debating whether to wear my uniform overcoat over my frock when Frau von Kechele came up the stairs with

a beautiful fur cape on her arm. *'Schön gut'n Abend, gnädiges Fräulein,'* she said with a smile. 'You are going dancing at the Bückensdorfferschloss tonight, *nicht wahr?* And you have no fitting overwrap?'

" 'That is right,' and I hate to wear my uniform coat,' I began when she interrupted with another smile. *'Natürlich.* And why should you when this you may wear, and welcome?' She held the beautiful fur cape out to me.

"It was a lovely garment and fitted as if it had been made for me. As I draped it round my shoulders I could have sworn it tightened about me, almost as if it had life.

" 'You should wear it with good health,' Frau von Kechele told me and as I looked at myself in the cheval glass the mirror seemed to grow transparent, like a thin cascade of water, and suddenly, though I had no idea how it happened, I was through it."

"Through it?" Weinberg echoed questioningly.

"Yes, just like little Alice in that charmingly droll book by Lewis Carroll. I had walked—or floated—out into a brilliant moonlit night, and I was lying on the snow, pressed into it. I had no sensation of chill, though, for I was wrapped from head to foot in fur.

"From far away a sound came to me faintly, not a human voice, but the deep, belling bay that only two kinds of beasts make—hounds and wolves—and as it struck my ears a queer, uncanny feeling crept through me. I seemed somehow to be identified with that sound; to be losing my personality—my *me,* if that means anything to you—and with the feeling came a surge of bitter, blinding hatred, a dreadful, crushing, killing hatred for all humanity.

"Then suddenly I was up and running over the snow. Not on my hands and feet, although I was not upright, but skimming along on the crusted surface with the speed of the wind and the smell of the new snow in my nostrils. I wanted to sing, to shout for very joy, and without thinking I threw back my head and gave a wild cry of delight.

"The sound of it was like a dash of water in a fainting person's face, for it was not a human shout I'd given, but a long-drawn, quavering wolf's bay.

"As I stood there trembling three great wolves came trotting toward me from a copse of pine trees, and though they seemed like natural beasts in every way I knew—don't ask me how, I can't tell, but I knew—that they were Gustav and Rudi von Kechele and their mother.

"The largest of the wolves—that would be Gustav—came up to me and nuzzled me and licked me. Somehow it seemed like a caress. I liked it.

"Then he trotted off, looking over his shoulder at me, and I followed till we rested by a pathway through the woods. We lay down on the pine needles and I was taut and nervous, not exactly angry, but horribly elated somehow, with a feeling of fierce, exultant anticipation. Then I saw them coming toward us.

"They were two peasants, farm laborers, and as they plodded through the snow their breath came from their nostrils in little puffs like cigarette smoke. At almost every other step they paused and looked round fearfully, and suddenly I knew what they feared. Us! The man-things were afraid of us, and with a wild, fierce feeling of exhilaration I sprang at them just as my companion beast gave tongue and leaped.

"I'll never forget the squeaking scream the nearer man gave as I sprang on him and fixed my teeth in his throat. He was a puny thing. I overbore him easily as if he'd been a babe, and when I felt the blood from his torn veins well up in my mouth I went absolutely wild. I bit and tore and worried him, and scored him with the claws

of my forefeet, and finally when he ceased to struggle I took him in my teeth and shook him as a terrier shakes a rat. And all the time I kept sounding that wild, eerie hunting cry. The sound of it roused me to fresh savagery as a bugle's notes stir a soldier's blood.

"Then suddenly the wind began to rise. It blew the snow in a fine smoky cloud about me, shutting off the trees and undergrowth and my companion beast and even the poor lad I'd mauled to death. And there I was before the mirror with the cape of baby wolfskin draped around my shoulders and Frau von Kechele smiling at me. Only now she seemed to smile with a sort of knowing smirk, as if to say, 'We know what we know, don't we, *liebes Fraülein?*'

"That evening at the General's ball I heard the wolf howl again, and realized with horror that it called to me and I was powerless to resist it as the rats and children of Hamlin were to resist the tune the Pied Piper played.

"I half-pushed Captain apKern away, but just as I turned to obey the summons woman's oldest defensive mechanism came to my rescue. I fainted."

Her gray-green eyes met mine and flickered for a second. "Do you believe in such a thing as love at first sight, Major?"

"I do, my dear," I nodded. "I have experienced it."

"Then you will understand. The very first touch of his fingers seemed to drain me of resistance. When he turned my hand over and kissed my palm I felt myself go weak and dizzy, almost faint with the thrill of it. Before we'd waltzed around the hall once I knew he had it too. It wasn't what we ordinarily call love. It was more powerful, almost terrible. I'd never seen him before, until that evening he'd never seen or heard of me, yet there we were, two strangers born the whole width of the world apart, who suddenly yearned for each other, longed for the pressure of each other's lips and arms with a yearning old as creation itself.

"I didn't encourage him. There wasn't any need. He could no more resist my lure than I could his; we were drawn together like the iron and the lodestone, and no power on earth could keep us apart.

"Then two nights later I had that appalling dream again. I was lying in bed, half asleep, half waking, when the wolf's howl sounded underneath my window, and I had to rise and answer it. And despite my struggle against it I felt that awful, searing hatred of humanity flow through me as I climbed out of my window and dropped down to the snow.

"It came again next night, and the next; and the next. Every night I dreamed I ranged the hills and woods and snowfields with Gustav and Rudi Kechele and their mother until at last I was like the priest in Gautier's *Morte Amoureuse* who dreamed each night he was lover of the courtesan Clarimonde until he did not know if it were the priest who dreamed himself a gay gallant every night, or the wastrel debauchee who dreamed each night that he was a poor parish priest. I'd gotten to the point where I did not know if I were a woman who dreamed herself a wolf or a bitch-wolf who dreamed herself a woman.

"Tell me," she asked with seeming irrelevance, "do not the regulations require that all cases of gunshot wounds be reported to the Military Police?"

"That's right," I answered, slightly puzzled.

"And do you remember Rudi von Kechele was reported suffering from a rifle-shot in the left shoulder?"

I thought a moment, then: "Yes, that's so," I agreed. "I remember seeing the report, but I didn't examine him."

"And"—the pupils of her eyes spread till they nearly covered the irises—"do you remember that a sentry at the foot of

Ehrenbreitstein was attacked by wolves one night last month?"

"I recall Major Amberson's saying something about such an incident, only he said they were police dogs, probably poor ownerless brutes made savage by hunger—"

THE laugh that interrupted me was like a scream of pain. "Oh, no, my friend, they were no dogs! They were not even wolves. They were *volkodláki*—werewolves.

I know, for I was one of them! They would have pulled him down and killed him, but just as they made ready for the spring I howled and gave him warning. When we got home that night they mauled and pummelled me with their paws and almost shook the life out of me in punishment for having warned the sentry."

Weinberg broke in sharply. "Stop it. You're letting yourself go. You know you were not there that night. You've just connected the two things. You knew that Rudi had been shot and heard about the sentry having been attacked by dogs."

"That's what I thought, perhaps that's what I really think," she agreed with a sigh, "but any way you make it, I am going mad, if I am not already so.

"How could I dream these dreams continually, imagine myself a werewolf, with a power of imagining that puts fact to shame, and still be sane?

"*Alors*"—she raised her narrow shoulders in a fatalistic shrug—"I wrote a letter to my lover dismissing him. If you could know what writing that note cost me! It seemed the pen was dipped in my heart's blood, *mais que voulez-vous?* We love with heart and soul and spirit, we Russians. I wished to give him children, brave sons and lovely daughters who would be called by his name and call him Father. Could I—dared I—bring them into the world tainted with the curse of madness?

"*Nichevo*—it is no matter. Women have loved before and had their heart's desire turn ashes. I shall have the touch of his hand, the memory of his kisses and his voice, to take with me into the night of madness."

Weinberg wiped his eyes and I was very near to tears as she finished. It's hard to see men die, but it is infinitely worse to see the life go out of hope. "These dreams," I began, and stopped in midword at the desperate, enmeshed look in her eyes.

"Last night," she whispered in a voice so low and sharp it seemed to cut our ears, "it was no dream. I was—I am—truly *volkodlák!*

"It was after midnight when the howling began underneath my window. 'I will not answer it,' I told myself. 'I will fight against it, conquer it—' Then presently I found myself out in the snow, running down the Kommandanten-Strasse, and in a moment caught the sound of growling and a man's voice swearing. I could feel the long hairs on my back and shoulders rising and that wild, insensate hatred for humanity swell through me. 'That is a man, you are a wolf. Leap on him, rend and tear him with your teeth and claws!' a voice seemed screaming in my ears, but through it came another voice: 'Wolf or no wolf, that is Fontenoy apKern whom you have held in your arms and loved—whom you still love. Save him!'

"I seized the stifle-joint of the other wolf in my teeth and held on even when it turned on me and bit me through the shoulder, and, *grace á Dieu*, my strength was great enough to hold it off until the provost guardsmen came.

"When I woke this morning my night dress and the bedclothes were sopping with blood and my shoulder hurt so terribly that I had to come here for treatment.

"Now, gentlemen, what do you say to that?"

Weinberg looked at me with creased

forehead and raised brows. "I check the bet to you, Major."

"It all boils down to what we've said already," I contended. "The piper may be slow in presenting his bill, but eventually it must be paid, and with interest. Michele is almost literally tired to death. Her unremitting work at the hospital was enough to break a stronger person down, and though she's never spoken of it, her flight from Russia and the deadly perils she escaped so narrowly must have made an indelible mark on her subconscious. She has been frightened by recurrent dreams of wolves. It all adds up. Flying from the revolutionists she led a hunted life. She is safe now, but the memory of those hunted days is still with her. Her dreams have developed a revenge motif, a sort of substitutive symbolism. She has been the hunted, now she will be the huntress. It's merely psychic overcompensation, like the weakling dreaming himself a prize-fighter or the cripple dreaming he's an athlete."

"But my wounded shoulder—"

I had an answer for that too. One that satisfied me, at least. "Undoubtedly you were bitten by a dog while sleep-walking. But you were so completely anesthesized by your dream—or wolf fantasy—that even the pain of the bite failed to bring you to complete consciousness, and it was translated into a wolf-bite by your dream. These dreams of yours have been extraordinarily vivid and convincing. That's why you thought that you had fought with a wolf to save apKern. A few days' absolute bed rest and careful feeding—and Fontenoy apKern—are all you need to be restored to perfect health."

WE HAD our final rounds to make and just as I was signing out they called me for an emergency appendectomy. Weinberg was waiting for me when I left the operating room. "What say we take a look at her?" he suggested. "If the dose of somnal I gave her did its work she should be sleepin' like a baby now."

A flustered, frightened nurse met us as we turned into the corridor from which Michele's room opened. "Major Carmichael, Captain Weinberg," she exclaimed, "Dr. Mikhailovitch is gone!"

"Gone?" we chorused blankly. "Where?"

"I don't know. I can't imagine. She was sleeping peacefully all evening, but when I looked in her room about five minutes ago she wasn't there." The worried look on her face gave way to an expression of blank wonder. "Her night dress lay by the window, so did her slippers. Her negligée is on the chair and all her daytime clothes are hanging in the closet."

Without much hope we searched the room. As the nurse said, Michele's clothes appeared to be intact, even to her slippers and nightrobe. "Good Lord, she must have gone out in this killing cold without—" began Weinberg, but I broke in:

"This may be some sort of clue. She'd evidently been writing just before she left, for the inkwell is open and the pen still wet. The blotter's white. Perhaps—" I held the blotter to the mirror, straining my eyes to make out the faint impressions on its clean white surface. "Vitally important . . . search . . . Breitauer-Strasse. . . ."

"What the devil does it mean?" I wondered.

"Dam' if I know; dam' if I care," Weinberg shot back. "The main thing is to find her before she gets her death with pneumonia. Come on." He flung a leg across the window sill and dropped down to the snowy street. "See there?" As he knelt and struck a match we saw traced in the fresh snow marks of narrow unshod feet. "She came this way all right. Running, too. Notice how much heavier the heel impressions are than those of the toes—what the devil?"

We had reached an angle of the building where the wind deflected from the jut-

ting wall had swept the pavement clear of snow for a space of ten feet or so. The footprints halted at the edge of the cleared area and nowhere, though we circled round like hounds at fault, could we find where they recommenced.

"Her toe-prints all point the same way, she didn't turn around or veer to one side or the other," I muttered. "Looks as if she'd sprouted wings or something here."

"Yeah. Wings—or something," he conceded. "Take a look at this, will you?" He knelt and struck another match, shielding its flame with his cupped hands.

I looked across his shoulder. "Dog tracks," I decided. "Pretty big dog, too. A collie or police dog I'd say."

"Yeah. You would say that."

"Well, what do you say?" I didn't like the hard, flat tone of his voice.

"I wish to God I knew," he answered in a weary tone. "I know it can't be true; but lots o' things we know ain't so are so, just the same."

"HEY, what're you guys doin', playin' marbles?" With a screech of brakes a squad car drew up to the curb and Amberson leaned from his seat beside the driver. In the body of the vehicle was a detail of M. P.'s armed with Thompson sub-machine-guns, rifles and tear gas bombs.

"Uh, hullo, Major," Weinberg rose and brushed the snow from his knees. "No, we weren't playin' marbles; just lookin' for something."

"So'm I. Got a hot tip Fritz is cookin' something. Want to come along? We might find a couple o' sawbones handy 'fore we're through."

"Damndest thing," he confided as I crowded in beside him and Weinberg wedged himself into the tonneau. "I was gettin' ready to turn in when I heard a scratching at my door. At first I didn't pay attention, but it kept up, and presently I heard a dog whimpering outside. When I opened the door there was a big white collie shivering and trembling on the landing. She had a note in her mouth."

"A note?"

"Yep. Slip o' paper addressed to me. Here it is." By the faint glow of the dashboard light I read:

Major Amberson—

It is vitally important that you search 735 Breitauer-Strasse at once. The Germans plan a coup tomorrow morning just before sunrise and have stored the arms for the uprising at that address.

"I don't know whether someone's tryin' to sell me a pup or not," he admitted, "but you can't afford to take chances."

"U'm?" I answered absently. There was something vaguely familiar about the writing. That immature yet oddly imperious script . . . my memory clicked with a snap like a rifle breech being closed. The farewell note Michele had sent apKern—the half-obliterated writing on the blotter in the room from which she'd vanished—*and* her billet was at 735 Breitauer-Strasse!

"You say a dog brought this?"

"A big white collie. She had the saddest eyes—"

"It was a female—"

"Yes, and she carried the note so daintily you'd have thought she'd been trained for it, holding it with her lips drawn back so the ink wouldn't get wet.

"Draw up," he turned to the chauffeur, then, to the men in the tonneau: "All out, boys. This is the end of the line. Tossourian, take three men and circle round the house. You've got"—he glanced at his watch—"just seven minutes to get set. If anyone attempts to leave or enter you know what to do. When you hear my whistle, or if you hear a shot, close in. The rest of you come with me."

As we swarmed out of the car and

stretched our legs on the snow-covered pavement I looked down the block. At the cross street there was a patch of shadow just beyond the zone of light cast by the street lamp, and in the shadow I saw darker shades, and a beam of light struck a faint glint from a bayonet. Amberson nodded approvingly. "Everything's set. I've got a detail posted at each crossing and patrols stationed in each side street. If Fritz is really getting ready to start something he'll get a bellyful of hot lead and cold steel."

"D'ye think all this precaution's necessary?" I asked dubiously. "Everything's so quiet, the Jerries are so well behaved—so friendly—"

"This *kamerad* stuff's a lot of bushwah," he cut in. "They hate our guts and there's not one of 'em who wouldn't put arsenic in our coffee or stick a knife in our backs. We're just a handful, an' surrounded by a vengeful, treacherous civil population and the veterans of an army that's demobilized but not disbanded. We stopped this war a year too soon—we should'a beat 'em clear down to the bricks, fixed 'em so they'd never dare start anything again. They'll be ripe for hell-raisin' in another ten or twenty years the way things are, and our sons will have to take the job up where we stopped. Come on, let's go."

THE sinister stone-fronted house was silent as a mausoleum. It looked unoccupied, as if no one had tenanted it for a long time.

Yet for all its darkened loneliness there was a threatening, expectant quality about it, as though it waited breathlessly for something, something abrupt and tragic and violent.

"Stand by to break the door in if they don't open," Amberson commanded and struck an echoing blow with his gun-butt on the panels.

The latch must have been left off, for at the impact of his pistol grip the door swung back and we stared into a hallway dark and empty as a tunnel.

"Careful with your flashlight, Sergeant," Amberson cautioned. "Hold it at arm's length, so if they shoot at it they'll only hit your hand or miss you altogether." Aloud he called: "Come out with your hands up, wherever you are. We're the Military Police!"

THE babel of wild howls and yelps that came from the basement was like an answer to his summons. Snarls, savage growls and yaps of pain and fury sounded from below stairs as if a dog fight to a finish were in progress.

"What the blazin' hell—" began Amberson, but Weinberg broke in almost hysterically:

"Quick! Down there! They're ganging up on her!" Shoving Amberson aside he rushed to the basement stairs, turned to motion us to follow him and plunged into the inky blackness of the stairwell.

We followed, and as our flashlights whipped back the shadows saw three great brutes setting on a fourth, a smaller white-furred beast that stood at bay against the wall and fought them off with fierce, defiant growls, slashing with needle-pointed teeth, dodging nimbly when they closed with her, sometimes rising on her hind legs to beat at them with her forefeet.

As we stormed into the basement the three beasts paused in their attack, wheeled defiantly on us and then like whipped curs slunk out the far door.

"Lend me your gun!" Weinberg snatched the sergeant's Colt and rushed out to the dark hall leading to the stair. "They mustn't get away—" The roar of his shots echoed like reverberating thunder in the low-ceiled passageway and the smoke stung our nostrils like acid.

"How dare you waste shots on a pack o' damned dogs?" Amberson demanded furiously as Weinberg handed back the

sergeant's pistol. "D'ye know you may have warned 'em—"

"I don't think so," Weinberg broke in. "Go take a look out there," he nodded toward the hallway and walked across the room to the white beast.

The thing seemed terrified of him, crouching till its furred stomach brushed the floor, shaking its head from side to side, whining with a soft, deprecating whine. He put his hand out as if to pat its head, withdrew it and bent till his face was level with the animal's. "Want to go back?" he asked softly. "The way's clear now, and tomorrow—"

The beast gave a low cry, half animal, half human, dodged underneath his hand and fled up the dark stairs.

"Well, I'll be a stewed monkey!" we heard Amberson exclaim. "What d'ye know about this?"

On the stairway a body showed against the darkness. Naked, gaunt, already stiffening, it sprawled on the steps, and as they played their flashlights on it we recognized the waiter at the Metropole who had looked at apKern with such deadly hatred.

"Good Lord, how'd he get here?" demanded Amberson. "It's Gustav von Kechele. He was lieutenant in a guards regiment and—what's that up yonder?" He pointed to an object showing dimly at the head of the stairs.

"Unless I miss my guess it's Rudi Kechele," said Weinberg.

It was. Like his brother he had been shot through the back, and had crawled almost to the stairhead before dying.

"There'll be another—the she-one," Weinberg added confidently. "She can't have gotten far. I fired point-blank, and—"

"*You* fired?" Amberson broke in. "You haven't shot at anything but a pack o' mangy curs."

"Maybe not," Weinberg's grin was loaded with sarcasm, "but five'll get you ten you find the she-one up there somewhere."

We did. Stretched in the hall, blood oozing from a wound that penetrated back and breast, we found the body of a woman. She was no longer young, but she had been well tended, and was still attractive in a buxom, bovine way, with flax-blond hair and smooth, fair skin and well-kept nails.

"It's Kriemhild Kechele, all right," agreed Amberson. "That accounts for the whole family, but how the devil—"

"Never mind the puzzles, old-timer," Weinberg broke in. "We've bagged 'em all. That's all that matters. Go look for guns and ammunition. Carmichael and I've got something important to do." He grabbed my arm and fairly dragged me toward the door.

A shot ripped through the quiet as we came out of the house. "What's that?" demanded Weinberg.

"I just shot at a dog, sir," the M. P. standing guard in the street answered. "It come runnin' out th' house like a bat outa hell, an' I know th' Jerries sometimes use 'em to carry messages—"

"D'je hit it?"

"I'm afraid not, sir. Leastwise, it didn't stop—"

"Bless God for that. Come on, Carmichael. W've got to get there before she does."

"Who?" I panted, struggling to keep up with him.

"Save your breath and run," he panted back. "I'll tell you all about it when we get there."

"SIR," the nurse met us as we rushed down the hall toward Michele's room, "Dr. Mikhailovitch is back in her room. She's been shot, sir. Hurt bad. I shouldn't wonder if—"

"Neither should I," he interrupted. "Have 'em get the surgery ready right away. We must operate at once."

It was a nasty wound. The bullet had gone through her back at the scapula and traveled in an upward oblique course to emerge just beneath the left clavicle. The shoulder blade was shattered by the missile and the wound at exit showed extensive laceration where the bone splinters had been forced through. There was little blood upon the skin, but a trickle of red fluid from the corners of her mouth told of internal hemorrhage.

"Habet," Weinberg shrugged his shoulders resignedly. "No use operatin'. What d'ye say, ergot and digitalis or morphine and aconite?"

"Try the digitalis and ergot first," I answered hopelessly as I propped the pillows behind her. "There isn't much we can do."

"Fontenoy," she murmured half deliriously as the stimulants took effect. "You'll bring him to me, won't you?"

"You're dam' right, we will," Weinberg promised as he pressed the call bell. "Have Captain apKern brought here, right away, please, nurse," he ordered, "and have the pharmacist prepare a hypo with a quarter grain of morphine and a three-six mixture of aconite."

"Saint Nicholas be thanked, you were in time," she whispered as the nurse left. "Tonight after you'd gone I heard a scratching at my window and when I looked I saw it was Gustav. He hadn't quite completed changing to wolf shape; his body was still human, but covered with long hair, and his face and head were wholly lupine. He grinned at me and told me I should thank my name-saint that I'd been taken by them into their wolf-company, for by tomorrow's sunrise not a man or woman of the Army of Occupation would be left alive in Coblenz. They'd stored the arms for the uprising in their house, and—"

A fit of coughing stopped her, but presently she found strength to continue. "The Kecheles have been wolf-folk for generations, and when I let them put that wolf skin cape on me I gave myself into their power. But it was not until Gustav bit me when I kept him from destroying my lover that I became a true wolf-woman. After that bite my case was hopeless. Nothing could cure my infection.

"I had to warn the Army, but how? If I told you about Gustav's having come to me you'd say it was a dream or hallucination. Major Amberson was my sole hope, but how could I get to him? Then suddenly I had the answer. If I willed myself to turn into a wolf I could run to his quarters with a note. So I scratched off a warning, then lay back on my bed and let the wolf-force flow through me—just made my mind a blank and kept repeating to myself, 'You are a wolf, not a woman—Michele Mikhailovitch, you are no woman, but a wolf. Take your natural shape, Michele Mikhailovitch.'

"Then I began to feel the prickling itching of my skin which always came before the actual change, and in a moment I had snatched the note up and gone out the window. When the change was complete I took the message in my mouth and ran to Major Amberson's.

"I'd just delivered it when I saw Gustav running toward me through the snow. He'd changed completely to his wolf shape by that time, but I recognized him, and his mother and brother, too. They didn't attack me right away, just closed around me and forced me to go with them to their house. Then—"

"Don't talk any more," Weinberg ordered softly. "Save your strength. apKern will be here in a moment."

"GET both feet on the ground and dig in for a toe-hold, feller," he whispered to apKern as the orderly wheeled him to Michele's door. "She's desperately wounded. Two to three hours is about all we can promise you."

They didn't talk much. There was no need of words between them as they sat with clasped hands and looked into each other's eyes, sharing that mystic, sweet communion that only lovers know. Occasionally one of us would tiptoe into the room, take her pulse and administer a hypodermic stimulant. When these interruptions came they took no more notice of us than if we had been shadows on the wall. Each was wrapped up in the other, oblivious of everything in the world as if they had been the last man and woman on a dying planet.

The pre-dawn chill stole through the open window like a spirit walking. The world was colder now, the light a little grayer. The ghost of a tired smile crept over her death-shadowed lips. "Good-by, *douchka*—darling—" she whispered. "Thank you so much for your love—for everything. . . ."

In the darkness of the eastern sky there showed a streak of brightness as if the fabric of the heavens slowly ripped apart. The world lay quiet with a sort of breathless hush beneath its coverlet of snow, but in the hospital room two sounds blended: Fontenoy apKern sobbing out his heart with the hard, dry, ugly sobs of a man unused to tears, and Nathan Weinberg with his cap pulled low upon his brow softly chanting the Jewish prayer for the dying.

IT TOOK a bit of doing, but we finally got an army casket from the Quartermaster for her. "It would be a profanation to let her go to her grave in a Jerry coffin," Weinberg insisted. An embalmer from the Graves Registration Service prepared her, driving back the stark, cold look of death and replacing it with an appearance of light, natural sleep. Then they dressed her in her Red Cross uniform and laid her before the altar of the hospital chapel with a tall, pale lily in her hand and the flag draped over her.

Midnight came, then one o'clock. We heard the tramping of the guard as sentries were relieved, and somewhere in the distance a cock crowed eerily. "Come on," said Weinberg as he ground the fire from his cigarette. "We promised apKern we'd look in on her and"—he smiled half shamefacedly, half defiantly— "I want to give her this. She rates it." From his pocket he drew the Croix de Guerre awarded him for gallantry under fire at Catigny.

It was so quiet in the chapel we could hear the ticking of our watches, almost the beating of our hearts, as we stepped toward the altar where the casket lay. A pace or two ahead of me, Weinberg paused to lift the flag, undo the fastenings of the casket lid and bend above her to attach the medal to her blouse. "Lord God of Israel!" I heard him exclaim softly.

"What is it?" I looked past him, then: "Who dared do this? Call out the guard!"

"For God's sake, Carmichael, be quiet," he begged. "Don't rouse the guard!"

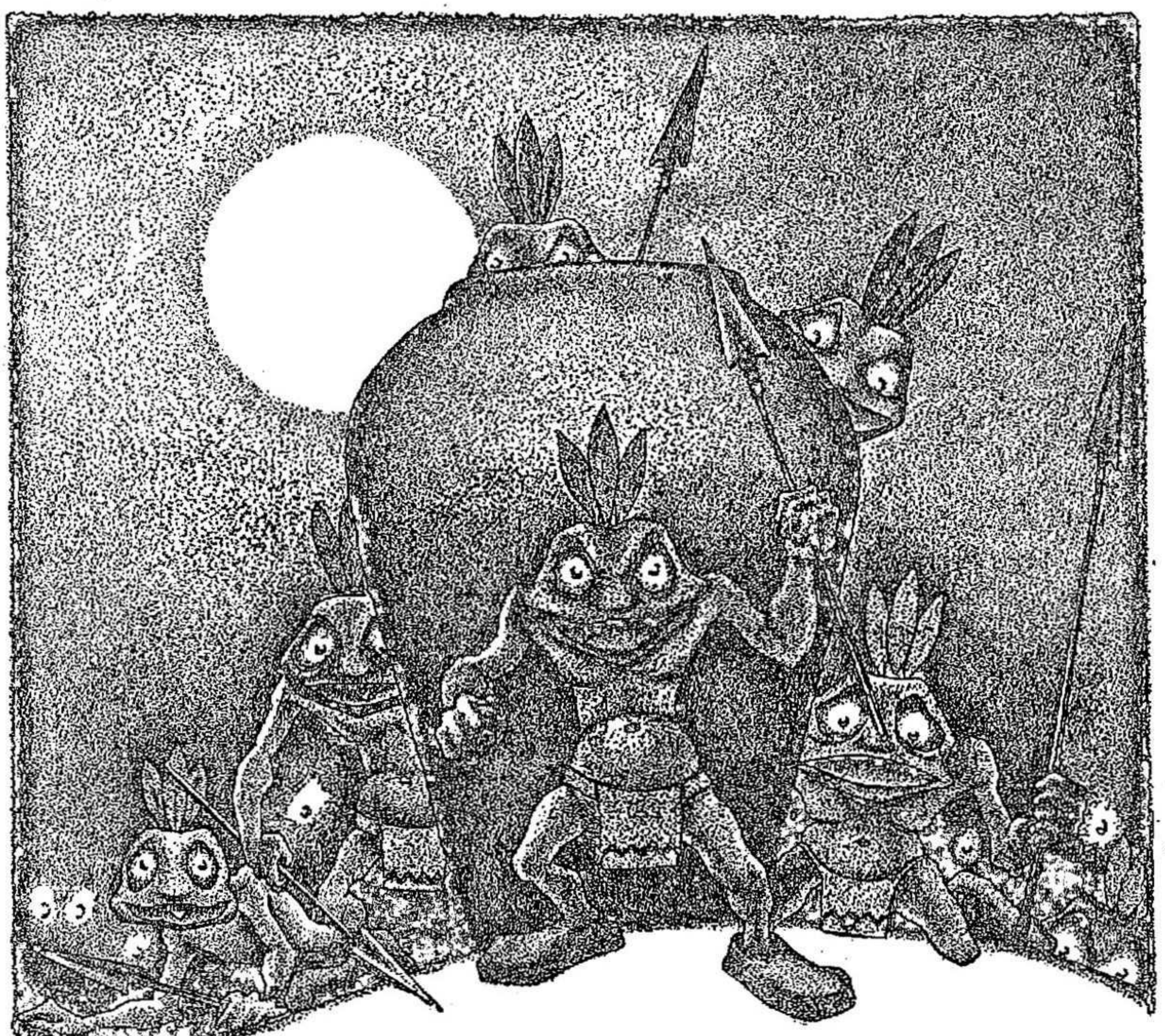
"But this is desecration—sacrilege!" I stormed.

In the casket where they'd laid Michele Mikhailovitch there lay, head couched upon the tufted pillow, a beautiful white beast, a snow-white wolf, serene and calm as if asleep.

"Be quiet!" he repeated in an urgent whisper. "Whatever form she wears she's still the same, a gallant lady, worthy of our homage."

He laid the medal on the wolf's white fur and drew himself up stiffly at attention, raising his hand in salute as to the flag.

"*Bon voyage,* Michele Mikhailovitch," he murmured in a trembling voice, "wolf or woman, you were hero's mettle. May the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob have you in His keeping and be gracious unto you."



Each warrior was given a sacred bundle, to keep and to pass on in reverence down through generations

The Golden Goblins

By MANLY WADE WELLMAN

LONG SPEAR'S tailoring was, if anything, superior to John Thunstone's, and his necktie more carefully knotted. His blue-black hair, if a trifle longer than currently fashionable, lay smooth and glossy to his skull, swept back from a broad brow the color of a well-kept old saddle. His eyes gleamed like wet licorice, and when he slightly smiled his teeth made a pure white slash in his rectangular face. Long Spear had been an honor man at some Southern university,

Heading by BORIS DOLGOV

member of a good fraternity and captain of a successful basketball team. But, as he sat in Thunstone's drawing room, he cuddled most prayerfully an object that looked to have come straight out of the Stone Age.

Thunstone, big and reposeful and hospitable, lolled in an easy chair opposite. He puffed at the pipeful of fragrant tobacco Long Spear had given him—tobacco mixed, Indian fashion, with kinickinick and red willow bark—and eyed the thing that Long Spear had brought into the room. It was shaped like a smallish, compact bolster, snugly wrapped in some kind of ancient rawhide, on which dark hair still remained. Tight-shrunk leather thongs held that wrapping in place. In Long Spear's hands it seemed to have some solidity and weight.

"I want you to keep it for me, my friend," said Long Spear. "Your trail to Those Above is different from the Indian's; but you know and respect the faith of my people."

"I respect all true worships," nodded Thunstone. "Yet I know very little of what your tribe believes. If you care to tell me, I would care to hear."

"We Tsichah were living on the Western Plains when the first Spaniards came under Coronado," Long Spear told him, and his voice shifted to a proud, deep register. "Before that, we had lived—who knows where? The name of the land cannot be traced today, and perhaps it is legendary. But the old men say that we came from there to the plains country. When the Tsichah made ready to migrate, their guardians—Those Above—descended from the Shining Lodge and walked like men to advise and help them. To each warrior who headed a family was given a sacred bundle, to keep in his home and to pass on in reverence to his oldest son. This," and he lifted the rawhide bolster, "is one such, given to the man who fathered my clan of the Tsichah. I, as hereditary chief, have charge of it. When I came East, for the purpose of conferring with the government, I felt I must bring it along."

"For worship, or for safe keeping?" asked Thunstone.

"For both." Long Spear spoke almost defiantly. "I have learned white men's ways, learned them so well that I think I shall defeat the warped arguments that now threaten us. But I hold to my father's belief, as a true son should. Do you object?"

"Not in the least, because you don't object to mine." Thunstone leaned forward. "Will you permit me to touch the bundle?"

Long Spear passed it to him, as gently as though it were an infant prince asleep. As Thunstone had judged, it was compact and quite weighty. He examined the rawhide with a soft pressure of his long, strong forefinger. His eyes were studious on either side of his big dented nose.

"Buffalo hide, I judge. But is it as old as you seem to think?"

LONG SPEAR smiled, quite beautifully. "Not the hide. That was put on by my grandfather when he was no older than I, say sixty years ago. When the outer covering of the bundle becomes worn or damaged, we wrap it in fresh hide. It is not permitted to open the bundle. That is, as the Tsichah say, bad medicine."

"Of such bundles I've heard," nodded Thunstone. "Yet I've never seen one, even in the museums."

"You won't find the Ark of the Covenant in a museum, either," reminded Long Spear. "A Tsichah would as soon sell the bones of his father. And don't ask me what's at the center of the bundle. I do not know, and I do not think any other living man knows. I do not think that anyone had better find out."

Thunstone handed the bundle back. "Well, you want me to keep it for you.

But why? What makes you hesitate to keep it yourself?"

"Someone's after it," said Long Spear, in a voice that suddenly grew taut and deadly. "Someone who calls himself a reformer, who protests against the old Tsichah worship. He knows it makes our tribe solid on its reservation. And he wants to disrupt, so as to rob the Tsichah as other tribes have been robbed."

Thunstone lighted his pipe again. "Let me guess, Long Spear. Might the name be Rowley Thorne?"

The blue-black head shook. "No. I've heard a little of him, he causes trouble and evil for trouble and evil's sakes. You've met him and defeated him, haven't you? . . . Rowley Thorne is washing dishes in a restaurant where I would not care to eat. This is someone else."

"I've heard of Roy Bulger."

Again a head-shake. "No. The Reverend Mr. Bulger opposes our worship, calling it heathen—but he's an honest, narrow missionary. He isn't in it for profit."

"You Indians like to put riddles, don't you? The man must be Barton Siddons."

"Yes." Long Spear's brown fist clenched on top of his bundle. "He's interested several Congressmen who know nothing about Indians. Convinces them that we're banded together in ancient warrior belief, and may cause trouble, even an uprising. Wants restrictions placed on our worship. Well," and the other fist clenched, "I'm here in the East to argue with certain Congressmen myself. If they don't listen, I'll talk to the President. And I can finish up with the Supreme Court. There's such a thing as freedom of worship."

"And I'm to protect your sacred bundle from Siddons?"

"If you will. He told me that he'd destroy it, as a symbol of wickedness. Nice apeing of the fanatic reformer style—but what he really wants to do is shame me before my people. I wouldn't dare go back to them without the bundle, even if I gained a victory in the dispute. You understand?"

"Perfectly," said Thunstone.

He rose, towering mightily, and crossed the room to where hung a painting of autumn trees. He pushed it aside and revealed a wall safe, which he opened. "Will it go in here?"

Long Spear brought it, and it went in easily. Thunstone closed his safe and spun the dial.

"Now, my friend, they say that no Indian will refuse a drink. How about one here, and some lunch in the grill downstairs?"

Those who understand John Thunstone, and they are not many, say that he has two passions—defeat of ill-magic, and service of the lovely Sharon, Countess Monteseco. This does not mean that he is otherwise cold or distant. His friends include all sorts of persons, not all of them canny, but all of them profitable. He likes to set himself apart from others who study occultism in that he does not believe himself to be psychic. If he were asked the wish of his heart, he might say that it was the return of honesty and good manners.

HE AND Long Spear had a good lunch, for they both liked excellent food and plenty of it. At the end of it, Long Spear excused himself, promising to come later in the evening. Thunstone remained alone at the table, sipping a green liqueur and thinking about whatever Thunstone is apt to think about. His reverie was broken by a voice beside him.

"Pardon me, but aren't you John Thunstone? The author of those articles in the *Literary Review* about modern witch beliefs. I read them—enjoyed them a lot. Mind if I sit down? Siddons is my name."

The speaker was narrow-bodied, tall, with hair growing to a point on his forehead and a cleft dimple in his chin. He

might be distinguished-looking except for too shifty, greedy eyes. He dropped into the chair that Long Spear had vacated.

"Mr. Thunstone, to judge by your writings and your looks, you're a civilized gentleman with a sense of spiritual rights and wrongs."

"Thanks," nodded Thunstone.

"Do you know that Indian you were eating with?"

"I seldom eat with people I don't know, Mr. Siddons."

"I mean, do you know his character? Mr. Thunstone, I'll be blunt. He's a dangerous barbarian."

THUNSTONE sipped. "Barbarian is a hard word for Long Spear. He's well educated, and has profited by it. Do I understand that you and he are enemies?"

Siddons nodded emphatically. "We are, I'm proud to say. I know these aboriginal intellectuals, Mr. Thunstone. Yapping for special rights and prerogatives; on the grounds of being here first. And planning, sir, to bite the hand that feeds them—bite it clear off, if they get teeth enough!"

And Siddons showed his own teeth.

Thunstone made his voice lazy as he said, "I never saw Long Spear bite anything savagely, except perhaps a filet mignon. Suppose, Mr. Siddons, you tell me what fault you find with him, and why you seek to impress me with it."

"Fault? Plenty of that. The man's a heathen. His tribe—the Tsichah—believes in human sacrifice." Again Siddons grimaced furiously. "A captive girl, consecrated to whatever devil they worship, shot to death with arrows and chopped to bits—"

"The Tsichah haven't done that for a century or so," reminded Thunstone smoothly. "It's an interesting study, that sacrifice rite. Done for crop fertility, and suggests some relationship to the Aztecs. The Tsichah were considerably cultured for plains Indians—lived in earth houses instead of teepees, grew maize and beans and potatoes, were well advanced in painting and carving, and had a hereditary aristocracy."

"That's what I'm getting at," rejoined Siddons warmly. "Hereditary aristocracy. Because a copper-colored tramp is born of the old chieftain stock, he swanks around like a grand duke. Not American."

"Not American?" repeated Thunstone. "The Tsichah were here well before us. And it's American to let them keep to their own ways."

"Not the ways of the Tsichah. Not when they're dangerous. Sir, I've been there to their reservation. They stick together like a secret society, with their scowling brown faces and maybe knives and pistols under their shirts. It's their clinging to old customs and worships, and obedience to their hereditary chiefs, that makes them a menace. I'm one who wants to stop them."

Thunstone considered. "It seems," he said slowly, "that twice before white men tampered with the Indian religions. There were uprisings each time, brutal and bloody—the Smohalla Rebellion in the 'eighties, and the Ghost Dance War in 1891. If the Tsichah worship is tampered with . . . but why should it be?"

"A religion that advocates human sacrifice?"

"I know that it hasn't been practiced for years. The Tsichah worship the Shining Lodge and Those Above, quietly and sincerely. And they credit their gods with being kind—giving them, for instance, mineral wealth, mines of cinnabar and some oil property."

SIDDONS started violently, and licked his lips. "Well, it's still heathen and barbaric, and as a non-white organization it's dangerous. Now to answer the second part of your question. Why should I tell you these things, you ask. It ties up to your friend, Long Spear."

"A civilized American citizen," said Thunstone.

"Suppose," said Siddons craftily, "I was to prove that he wasn't?"

Thunstone's black brows lifted, and he said nothing.

"Suppose I should tell you," went on Siddons, "that he carries a savage talisman with him, and places his faith and sense of power in it? An ancient fetish—"

"A sacred bundle of the Tsichah religion?" suggested Thunstone.

"Exactly. You know about sacred bundles?"

"A little. Go on with what you say."

"Well, Long Spear has one. His whole narrow Indian mind is obsessed with how holy and mighty that thing is. I mentioned the possibility of destroying it, and he said quite frankly that he'd kill me for that."

Again Thunstone said nothing. His eyebrows came down again, his eyes narrowed a trifle.

"You, Mr. Thunstone, have a reputation for crushing evil beliefs. And I have in mind that you might be persuaded to help—"

"I know that Long Spear has the bundle. I've seen it."

Siddons leaned forward excitedly. "Do you know where it is?"

"I do," said Thunstone, still smoothly. "It's in a safe place of my lending, and it will stay there. Mr. Siddons, you'd better leave it alone, or I feel sure that Long Spear's prophecy of death will come true."

Thunstone got up. He was always immense when he did that.

"I'd heard about your real purpose in wanting to disorganize the Tsichah. I made sure by mentioning their mineral wealth, and saw you start. You want to get your hands on it, don't you, Siddons? Well, I'm not going to help you. I'll help Long Spear, because he's a sound, honorable pagan gentleman, and a credit to any race. Good day."

Siddons rose in turn. His face twisted, his eyes rolled a little.

"I might have known. You hokus-pokus birds are all alike, crackpots. But don't try to buck me, Thunstone. I might cut you down to a dwarf."

He strutted out, like a rooster whose dignity has been offended. Thunstone sat back in his chair.

"Waiter," he said, "another liqueur."

LATER in the afternoon Thunstone was alone in his drawing room. On impulse he took the sacred bundle from his safe, and sat in the armchair with it on his lap. Long he studied it, and with true reverent attention.

He tapped the outer envelop of rawhide. Under it was what? Another layer. Under that, another. Another beneath the third—and so on for many layers, each representing a generation or more of time. Finally, if one flouted ritual and peeled them all away, would come into view the original sacred bundle, the gift that Long Spear said had come from Those Above. And inside that—what? Nobody knew. The gods had not told her children, the ancestral Tsichah. And no man had looked.

Thunstone took it in his arms, carefully. He had seen Long Spear do that. His constant yearning for knowledge of the unseen and unknown was strong in him; but evidently not strong enough. He was not psychic, he thought once again. His was not the gift of priesthood or prophecy. He had a sense of solemnity, no more.

Long Spear came in. I had lunch with you," he greeted. "How about dinner with me. . . . I see you're looking at the bundle."

"I didn't think you'd mind, Long Spear."

"I don't. I trust you full with it. What do you think of it?"

Thunstone shook his head. "I was trying to find what to think, by holding it.

It should do something to me, but it doesn't."

"Because you're not a priest, a medicine man. But I am. That's hereditary among the Tsichah, too, the chief is also the prophet. Shall I try for you?"

"Why not?" said Thunstone, holding out the bundle, but Long Spear did not take it at once. Instead he produced from his pocket a pipe, not his usual briar, but a stubby one with a bowl of black stone, old and polished as jet. This he filled most carefully. Facing around so that he looked toward the east, he lighted it. Then, without inhaling, he faced north, and emitted a puff of smoke. Continuing his facing, he puffed on—to west, to south, to east. Finally he observed the "two directions," with final puffs up at the ceiling and down at the floor.

"Give me the bundle now," he said deeply, "and take the pipe. Keep it lighted and smoking. You must sit there, and be the council."

Pipe and bundle changed hands. Thunstone drew a lungful of the fragrant mixed vapors and breathed it out. Through the veil of blue fog he saw Long Spear lay the bundle in the hollow of his left arm, almost like a lyre. His right hand, with fingers slightly bent, rested upon it. The heel of the right hand became a fulcrum and the fingers moved slowly and rhythmically. The old dry hide gave forth a scratching tempo, like that evoked by Latin-American musicians from gourds. Long Spear began to chant, monotonously and softly:

"Ahkidah, ai-ee, ai-ee!
Ahkidah, ai-ee!"

Over and over he chanted the little hymn in his own tongue, and then began slowly to turn. His feet moved and took new positions softly as though he wore moccasins. His brown face turned upward, his eyes sought the ceiling as though they could pierce it to the sky above.

"Ahkidah, ai-ee!"

Now it seemed to Thunstone that the smoke began to drift and eddy, though there was no draft in the room. A little wreath swirled momentarily around Long Spear's head, something like a halo. And a hint of other voices, softer than echoes, softer even than the memory of voices long dead, became suggestible, as if they joined in the chant of the Tsichah chief. Raptly Long Spear sang, and prayerfully. More smoke drifted from the pipe in Thunstone's mouth, but the room contained some sort of radiance . . . as if a hand held a lamp to them, not at doors or windows but at some opening from another place, not easily discernible. . . .

Long Spear sat down, and laid the bundle on his knees.

"Put out the pipe," he said. "You've just heard a real prayer-song. We have other stuff, more showmanlike, for tourists and scholars. Not everybody—indeed, hardly anybody—is of the right mind or mood to join with us in our worship. I trust you with that, too."

"I'm flattered, and I did get something, Long Spear. I felt that your prayer, whatever it was, got an answer."

"All my prayers are answered. All of them. I don't mean that all are granted, but I know that they are heard, and that judgment is made on them. Just now I prayed to know what would happen to me, as a man of my people striving for their freedom and good. What I got was a warning of danger—no more."

He was silent, and carefully touched the bundle and its lashings.

"The buffalo hide is old, it may crack soon. I know where a new piece of tanned buckskin may be got, and sinew to sew it on securely. Keep it for me again, will you? I'll bring back the new covering, and make all snug. Then we'll have dinner, eh?"

"Of course."

Long Spear laid the bundle carefully on a center table of rubbed mahogany. Thunstone saw him to the door, and returned to the table for the bundle. He carried it to his safe, put out his hand to open the door.

At that moment something struck him slashingly on the head behind the ear, struck him with such savage force that not even his big body could stand up under the blow. Down he went on his knees, with darkness rushing over him like water. He could not see, and his ears rang. Somebody was trying to tug the bundle out of his hands.

Thunstone fought to keep it, and another blow drove what was left of his wits clear out of him.

HE WAKENED to find himself in an armchair of wood, where he seldom sat. His ears still hummed, and his first opening of eyes filled his brain with glaring lights. He tried to get up, and felt himself held back by cutting pressure at wrists and ankles and across the chest. Shaking his big head to clear it, he looked down, and saw that lengths of insulated electric wire bound his arms to the arms of the chair, his feet to the front legs. More strands encircled his body, and one loop passed under his chin. His head ached furiously.

"You're all right, Mr. Thunstone?"

He knew that voice. It was Barton Siddons's. The gaunt man bent down anxiously, looking at him.

"Get me out of this," said Thunstone.

"Why should I," asked Siddons airily, "when I took such trouble to drag you to that chair and tie you?"

Thunstone said nothing else, but stared at his captor.

"I've been in this room for more than an hour," went on Siddons. "Hiding behind those hangings. I hoped for a chance to get the bundle—twice as much after Long Spear gave that heathen exhibition." He glanced toward the center table, where the bundle was lying. "I've been waiting for you to wake up."

"Why?" demanded Thunstone. He wondered how strong his bonds were, but made no exhibition of tugging and struggling.

"Because you shall witness its destruction." Siddons licked his lips. "I intend to discredit Long Spear with his people—and you with Long Spear. He entrusted his treasure to you. You weren't able to keep it safe from him."

Thunstone again kept silent, and stared. His eyes made Siddons uncomfortable.

"From your own lips I heard words of respect for that savage Tsichah belief, Mr. Thunstone. I don't despair of showing you its fallacy. Watch."

Siddons went to the table. Something gleamed in his hand. A knife—he slit one of the binding thongs, another and another. He pulled the ancient buffalo-hide wrapping open. It came away stiffly, with a dry rattle.

"Another layer," observed Siddons, grinning briefly at Thunstone. "Whatever is inside, those Tsichah believed in keeping it well muffled." Another stiff layer of rawhide was pulled away. It adhered, and needed force to detach it. "Now for the third—hello, what's this, tucked in between wrappings?"

He picked it up, a dangling pale tassel.

"Human scalp," he diagnosed. "White man's hair, quite fair. Wrapped in there to signalize a victory, perhaps. But there weren't enough victories. The white man won in the end."

Siddons slit away another hide wrapping. Another. The next broke at his touch, into irregular flakes like old paper.

"Old and rotten," pronounced Siddons. "Now the fifth layer—it must be two hundred years old. And here's something that isn't rawhide."

From the last swaddling he lifted a

strange thing like a rectangular brick, as large as a commercial cement block.

"It was cushioned inside the rawhide by something—perhaps leaves or grass or herbs, all rotted to powder," explained Siddons, as though lecturing amiably to a class. "Look, it's hollow. Got a little slab of baked clay for a lid—comes off easily. Inside, another smaller hollow brick. You may be right, Mr. Thunstone. The Tsichah must have had an ancient history of something close to civilization to do this sort of brickwork. Inside the second, a third—each nested in old leafy dust. And here—we must be at the heart of the thing."

HE HELD up a vase of pottery, so old that the red of the clay was darkened to a mahogany brown. It was no larger than a man's fist, and shaped like an egg with a flattened end to stand on. Siddons poked and twisted.

"Look, the top comes off—unscrews! Who'd have thought that Indians understood the screw principle and would apply it to pottery? I'm leaving these things and you, Mr. Thunstone, for Long Spear to find."

His grin grew wider. "Why don't you take notes, Mr. Thunstone? You're sitting in on a notable event, the opening of an inviolable sacred bundle of a heathen people. And the notes might be important—Long Spear may be so disappointed in you that he'd destroy you before you had a chance to tell verbally what you saw."

"If Long Spear destroys anyone, it will be you," predicted Thunstone.

"Oh, he'll try—and I'll be prepared, and forestall him, and land him in jail. That's where he belongs, and all who head that Tsichah brotherhood. But let's have a final look."

He unscrewed the top of the vase, peeped in with eyes that squinted, then widened.

"Hello! Take a look at that!"

He thrust the open vessel under Thunstone's nose.

-Light struck into the dark interior of the vase, and evoked a yellow gleam. Thunstone had a brief impression of eyes, or something like eyes. Then Siddons was fumbling in the vase with his fingers. He took something out and held it up.

"Tin soldier, eh? But it's not tin—it's gold!"

The little figure was no longer than Siddons' thumb. Its yellow body was lizard-gaunt, and set upon brief, bandy legs with great flat feet. It had arms, too, that held a wire-like spear shaft at an angle across the chest. And the head, crowned with golden plumes, was tilted back and the face turned upward. That face was human only as a grotesque Hallowe'en mask is human—with a blob of nose, a gaping mouth from which a tiny tongue lolled, no forehead and no chin. The eyes were tiny blue stones, probably turquoise.

Siddons weighed the thing in his palm, turned it over and over.

"Gold," he repeated. "A little golden goblin. The Indians weren't metallurgist enough to make brass or anything like it. This is probably virgin, and worth plenty as a nugget—worth more as an archaeological find."

He set it upright on the table, pushing back the heap of rifled hide wrappings. It balanced solidly on those wide flat feet. Siddons smiled down upon it.

"Aztec influence, you suggested? Or maybe Maya or Inca, from farther south. I think we'll just keep that little souvenir. As for this pottery container—"

He poised it as if for a smashing downward throw. But then he hesitated, looked inside again. "Well, well! The little gentleman has a brother!"

He drew out another tiny figure. "A duplicate!" he crowed. "Same size, same shape, same attitude! Same spear, same little crumbs of turquoise for eyes." He

set down the vase and picked up the first figurine. "Even the same little scratches and markings, as if the carver duplicated those—what do those Indians think of, Mr. Thunstone?"

Siddons put the two golden goblins side by side on the table. "Cute, eh? How did they both fit in this vase?" He stooped and peered in, then straightened and scowled. He put in a forefinger, drew it out again. "Yes," he said, in a lower voice. "Another of them."

HE BROUGHT it into view and set it by the first pair. It was exactly like them. And Siddons, again at the vase, took out yet another with his left hand, and a fifth with his right hand.

"I don't quite understand," he said, and he was speaking to himself now, not to his prisoner. "There isn't— There doesn't seem to be an end to them."

He set down the fourth and fifth little warriors, took out a sixth. A seventh. An eighth. These, too, he set down. Now his hands trembled. He drew back without fishing in the vase for more.

"Thunstone," he said, "I was wrong about that bundle. It did—it does—have something beyond nature to it."

"It's like that purse in the myth. Fortuna's purse. You took out the gold in it, and more came. And," his voice grew strong again, but with a fierce, semi-hysterical note, "I know where I stand! Thunstone, I'll be rich!"

He almost sprang back to the table. "Don't you see? All these generations, nobody dared open these tabooed bundles! But inside were riches! Riches, that is, for whoever dared come after them!"

He was taking more figures out of the vase, a little golden procession of them. Each he set on the table. Now there were ten—eleven—twelve—fifteen—

"All alike," gurgled Siddons. "All of gold, all of them!"

He had made a row of them, like toy soldiers, clear across the table-top. He turned and faced Thunstone exultantly.

"You can give a message to Long Spear," he said in a sort of whooping quaver. "Tell him that I ruined his bundle, but that I'm not going to fight him or the Tsichah. They can have their land and whatever riches it contains. . . . Thunstone! What are you staring at?"

THUNSTONE'S eyes were not on Siddons, but on the row of figures.

"For a moment," he replied, "it seemed that one or two of those figures moved."

Siddons swivelled around and studied them. "Rot! They only shook or quivered. Maybe I joggled the table."

"You didn't touch it," said Thunston. "There, Siddons; they moved again. Almost next to your hand."

Siddons turned away from his treasure again, and walked to Thunstone. With the heel of his hand he slapped Thunstone's jowl.

"Don't try to make me nervous," he growled. "It won't work, Thunstone."

"I'll say no more about it," promised Thunstone, watching the table beyond Siddons.

Out of the vase was coming another gold figure, without waiting to be lifted out.

Thunstone saw a tiny fleck of radiance first—a clutching hand on the lip of the vase, a hand no larger than a little frog's forefoot. Then the head came into view, with open mouth and plumes and staring turquoise eyes. Then a leg hooked over, then the whole gleaming yellow body was in view, erect and balancing on the vase's rim. The thing moved nimbly, knowingly, lively as a sparrow. It pointed with its spear—pointed at the back of Siddons.

The others stirred into motion, bunched like a tiny war party.

Siddons was moving back toward the table, and at first glance did not know, or

did not accept, what was happening. Then he shuddered and cried out, but too late.

His hand had rested for a moment on the table. The warrior that had come last from the vase made a sort of grasshopper leap, striking with his tiny gold-wire spear. Thunstone could not make out plainly what happened, but he saw Siddons tugging wretchedly and ineffectually to lift his hand from where it had touched the table. A moment later the other tiny golden bodies had charged, were leaping and scrambling upon Siddons, up his sleeves, up the front of his coat. One thrust a spear at his eye. Another was apparently trying to climb into his ear. Siddons cried out again, but his voice was muffled—Thunstone could not see what was at his mouth.

There was a moving, gleaming cloud and crawling about Siddons' face and head, as if brilliant, venomous insects were swarming there. Siddons dabbed at them once, with his free hand, but very feebly. He began to totter, to buckle at the knees. He sank slowly floorward. The golden warriors receded from him in a wave, as though in disciplined retreat. They were back on the table-top away from him, and the last to leave, their leader, paused to free his little spear from Siddons' hand. Released, Siddons settled prone on the carpet.

The leader of the tiny warriors dropped lightly to the floor. Looking down, Thunstone saw the golden morsel scamper toward him, felt it scale his trouser leg like a monkey on a great tree trunk. The thing came into view upon his chest, fixing him with searching, turquoise eyes, poising a spear calculatingly. The spear-point moved forward—touched a strand of the wire that bound Thunstone. He felt his bonds relax. His feet and hands were free. The golden figurine scrambled down again, retraced its hasty progress to the table, and nimbly hopped up again. It fell into line with the others.

Thunstone sat where he was until Long Spear returned.

"IT IS all easy to interpret," pronounced Long Spear when Thunstone had finished his story. "Siddons desecrated a sacred object, and that object contained the power to punish him. But you were not only spared, but freed of your bonds. There is no reproach to you."

He looked toward the silent form of Siddons. "I find no marks upon him, not even a pin-prick, to show where or how those little spears wounded him. What explanation need be given of his death?"

"No explanation," replied Thunstone, "because none would be believed. It happens that I know certain men who owe me great favors, and who can easily take this body away and dispose of it unknown to the law."

"That is good." Long Spear moved to the table with its discarded bundle-wrappings and the pottery boxes, and the row of little golden warriors. "I have brought back the buckskin sheathing for my bundle. I shall restore it as it was before Siddons meddled."

For a moment he glanced upward, his lips moving soundlessly in prayer to the gods of his tribe. Then he carefully lifted one of the figures, put it in the vase. Another he put inside, another, another, another. One by one he slid them out of sight.

When the last had been put in the vase, Long Spear lifted the lid to screw on top; then he paused, turned to Thunstone, and silently held the vase so that his friend could see inside.

Only a single golden goblin could be seen, a tiny carven image with bandy legs, a spear held slantwise, and upturned grotesque face. Yet—though it may have been a trick of the light—the turquoise eyes caught and held Thunstone's, and one of them seemed to close for a brief instant.

Dimensional Doors

By HANNES BOK

THE bar was crowded, so Danny Roberts tipped the jigger of rum into the glass of ginger ale, picked up a swizzle-stick, and looked for a table. The Hurry Inn was overflowing with customers—they were so packed at the tables, bar, and floor that they formed a mobile wall, blotting out the tavern's hack murals, the dim tube-lights which only feebly illuminated the place. Danny found a small table with room for only two, and sat down. He stirred his drink.

But as he raised his glass to his lips, his eyes turned toward the door. Taking a sip, he set the glass down and looked wonderingly at the young fellow who was just entering—a tall and husky lad who was of the football-hero type, but who seemed terribly afraid of something—of what? Something outside, for he glanced anxiously over his shoulder at the door. Then his eyes swept the room, studying the chattering people as though he were searching for someone he knew. He looked at Danny twice, then went to the bar, ordered a drink, and a few seconds later was heading for Danny's table.

He asked, "Mind if I sit with you?" His hand with the glass hovered over the cloth. "The rest of the place seems full up." His voice shook, as though he were unable to control it, and his hand shook too: drops of whatever he was drinking splashed over the edge of the glass, ran over his fingers, dripped on the table.

"Sure, go ahead." Danny waved toward the other seat; the husky fellow sat down. Danny took a swallow of his rum. The stranger lifted his own glass, but it clicked against his teeth as he sipped from it. The red jewel of a massive ring glinted on his hand as he put the drink down on the table again. He observed Danny looking at the ring, and slowly pushed his hand forward.

"It *is* a strange ring, isn't it?" he asked. Danny mumbled a monosyllable by way of polite reply. The stranger mused over the brilliant gem, smiling wryly. Suddenly he looked up at Danny.

"Here, you take this." He took off the ring, held it out on an upraised palm.

Danny looked from the ring to the stranger's face. "But—I mean—"

The other man jerked his hand impatiently. "Go on. Take it. At least, look at it." His own eyes reverted to the flashing red stone. "Tell me what you think of it. I'd like to see if you can guess—can guess—" Breaking off, he thrust the ring against Danny's hand on the table-top.

Danny accepted the ornament; its weight surprised him. "Golly, that's certainly one big lump of gold!" he marveled.

"Yes, isn't it? But the jewel—the jewel—"

Heading by
HANNES BOK

DANNY peered at the flashing red facets. Odd how the reflected light seemed to twinkle, as though there were actual churning flames, however miniature, within the stone. The setting was ordinary enough—just another man's ring of the usual type—but the bezel was ribbed horizontally, as if made of wires soldered parallel to each other. "What's it—ruby?" he asked.

"I don't know its name—only that it's no earthly jewel. It came from—" the stranger shook his head sheepishly, and sighed. He gulped his drink. "God, this is good. I'm going to have another." He snapped his fingers at an unresponsive waiter. "You'd like to have the ring? Take it—it won't do me any good any more." His voice was defiant.

Danny scanned the gem admiringly, but handed it back. "I can't take it," he said. "It looks too expensive for me to consider buying. You keep it—you might feel differently about it tomorrow."

"You think I'm drunk? Well, I'm not. And if I gave you that ring, it wouldn't be outright for nothing. No."

Suddenly he leaned very far across the table.

"I need help," he said. "Desperately. This is the only chance I've managed to get to ask for help. I've been followed every place I go. I can't talk to a cop—nobody who's cold sober will believe my story. The safest place to come is here—here, because if someone will believe me, will take this ring and promise to help me, the things that are following me won't know about it—won't have any definite proof that I've made a contact. Supposing I was seen to enter some one's house? The house could be watched—and whoever lived in it wouldn't be living long. I tell you, I'm afraid—afraid—"

His wide eyes were appealing: unconsciously his hand shot across the table, gripped Danny's in terror. Danny was motionless, puzzled. The fellow meant what he was saying. . . :

The stranger reluctantly drew back from Danny, composed himself. "Will you let me tell you my story? Please? Or should I say that I'm sorry I've bothered you, and move on—and look for somebody else, somebody who can help me?" He glanced down at his broad chest, his powerful arms, then at Danny. "Oh, I know what you're thinking—you're saying to yourself, 'That guy looks strong. If he can't take care of himself, what can I do?' But it's not that kind of a problem. And you can be of help. Well—shall I go? Or will you take this"—he proffered the ring again—"in return for hearing me out?"

Danny pushed the ring back to him. "You keep it. But go on and tell your tale of woe, if it'll make you any happier." He tasted his drink indifferently.

The stranger's eyes brightened; he smiled eagerly, gratefully.

"Thanks," he said, "that's swell. I wonder . . . where I should begin? From the start, I suppose." He put his hand over the table for Danny to shake. "My name's Eddie Foster."

"I'm Danny Roberts."

"Pleased to meet you, Danny." Eddie's eyes were turned on the man, but they were introspective. "My—my story really starts several years back—to my running away from home. Stepmother trouble. We just didn't see eye to eye—but she was a good woman, and I felt like a dog when I sneaked away. I hadn't finished school yet; I didn't know the value of a thorough education. Oh, I found work all right, had several different jobs. Then—just a year ago—I was sick, and when I came from the hospital, there wasn't a job to be had. Nowhere."

He frowned at memories. "Yes—it was just one of those tough breaks that happens to everybody, I figured. H'mph! If only I'd known! My clothes kept getting shab-

bier and shabbier as I drifted from one cheap hotel to another—then one of those fifteen-cent flop-houses. Then—I had no place at all. But I couldn't bring myself to mooch anyone for a dime. I'd always been independent. God, I'll not soon forget one night!"

He twitched, stung by the recollection. "There I was . . . pounding the pavement . . . weak . . . everything had become light and swimmy—"

YES. Everything had become light and swimmy, the way things look on a hot day, when waves of warm air ripple up from the ground and make the landscape shimmer. But it was not a warm day. It was night in late autumn, and briskly cold. Eddie had reason for feeling dizzy—he had not eaten for three days.

He limped a little as he plodded along the dark streets, his hands thrust for warmth into the pockets of his threadbare suit-coat. He trudged, discouraged, tired, his shoulders hunched and his head drooping, his glance occasionally flicking up to the passersby, resenting their complacent comfort, their well-fed looks and dressy clothes.

He stopped at the window of a cafeteria and peered in through the green mist of a neon sign, envying the crowd around the counters, stocking up on food. There was a wonderful odor of good things to eat—a blend of savory meat, coffee, the sweet dampness of fresh bread.

He was ravenous! He gazed, sick with envy, until the chill wind whisked dead leaves past him with a papery rustling like the voices of discontented ghosts. He turned away—and saw that there was a park across the street, with benches lined under the nearly naked trees. Well, there at least was a place where he might sit without having to pay for the privilege.

He crossed the road, picked a bench in the shadows, and seated himself with a sigh. Fog was rolling in from the Bay; people grew fewer and fewer. Eddie began to shiver, his teeth to chatter; he bit on a lip to control his shaking.

The fog thickened, veiling the street, dwindling the street-lights into mere blurs. Eddie felt as though he were in a private world all his own. Hours seemed to pass.

And then—Aslanvik came. Eddie heard him before he saw him: the mist seemed to amplify sounds. There was a thud of feet on the pavement, forecasting the giant which Aslanvik turned out to be. Unconsciously Eddie faced the approaching tread. After a few seconds, a black bulk broke from the gray folds of fog, and Eddie saw the man—saw Aslanvik.

He was a monster of a man. Eddie was six-feet-one, and thought himself tall, but the newcomer was huge even to him. Around six feet, eight inches, he was shrouded in a dark coat that hung down almost to his heels, and his hat was pulled far over his eyes. His entrance was theatrical, melodramatic—like the scenes where the devil appears to the young hero and offers to buy his soul.

Aslanvik peeped from right to left, craning out his head as though expecting to find someone he knew awaiting him, but nobody was around except for Eddie. Then the giant glimpsed the young man and went over to him, a tall black blur in a universe of mist. Eddie looked him over as he sat down on the bench.

Aslanvik took a cigarette case from his coat, snapped the lid open, and held it toward Eddie.

"Have a smoke?" he offered.

Just those few words told Eddie that the man was a foreigner, but he could not place the accent. Later, he found that it was not so much Aslanvik's accent that gave him that alien touch; it was the curious expression of his voice, and his odd mannerisms.

The cigarette case glinted faintly; it was a beautifully wrought golden one, and

looked very expensive. Eddie thought, "This fellow ought to have money. I ought to ask him for something. I—I'm hungry." He was almost tearful at the idea of food.

He went so far as to open his mouth, but he could not speak. Damn it, he couldn't beg! He'd always been independent. Now he had nothing—except his pride. If he let that go, he wouldn't have a thing at all. No, he wouldn't ask. But—?

No, he wouldn't ask!

He did accept a cigarette, though; but his fingers shook to such an extent that the slip of tobacco dropped between his numbed fingers and fell to the walk. He reached down for it, but Aslanvik caught his arm.

"Let it go. Take another."

In the flare of Aslanvik's lighter, their eyes mutually searched each other. Eddie saw a long bony face like that of a Gothic statue—almost out of proportion. Equine in length, but not in character. Catlike, rather. The pupils of the eyes were so dilated that Eddie imagined the eyes to be gypsy-black: they were deep-set and cavernous. Unfathomable. His expression was —well, enigmatic—Eddie couldn't quite riddle it.

A poker-face, masklike. And then Eddie had typed it. A dead face in which only the eyes lived.

THE lighter's flame winked out; Aslanvik put the little box away and the two men drew on their cigarettes. The fragrant smoke was so pleasant that Eddie momently relaxed—and promptly fell to trembling again. Aslanvik glanced at him.

"Well," the giant said, "you ought to be wearing a coat in this kind of weather."

Eddie invented a laugh, at least he meant it for one, but it sounded like dried bread being crunched through a meat-grinder.

"I would—if I had a job," he said. "Don't let's talk about it, or I'll wind up telling you a hard-luck story." He took another drag upon his smoke and tried to smile.

Aslanvik asked, "Out of work?"

Eddie nodded.

"You've really tried to find something to do?"

That touched a sore spot. Eddie asked vehemently, "Do you think I *like* sleeping out in the open?"

"Sorry. But I should think a young man like you wouldn't have difficulty in obtaining some sort of a position."

Eddie smiled crookedly. "Wait until you've tried!"

Aslanvik seemed to ponder. "Well! . . . Have you . . . a place to sleep tonight?"

Eddie shook his head. He didn't like thinking about it. Somehow, it made the night twice as cold.

Abruptly, Aslanvik arose. He touched Eddie's shoulder. "Here, you'd better come along with me. I've an extra room in my place, and you may turn out to be the very man I'm looking for." Eddie stared up incredulously. "Come on," Aslanvik urged cheerfully, his hand again tapping Eddie's shoulder.

Eddie warmed with the dawning thoughts of a meal and a warm, soft bed. And then—the vision snapped out like a blown flame. Was this man a plain-clothesman, about to lead him smack to a jail?

Eddie drew himself upright slowly, feeling as though he were about to be hung. Jail! That would be the last straw! It wasn't his fault that he was broke and hungry. God knew he'd tried—!

Aslanvik understood. "Don't worry. I'm not a policeman." He patted Eddie's back, starting the lad down the walk. As they went along, he asked, "Where are your people?"

"My folks are dead, I guess."

The giant smiled—ever so slightly. "Good," he said, and again, "Good!"

IT WAS like being in a world of their own as they moved along—not a soul to be seen or heard, only a few indistinct noises of distant traffic. Eddie had not the slightest idea as to which way they were taking, but Aslanvik did not act like a lost man. Finally they arrived at a little side door opening on a lightless alley. It was padlocked; Aslanvik unbuttoned his long coat, pulled out a chain of keys, and opened the padlock, then a tumbler lock. He pushed the door inward, and waved Eddie ahead.

"Here we are. You go first. I'll switch on the light."

It was an old building, but very clean. The paint was flaking from the cracked plaster of the walls, and the air reeked of cheap incense. The steps creaked as the two climbed them.

At the landing was a second door, also double-locked. Aslanvik opened it, preceded Eddie inside. Lights blazed as Eddie crossed the threshold, and he halted, stunned. It was as though he had stepped into the Arabian Nights.

It was inconceivable—all that splendor. The commonplace stairway had disarmed him from expecting anything like this.

First he saw the blaze of scarlet-and-gold tapestries that hid the walls. They hung from a point not quite in the center of the ceiling, and spread out like a tent. The floor was three-deep with moss-soft rugs glowering with rich color. There were cabinets, tables and chairs carved from glossy black wood—carved in the strangest shapes imaginable—tangled monsters, dragons, looping snakes, weird feathered beasts which Eddie could not recognize. On the tables were carelessly strewn rainbow scarves, ponderous books whose metal covers were encrusted with jewels, curious little statues of fantastic monsters and oddly distorted humans more like the people of another world than of this. The lights glared from gemmed chandeliers whose distorted lines suggested fire patterns for the construction of mythical wonders.

Aslanvik somberly watched Eddie's reactions. "You like it?"

Eddie bent his head in acquiescence.

Aslanvik shed his coat and hung it up, motioning for Eddie to sit down. Eddie lowered himself to a chair that was a scaly tiger-shape, a little frightened of it. For it looked so alive! As if at his touch it would turn upon him!

Aslanvik took a decanter and two glasses from one of the cabinets; he poured out two drinks, stoppered the flask, and handed Eddie a glass. The liquid was clear, and gray in color; it had a piercing spicy odor. Aslanvik tossed his down in a swallow; Eddie cautiously tasted his own. It was aromatic, like cough medicine, but going down it felt wonderful.

"And now," Aslanvik said, "we'll repair to the kitchen and see what we can find to eat." Eddie was heartened by the liquor, and followed him with a bounce in his feet.

The kitchen was pretty much of a disappointment, after that sumptuous room; just the ordinary kind of a kitchen to be seen anywhere, with a linoleum on the floor, an untidy stove, a greasy sink, and packages of cereals spilling out of the cupboards.

"I'm a bachelor. Haven't time to clean the place," Aslanvik apologized.

He opened two cans of food, dumped their contents into pots and set them on the stove to heat. Then he drew Eddie through a hall to a door which he unlocked.

Beyond was an immense room. Eddie saw then that Aslanvik did not live in an apartment house or tenement; he lived in a business building, and his rooms were remodeled offices. There was not a stick of furniture in this particular chamber. Blank

white panels in heavily ornamented frames hung all around the walls, as in a picture gallery.

"So you're an artist," Eddie said.

Aslanvik eyed him without expression. "Yes—but not in the way you're thinking," he acceded.

He locked the door, and they returned to the kitchen. He indicated that Eddie was to sit, and while he set the table and dished out the food, he questioned, "What do you think about life? Have you any ambitions?"

"I just want to have a nice home and a good job."

"And your home life? What was it like?"

EDDIE did not realize then that Aslanvik merely wanted to make sure that no one would inquire after him in case he should drop out of sight. He answered dutifully. At last the giant thrust forth a hand to be shaken. Eddie took it. "Yes, you'll do," the big man said. "My name is Rhude Aslanvik."

"I'm Eddie Foster."

"Eddie Foster," Aslanvik repeated thoughtfully. "Well, Eddie, I could tell that you are an adventurous type. There'll be plenty of adventure for you—even action, if you can stand it—later on, when you've proven your worth to me by carefully attending to the tasks with which I intend starting you."

As they ate, he furthered, "You will find that I'm not like other people. I have a profession of a sort—you might call it bartering—but my markets are not like the prosaic things. No, with me"—his eyes lighted exultantly—"with me you will find yourself surrounded by incredible romance—beauty, mystery, wealth." His voice dropped a note lower as he added, "And danger. Perhaps, death." His eyes became bleak. "I can trust you?"

"Oh, sure," Eddie said easily, figuring that he could back out of anything unreasonable or dishonest. This stranger and his talk—they didn't sound just right. Mystery and wealth—danger, perhaps death. Was this Aslanvik a Nazi spy?

Aslanvik scanned Eddie's emptied plate. "Had enough?"

"Thanks. Yes."

The giant stood. "Come along then." He conducted Eddie back to the room where the white panels hung. Unlocking the door, he said, "I call this my Hall of Entrances."

"Why all the locks? You'd think that you had a treasure in there instead of bare canvases."

"Ah, but there is a treasure in here—and they are not canvases—nor are they bare."

The door opened; they went within, to one of the frames. Aslanvik ordered, "Inspect it carefully." It was an amazing bit of carving: there were intricate squirmy forms of dragons, interlaced flowers and strange abstractions.

Eddie said, "Swell job of carving. An antique?"

"Oh, very," Aslanvik answered, mockery and impatience in his tone. "But what about the jeweled eyes of the dragons? Haven't you noticed them?"

LOOKING again, Eddie discovered the inlaid smoky crystals. Aslanvik touched one of the reptilian heads.

"See, there is no eye in this socket," he said, slipping off a ring and handing it to Eddie, who had noticed it, but had not thought anything of it. If Aslanvik wanted to wear a ring big as a moon, that was Aslanvik's business.

All right—it was a ring—but what had it to do with the frames? Eddie gazed up from the circlet to Aslanvik, who took the trinket from him. The giant thrust the ring, red gem foremost, into the dragon's eye-socket, twisted it; and it remained in

place. The ring's bezel was threaded like a screw, Eddie realized.

Aslanvik explained, "The jewel is a key." Eddie did not understand, but nodded sagely all the same, and later on, Aslanvik elucidated.

But as Aslanvik uttered those words and stuck the ring into the eye-cavity of the dragon, Eddie heard a soft sighing sound, then a snap. The white panel had disappeared from the frame—vanished into nothingness. A minute earlier it had been before the two men, and now suddenly—it was as though it had never been there.

They should have been able to see blank wall-space behind the empty frame, but no. Stretching before them, on the opposite side of the frame, was an endless landscape of drifted sand. Not a picture, but reality.

Why, it was like standing at a window!

IT JUST didn't seem possible! Eddie turned to Aslanvik, then back where the panel had been. He put his hand forward, touched nothing, and withdrew it rather quickly. Aslanvik, untwisting his ring from the dragon's head, laughed at him. Eddie heard another fleeting gasp, another snap, and the panel was in its place again, a blank white surface in a black frame. It had appeared out of the air.

Aslanvik nonchalantly slipped his ring back on his hand and motioned for Eddie to follow him from the room. But Eddie could not. He stood stone-legged, his mouth hanging open, trying to convince himself that Aslanvik had either doped or hypnotized him. The big man gestured again, starting away, and somehow Eddie managed to trail after him.

"What was it," he asked, "another room full of sand doctored up by false perspectives to look like the whole Sahara? What do you use it for?"

Aslanvik said nothing just then, only shook his keys and cocked his head mysteriously. They went to the overdressed living-room; he waved Eddie to a chair, poured them both another swallow of that gray wine of his, and passed the glass to Eddie. He sat down.

He said, "Every one of those white panels you've seen—every one of them opens on worlds such as that sandy one I showed you. Not rooms filled with sand, as you seemed to think, but worlds—worlds like our own. But they are constructed from forces alien to ours, bridged to ours by intermediate forces. The smoky crystals which I pointed out to you in the frames all radiate a vibration; spaced as they are, the vibrations neutralize each other."

He sipped his wine. "What are these vibrations? Light, of course. But light and heat and sound—they are all the same thing, basically. And when this key, this ring"—he held up his hand, and the red gem smouldered—"is fitted into the cavity in the frame, its radiations affect those of the others, creating a forceless gap between the alien worlds and ours. Then it is possible to cross the gap from here to—there. You follow me?"

Eddie was not quite sure whether or not he did, but Aslanvik was obviously sincere enough—and after all, the thing had happened. Why try to account for facts? Eddie was no scientist. He shrugged, taking it all for granted. If it rained fire, he told himself, people might look at it for a few minutes, asking "Why?" or "How?" but as soon as they were burned, they'd have proof enough.

Aslanvik drained his glass, put it down, and leaned forward. "Now that you've seen," he said, "will you stay and help me here—if I pay you by giving you a world of your own, to do with as you wish? Think of it!—a complete world, of which you will be sole master—"

Eddie said, "I can't see any point in being master of a desert."

The giant frowned. "Only one of my

doorways opens on a desert. Why, I have forest worlds, metal worlds—places of fire, of water, of pure light. You who were so astounded—yes, astounded—by the opening of the door, how could such as you possibly dream of the infinite variety of my worlds?" His face was without character, but his voice sneered. "Well! Will you stay?"

Eddie temporized. "Let me think it over for a while."

There was a silence while the big man studied him. At last Aslanvik arose. "It's late. You'd better get some sleep. I'll show you to a bedroom—you can tell me your decision in the morning."

Eddie lagged after him into a small bedroom, evidently set apart for guests. There was thick dust on the dresser-top, on the window-sill, as though the room had not been in use for a long period.

He unhitched his necktie, Aslanvik standing at the door.

"There's an adjoining bathroom, so you won't have to step out into the hall during the night." There was a secret meaning to his words. Was he warning Eddie to keep inside the room—that he did not trust Eddie with his frames, locked away though they were? He pointed out the door to Eddie. "This other is a closet," he said. "And so—good night. See you in the morning. I'll wake you at eight." He went out, closing the door behind him.

Eddie dragged off his clothes. He was too groggy to hang his things in the closet, and threw them over the back of the chair by the bed. He washed in the bathroom, turned off the light, and slid under the bedcovers.

Weary as he was, he could not sleep; he lay puzzling over what he had seen. Then something was walking back and forth in the hall outside his door—back and forth, the feet thudding softly. Not Aslanvik: by now Eddie knew the giant's tread. No, this was someone—something—else. From the sound of it, the thing must be a Great Dane. So that was the reason that Eddie must not step out into the hall. Aslanvik had a dog, and presumably not a very friendly one.

EDDIE slid out of bed with as little sound as he could help, and crept over to the door to listen with an ear pressing against the wood. Pad . . . pad . . . pad. He knelt and squinted through the keyhole, but the hall was dark, and he could not discern what was making the noise. There was no key in the lock, no bolt on the door. Evidently the walking thing could not twist a door-knob, as some dogs can—or could it? Would the chair propped against the door keep that thing out?

Eddie sniffed. Aslanvik must be burning incense: there was that sharply sweet odor which he had noticed on the stairway.

He returned to the bed, but still could not sleep, lay rigid, cold shudders rippling through him at the slightest deviation of that rhythmic pad . . . pad . . .. out in the hall.

Eddie tossed restively, worried. Aslanvik—incense—frames that were doors—that thing outside. He didn't like it!

Well, wasn't there the window? Maybe he could drop down out of it and get the devil away from this place—and not come back again!

But when he tried the window, it would not open, and no wonder! It had been nailed shut. Its glass was pebble-surfaced: he could not see through it.

Still, he did go to sleep at last. Aslanvik's knock on the door woke him in the morning, though there was no light at the window.

"Get dressed!" Aslanvik bellowed. "Breakfast is ready!"

Eddie yawned himself awake and got up, washed, and started putting on his clothing. Out of curiosity he opened the closet door and glanced within. There was a hat on a

shelf, an old coat on a hook, and a pair of neckties, in bad shape, on the floor. They were not Aslanvik's—the coat and hat were too small for him. Eddie shut the door, finished dressing, and cautiously stepped out into the hall. The animal, or whatever it had been, was no longer on sentry duty. Aslanvik called genially from the kitchen, "Eddie! Aren't you dressed yet? The cereal's getting cold!"

Eddie ambled into the kitchen. The table was set, Aslanvik seated. Eddie joined him.

Pouring the coffee, Aslanvik asked, "Well, have you made up your mind?"

Eddie's eyes were restless. He was sure now that if he decided to go, that Aslanvik would not allow it. He'd have to try a ruse.

"I'd like to stay."

The coffee-pot had been poised in mid-air while the giant awaited the answer; Aslanvik set down the percolator. "Good."

"Only—I'll have to go out and notify my friends of a change of address."

Aslanvik did not like that. "Can't you mail them this address? Must you go in person?"

"No, I think I ought to see them."

"Nonsense!" Aslanvik said, with finality. "I'll find you a postcard, and you write them; I'll mail it for you next time I go out." He fished into a pocket. "Yes, here's a card. A little soiled." He proffered a pen. "I think there's ink in this. Go ahead, write whatever you like. This address is"—he lifted his gaze to the ceiling in thought — "six-twenty-nine Oakley Street. Yes. Six-twenty-nine Oakley Street."

He stared at Eddie, who uncomfortably wrote on the card. Aslanvik took back the pen, scanned the card, and smiled unctuously. "There. Simple as that! But now, eat your breakfast. We've things to do."

AFTER dining, they stacked the dishes in the sink. Aslanvik said, "Your chief duty here will be housekeeper. I haven't time for that."

"The place could stand a little going-over," Eddie agreed. He was certain that Aslanvik did not intend to mail the card. The giant would take no risks with his multiple locked-away secret. But how to feel the man out? "The bedroom was pretty dusty. There were some old clothes in the closet that ought to be thrown out—"

"Clothes? Ah, yes," Aslanvik said smoothly. "They belonged to—your predecessor." His face was blank, but his eyes probed Eddie's. "I had to—ah, dismiss him—not long ago. He wasn't competent. Or trustworthy. But *you'll* be competent, won't you?" His tone implied, "You will, if you know what's good for you!"

Ill at ease, Eddie choked as he answered, "Sure, I will!"

The dishes were all stacked. "Come along," Aslanvik said. "Turn out that light after you." He went to the room of the frames, ushering Eddie from frame to frame, unlocking each of them in the same fashion with the ring which he called a key. None of the frames was alike; some bore human figures, others animal forms, but there were so many of them that Eddie never really did get the chance to study them.

The ring went into a different socket on each frame. Aslanvik snapped open the Doorways for just a second, then closed them and moved along. Eddie had the opportunity for the merest glimpse of what lay beyond: he saw places which resembled the frost-forests of a winter window-pane. There were mountains of glittering metal —he could not help of thinking, "Bring in your scrap! Beat the Jap!"—stormy oceans where little froglike sea-folk played. . . . Once he saw a crowd of grinning faces topping reptilian bodies, faces which beamed recognition on Aslanvik, as though awaiting him. . . . It was as unbelievable as it was horrible, but there it was, happening.

Why didn't Eddie wake, if it were only a dream?

Aslanvik gave him the ring, and produced another for himself. "Your duty," he said, "is merely to lock each Doorway after I have passed through it. The Doors cannot be locked from the inside—unfortunately—and if I were to wander far from the entrance, things"—he savored the word—"things might escape out into our own world." He did not state their natures, but Eddie gathered from his tone that they were not very friendly.

Aslanvik pointed to a frame. "I'm going to enter this one now. Use your key."

Eddie took off his ring, pushed the stone into the proper opening, and gave it a turn. The white panel disappeared. Before him was a lush jungle, a splash of green. Ferns popped springlike over the frame's edges, and hung swaying.

Aslanvik climbed over the frame's sill as naturally as if crawling through a window. Eddie heard a weird, loud scream from the thicket—like a woman's cry. It echoed through the room. He looked at Aslanvik, who smiled very faintly.

"Lock me in," the big man said. He was standing among the ferns. "Come back at three o'clock—on the dot—and let me out. It's ten, now." He pulled up a sleeve to show Eddie his wrist-watch.

Eddie jerked the ring from the frame; the white panel reappeared, sealing Aslanvik behind it. Was he really in another world? Eddie tugged at the frame, and it slipped off its hook. It had been hanging like an ordinary picture. He replaced it on the wall.

Now was his time to get out of this place. He made a dash for the entrance beyond the living-room, and stopped still. Why? Because when he reached the door, he heard sounds outside—unpleasant snuffling noises, and the sudden scrape of claws on the portal. Whatever was outside had heard him approaching—and the racket which it was making did not imply that it wanted to make friends. Eddie drew back from the door . . . then sidled back to it; he stooped to peer through the keyhole, his nostrils dilating at the fragrance of incense.

He saw a flash of scaly green hide, the dull glint of a piggish eye. As the creature fretted before the door, he noticed short sharp horns—also green—and long yellow fangs in a crocodilian maw.

No chance of getting out—not this way. But what about the windows?

Well, there were no windows, he discovered—only the one nailed shut in his bedroom. He searched the kitchen drawers for a hammer and pried up the long spikes, then raised the window to—blackness. An airshaft. Only blank cement wall and brickwork on all sides, rising up, a square well three feet wide, to a tiny hole of sky. There was a possibility that he could climb the airshaft, nudging his back upward an inch at a time with his feet braced on the walls. But if he fell. . . . No, there might be a chance to escape later. Something less drastic than this.

He shut the window and hammered back the nails. Aslanvik mustn't suspect that he had tried to get out. He returned the hammer to its place, profoundly depressed.

He was marooned in Aslanvik's house.

AT THREE, he touched his ring to the proper spot on the frame, and Aslanvik wedged out, his arms laden with bundles wrapped in colorful cloths. "Quick! Lock the door!" he said.

Eddie took away his ring, sealing the jungle-world. Aslanvik handed him some of the packages to carry; they were heavy, as if made of metal, and irregular in shape. They went to the kitchen; Aslanvik put down his bundles on the table, ran back to lock the door, then returned to unwrap his findings.

There were things made mostly of gold:

little idols, gem-studded combs, books with golden covers.

"I'll sell these to a museum," Aslanvik said. "Though I think that the combs might go to a jeweler."

And so that was the way things were. Weeks passed. Eddie acted as housekeeper and—gatekeeper to Aslanvik's worlds. In all that time he did not set foot out of doors. At last he asked the giant, "Don't you trust me? Can't I go out even to see a movie? I'm just about going nuts in here. I've got to get some air."

The big man mulled over the question. "Yes, I imagine that I can trust you—now. You may go out when you like." Eddie smiled appreciatively. "But not alone," Aslanvik amended. "One of my—call them dogs—will follow you. Strange-looking, my dogs. They might attract unfavorable attention if you were to take them out strolling during the day. So of course," he added smoothly, "you will have to confine your outings to the night."

Eddie was curious about the "dog." So far, he had not really seen it. Perhaps it might be tamer than it had seemed. He could befriend it, slip past it. . . . He asked, "Well, may I go out now?"

Aslanvik bared his wrist and scanned his strap-watch. "No, not for a while," he decided. "Too early. There will be people on the streets—something you don't want to risk. Wait a while. I'll let you know when it's time."

Eddie sat down and thumbed an out-of-date magazine. He took a drink, then looked through an old newspaper—since Aslanvik did all the marketing, and much of that in his alien worlds—fresh newspapers were not always on hand.

Aslanvik cared nothing about current events. Why should he? Why should this world's news interest *him*, the master of many worlds? Why, he was in command of this very world—Eddie understood it now—with his legions from those other places, Aslanvik could tear this world to bits if he were minded. But the giant would not want to, no. Because in all his other worlds, he was not trusted. He was an Outsider. Here in this world he was safe in anonymity.

At last the giant returned to let Eddie go out. As he stepped into the room, the young man perceived that he held a leash, the other end of which was not in sight.

"Here you are," he said, advancing to Eddie, tugging on the leash. Into the room came—that thing which Eddie had heard prowling the hall, and glimpsed through a keyhole—his dog, he called it. His dog? More like a giant lizard! But that was not the worst of it, no!

No, the hellish thing was that the animal was—transparent!

Well, after all, what was so peculiar about a transparent animal? Once you get over the shock of it, of course. He had left his chair and was standing at attention, blinking. The—dog—crouched close to Aslanvik, snarling most unpleasantly. Eddie was glad that the giant was there.

"Now, Chalik!" Aslanvik chided the beast. "That's no way to behave!" His eyes glittered malignantly. "Really, it's a shame, but Chalik doesn't seem to like you. I'm afraid to leave you alone with him. And so—I fear you won't go out for your walk tonight!"

Eddie asked, "But what is it? How can I see through it?"

Oh, it wasn't like glass: he could look into it and discern shimmering trails, phosphorescent lumps that were its bones, organs and entrails. Even perceive three separately beating hearts. . . .

Aslanvik turned and led the creature away. With it went a whiff of the strange incense which Eddie had noted—the odor of the thing.

Coming back, Aslanvik said, "It's called a kyi. Not a native of this world, as you've probably guessed, but from one

of those frames—never mind which. And as for its translucence, what is so peculiar about that? Are not certain creatures here translucent? What about tadpoles. And some insects?—whose names I cannot at present recall. This kyi of mine is the same phenomenon, but on a larger scale. It's not a native to this world, so why need it conform to this world's laws?"

And so Eddie did not get outside after all.

There is an old saying that, "The devil finds work for idle hands." And Eddie's hands were idle most of the time. There is a story of a sorcerer's apprentice who got in trouble by using his master's magic spells. And a prince, Agib, in the Arabian Nights, who was not supposed to unlock one special door of the palace from which his forty fair ladies had departed. And there was Bluebeard's wife who opened a door which had been better left shut.

And there was Eddie . . .

All the panels were coated with a splotched silver sheen. To all effects, they were white. Eddie could not tell by looking at them what really lay beyond them. He could guess . . . but what seemed vaguely like a garden might turn out to be a misty lake.

Eddie had just sealed Aslanvik into one of the panels. He had the ring—the "key"—in his hands; he turned it over and over thoughtfully. Then he studied the frames, the walls crowded with them. He did not know what was within half of them. He wanted to see what they held, and—did not dare. He approached one, ran his fingers over its carvings until he found the place where the ring was meant to be inserted; he lifted his ring to it—and dropped his hand.

Suppose he encountered one of Aslanvik's kyis—his dogs? Or one of those "unfriendly" things? He moved to another frame, found its keyhole, and fidgeted with the ring. But eventually, almost against his will, his hand lifted, set the ring in the proper spot, and—twisted it.

Fire gushed out! Eddie lost his front hair, eyebrows and eyelashes as he staggered back, a hand thrown protectively over his face. It was not ordinary fire; it was intensely green, like the colored fire obtainable for Independence Day pyrotechnics. Within it, wrapped by it as though wearing a blazing cloak, was a shape of brighter fire, something like a candle's flame magnified thousands of times until it was about nine feet in height and two in width. It trembled in the center of the green radiance, which rolled out of the frame and upward over the ceiling like an upside-down view of spilled liquid. Its motion was slow and oily. The heat was terrific. It made very little noise; none, in fact. All that Eddie could hear was a snapping from the walls as the green streamed up them, blistering the paint. Then he ducked low, scuttled forward, and jerked the ring from the frame. The circlet was very hot, and burned his fingers; he dropped it.

The green flame spread lazily over the ceiling, the huge oval of brighter fire still in its middle. The green began to dim and vanish. It died away, leaving a trail of charred and blistered paint where it had climbed the wall. Leaving, too, the nine-foot candle-flame image, which suddenly lifted upward, it seemed into the very ceiling itself—and did not appear again.

There was no way of repairing the damaged wall. Aslanvik was due back soon. Maybe, Eddie thought in panic, maybe he could sneak outside. But could he get past the kyi? Could he?

THE instant that his hand touched the knob of the living-room door, the thing in the hallway was restless. Eddie unlocked the door, opened it a crack, and looked out. The kyi hadn't moved an inch on the night that Aslanvik had brought it in on a leash.

It was intelligent—more so than a dog. If only it had more brains, Aslanvik would probably have used it for an assistant instead of Eddie. But perhaps he could not trust it with that sort of a job, though its claws were more like hands than paws.

The kyi pushed at the crack of the door as though it meant to shove itself into the room; it panted a series of short snaky hisses. Eddie pressed his weight against the door, which gave inward now to the beast, and outward again to Eddie.

It was nip and tuck—see-saw—the beast unable to force itself inside, and the man unable to slam the portal on it. One of the sharp-clawed hands shot around the door and swiped Eddie's leg, ripping the trousers-cloth away and furrowing the flesh beneath. Warm blood ran down Eddie's shin, and the kyi must have smelled it. It howled—raucously! horribly!—like a human being in the process of being mangled. . . . It made Eddie so ill that he forgot himself for a moment and almost permitted the thing to get inside.

As he shoved against the door, he realized that if the thing really wanted to get inside, he could take a chance, fling the door wide and step aside, letting the kyi rush past him—then pelt outside and bang the door. So he tried it. Well!

It did not work. The kyi came bounding in, and Eddie went bounding out. But the creature had whirled and caught Eddie's wrist in its mouth as he pulled on the door to close it.

A transparent gray dog-lizard . . . looking like a curdled shadow . . . and it dragged Eddie back, back into the splendid living-room, then down the hall and into the chamber of the frames. It stood guard at the entrance, grumbling at every move that Eddie made. There was nothing for the young man to do but stand and wait until it was time to let Aslanvik out.

He opened the frame, shaking with nervousness. The giant was burdened with silk-swathed treasures, as usual. "I brought you a present," he said amiably to Eddie—and then he saw the kyi at the door, the trail left on the wall by the green fire.

He dropped his packages—they thudded and crashed tinkling on the floor as his huge hands gripped Eddie's shoulders and he shook the youth back and forth as if he were a baby. The kyi leaped to the two, its hands on Eddie's back, awaiting a command to rip the young man apart. Aslanvik shook and shook and shook him—and when he let go, Eddie hurtled across the room, tripped as he went, and sprawled on the floor.

The giant towered over him, his face no longer a mask. It was distorted with fury. "You fool! You utter, utter fool! I ought to have known that you'd do this! he shouted, and bending, smashed his fist on Eddie's face. The pain sent Eddie to his feet, his fists ready—weak fists, but at least he was willing to fight. He aimed a blow at the big man, but the kyi pounced upon him, pulled him back to the floor; man and beast rolled over and over, struggling. The thing's teeth met through the skin of Eddie's arm: Eddie could not repress a cry of terror. The smell of the beast—like ten-cent perfume—was an anaesthetic, and he fell back unconscious.

When he recovered, he was in bed, Aslanvik tying a knot on the bandage on Eddie's arm. He was his old self, his face without expression, but his eyes were not very reassuring.

"It doesn't hurt any more, does it?" he asked, gently enough. Eddie shook his head to show that no, it didn't. "I put some salve on it—salve from Tharoia," he explained. "It soothes and heals—it will not leave much of a scar." His mouth slipped awry. "I think you've learned your lesson now. You won't try *that* again!"

But ever after that . . . Eddie knew that he was being watched. He would be cleaning the kitchen, straightening up the living-

room, or merely reading to kill time—and looking up, he would find Aslanvik's eyes fixed on him. If Eddie tried surprising him, by looking up suddenly, the giant anticipated him.

But Eddie knew that he was on probation. Sometimes he thought that it would be best to wait until Aslanvik was outside shopping, then run into the Hall of Entrances, open a frame, and dash as far as he could within—so far that Aslanvik would never find him. But what kind of a world would he find himself inside? Would he be able to get along in it? Or would he die there?

Worse still—Aslanvik had only to seal Eddie into a frame, and there Eddie would be, imprisoned for life. Ah, there it was! Hadn't Aslanvik promised Eddie a world all his own? What had happened to Eddie's "predecessor," the man whom Aslanvik had "dismissed"?

THE next time that Aslanvik was away, Eddie pried open the bedroom window, then clipped the nails off close to their heads and hammered them back in. The window looked as if it were still nailed shut, but it would open readily. Now he could climb the airshaft, as soon as he had locked Aslanvik into a picture.

All well and good. Only—the giant was taking no chances. So that Eddie had to try making his escape by night.

That was no easy trick, getting up the airshaft. Eddie sat on the window-sill, his feet just touching the wall opposite; he braced himself with his hands and shrugged to the masonry beside the window. And slowly up . . . his legs began to tremble; he rested by digging his fingers into the brickwork and gulping deep breaths. It was black, underneath him; he wondered how far he would fall, and whether the drop would kill him. He mustn't fall! Aslanvik mustn't hear him!

Up, and up, and up. Hours, years, centuries. The sky was still very far away. But now the air was fresher. . . . He was close to the top. And now he was there; now on the roof, under a clear sky's starlight.

Perhaps he had made more noise than he thought. He'd better get away—but pronto! He hurried over the roof, clambered over a low wall to another roof, searched around for a fire-escape. He found one, poised on its rungs, looking down. He was in the business section of the city. The streets were dark. But he knew where he was. There was little traffic down below—a few trucks, then a taxi, then a private car. Then—nothing.

Had he heard a movement on the roof? He peered through the murk. Aslanvik was coming! The giant must have missed him, or heard him. . . . He started down the rungs to the iron-grille stairway that zigzagged down the building.

And Aslanvik followed. Once the giant paused, whispering fiercely, "Come back! Come back, you!" But Eddie scrambled down regardless. He was on the stair now. The giant paused, began to climb upward again. Was he going to meet Eddie down in the street? With the kyi?

Someone was down on the fire-escape. Someone smoking a cigarette. Eddie could see the tiny red glow. He stopped, but had to go on. Aslanvik!

And then, reaching the level of the smoker, he found that no one was on the fire-escape after all! The small point of red light hung in the air, a red firefly. He passed it and hurried down, and—it followed him. That was no glow-bug, surely.

It was something sent by Aslanvik!

Eddie had to unhook an iron ladder and lower it to the sidewalk. He made special note of the address. The giant had not reached the street yet. Eddie fled over the walk without any definite objective. All that he wanted just then was to get away from the giant.

There were no shops open. No restaurants. Everything in that sector was closed for the night. Farther on, perhaps, where there were theatres and hotels, there might be some place of refuge.

And always the red light followed him.

It followed him. And did it cast off sound-vibrations too high in pitch for Eddie to hear? Did it communicate telepathically with Aslanvik, informing him where Eddie was?

For Eddie detected a rhythmic pad . . . pad . . . of feet behind him. As if a large cat were stalking him. He turned, glanced back—

It was the kyi!

If only the streets were not deserted! If only there was someone to whom Eddie could shout for help! And then he realized that others could not save him. Why, the beast could kill him in front of a dozen witnesses, and after hearing their story, the listener would exclaim, "Aw, g'wan, there ain't no such animal!"

If the kyi left any witnesses . . .

It was drawing closer, its teeth perpetually grinning behind the transparent lips. It growled, but did not fly at its prey. It kept pace with Eddie.

Or perhaps Aslanvik had ordered it not to kill, only to capture!—to herd Eddie back to the giant's quarters. Yes, that was it! For now it was at his heels, and now was loping around in front of him, stopping in his path. Its fanged jaws menaced him when warily he tried to pass it.

INSPIRATION came to Eddie at the sight of a parked car by the curb. He angled over to it, praying that its door would open. The door, however, was locked. But the window was partly down. The kyi halted beside Eddie, sniffing. Eddie crammed a hand through the opening, squeezed his arm through, felt down. . . . His finger just touched the catch which unlocked the door. He pulled it open.

The unexpected happened. Eddie had intended getting into the car, slamming the door, and waiting for help. But the kyi bounded in ahead of him. If Eddie wanted to get into the vehicle, the kyi had no objections. It would simply get inside with him. Cat and mouse.

So Eddie simply slammed the door, imprisoning the beast. But judging from the vigor with which it banged against the car's window, it was not imprisoned for very long. Eddie had better start moving.

He had forgotten the red glow, but as he looked up, he saw it, hovering over him, keeping measure with him.

There was a loud crackling. The kyi had injured the window! Eddie ran, his feet tick-tacking briskly. He turned a corner, and observed a glow of light from a plate-glass window. A beer parlor!

He stopped at its door, stared within. It was crowded. Safety in numbers. . . . He pushed against the door, and went in. The red gleam hung in the air outside, awaiting his return.

And then he had seen Danny. And that was all. . . .

"Yes," he told Danny. "That's all. And now—do you believe me? Well, never mind. Don't answer. Only promise me this—that you'll keep the ring and that some day you'll look up Aslanvik's address and go there with a bunch of cops."

Danny threw up a demurring hand. "Wait! You sound as if you're going back to Aslanvik!"

"Yes, I am. There's nothing else to do."

"If you're serious about this whole business, you could telephone the police. They'll escort you out of danger."

Eddie laughed. "You think so? Suppose the kyi becomes impatient—and breaks into here? Think of the hell it would raise! Because it's out there, waiting for me. It's gotten loose by now. I know it." He glanced toward the door. "If it should

be impatient, and come in—what would you have? A dead Eddie and a lot of wild stories of some big beast that broke in and then ran away. . . ."

"You ought to try it. You'd be safe in jail. Aslanvik couldn't reach you there."

Eddie raised his brows. Was this Danny humoring him? "I told you about the red light, didn't I? And the fire that gushed from the frame? Aslanvik could reach me anywhere. Fire can pass through iron bars. . . ." He twitched, foretasting death. "No. I'm safest back with Aslanvik. He'll banish me into one of his worlds. And then I'll be freed when you come with the police and open the frame with that ring. A few tear-gas bombs ought to keep Aslanvik too busy to put up much of a defense."

Danny pointed to the door. "Those people coming in. They don't seem to have noticed anything waiting outside."

"No, you fool! Are they expecting to see anything hiding out there? Do you think that Aslanvik's creatures are sitting in bright light where anyone can see them?" Eddie tipped his glass, finishing his drink. "Well, you can't say that I haven't tried. You think this over. No, I don't want the ring back. You keep it."

"You're not going to phone for help, then?"

"I've been in here too long as it is. I can't take a chance of having the thing break in here. . . . My fault, anyway . . . no use endangering others. . . ."

HE AROSE. "You think I'm drunk. Listen, if you keep the ring and it bothers your conscience, you'll remember me and the address—Sixty-one Broome Street, a side door in the alley. Thanks for listening, and good-night—and I'll be seeing you, I hope." He stood up, swayed slightly, and eyed his feet in surprise. "Gosh, I guess I *am* drunk at that! My feet feel a little queer!"

He nodded an extra farewell at Danny and started out. Danny, ring in hand, half-arose, haunted by the look in the fellow's eyes. But Eddie went straight out; Danny shrugged and sat down again.

Suddenly he jumped up, hurried to the door past the indifferent gantlet of drinkers, and stepped outside. There was no trace of Eddie Foster—no man dwindling in the distance, faintly limned by street lights. And no kyi.

"Oh, well," Danny said, going back in. But he was uneasy. . . . If only he had not accepted the ring! At every sight of it, in the days following, he remembered Eddie.

Finally he did go to the Broome Street number. Yes, there was an alley doorway, and on the door was a sign, "Loft to let. Will remodel to suit"—and then the realtor's office address.

At the rental agency, a mousey girl looked listlessly through a grubby card-index. Yes, the loft had been rented recently, but the name was not Aslanvik: it was Thomas. She could show Danny the place, if he liked. And he liked. Her untidy superior gave her leave from the office, and so they visited the loft.

There was the odor of cheap incense in the hall. But upstairs there was only a vast single room. There had been partitions, the agency-girl said, but they had been ripped away. The last tenant had even walled up the windows, imagine! No, she didn't know of a forwarding address—she'd only seen the tenant once: he paid his rent by mail . . . he was a big blond man.

Well—there Danny was. It might have been a true story at that. He still had the ring. Here was the place where Aslanvik had been living. But that was all.

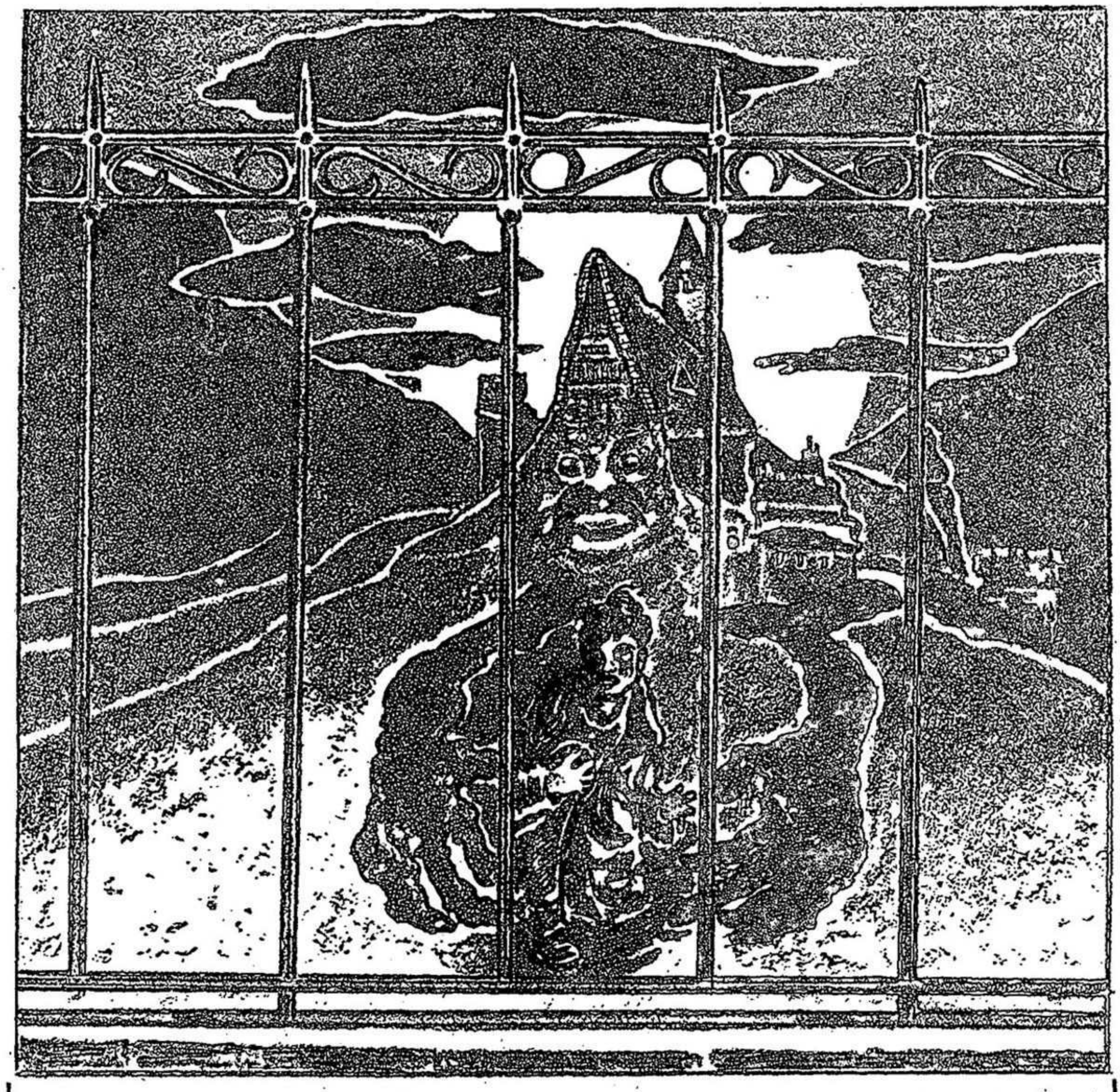
What in the name of heaven could Danny do?

Except get a drink . . . he stopped in at the first bar he saw and had several.

What would you have done?

House of Hate

By ALLISON V. HARDING



An evil house begets evil dwellers—and silently revels in the black deeds perpetrated within its walls

AMBROSE TIMOTHY was seemingly a man of meekness who seldom found the courage to satisfy even that sort of curiosity that is neither feminine nor morbid, but natural. Take the house next door, for instance. Its fenced-in secretiveness; its very appearance and influence on the surrounding countryside—and especially on Mr. Timothy's adjoining bungalow were enough to make a

Heading by A. R. TILBURNE

peace-loving man become quite inquisitive.

But none of this seemed to bother Mr. Timothy as he limped around puttering in his neat beds of larkspur, roses, snapdragons, and zinnias. Timothy confided to the real estate agent that he had worked long and hard for retirement and a modest sum of money. Now these were his, with all the peacefulness their attainment implied.

His bungalow was as newly his as his garden beds. There was no use making trouble over the habits, however eccentric, of next-door neighbors.

Besides, what could he complain about? Of the way they treated the little golden-haired boy? Or the noises at night? He couldn't tell a local magistrate that he just didn't *like* that woman in black or her coarse male companion. Anyway, they were probably people of influence and power. Timothy reflected that he would keep up the grounds better if they were his—but perhaps they were not fond of flowers and a nice lawn. (This last as though Mr. Timothy could not conceive of anybody being so indifferent.) All this, of course, was before he found the red diary half buried in the soft earth of his flower bed.

Three months ago when Timothy had come here he recalled that the enterprising young real estate lady had steered him away from the side of his prospective property that bordered the strange Paquin house, its forbidding aloofness protected by a high iron fence. Ambrose Timothy, fresh from the city, admitted that he was infatuated with the bungalow and the surrounding flower beds and had only a casual look beyond the one acre and one-half that comprised his heaven.

"Oh, them," the young real estate agent had explained airily in answer to his question about the neighbors, "Just the Paquin house. They keep to themselves. A woman and a young boy who is not very well, and some sort of companion, I think. I don't believe they'll bother you.

"The woman is a chemist, her husband was a famous doctor, we hear—he died long before they came here. They have to keep pretty close watch on the young boy, but," she added hastily, "that's why the fence. You won't be annoyed."

Mr. Timothy remarked absently that the Paquin house looked something like a huge dragon—waiting to devour something or somebody..

After which remark, the young real estate girl laughed and tactfully led him away to the flower beds again remarking, "Oh, Mr. Timothy, you're amusing. Now, is everything all right?"

And Ambrose Timothy, after commenting that forget-me-nots would look nice outside the porch, signed up.

HIS first run-in with the Paquin household came one warm afternoon when he was startled by a sudden eruption of earth near a bush on his side of the iron fence that circumferenced the next-door grounds.

"Ah," said Mr. Timothy, dropping his trowel.

Then before his eyes a hand appeared, then an arm and finally a sharp head and face.

"My word," said Mr. Timothy hurrying forward toward the sunny-haired boy who had virtually erupted in his front yard.

Shaking himself like a cocker spaniel just from a water chase, the boy raised his finger to his lips and shook his head significantly.

"Yes, by all means," murmured Mr. Timothy, "Er, that was very interesting the way you came through there, young man."

The boy was blond with dark shadows under intelligent eyes. His body was thin and small-boned. He was, Mr. Timothy

calculated, about sixteen years of age. This must be the young man from next door—the young man who was not so well. Timothy's eyes narrowed as he noticed the angry red and purple bruises on the slim forearms.

The boy came near to Timothy and stood looking at him, his sharp, peaked features appealing.

"Well, well," said Timothy, "I guess we are neighbors, young man."

The boy continued to eye him appraisingly.

Timothy said hastily, "Well, now. Don't be afraid of me, young man."

Then, "Here, what are you doing?" The boy had gone over to one of the flower beds and was sketching something with a pointed stick he had picked up. Timothy came over and looked down at the words rudely marked in the soft earth.

Pencil—paper.

Mr. Timothy leaned over and looked again. The boy looked back toward the house with a look of apprehension and furtiveness that impressed Mr. Timothy. It was obvious the lad was a mute.

"All right, youngster. I don't know what the game is, but I'll get you what you want." Timothy trundled into his bungalow and came out with a pad and the stub of a pencil. These the boy took and began to write feverishly. When he had finished, he handed the note to Mr. Timothy.

"Ah," Timothy accepted the piece of paper much in the manner of a man receiving a young child's first poem.

He looked at the note and his eyes sharpened as he read.

"Get writing book and pencils, please. I am dumb. Must have right away. Stick them in hole under garden fence."

"But—but—" Ambrose Timothy stuttered as the boy, still carrying the pencil and pad obtained for him by Timothy was scuttling away. Before Timothy could find any words, the boy had burrowed under the fence and was busily engaged on the other side smoothing over the ground.

AS TIMOTHY watched, the young boy barely finished this and turned toward the house with the pad and pencil now concealed behind his back, when a tall woman swept around the corner of the old house and spied him.

"Ah, there you are, Martin. Up to your old tricks, eh." The woman came closer as the boy slunk along like a dog anticipating a beating. Evidently, she hadn't spotted Timothy peering through the iron-grilled fence.

The woman stopped. Martin stopped too, his hands behind his back. "Martin," the woman screeched, "Martin, what is it you have behind your back?"

The boy's only answer was a hopeless shrug.

As the woman advanced on him, the boy edged away.

Then the woman called at the top of her voice. "Rippick, eh, Rippick, here!"

There was a harsh male answering call and then from the house came a man who at first look appeared to be a servant. He had on clothes that appeared too small for him. His arms crept down from the sleeves of his coat and hung, almost self-consciously, down by his knees. His chest and shoulders were immense.

"Yeah?" Mr. Timothy heard him answer. Certainly, this was not at all the way country estate servants should reply to their mistresses.

"Rippick, the boy here has something behind his back. He's up to his old tricks, Rippick."

"Yeah," was the laconic answer.

Timothy edged nearer the fence as the two elders closed in on the young boy. Finally the man, with a quick jump, grabbed the boy and forced his arm into sight with a cruel wrench. The pad and pencil came to view.

It seemed a pretty brutal way to treat a sick boy, Timothy reflected as he watched, edging further forward until his face was nearly pressed against the railing separating the two properties, but it was no more than he would expect from these two.

"Paper and a pencil ya got, eh," said Rippick in his longest speech to date. Then with an effortless cuff he sent the boy reeling to the ground. The woman had the pencil and pad, after scrutinizing them, and was stuffing them into her dress when she noticed Timothy watching on the other side of the fence.

She said something in a low voice to the man and he turned like a cat to also stare at their spectator.

Somewhat embarrassedly Ambrose Timothy pulled himself to his feet and stood there grinning sheepishly.

He cleared his throat. "Hello," he said.

The woman came over toward him, her face sharp and questioning.

"I am Mrs. Paquin. You live next door now?"

"Yes, Ma'am," Timothy bowed.

"I guess you gave Martin the paper and pencil." It was a statement rather than a question.

"Yes, Ma'am, I did. I'm sorry if that was wrong."

The woman looked back to where the boy was now picking himself off the ground from Rippick's blow. The barrel-chested man was standing over the lad with one huge hand clutching the boy's slender arm.

She turned back to Timothy and smiled in a manner meant to be reassuring and neighborly. "Well, you see Mister, er—"

"Timothy."

"Mr. Timothy, the boy is not very well. In fact I'm sorry to say he is, well, you know—" and she tapped her head significantly.

Timothy nodded gravely.

"I'm sorry," he said simply.

"They don't like him to have certain things. It, er, excites him to write, so we have to keep all sorts of writing materials away from him on their orders."

Timothy nodded again.

"So please don't ever let him have anything of that nature again. Although I am sure he will beseech with his eyes—and Martin has beseeching eyes." The woman turned with a smile on her face. The boy still held by Rippick was standing there just looking at them.

She called. "Bring Martin over here, Rippick."

The man responded and led the lad over to the fence.

"The young lad was born speechless, I adopted him," the woman explained. "This man is Rippick, he helps me," she said the last almost as an afterthought.

Timothy nodded acknowledgment.

"So then, Mr. Timothy, never, never, put anything through the fence for the boy again."

Ah, so she didn't know the youngster had found a way of burrowing under the fence. Well, he certainly wouldn't tell on the poor young fellow. That would probably call for another cuff from Rippick.

THE woman surveyed Timothy closely and then said again, "Remember, nothing through the fence, eh?" She smiled as though sealing the pact.

All the while they had been talking, the boy's eyes had never once left Timothy's face. Never once—and, as the woman herself had said, Martin had such beseeching eyes.

Trying to get the conversation on a pleasanter subject, Timothy launched out enthusiastically.

"You know, Mrs. Paquin, you've got splendid grounds for flowers. I should think you'd want to experiment a bit with them."

"Flowers? Experiment with flowers?"

She threw back her head and laughed and laughed.

"Well, I meant," said Timothy lamely, "that it's such fun to create things. I know I'm just here from the city and I find that it is really splendid to get out into a garden and putter around. I should think you'd want to in your place." He pointed proudly at his own neat beds. Then amazed at his own boldness, Timothy stopped.

"We keep busy," said Mrs. Paquin after a look at his garden, and bowing stiffly, she turned away, an amused smile on her face.

As the three walked away from the fence, Timothy noticed that on one occasion they looked back and he could hear Rippick's voice contemptuously say something about "flowers."

That had been Timothy's first and only run-in with the people next door. Remembering the boy's beseeching look though, he had, on that same day when he went to town for provisions, bought a red-bound diary, and placed it with a bunch of lead pencils in the hole under the fence. And the following morning when he had looked, the diary and pencils were gone. For a time, he feared that Mrs. Paquin or the coarse Rippick had found them, but a few days later the boy had appeared and had waved a hand in appreciation.

It was several weeks later that Timothy had been gardening and had come on the red-bound diary. Evidently it had been thrown over the fence. It was the same one he had put under the rail for the boy. It was half buried in the soft earth of his garden and now there was writing in it.

Timothy had opened up the book and had begun to read.

Finally he retired inside the house, and his fingers drummed nervously as he reread the words scribbled there.

It was plain, as he had suspected, that the boy was a virtual prisoner in the house and that horrible things were about to happen—or were happening! Timothy's eyes glinted. Now was the time for action—he would go next door. It was the only thing to do.

IT WAS late afternoon as Timothy went out on the road and pushed the bell button on the huge old-fashioned gate that guarded the frontage of the property. He rang several times, and then when there was no answer, he shouldered at the grille. It was open and Timothy slowly went in and walked hesitantly toward the house. He reached the front door and let out a loud halloo. There was no answering sound.

Despite the warm air, a chill struck Timothy as he raised the great brass knocker.

Finally in answer to his pounding, Mrs. Paquin came to the door. She was, as always when he had seen her, dressed in severe black.

She looked distraught, her face a tableau of evil.

She stood for a moment regarding him. "Well?"

"Mrs. Paquin, there's something wrong I'm afraid I've done," Timothy blurted out. "It's about the young fellow, Martin."

Mrs. Paquin stepped aside and said, "You'd better come in, I can't wait out here with you." As Timothy followed her into the dark old house, he noticed for the first time that over the darkness of her dress she wore what looked like a tourniquet on her arm. He followed her down a stone stairway into a cavernous cellar.

As soon as she reached this room she sank down on a pallet in the corner and said again. "What is it Mr. Timothy, what about Martin?"

Ambrose Timothy noticed that Rippick was in the corner too, grinning wolfishly at him. His powerful forearm was bare, and just over the elbow was the black band of a tourniquet twisted tight. The room

smelled strangely from must and chemicals and the wood-burning fireplace back of Rippick.

Mrs. Paquin noticed Timothy's eyes and spoke up.

"We've had a little accident. We do some of our work in this cellar and its infested with spiders, some of them of a poisonous nature. You're not familiar with medical methods of treating spider bites, ah, well, of course not. However, we have adequate equipment here, I think."

Rippick grinned wolfishly from the corner in which he sat. "How's de flowers?" A thin trickle of saliva ran from the corner of the man's mouth.

Timothy answered, "Doing nicely, thank you." Then he turned back to Mrs. Paquin who was filling a hypodermic needle. "Maybe I should not have come just now. You people are ill."

Mrs. Paquin shook her head and looked up at him. "No, Mr. Timothy, if it's about Martin, I want to hear what you have to say."

Ambrose Timothy went on. "Some time ago I got a diary for the boy. I know after you told me what you did that I shouldn't have done so—but, well, I did. He wanted one so."

Fear came into Mrs. Paquin's eyes at that. She shook her head. Rippick made an angry noise in the corner.

"What's become of it?" rapped Mrs. Paquin.

"I don't know," Timothy lied.

"We found no diary here," the woman in black snarled with a look at Rippick who nodded back.

"Well then—what does it matter? The boy evidently misplaced it," and Timothy spread his hands.

"You cursed fool, you . . ." Rippick got laboriously to his feet. Timothy noted that the man's face bore signs of some deep physiological upheaval. Despite this, the heavy man came forward menacingly.

Timothy started backward.

But Mrs. Paquin was still mistress of the situation and her house.

"Stop . . . Rippick! Go back, idiot!"

Then she turned to Timothy.

"Of course it doesn't matter, Mr. Timothy. Martin is utterly mad—he *can't* write." Mrs. Paquin bowed to Timothy.

He could see that she too was in a perturbed state of mind and body, for, as he went up the stairs from the basement laboratory, he heard her begin to laugh—crazy idiotic laughter that Rippick joined in.

Timothy went up the stairway two at a time and then outside into the light again feeling like a reprieved man. He moved hastily to the gate and through it and then around to his own place.

AMBROSE TIMOTHY did not sleep well that night. There was a lot to think about. And then there were noises from the house next door. Noises of bumping and thumping, cries and yells, and unholy bursts of laughter. Mrs. Paquin was up as was Rippick, for on several occasions when the noise drove him to the windows of the bungalow, he could see them standing silhouetted against the bare windows of the old house next door. From the distance they looked as though they were fighting or dancing insanely. Once he thought he heard Martin's voice raised in terror but he might have been mistaken.

As soon as it was light, Timothy went over to the fence and peered through. There was nothing to be seen. Everything was as quiet as if the house were unoccupied. It was that afternoon that a grocer's delivery truck stopped outside and a boy went in. Timothy watched as he walked to the gate and rang the bell. Then he walked up to the house. He disappeared within and reappeared a few minutes later running.

Timothy yelled. "What's up, there?"

The boy redoubled his speed at the voice,

looking startled and sideways. "Something's awful wrong in there, Mister. I don't know just what, but something terrible is the matter. I'm getting the sheriff."

And with a smashing of gears and a burst of speed, the vehicle went roaring down the road as fast as the terrified delivery boy could make it go. Timothy watched until the car disappeared down the desolate highway.

He thought of the diary and dropped it back of his pillow. He puttered around absently in his garden until the delivery truck, leading a large official car, drew up to the Paquin house a few minutes later. Out jumped the grocer boy, all importance now, and a large florid-faced man. They disappeared up the path to the house. The delivery boy came out a few minutes later and spotted Timothy.

"Heh, Mister, the sheriff wants to talk to you."

Timothy walked over obediently.

The sheriff was standing at the foot of the stairs looking up, and in his hand was a long-barreled revolver. He turned as Timothy stood inside the front door.

"Delivery boy said you were next-door neighbor. Wanted to know what you made of all this. We've got a couple of completely mad people upstairs. I can't even go near 'em. I'll have to call the county home and get some of those boys to come over."

"I don't know much, Sheriff," Timothy said shaking his head. As his eyes grew accustomed to the light, he noticed blood stains on the floor on all sides and going up the stairs. It was these unmistakable red smears everywhere that must have startled the delivery boy, Timothy surmised.

The sheriff hummed and then went to the phone. He called the county home. Timothy looked furtively around while he was calling. The question was, where was the young boy? The delivery boy stared fascinatedly at the blood stains.

SO suddenly that the three jumped came a burst of sudden noise from upstairs . . . a screech of voices so outré and terrible in quality that it sounded like the laughter of demons in some horrible, feverish nightmare.

The sheriff, who now introduced himself as Ethan Hodgins, mopped his face.

"Don't like it, but I guess I'll have to go upstairs again. Crazy people is more trouble than they're worth, I've always said. Well, let's go."

The delivery boy looked eager but uncertain. Timothy hesitated.

"You mean you want us to come up with you?"

"Just a bit of the way," Hodgins urged. His smile was forced.

"If they start throwing things, you can back me up."

Timothy started up the stairs behind the sheriff with the young delivery boy last. They went up slowly, and with each step, it sounded to Timothy as if they were approaching the mad convolutions of another world. The sheriff had tip-toed to the landing now and was nearing a door that stood at the end of a hall. He paused outside for a second and then gently turned the knob, allowing the door to swing silently open allowing a view of what was within.

The delivery boy had pushed ahead of Hodgins now and was just behind the sheriff when the door slid open. The three looked in. Timothy, with his image of the two clearly in his mind, was the one most shocked. The two creatures in the room were surely not human. They were pawing and playing over certain objects in the center of the room—they themselves were disheveled. Their clothes torn and ragged. Mrs. Paquin's black dress was hanging in strips from her and Rippick was as ragged. As the three watched, Mrs. Paquin lashed out at Rippick with something, and the curses and screams started again. He re-

taliated with a yell of anger and hit heavily at the woman.

Just at the moment Sheriff Hodgins stepped into the room with his long-barreled gun pointed, Timothy made out the identity of those objects. They were, God forbid, the dismembered parts of a human body. The golden hair on one round glob of matter that lay on the floor like an out-of-shape soccer ball was too much for the delivery boy at Timothy's side. His knees gave way beneath him.

IT WAS not hard to get rid of his bungalow. It was so nice and cozy and Timothy had worked so hard on the flower gardens! And so Timothy moved away with all his belongings . . . and the red-bound diary.

The diary was very precious. Timothy, although not a curious or inquisitive man, used to read it over nights. It was interesting, as anything written by an idiot would be. And Ambrose Timothy would smile sadly at this thought. For the author had certainly not been an idiot.

Not that he didn't remember it almost by heart now.

It started out with this entry:

"I know now that the black lady means to kill me. I don't know how or when. At least I don't know for sure. I am able to write because a man has moved in next door who has been kind enough to me to get this book and some pencils. I had a hole under the fence into his property and the lady and Rippick haven't found it yet."

The next entry read: "I think that I am going to be used the way they used animals. Something goes on in the cellar that they have never let me see. I have known since they brought me here from the school that they were interested in some form of science. But I never have been sure just what type. I have seen books around on the glands. I think they experiment with glands. And I have heard them whispering and laughing about me. I think the man next door is my only chance. I tried to escape several times long ago but I can't get far. I am always returned here and Rippick beats me. It is true I cannot speak, but I was educated well at the school—I am not crazy as they tell everybody.

"I suppose all of this is silly . . . that I am counting so much on this neighbor. He is a little fellow with a limp and a funny wrinkled face like a mask and seems only interested in his gardening. The first day I burrowed through into his grounds he looked so startled. But he finally gave me a pad and some pencils. Rippick and Mrs. Paquin caught me as I got back in the grounds and Rippick hit me and took the stuff away. Then the lady took me over to the wall and make me stand in front of this man who does so much gardening. He said his name was Ambrose Timothy.

"I HAVE found out something very interesting. The lady took me downstairs today and told me that I was to have a part in a very wonderful experiment. She said it was so important that she hoped I realized that whether I lost my life or not, it didn't matter. She laughed then and said that she was telling me this because she knew I couldn't talk and tattle on them. Then she said that her husband had been a very famous doctor who had been perfecting a spectacular glandular substance that would revolutionize medicine. He realized he had discovered the true secret of insanity caused by glandular imbalance . . . that's just what she said. But he was such an old dote, she said, that he hadn't had the sense to realize what could be done with such a medicine. Rippick, this creature who cuffs me around, had also been a chemist. (I'll bet he wasn't much good.) But he and Mrs. Paquin had got along very well. She had approached her husband and said that she and Rippick wanted to buy him out. That they had great ideas

for the medicine. Mrs. Paquin has told me that they found out a good deal about the doctor's formula but not quite enough. They would be everlastingly rich if they could find the missing link, though.

"There was an argument and Rippick had nearly killed Dr. Paquin trying to get certain facts out of him. They put acid on his face and legs. Then they seated him in an old car, she smiles as she tells me this, and let it roll off a bridge. That was the end of Dr. Paquin, she says. Nobody ever found out and she got his money.

"And she keeps repeating that after all I don't matter because I can never tell anybody what I know. And that is true. They keep all writing materials away from me. I know that Rippick wanted to beat up that man next door who was kind enough to give me the writing materials. But I have been able to get this and that is what counts."

Another entry:

"A strange thing happened today. I know that Rippick and Mrs. Paquin are about to try their latest gland experiment on me. But I was out in the garden near the fence when this man, Timothy, came over to me. He said something to me. I don't quite understand, but I took what he gave me. It was a bottle. It was all very strange, but I think he means to help me.

"It was easy to get hold of one of the empty hypodermic syringes, fill it, and hide it. Then when Mrs. Paquin was sleeping one time, I stole over to her and plunged the needle deep into the muscle of her arm. I ran as she woke up. There was just enough in the bottle for me to fill the syringe again. I'd just finished when Rippick came running in answer to her calls. I was able to jab the needle into his arm and push down the plunger before he cuffed me to the floor.

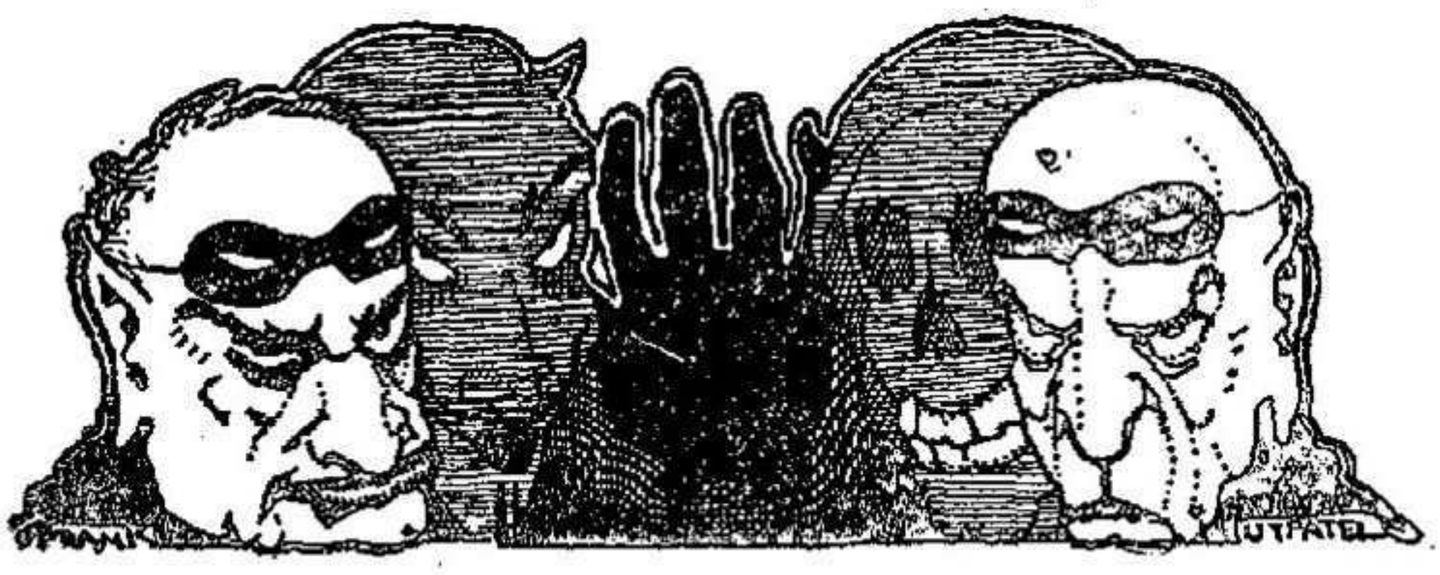
"Rippick and Mrs. Paquin whispered to each other and then went downstairs after cuffing me again. They screamed at me to tell them what I had had in the syringe, but I wagged my head absently. Then they locked me up. At the first chance I am going to throw this out the window over the wall into Mr. Timothy's place. He will find it and will read what I have written.

"Rippick and Mrs. Paquin are slowly going mad. They have put tourniquets on their arms and they cut and probe their own flesh! I have written because I hope somebody will find this. I know they are going to kill me, but I know now that they will go insane—worse than death. I did what Mr. Timothy said."

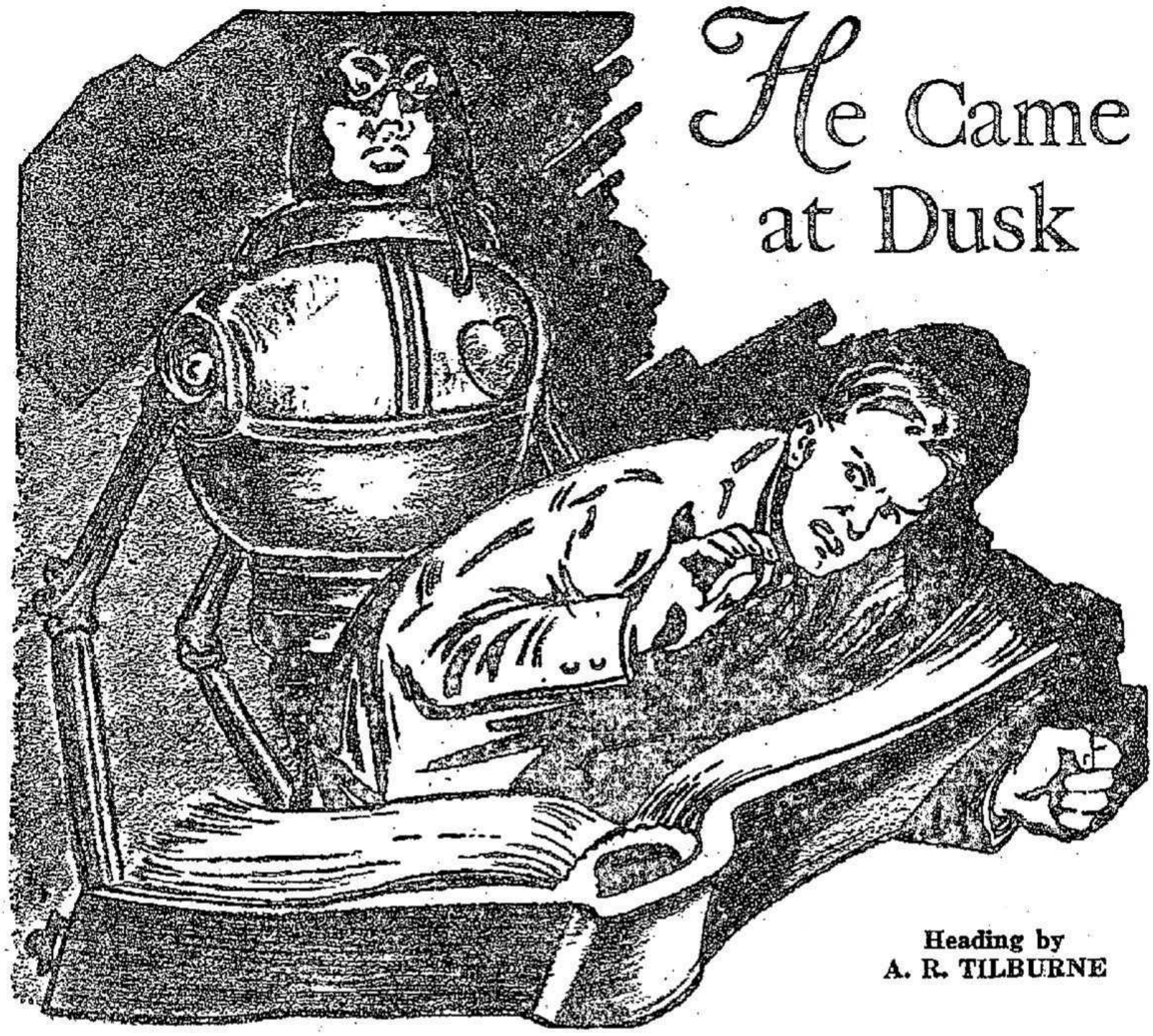
It was fascinating to read this, thought the man called Ambrose Timothy as he lay on the bed and fondled the book. Timothy sighed

Finally he limped to the corner and burned the diary carefully as he had a paper with minute figures and equations on it. Back in bed he turned his wrinkled, scarred face to the wall. It was too bad about the boy—but then his own "accident" long ago had been too bad.

And for the first time in nine years Dr. Paquin slept peacefully.



He Came at Dusk



Heading by
A. R. TILBURNE

By FRANK BELKNAP LONG

RESTON felt like weeping. He wanted to sit alone in a chair by the window, where he could contemplate what he had done, and indulge his grief without let or hindrance.

When he shut his eyes he could still see Tom George standing in the garden, his square, gleaming head as still as the long shadow of his body. Not only had Tom George a faculty for doing the most unusual things but there had been something gentle and sad about him which could never be recaptured.

With every heartbeat Reston's grief seemed to increase, so that he had to keep reminding himself that Tom George had approved of the experiment. With that awful prescience so typical of robots Tom George had foreseen his own dissolution.

"You're using me as a stepping stone, aren't you, Jim?" had been Tom George's last words, spoken without reproach or rancor.

There had been no reproach in Tom George's photo-electric stare either. Only sympathy, compassion, understanding—for Tom George was no ordinary robot. He was a person with whom Reston was able

There can be nothing more final than the death of a robot—

to share his closest thoughts, for he possessed what in a human being would have been called *character*. He—

Reston shuddered. Why was he thinking of Tom George in the present tense when the robot's tall, angular body had been completely dismantled, his pitiful remains scattered the full length of the laboratory.

Sometimes it seemed to Reston as if there could be nothing more *final* than the death of a robot. Death in any guise was, of course, a terminal phenomenon, but when a man died he didn't fly apart and go *clattering* into oblivion. Indeed, his destiny seemed by comparison rich in promise, for when he shuffled off his mortal coil something of his essence lingered like a nebulous wraith on the peaceful bosom of Mother Nature.

Groaning, Reston stooped and picked up a small, lead-acid battery. The battery had reposed inside Tom George and was just as surely Tom George as the Braun tubes, inductance coils, magnetic transformers and argon rectifiers which had made Tom George great.

For Tom George had been a truly *great* robot. Being a robot-maker by profession Reston carried about with him a precise mental yardstick which he applied to all robots everywhere.

He had examined thousands of robots—in factories, in mines and on assembly lines—and without going into details it can be assumed that his professional pride hadn't been shaken. Would your vanity have been shaken if, after examining a robot capable of muttering only a few unintelligible words you had been greeted by Tom George with a: "Jim, you've been working much too hard. It would be a splendid thing for you to chuck all this and breathe a different atmosphere. I mean, for a few days, Jim."

Well, Tom George was gone now. Reston's eyes felt gritty, as though little grains of grief had wedged themselves under his lashes, and were beginning to revolve.

In a few short hours he could reassemble Tom George's scattered remains. He could construct another robot with an even more remarkable brain, for his experiment had been a success. The fact that the experiment had caused Tom George to fly apart was all the proof he needed to convince him he'd been working on an improvement which would have far-reaching results. The new robot would look exactly like Tom George, but he'd be able to think more constuctively and—

Oh, damn, damn—there'd never be another Tom George. He could put Tom George together again, but that elusive, indefinable something which was a robot's personality could never be recaptured. Even if he stippled in exactly the same memory impressions on the sensitive brain plate of the new robot he'd have a lot of explaining to do.

It was disturbing how even his grief was beginning to flow in channels which were the opposite of contemplative. He'd have a lot of explaining to do when his wife identified the remains. A lot of explaining—

THE more Reston thought about it the more alarmed he became. For though his wife prided herself on her self-control she could, on occasion, become almost uncontrollably emotional. And she had been very fond of Tom George. Something about Tom George—his childlike candor perhaps—had appealed to her maternal instincts.

It was conceivable that she would accept what had happened with the Rembrandtesque grief of an old Dutch painting. But more probably a fury impossible to determine in advance would well up in her, a fury which might well put a gulf between them which couldn't be spanned this side of eternity.

SUDDENLY Reston felt a coldness on the nape of his neck, and wondered at it, for he hadn't heard the door open and wasn't aware that his wife had entered the laboratory.

"Darling, where is Tom George," came suddenly from behind him. "I've a little surprise for him—"

In the intense hush that followed Reston could hear the ticking of his wrist-watch, and the drowsy hum of insects from beyond the window.

He turned slowly, wishing that he could risk his life for his wife, try to kill something that was threatening her or do a deed that would so dazzle her that she wouldn't be able to see into the shadows behind him.

"Darling, where—"

Reston swallowed hard. "He—he isn't here, Louise," he blurted.

"He isn't here. But I thought—"

Louise Reston broke off abruptly, her pupils dilating and her face turning so pale that her husband leapt toward her with a startled cry.

"Louise, I—"

Slowly, without uttering a word, she backed away from him, a convulsive loathing in her stare. Her eyes said as plain as words: "You promised me you wouldn't—ever. Not with Tom George."

"I couldn't help it," Reston almost sobbed. "He *flew* apart. But he isn't lost to us darling. I'm going to put him together again."

Louise moved close to him suddenly, her nostrils quivering. Quite as suddenly—her nails raked his chin.

"Murderer!" she choked, and turned and ran out of the laboratory, slamming the door with such violence that Reston began to tremble. It was typical of him that he at once sensed the awful finality of his wife's departure.

He felt certain that she would leave him and he'd have no one to keep house for him, and look after him. He could not imagine her changing her mind even if he succeeded in convincing her that Tom George had approved of the experiment. He *could* imagine her saying in his presence what she had implied with her stare, that there were any number of men she would rather have as a husband, after what he had done.

But Reston was not a man who surrendered easily to despair. Shaken though he was there was one vital part of himself that refused to be dismayed. He was still an accomplished robot maker. No one could excel him in that respect and when he put Tom George together again Louise would come to realize she should have exercised a little more imagination.

When she saw the new Tom George she'd forget all about the loss of her first big mechanical doll. All Louise really wanted was a big metal giant to take under her wing, for a grown woman could be quite as sentimental in that respect as a little girl.

Reconstructing Tom George was a frightfully unnerving ordeal, for Reston had mislaid the robot's micro-equivalent, and had to be guided by instinct. Indeed, it did something to the rhythms of his being, so that he felt as limp as a rag when the broad-shouldered, long-legged and long-armed robot body stood before him, lacking only an added foot of face and brain to become—

RESTON wiped sweat from his forehead with the inside of his sleeve, and stared out the window. Outside the cottage it was not quite dark, and through the window he could see a row of petunias standing straight and still in the garden.

Tom George had liked flowers. In some respects Tom George had had the sensitive perceptions of an artist. Reston wondered if the new robot would like the smell of damp earth after rain, and the pattern of

loveliness traced by the red harvest moon on a sheen of starlit water.

He had to admit there was a real risk of failure. Endowing a robot with aesthetic perceptions hadn't been easy. And though it gave the lie to robot makers who claimed that emotions couldn't be stippled into a robot, something deep inside him whispered that if he failed to duplicate the achievement his triumph would be a hollow one.

Tom George might have been a freak of circumstance, a robot whose sensitive photo-electric mechanism had absorbed emotions like a sponge through some accidental collocation of atoms.

Well, he'd know in a moment. He must now replace the massive brain box on the tall, angular robot body.

Clamping it into place took him longer than he had anticipated. He could scarcely control the trembling of his hands, and for an instant he felt as though he had parted company with his sanity, and was busily engaged in disinterring a zombie. Having allowed his imagination to go bounding on ahead of him, it now seemed to be seeking an opportunity to glare at him with red-rimmed eyes from caverns measureless to man.

A prickling took hold of his neck hairs when he pried open the brain-box, raised the burnt out brain-plate which was now literally a mortuary relic, and inserted a new plate under it.

He knew of course that the acid-sharp impressions on the old plate would transfer themselves to the new plate the instant he turned on the current. But though the stippling in process didn't in itself terrify him he dreaded the awful finality of removing the old plate afterward.

He had to stand very still for a moment to nerve himself for the ordeal ahead of him. Why, he wondered suddenly, had he ignored the flexible beryllium face of Tom George, which was still lying in a crumpled heap on the floor. Why had he put off what *had to be done?*

Grimacing oddly he bent, picked up the flexible countenance, and attached it with fingers that trembled a little to the electro-skeletal projections on the darkly yawning brain case.

Instantly he felt calmer, more sure of himself. The face of Tom George was utterly impassive. The eyes were closed, the long nose granite-still, the tight, firm lips—

No, not *quite* unsmiling. There was the faintest suggestion of a smile on them, as though Tom George had flown apart while bestowing a silent benediction on his maker.

Save for the iridescent sheen of the features, the face of Tom George resembled an old-fashioned death mask. The death mask of a man incapable of animosity, who had met life's vicissitudes with unfaltering courage.

Reston's heart seemed to be beating steadily enough, but he couldn't help wondering if it hadn't begun to bruise the surrounding tissues a little. It was beating steadily, but with such vigor that he no longer felt calm or sure of himself.

His fear was greater than ever now, but he found that he could keep it at bay by holding tight to one comforting reassurance. When he turned on the current Tom George wouldn't *immediately* stir or open his eyes. He'd have to remove the old brain-plate first.

For a moment as he contemplated the still and impassive robot a strange fantasy flitted across his mind. He saw himself as a little boy alone in the dark, putting a brave face on *everything,* but wishing he had the warm, reassuring arms of his nurse about him and could hear her saying over and over that there was nothing to fear. Nothing, nothing to fear.

He turned on the current abruptly, resting his hand for the barest fraction of an

instant on the robot's cold, unmoving shoulder. With bursting temples he heard the vibrant drone of the current as the spark of life flitted evanescently about the two plates, one virginal and awaiting impressions and the other a maze of burnt-out memories, emotions and desires.

The spark of life! Surely it was ridiculous to assume that only protoplasm held the secret of intelligence and desire and that a robot was incapable of emotion.

He had proven otherwise. Thought was simply the mundane crackling of tortured electronic orbits in any fortuitously conditioned thermodynamic medium with sufficient plasticity to receive and retain—.

Reston shuddered, like a man awakening from an unpleasant dream to an utterly intolerable reality. He had now to turn off the current, raise the brain-box and remove the old plate.

He did so almost automatically, although when he carried the old plate across the laboratory, and steeped it in an acid bath so that its tortuous memory-patterns would be "one with yesterday's ten thousand years", a great, convulsive grief welled up in him.

He had clicked on the current again, after removing the old plate, but he did not turn immediately. There was something he owed to the memory of Tom George—a moment of absolute silence before the tray where a now scoured and shining plate spoke more eloquently of mortality than a sheeted body could have done.

As he stared down at it through a thin film of vapor he didn't hear the clump of a metal foot behind him or see the shadow over his shoulder.

BUT he did see the book. It seemed to float down toward him from above his right shoulder. So lightly it came to rest on the table before him that for an instant he stood as though turned to stone, unable to believe that a hand could have placed it there.

And then he saw the metal fingers turning over the pages slowly, thumbing through a book which now seemed familiar, which he did indeed recognize.

Reston blinked and tried hard to swallow. He knew without turning that the book had been ripped down from a shelf behind him. He knew too that it was a book which Tom George had read from cover to cover.

It was a book which had been written by a half-mad visionary far back in the twentieth—no, the late nineteenth century. It was a book, with specks of white froth on every page, an utterly rabid book, a book which glorified something which ought never to have come to pass.

The book was called "The Overman" and its author was—Friedrich Nietzsche.

The metal finger had singled out a paragraph in quotation marks just beneath a chapter head and was rising and falling as though it wanted to draw Reston's attention to the thoughts recorded there.

"Tap, tap, tap," went the metal finger. "Tap, tap, tap—tap, tap—tap, tap, tap."

Sweat poured out over Reston's now suddenly gray face and his eyes walled back in their sockets, so that for an instant he seemed to be gazing down at the book with glazed, unseeing eyes.

"Tap, tap, tap—tap, tap, tap."

The passage read: Thus spake Zarathustra: "Now we will that Overman live, for man is a bridge and not a goal. Man is a something that shall be surpassed. What have *ye* done to surpass him?"

Could Reston have screamed an answer it might have been: "What have I *not* done!" But Reston could not scream. His vocal chords simply would not function, and even the shuffling sounds which his feet made seemed lost and smothered in the silence which was gathering about him.

He never even saw the twisting, cruel mouth of the new robot, or the look of

fiendish triumph in its stare, for its two metal hands had fastened on his throat and were bearing him implacably backward.

For an instant he struggled, his bloodshot eyes protruding, his breath coming in lung-choking sobs. Something inside him screamed that if he could only break free and turn off the current he'd have the robot at his mercy.

He'd be able to breathe again. If he could just squirm about, and free himself—

But he never did.

SUPERSTITIONS

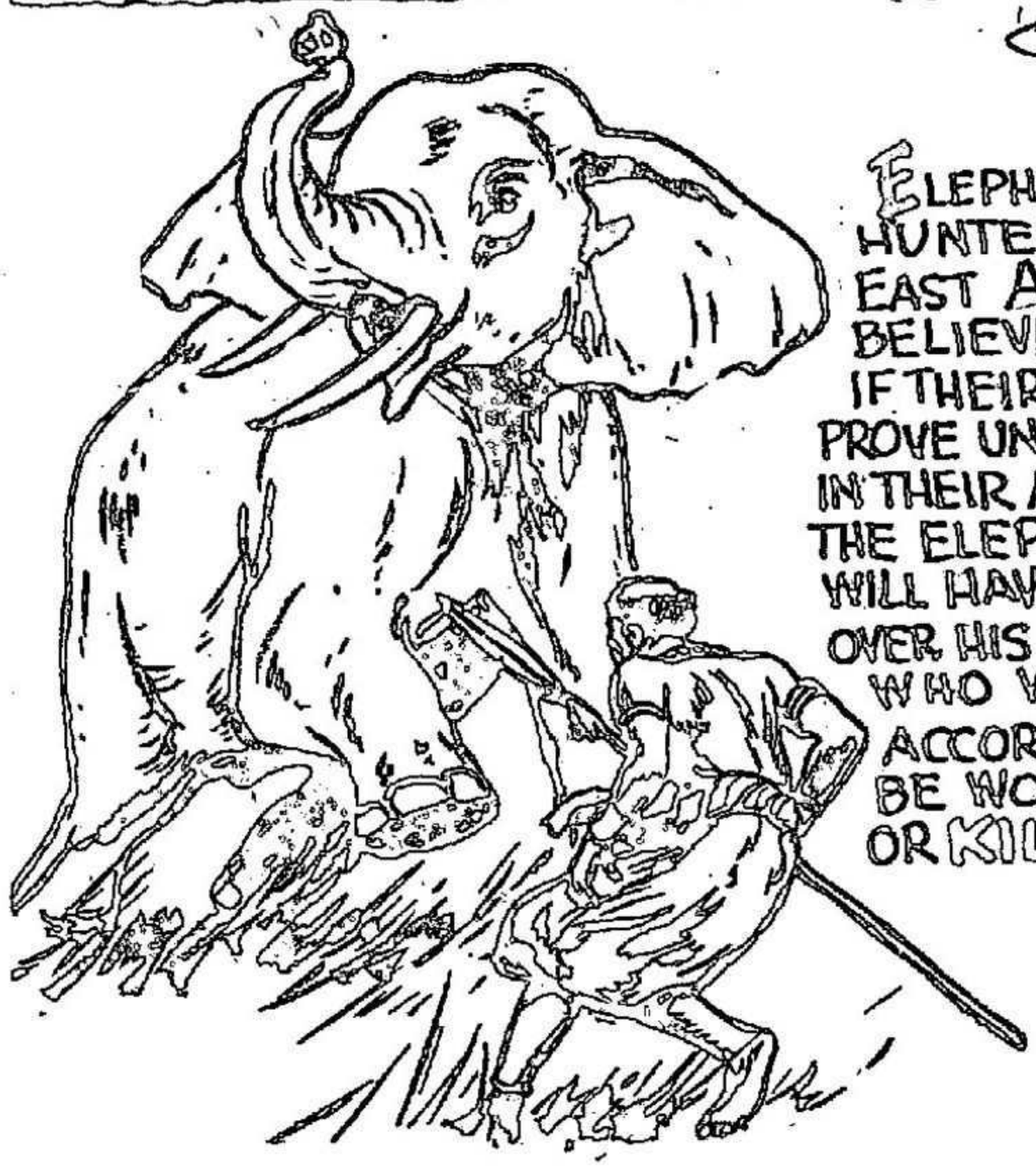
KABYLE WOMEN OF TUNISIA BELIEVE THAT THE MARABOUT TREE HUNG WITH FETISHES HAS THE POWER TO MAKE THEM FRUITFUL! SUPPLICATION AND FERVENT PRAYER IS MADE BEFORE IT IN THE HOPE THAT SONS MIGHT BE BORN TO THEM.

IN VARIOUS OTHER PARTS OF THE WORLD THE SAME MAGICAL VIRTUE OF INSURING CHILDBIRTH IS ASCRIBED TO TREES. IN THE TUHOE TRIBE OF MAORIS A BARREN WOMAN HAD TO EMBRACE A TREE WITH HER ARMS AND SHE RECEIVED A MALE OR A FEMALE CHILD ACCORDING AS SHE EMBRACED THE EAST OR THE WEST SIDE.

SOME DISTRICTS OF SWEDEN FORMERLY HAD A GUARDIAN TREE IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD OF EVERY FARM. TO PLUCK A SINGLE LEAF OF THIS SACRED TREE OR INJURE IT IN ANY WAY WAS BELIEVED PUNISHABLE BY ILL-LUCK OR SICKNESS!

AND TABOOS

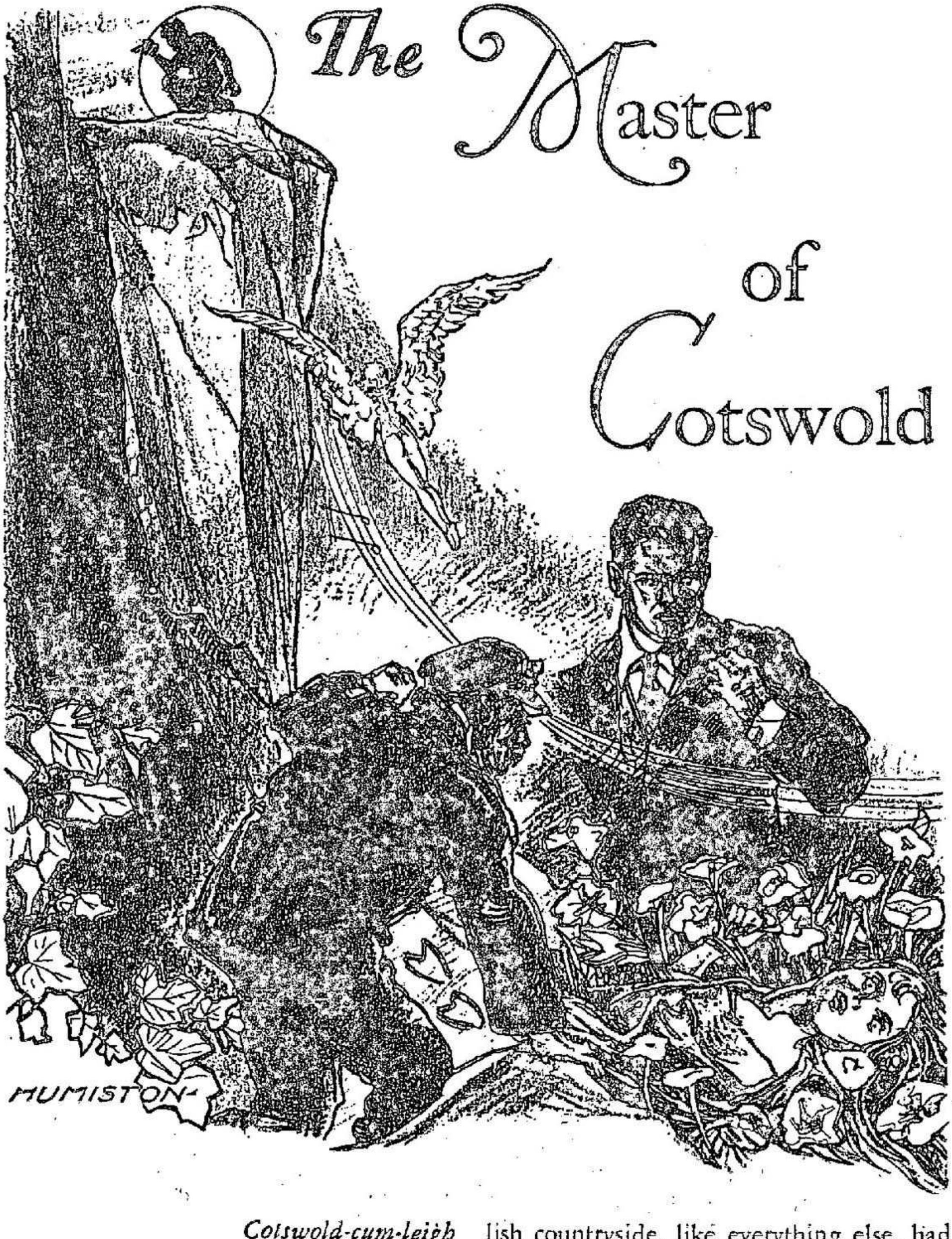
by Hill



ELEPHANT HUNTERS IN EAST AFRICA BELIEVE THAT IF THEIR WIVES PROVE UNFAITHFUL IN THEIR ABSENCE, THE ELEPHANT WILL HAVE POWER OVER HIS PURSUER WHO WILL ACCORDINGLY BE WOUNDED OR KILLED

IN REMOTE SECTIONS OF INDIA, PATIENTS CONTEMPLATING AN OPERATION DEMAND THE BURNING OF INCENSE IN THE OPERATING ROOM - OTHERWISE DEVILS MIGHT ENTER THE BODY THROUGH THE OPENING

The Master of Cotswold



Cotswold-cum-leigh
March 14th

BRANNOCK was right. Completely, perfectly, absurdly right. I shall have to write and tell him so. When he first suggested Gloucestershire, I pooh-poohed the idea. I thought that the English countryside, like everything else, had given way to the onslaught of modern civilization; that it had been swallowed in the greedy maw of this damned Machine Age.

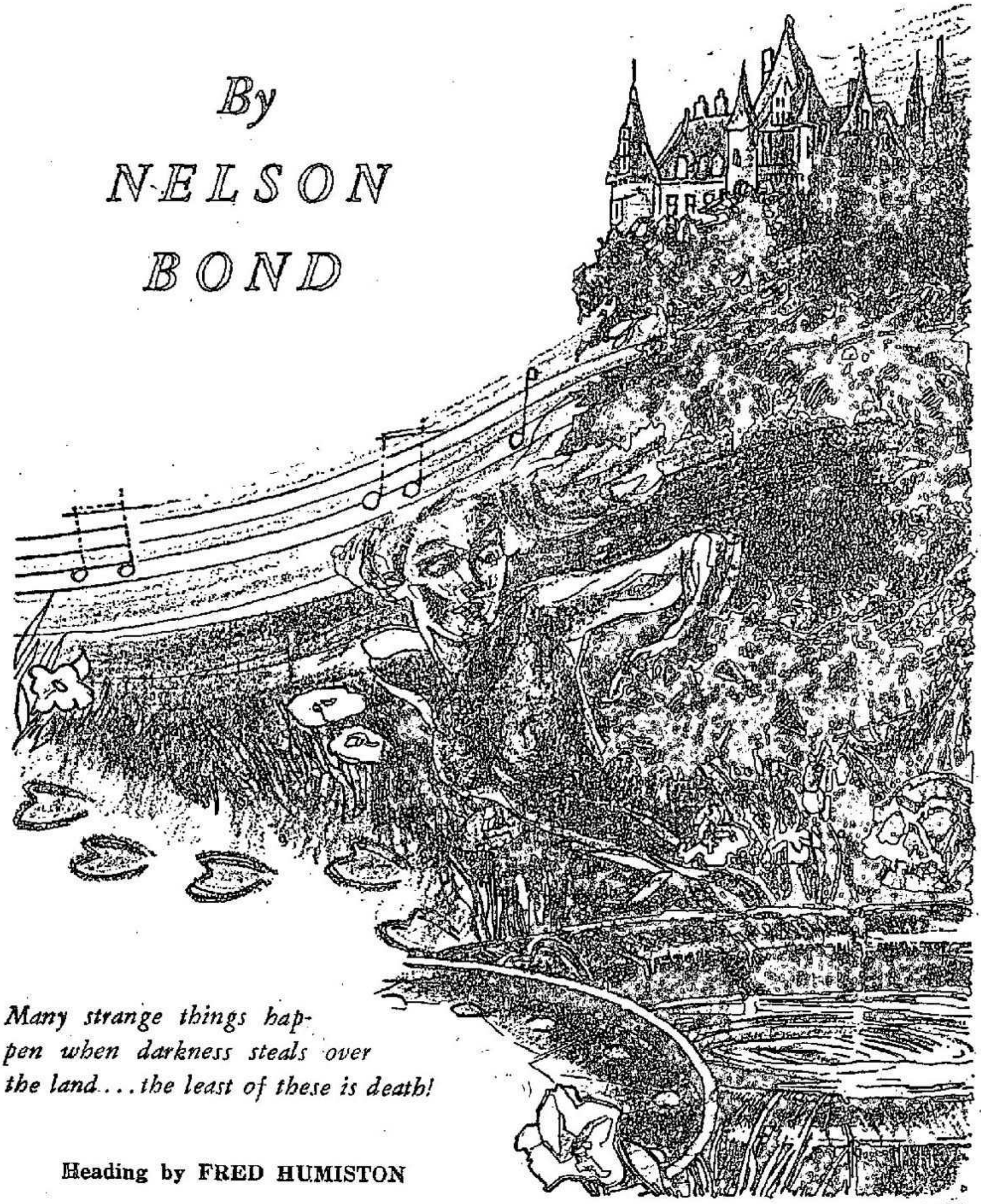
I said, "Country, Brannock? You're crazy! There is no 'country' any more. The towns ape the cities, the hamlets try

to look like towns, even rural cross-roads are just small-scale reproductions of Fifth Avenue and Forty-second Street. Show me a small farm, and I'll show you a Broadway annex with a radio blaring the latest hot dance tune, power lines pumping in the electricity that milks the cows, washes the dishes and cleans the house. A farmer's wife who uses Squeejums Lotion to keep her hands lily-white, and wears a Schiaparelli reproduction distributed by a mail-order house for $14.95."

Brannock yawned, "In America—yes. You see, Peter, this great nation of yours

By

NELSON BOND



Many strange things happen when darkness steals over the land...the least of these is death!

Heading by FRED HUMISTON

is not really a nation at all. It is an homological atavism. A throwback to the city-state of the ancient Greeks. Peel the rind off a New Yorker, and find a Kansan or a Swede from Minnesota. Under the meteorological boastings of a Californian the quick ear can detect an accent originating in Iowa. America is too large; too spacious. It arouses the wanderlust in its inhabitants. Their ceaselessly moving feet have turned it into one, huge city, whose core is New York, whose suburbs are as far apart as Washington, Texas and Florida."

"If you don't like it over here," I began pettishly, "Why don't you go back where you came from? There's—"

"Don't get me wrong, Peter. I *do* like it over here. Tremendously. That is why I have forsworn my allegiance to a sister land, and made America my home. But you want rest and quiet. Peace and solitude. I say you cannot find it here in America—but you *can* still find it in England."

"Where in England?"

"A number of places. Dorsetshire. The Chilterns or West Riding. The Cotswolds—" He paused reflectively, then nodded. "Yes, I know the very place. A little section known as Cotswold-cum-leigh. Here, I'll show you—"

He lifted the atlas from my bookcase. We studied it together; he finally put his finger on a tiny dot.

"This is it. Fourteen miles from the nearest train. When last I was there, the connecting road was still unpaved. But I think you'll have no trouble reaching it. You can hire a car, or find a hack."

I SAID, ruminatively, "It sounds like the answer. I like the sound of it. And I *do* need peace and quiet. I have a novel in mind, but I can't write it here in New York with a telephone ringing at my elbow every fifteen minutes."

Brannock laughed.

"You'll not be bothered with telephone calls in *that* neck of the woods, Peter. The people who live there waste no words. Sometimes I think they must communicate by telepathy. But, seriously, it is a wonderful place, except for—"

He hesitated.

"Well?" I challenged.

Brannock looked embarrassed. "Oh, nothing. I guess I was being a bit silly, that's all."

"Go on. Except for what? Don't tell me you've just remembered the place is a leper colony?"

"No. Nothing like that. But you see—Cotswold-cum-leigh is rumored to be a bit—well, shall I say *sinister?*"

I said, "What do you mean—sinister?"

"Well, there's a bit of a legend. Something about a race of elder gods, or some such bosh. The villagers believe in it wholeheartedly. Of course there's nothing to it."

I grinned.

"Of course not. But congratulations, Brannock. You are an excellent salesman!"

He looked startled. "Eh?" he said.

"The mystic overtones," I said. "Decide the question for me. Cotswold-cum-leigh without a spook sounded drab, but *with* an evil force lurking in the background—well, how soon can I get a boat?"

Brannock said anxiously, "Now see here, Peter, don't be so flippant about it. I know that most of these old tales are the bunk, but at the same time, for all we know there *may* be strange forces, strange creatures—"

But I was already on the phone. The *Isle Royale,* a sleepy-voiced clerk was telling me, sailed on Tuesday next.

So here I am, in the hostelry at the tiny village of Cotswold-cum-leigh. The crossing took but five days, my trip by rail from London but one more. Yet sitting here before an open fireplace, scribbling in my notebook, I feel as though I had

stepped backward through the tunnel of Time three or four centuries. My landlord is a character out of *Tristram Shandy*—plump, dogmatic, solicitous. Perhaps a trifle suspicious, too, of this crack-brained American "arthor" who is staying at his inn.

But I do not care about that. I am revelling in the feeling of antiquity that surges about me, through me, touching me with fingers almost tangible. A feeling that seems to emanate from the crusty, rough-hewn rafters of this delicious oak ceiling; from the blown-glass window-panes that shake now before the gusty breath of the harsh March wind; from the old floors and wheezing, chimney-flue, the dull-gleaming pewter on the mantelpiece, the very odor of life, death and hatred—of love, growth, and decay that is so strangely mingled here. I have an odd feeling of prescience. I feel that here, in this very room, men once fled screaming from some frightful horror—or cowered abjectly in the most shadowy corners, hoping to escape that horror's obscene vision. . . .

But that is ridiculous, of course. I am succumbing, as Brannock prophesied I would, to the mystic overtones of an incredibly ancient demesne. Demesne? I wonder whose?

Tomorrow I must look for a rental agent. There must be some cottage around here that I can lease.

Cotswold-cum-leigh
March 17th

WELL, I *am* in luck!

When I wrote in my notebook, three days ago, that it was my hope to find some cottage for rent, I had no idea what a task confronted me.

These Cotswolders—would you call them Cotswoldians?—evidently do not believe in real estate booms. They build their homes for themselves, for their children, and for their children's children's children, forever and ever, amen! When I asked around for a place of my own, I was met with gazes of shocked stupefaction, as if I had asked one of them to let me open his grandfather's crypt and dig up the bones for ivory.

For three days my search was fruitless. Then, today fortune smiled on me. I found a place, just three miles from the center of town. And *what* a place!

Did I say I was seeking a cottage? Anston Hollow is far from being a mere cottage. It is a manor house, the kind of rambling house in which lived the descendants of the feudal lords when their castles had been reft from them. A huge old frame structure with pillared porch and a rococo cupola. Raw windows that stare at you with the unwinking persistence of a lidless monster. It is drab and unsightly now; badly in need of a coat of paint, new shutters and door, some patch work on the roof.

I don't paint a pretty picture of it, I know, but it is that kind of house. So ugly that it is almost beautiful. Hogarth would have loved it. I do, already. It is the exact antithesis of everything I've ever known before in my life.

It has grounds, too—voluminous grounds! Sprawling acres of lawn that cascade from the house itself to the road. A grove of larches, elms, aspen, and some other trees I can't identify lying to the right of the house as you face it. The grove, like the lawn itself, is now scraggly, unkempt.

But I shall hire someone to repair this shortly. Beneath the weeds and mat of dead, scabrous foliage will be soft, tender, green grass.

The north side of my estate—see, I am beginning to take a lordly pride in it already?—is the least attractive. There is a stratum of chalk in this neighborhood, and at one time, the white stuff was quarried here. As a result, I have become the not-

too-proud possessor of an abandoned limestone quarry.

It is very unsightly. I should say somewhat dangerous, too, since there exists only about two hundred yards of lawn between the side of the house and a steep, hundred-foot cliff. The quarry itself is smeary, mottled; pocketed at the base with sluggish pools of water. I think I shall have someone run a guard rail around the edge. A worm fence would be at once protective and amusingly rustic. Later on, perhaps I will plant shrubbery along the fence, blocking the quarry off from the estate.

I was overjoyed with my discovery. The reluctance I had met with on the part of the renting agent was typical of this quaint community. He did not seem to *want* me to lease Anston Hollow. Imagine!

I said, "See here, Mr. Peabody—" He pronounces it "Pibbity," and somehow contrives to say it as if it were just one syllable. "Why didn't you show me this place before? If I hadn't chanced to go walking; if I hadn't noticed, myself, that it was unoccupied, I might still be looking for a home."

He said apologetically, "Well, now, you see you were askin' after a *cottage,* Mr. Chandler—"

"But the rental fee you have quoted me," I said, "is no more than I should have expected to pay for a *small* place. Ninety shillings a month! Why, that's not unreasonable."

Unreasonable, indeed! It was a steal at that figure—and I knew it. So did he. His face reddened.

"It's not whut mought call an up-to-date place," he insinuated. "They's no barth-room, an' it's in bad state of repair."

"Then we'll install a bath," I laughed, "and put the place into habitable shape. If I'm willing to meet my share, will you split the costs with me fifty-fifty?"

"I suppose so," he said ruefully. He seemed on the verge of telling me something that wouldn't come out. But he nodded, finally. "Yus. Fifty-fifty."

"Very good," I said. "I'll run up to London and get some furniture. While I'm gone, you send the carpenters and plumbers around. Will a fortnight be long enough for them?"

He said, "I expect so." Then, miserably, "Very good, sir. A fortnight."

That was all I could get out of him. The repairmen are to begin work on the place tomorrow. I am taking the ten o'clock to London. This will be my first experience at home-furnishing. I am feeling as eager and skittish as a colt.

London Arms
March 27th

JUST four more days of this hotel life; then I shall return to my own home, my own manor, in Cotswold. The dealer from whom I bought my furniture has vanned it down, and tells me it has been installed safely.

As usual, I left Cotswold without thinking of everything. It dawned on me last week that I had forgotten to get some help. A housekeeper-cook, and a man to help me around the estate. I wrote to Peabody, but he replied rather curtly that he could not find anyone in Cotswold-cum-leigh. I guess I was wrong about Peabody. Essentially, he is just like any American realtor. His interest in the property and in myself ended abruptly when I became lessee. I shall have to look up help for myself while I am here in Foggytown-on-the-Thames.

London Arms
March 30th

MY LUCK is holding out.

At an employment agency, this morning, I found just what I was looking for—a family of three, who will serve as my servants at Anston Hollow.

Their name is Dolphin. The father, Josh Dolphin, was a top-sergeant in the B. E. F. during the World War. Once an ostler, he has been down on his luck since the Depression put the era of expensive stables to an end. He is strong, ruddy, and able. He'll make an excellent gardener and handy man if I know anything about human nature—and I think I do.

His wife, Martha, is a plump, pretty, fortyish woman with a quick wit and quicker tongue. She will be housekeeper and cook, while the daughter, Belle, will act as maid. Belle may prove a bit of a problem. She is a pretty girl and, I am afraid, rather too lively for the rural life. She is fond of dancing and music-halls, and protested strenuously against her father's decision to move to the country with me. But he is very much the head of his house, and silenced her with one sharp word and a raised arm.

They are going down on the train tonight to open the house and get it ready. I have several things to do yet. If I can swing it, I want to get a dictaphone. Then there are a few things I want to look up at the London Library before the country closes outside sources of information to me, and I am immured within the circle of my own thoughts.

Anston Hollow
March 31st

I AM amazed! Amazed and charmed and pleased. From the beginning, I knew that Anston Hollow was the answer to my desires, but it was not until I arrived here this morning and saw it in its refreshened guise that I realized how perfectly wonderful it was!

The roof has been reshingled and painted deep forest green; a green that blends superbly with the copse adjoining. Doors and shutters have been painted to match, while the body of the house is a bright, cheery white.

A small guestroom was torn out, and modern plumbing installed. I have a 20th Century shower in a room that still bears echoes of the splashing of kettlesful of hot water being poured into a wooden cask.

Another smaller bath has been installed in the rooms set aside for Dolphin and his family. I could afford to be prodigal with space. There are eight huge rooms on the ground floor of the manor house; six bedrooms and two baths upstairs, and a spacious attic. I have given Dolphin complete run of a three-room suite at the back of the house. My only demand of him is that he serve me well, keep the grounds in condition, and do not disturb me when I am working.

As to working—well, if I ever get over the novelty of being "landed gentry," I shall work in the library. There are wide, airy casement windows in there; opening out to the green patch which is my own private "woods."

When I reached the house, I found a throng gathered. A most unusual sight in this placid, incurious neighborhood. Dolphin, making himself at home swiftly, was already at work on the lawn with grass-cutter and trowel. I could see Martha pinning up curtains at an upstairs window. After paying off the cabby who had driven me from the station, I started up to the house.

The crowd was making strange, mumbling little sounds. Not threats, or anything like that. Just incoherent sounds of disapproval. I thought I knew why. They resented the fact of an American—a foreigner—having taken over one of their old landmarks. I decided to assure them, immediately, that everything was all right; that the place was in good hands; that I would make no further efforts to modernize the place. I said, turning to them:

"My name is Peter Chandler. We are now neighbors; I hope we will also become

friends. I want you to believe that I am as proud of Anston Hollow as you are, and will do everything in my power to preserve it as a part of a lovely community."

It was a rather stilted, Vicar-of-Wakefieldish thing to say, and I felt silly saying it. But I knew that, speaking to these people, I would have to speak their language.

My words impressed them. Several nodded approvingly, and a little hum ran through the assemblage. Then the leader of the group, an old gaffer of unguessable age, hobbled forward on his crutches and piped:

"We ain't worrit aboot that, Mr. Chandler. Whut we wants t' knaow is—be-ye of a 'quisitive nat're?"

I smothered a smile. It seemed that the old gaffer was of a somewhat "inquisitive nature" himself. But I said, quietly.

"Not unduly so, sir. At least, I hope not."

"Very good then," he said, mollified. "It don't do f'r't' be too 'quisitive at Anston Holler. Ye'll do well t' remember that, young man."

And with this cryptic utterance, he stepped back to join his friends. One by one, they drifted away. I watched the last of them trudge down the road toward town; then went on up to the house. My house.

So that was my "official welcome" to Anston Hollow. A warning against curiosity. I wonder what it meant? Why, of all things my new neighbors *might* have asked me, did they want to know if I were of a "'quisitive nat're"? Perhaps it would be well to write and ask Brannock. He understands the involved psychology of these natives. . . .

Anston Hollow
April 3rd

I GUESS I won't have to write Brannock, after all. I am beginning to realize, without his help, why anyone with an inquisitive nature would be a nuisance to the good people of Cotswold-cum-leigh. Possibly not only a nuisance, but an out-and-out menace!

Brannock's warning was right. There is a sinister atmosphere about Anston Hollow. And I think I know why! The house in which I live has been the scene of violent death!

The signs are unmistakable. In the living hall, Jos Dolphin and I were sanding down the painted oak flooring. It is a marvelous floor, incidentally. Puncheon boards, skewer-pegged. I have seen lesser examples of Seventeenth Century carpentry go under the auction hammer in America for hundreds of dollars. Well, just before the fireplace—a massive gash of block limestone—we found, carefully painted over, stains that could be only one thing. Dried blood!

Not only that, but stamped or hammered into the wood beneath the ugly blotches were a series of overlapping, interlocking *symbols!* A stamping of the letter M—only the edges of the letter were rounded, instead of straight. A sort of a monogram, so to speak.

I wonder if these things are coincidental, or if the former master of Anston Hollow was a sadistic murderer, who, after killing, marked the scene of his crime with his initial?

It is an eerie question. The sight of the stain set my nerves quite on edge. I have not been able to work today. I have felt again that strange, creeping sensation of horrors unseen that I felt before in the Cotswold inn. I must try to win the confidence of the townsfolk; get them to tell me what happened here at Anston Hollow years ago. There is a mystery of some kind. It intrigues me.

Anston Hollow
April 5th

Well, I am at work at last. I have sketched out the rough outline for my new

novel, and it looks good. This is a fine place for creative work. Bright, sunny, cheerful. When I look out my study window, I see that the saplings are fresh with tender, green bud. Spring is coming in. I know now the meaning of Browning's panegyric, "Ah, to be in England! Now that April's here—"

I have set Dolphin to clearing the underbrush out of the copse. The rank growth must not be permitted to throttle the young spring flowers.

Anston Hollow
April 6th

BLESS us, I am going back to the days of my elders!

No more of this soft, chemically treated, town water for me—if the chemist's report is good. While clearing the copse, yesterday, Dolphin discovered a well! A real, honest-to-goodness, old-fashioned well.—

How long ago it was dug, heaven only knows. Dolphin thought, at first, it was a cairn—or perhaps even a dolmen. He came racing in to my study, excited, to tell me about it.

"If it's a dolmen, Mr. Chandler," he puffed, "it's a valyble thing! Them archy—arky-something puffessors at the Mooseum study dolmens."

I shared his excitement, and slung my Leica about my neck before going out to see his discovery. But it was not a dolmen.

The rocks were piled too irregularly; too haphazardly. And there were too many of them. They covered more than ten square yards.

I snapped a few pictures of it; then we began to excavate carefully. That was when we learned we had a well. A fine, deep one, too. The parapet had been broken down, and a sheet-metal casing, rusty with age, was held flat over the top by the immense pile of rocks—but after we got these off we looked down to a bubbling, black expanse of water.

That is, I looked down. The sun was almost directly overhead. I could see my own face—or a distorted parody of it—peering back at me from the turgid depths. I smiled and the mirrored image shimmered and grimaced back. I turned to Dolphin delightedly.

"Dolmens be damned!" I said. "This is better yet; a well! Just what we needed to put the rustic touch to Anston. Do we have a bucket in the house, Dolphin?"

Dolphin said yes, we had, but advised against drinking from the well. "They must of been some reason for boardin' it hup," he said. "Could be the water's not good."

He was obviously right. However, we did get a pail, and did take a sample of the water. I have sent it to London for analysis. I hope it proves pure.

Later

I have given Dolphin a shotgun and sent him out to order the trespassers off my property. As we were returning to the house, after opening the well, I heard the sound of music from the woods. Gypsies, no doubt. I recognized their peculiar sharp-and-flat piping airs. I will not have my estate trampled by vagabonds.

Anston Hollow
April 7th

I did not sleep well last night. Those Gypsies must be having one of their festivals. They kept the entire night alive with their damned music. Perhaps lack of sleep had put me in a hypercritical state of mind. It really is good music I suppose. But so confoundedly, everlastingly melancholy!

In the evening, it was not so bad. Just this single piper, blowing softly on his flute, or whatever derivation of that instrument Gypsies favor. But after dark, it

became increasingly annoying. More instruments joined in, and more and more, until it sounded like a whole, damned off-key symphony. The most pleading, most sorrowful, weirdest music that I ever heard.

Even the animals were disturbed by it. From the cottage of Matthews, my nearest neighbor, half a mile down toward town, I heard dogs barking. Howling, rather. Along about the dawn, there was one final, triumphant burst of melody. On the crest of a single, sobbing, wretched note that sounded like a lost soul wailing in torment, the music stopped. I finally got to sleep.

It is annoying, but I fear there is nothing I can do. The Gypsies are not on my estate. Dolphin combed the grounds thoroughly yesterday afternoon, and saw neither hide nor hair of them.

2 P.M.

WELL, somebody seemed to like last night's concert. At lunch, Belle, who was serving me, asked:

"Were you listenin' to the wireless last night, Mr. Peter?"

I said, "Why? Did you hear the music?"

Her eyes lighted ecstatically. She said, "Aow, yes! Wasn't it wunderful, sur?"

"If you like that kind of music, I suppose it was," I told her. "It wasn't the wireless, though. It was Gypsies camped somewhere around."

She said, "Gypsies—aaouw!" Then, staunchly, "Just the same, it was thurillin' music!"

Nevertheless, I don't intend to spend another sleepless night, just for the sake of entertaining my maid. Maybe the Gypsies are camped on Matthews' estate?

No report from London yet.

Anston Hollow
April 8th

I am living next to a madman.

I made a neighborly call on Matthews last night. It was my intention to ask if he had permitted the Gypsies the use of his grounds, but I had scarcely made the opening gambit in our conversation when he said:

"Gypsies, Mr. Chandler? Whut do y' mean?"

I said, "The music last night. Certainly you heard it?"

His rheumy old eyes widened; glittered yellowly. He said, "Moosic?"

"Yes. Like flutes. Or fifes. Some confounded wind instrument."

He squealed like a stricken pig. He shrilled,

"Flutes! Pipes, you mean! You fool, you been peekin' beyond!"

I said, gruffly, "Talk sense, man! What do you mean—peekin' beyond? I just asked you about the—"

He started to crowd me, stiff-armed, toward the door.

"Go away!" he squealed. "Go away, before you bring it here! Go!"

He shoved me, still too confused to do anything but retreat, protesting, out the door.

I heard the key turn in the lock; then the jar of wood on wood as he rammed the heavy super-brace into place. I turned and strode home angrily.

The piping—now that I think of it, it does sound more like pipes than flutes—had started. I heard it in the woods around me as I walked home. It did not seem to originate from any one direction. The wind was light; almost still. I suppose that is why it seemed that the music sprang from all about; from the woods, from the darkened pasturelands; from the very tops of the trees.

It was louder tonight; louder, shriller; more persistently calling. Therefore more annoying.

Tomorrow I will go into town and ask someone what it all means.

Anston Hollow
April 9th

THIS is becoming unbearable. Last night, once again, I tossed restlessly, unable to sleep because of that blasted cacaphony of woodwinds. This morning I awoke, red-eyed, still weary, to discover that during the night some fool had let his flock break its barriers and overrun my beautiful lawn.

My carefully nurtured sward is chopped and gnarled a hundred times with the hoofprints of sheep. Damn it! After breakfast I am going to town and raise a bit of hell!

Later

What is the matter in Cotswold-cum-leigh? Matthews has preceded me, has spread some deceitful lie which has made me an outcast and a pariah.

There are never many people on the main thoroughfare of the tiny village. But today there was no one at all. Not even a housewife, shopping. Not even a carter, flogging his reluctant nag along the rough cobbles. Not even a youngster; and Cotswold is, if nothing else, prolific in the creation of offspring.

Everywhere I went in town, I found closed doors and shuttered windows, from behind which pallid faces peered out at me anxiously. The tradesmen's shops were muted beehives, into which stole furtive customers. Only the Inn retained a vestige of its former activity, but here, too, I found that air of frozen speculation; fearful anticipation.

I dropped into the public room for a glass of beer; asked the innkeeper if he had seen Matthews. He hadn't. I then asked if anyone in town had complained about the Gypsy music. For some strange reason, my question seemed to throw him into a spell of mortal terror. He thrust my beer at me with shaking hands, turned without waiting for my tuppence, and ran from the room.

Only one other was in the room beside myself. The old gaffer who had accosted me with that odd query the first day I moved into my new home.

I shifted my questioning to him, but got only vague answers. Yus, he had heard the moosic. Aye, he kenned its nat're—didn't I? Naw, there was no need o' his tellin' me who or whut caused it. Who should know better than I?

I said, angrily, "Now, see here, old man, this is a bit too thick! I swear I know nothing about that music; not as much as *you* seem to. There's no reason for making me—"

"I warnt ye," he cackled, "aginst 'quisitiveness."

"But, good Lord!" I raged, "I think I have a right to be inquisitive now. My sleep is disturbed by music. And no one will tell me who's responsible for it. My estate has been overrun with sheep; my lawn clawed up—"

"Sheep?" he interrupted.

"Yes."

He rose to his feet; hobbled to the door. He looked back over his shoulder.

"Ye might look again, stranger," he said. "Could be them ain't sheep-prints. Maybe—goats?"

"There are no goat herds in Cotswold!" I stormed. I was talking to thin air. He was gone.

Now I am back at my desk, trying to concentrate on my novel. I am halfway through Chapter One. The writing is the worst I have ever done. And no wonder. I can't even hear myself think. It is still daylight, lacking some hours to dusk, yet already the piping has begun. It sounds distant; haunting. There is something eerie about the Romany themes. They seem to promise something; something which is indefinable; far away, yet shudderingly near. The music swells and fades with the soft swirlings of the wind. It beckons,

yet at the same time repels. It makes me think of things in my past that would be better unremembered. Of exotic delights once tasted, never forgotten. Of fragments of dreams, lingering on in the soft melancholy of semi-wakefulness.

I do not like it. It disturbs me.

Anston Hollow
April 10th

THE sheep, or goats, or whatever they are, trampled my lawn again last night. I know they did, because poor old Dolphin worked like a dog all day yesterday repairing the damage done on their first visit.

It is a shame. Worse than that; it is a crime!

It must not happen again. I will put a wire fence around the sward.

Dolphin is worried. He is afraid Belle is not very well. At first she complained bitterly at being incarcerated here in the country; far from the press and bustle of London crowds. Now she has become moody, self-contained, sensitive. He is afraid she will do something rash; run away from here.

Martha is nervous, too. There are circles under her eyes. I fear this nocturnal music is turning us all into neurotics.

Why do I complain like this, when all the world outside is wakening with spring? The early flowers are bursting into bloom; the trees are now freshly garbed, and delicately, in their first, yellow-green finery. The soft winds whisper that spring has come at last; that the slumber of dull winter has come to an end. There is an added warmth to the kiss of the sun; new sparkle to the morning dew; dainty fragrance in the scent of growing things. Even the distant piping seems a part of the loveliness.

I feel an almost pagan desire to go native. To strip off my garments; go roll myself on the green grass; tossing, tumbling, kissing the verdant earth.

Anston Hollow
April 12th

THIS is a day of disappointments.

This morning's mail brought a communication from the London analyst. The water sample from my well, he tells me, is pure enough—but not drinkable. It is high in sulphur content. I am sorry about this.

But I have not given up all hope. There must be a mistake somewhere; I never heard of any sulphur deposits in this part of England. My encyclopedia is an ally in this belief. I am taking a fresh sample, and shall send it to another chemist.

Dolphin and Martha have suffered a discouragement of even greater scope than my own. For the past few days, Belle has been acting moodily. This morning we woke to find that she has left us—gone, presumably, back to London.

When or how she left, we have no way of knowing. It must have been sometime during the night. The lure of London life was too great for her. She did not even take her wardrobe; merely the clothes she was wearing. Dolphin thinks she plans to stay with her Aunt Cora, in Kensington. I wrote the aunt, at his request, this morning, asking her to communicate with us as soon as Belle arrives.

Dolphin is quite broken up about it, and apologetic, too. I have told him not to be concerned.

We can manage all right without Belle, and if she is happier in the city, that is the place for her.

Disappointment number three is the failure of that new fence to keep out the night-roving herds. My once prized lawn is a disgrace. Sheep or goats, I shall put an end to it soon. Beginning tomorrow night, Dolphin and I shall begin to take turns guarding the estate. A few well-placed shot would discourage that grazing herd, I think.

Anston Hollow
April 13th

THE nocturnal music seems to be closer to the house. Dolphin and I are going to see whether the intruders have, by any chance, moved onto our property.

No news from London regarding Belle.

Anston Hollow
April 14th

WE HAVE found Belle!

She did not go to London, after all. She did not go for a very good reason. Because the poor girl is dead!

Let me begin at the beginning. Last night, Dolphin and I kept watch over the estate, so we might frighten off the herds that have been using our lawn as a grazing pasture. It was agreed that I should keep the first watch, from 10 to 1, and Dolphin was to spell me at one o'clock.

Nothing happened during my "watch." I sat with shotgun across my knees, flashlight ready, almost hoping to get a crack at that wandering herd. The night was pleasantly warm. The music from the woods —strange that one cannot tell just which direction it comes from!—was louder, more giddy, than I have ever heard it before.

It enraged me, yet at the same time cast a spell over me: a weird enticement.

But nothing happened. And at one o'clock, Dolphin relieved me, and I went in to bed.

It was three hours later that I was rudely awakened. The sound of a shotgun's belching explosion hammered me into consciousness; Dolphin's angry cry from the porch. I leaped into dressing gown and *huiraches* and ran out. Jos was racing across the lawn in futile pursuit of a dim, blackish shape I could barely determine.

I ran after him, only half aware, in my excitement, that the everlasting piping had ceased; that a brooding stillness hovered over Anston Hollow. I am faster on my feet than Dolphin. He has cause to be grateful for that. I caught him at the very brink of the chalk-pit. Another step or two, and he would have plunged headlong into the depths of the rubble-strewn pit!

I clutched his shoulder and swung him around.

"Look out, you idiot!" I yelled. "Do you see where you were going?"

He saw, then, and shuddered. The expression of eager intensity faded from his face; was replaced with one of sudden fear.

"Gorblimee!" he muttered. "Gorblimee! I didn't see it, Mr. Peter. Thankee kindly." Then, wrathfully, "I didn't even touch the thing, did I?"

"Evidently not," I said. "The thing? What was it? A sheep? A goat? Was there only one of them?"

"Nay, zur. They was more than just the one, but the one I was a-chasin' was the bellwether o' the lot. It—" He looked at me half fearfully. "It looked a bit like a *booman*, Mr. Peter!"

"Ridiculous!" I snapped. "You couldn't see it very plainly in the darkness. But where did it go It must have fallen down here somewhere—"

I flashed my four-celled light into the pit; swung it from side to side. Nothing stirred. Then—

"Back there, zur!" cried Dolphin. "Left a bit more! There—what's that?"

I knew all too well. I snapped off the light swiftly and said, "Dolphin, perhaps you'd better go back to—"

But he, too, had seen that crumpled figure sprawling at the base of the cliff. He clutched my arm agonizedly.

"Belle!" he choked. "My God, zur! Belle!" And his voice broke.

I could not console him with words. A fine, salmon-edged sliver of light creased the eastern horizon. The dawn. I said, slowly, "I'm going down. Do you want to come?"

WE PICKED our way down the declivity; careful not to share the fate of the unfortunate girl. I had tormenting visions of her lying there for minutes . . . hours, maybe . . . screaming hopelessly to ears that heard not. But when we reached her side, this added reproachment faded.

"She did not suffer, Dolphin," I said. "Death struck instantly."

It was small consolation, but it was all I could say. Her body was bruised, crushed, broken in a hundred places. An arm was glued stiffly before her eyes, as if in that last, dreadful moment, when she had felt herself hurtling downward, she had tried to screen from her sight those jagged shards.

Her body lay half in, half out, of one of those slaty puddles of stagnant water. Had she not been killed instantly, she would have drowned, anyway. But there had been no time for that. There was a mask of frozen horror on her face; the foreknowledge of approaching death. Not the patient resignation carven on the visage of a drowned person.

Dolphin collapsed, whimpering, over her body. Heartbroken, he keened, over and over again, "My daughter! Belle! An' I was angered at her. God, forgive me—"

Gently, I drew him away. "Come," I said. "We must leave her here till we call the authorities."

He came to his feet brokenly. As we started back up the incline, he looked back once more.

"Aye, leave her so. She loved flowers. It is a fitting grave for her."

I had hardly noticed it before. Now I saw that where she had fallen, the bottom of the chalk quarry was a jungle of riotous blossom. Great, creamy white flowers with crimson hearts; lilting, dancing, swaying in the dawn breeze. Somehow they reminded me of Belle herself. Her soft, white skin was the color of their petals; her smiling lips the color of their hearts. Their impudent dancing was her own impertinent little walk. . . .

Later

I HAVE never seen a woman so bowed with grief as the mother of Belle. Dolphin could not summon the courage to tell his wife of the girl's death, so asked me to do it. I broke the sad news as gently as possible. Her eyes widened, but she said not a word. For a moment she stared at me, through me, as if she was listening to someone speak from miles away. A glazed look crept into her eyes. She turned, and without a single word, left me.

I hope time will assuage her grief. She is a young and attractive woman herself. Pretty, too, in a comfortable, buxom way. Her life lies before her, if this grief does not destroy it of all meaning. . . .

Later

IT IS not enough that my work should be disturbed by a tragedy. I must also listen to zany prattling from one who should, by virtue of his training and his cloth, know better!

The constable came, inspected Belle's body, and certified death by accident. She had been brought to the house. An hour ago, the priest came from town to administer the last rites of the Church.

When he had finished, he sought me in my library. I welcomed him. I could not work—not after what I had seen.

"My son," he said as soon as we were alone, "I come to give you a grave warning."

"Yes, Father?"

"It is my advice," he said weightily, "that you pack and leave Anston Hollow immediately."

The only logic I could find in his words was incomprehensible.

"But surely," I said, "you don't think the townsfolk will hold *me* responsible for

Belle Dolphin's death? Father, I don't understand you."

"Sometimes I don't quite understand myself, my son. No—you are not responsible for the girl's death. Not in the usual sense. But in a deeper sense—perhaps you are."

"What do you mean?"

He paused between sentences, choosing his words with extreme care. The sunlight, slanting through the casement, limned his face with strange light. As if musing, he said:

"This is not a good house to live in, my son. There are sinister forces at work in Anston Hollow."

Sinister forces. His words were reminiscent of the warning of Brannock; of the cackling of the old gaffer at the inn. I remembered that which I had discovered earlier.

"There is some truth to what you say, Father. If old sins can cause a house to become evil, there may be evilness here. I found evidences of a murder in the living-hall. Tell me about it. Who did it, and when did it happen?"

"It happened many, many years ago. Before you were born, and before your father was born. But the town has not forgotten." He looked at me oddly. "I was not alive myself when it happened, my son. But I have read the—accounts. And they say it was not done by a *person,* but by—something from Outside!"

"Something from—" I stopped, frowning. "Excuse me, Father, but I am astonished at *you,* a man of the Church, even daring to recognize the existence of supernatural forces. You who believe in a supreme, kindly God!"

"A kindly God, yes. But that man is a fool who does not recognize, also, that there were other gods, less kindly, who ruled the earth before—"

I know I looked shocked. "I said, "Father!"

"I am an old man, my son. I do not profess to a great knowledge. Soon, perhaps, I shall learn the truth of these mysteries. But this I *do* know—that even God has his enemies. Faith and truth and light have banished many of them from the earth. But there are still Gateways—" He looked at me with sombre eyes. "Gateways through which they may pass, if these Gateways are opened.

"Once before, years ago, a Gateway was opened here at Anston Hollow. A god, an evil god whose very name would defile my lips, came through to claim his devoirs. And I fear that now, once again, the Gateway has been opened for him."

I sprang to my feet.

"This is a madman's conversation!" I stormed. "There were no barred doors or locked windows at Anston Hollow when I moved in. I have opened no 'Gateways.' This is all part of a conspiracy to drive me out of Cotswold, just because I am an American. A foreigner. I blush for you, Father. Because you have betrayed your cloth. And now, I bid you good day!"

He rose resignedly. "Very well, my son. Peace!"

He left. And a good thing, too. I am writing this in a storm of indignation. For tuppence, I'd write a snappy note to the Bishop; tell him the kind of subtleties to which this two-bit parish priest has descended. Men like him are a disgrace to the Church. . . .

Anston Hollow
Midnight

I HAVE taken two sleeping powders, and am waiting for them to take effect. Until they do, I will write for a while.

It is midnight, and outside the moon is overcast with scudding clouds that drift across its sullen face like ghostly fingers. The still night air is sodden with mystery; a sense of indefinable terror. I suppose

this is because I, civilized being though I am, cannot help remembering there lies in this house a corpse.

Why is it that we, the living, have so great fear of the harmless dead? So thin a barrier lies between Being and Non-being. One moment we kiss, and laugh, and talk; love and are loved. Then a moment of sharp pain—a wrench—a breaking of the silver cord. The face of the loved one pales; the body stiffens. Something steals from the clammy flesh—and something new and strange and horrible creeps into that grim habitation. . . .

Good! I yawned! I will sleep soon. I will sleep, and forget all about that accursed piping that skirls across the woods and lawns with such interminable persistence.

There is a new, strange sound to that piping tonight. A sound that is almost like a human voice, raised in mingled anguish and ecstasy. The death of poor Belle has affected me more than I realized. It is as though the pipes had stolen her voice . . . as though it were she who sang that melancholy tune that fills the night. . . .

Too tired to write any more. Must sleep now. . . .

Anston Hollow
April 16th

I WAS afraid of this!

Martha has become deranged by her daughter's tragic death. At least, that is our fear. Dolphin came in to wake me this morning, petrified with despair. During the night he had heard nothing, but this morning Martha was gone.

We searched for her. She is nowhere to be found—but we found evidence of one place she had been. The quarry in which Belle's broken body lay. Martha's kerchief and her shoes were there. Marks of her feet and hands. And—

Those flowers; those lovely, unusual blossoms which nature had generously strewn upon poor Belle's untimely tomb, were broken! Their withered heads lay curling on the ground. Their dried stalks drooped. Those firm, slender, dancing stems that had borne the blossoms so proudly, had been hacked off and carried away.

This is dreadful. A mad woman, shoeless, and half-naked (we found her skirt at the base of the chalk-pit) must be wandering somewhere about the countryside, clutching a pitiful handful of withered stems. I have asked the police to look for her; to treat her with all gentleness when they find her.

Anston Hollow
April 16th

THEY have found Martha. Her body, rather. For poor Martha's soul has gone to join that of her daughter in the the world beyond.

A search party found her lying in the woods beyond our house. Perhaps it is better, after all, that she was dead—for she was clearly insane. She had stripped off the last vestige of her clothing, and when found, was lying face downward in a fragrant patch of sweet spring flowers, as though trying to crush the loveliness to her breast in her last, sad farewell.

The cause of death is uncertain. There were bruises on her throat and breasts, and a fixed stare of torment on her lips. There was a loose, rolling bit of rotten wood near one foot; a blue contusion on her forehead. The coroner suggests that in her delirium she may have slipped on this piece of wood, fallen, and caused internal injuries.

We do not know. They are going to perform an autopsy to find out. Meanwhile, I have suggested to Dolphin that he go back to London; try to forget these horrible events. His grief is dreadful to behold. He pulled away angrily when I

suggested London to him, swore he would not go, shook his fist at the trees, at the woods, at the sky.

"It was the Thing that killed them!" he raged. "Now I see it all. The music . . . the prints . . . the flowers. . . ."

I soothed his babbling as well as I could. I know how he feels. That everlasting music is becoming unendurable. And those sheep—or goats. But he should not blame his woes on unavoidable things like—

The flowers? It is strange that both women should be found lying amidst flowers, isn't it? But no! It is sheerly coincidental. The flowers were not the same kind. Those in which we found poor Martha were fleshier, golden-tinted, full-blossomed. Mature, robust-looking plants.

Like Martha herself.

Anston Hollow
7 P. M.

JOS has taken my shotgun and gone into the woods. I do not know what he means to do. I fear for him.

Later

IF I COULD only *do* something! I sit here, wondering and waiting. The piping is stronger now. It always becomes more heady, more intoxicating, as dusk gives way to darkness, and the false shadows of twilight are replaced by the silver-tendriled ekings of the moon.

I wonder if Jos—

What was that? Was it a shot?

I must see! If anything happened to Jos—

Anston Hollow
April 17th

I AM beginning to see it all now. Jos was right. I did not understand what he meant when he said that all things tied together, the music, the prints, the flowers—

Those Gypsies! Wherever they are—I have never been able to locate their camp—they are the ones responsible for the deaths of Belle and Martha. And now—Jos!

It was a shot I heard last night. I ran out in the direction whence it had sounded, carrying a revolver. In the woods, not fifty feet from where we had found Martha's body, I found Jos. Or what remained of him.

It was dreadful! He had been beaten to death; literally clubbed to a pulp. As if some huge, demoniac monster had deliberately trampled him under horrendous hooves. Even his face was mashed to a bloody, unrecognizable mask. But in one crushed hand he still clutched my shotgun—from which a single shell had been fired!

BUT it was no monster. It was those Gypsies. I know I am right. Who else would play, play, play that sad, heart-piercing music all evening and all night? Who else owns herds unregistered in the neighborhood stock farms? Who else would choose the final, sadistic mockery of throwing the bodies of the women they had ravaged, the man they had brutally slain, into lovely swells of beauty? For Dolphin's body, too, lay amongst flowers. Stiff, bristling fern; staunch and unyielding as a militiaman—

Militiaman?

Enough of this! I know now. I am going into town; insist that these murderers be tracked down; their dastardly deeds be avenged.

Later

WHAT is this? Am I the only person in a deserted village?

Shortly after making my last entry, I walked into Cotswold-cum-leigh. And—there is no one there! The hamlet is a ghost town. Doors are locked; shutters are up and barred; the very cobbles echoed

hollowly to my footsteps. There was not a living human in sight. Only a few stray dogs and cats that shifted away from me restively, uneasily, as I went by them.

No birds are singing in the larches; no cattle low in the pasture lands. There are signs of a hasty exodus from the town. Tire marks on the side lanes, bits of drapery and linen scuffed in the dust as though kicked there and forgotten by people fleeing in haste.

I tried to find a phone. But short of breaking into someone's house forcibly, I could not do so. So I am back at Anston Hollow, wondering . . . wondering. . . .

There is something strange going on. I know why I saw no animals in Cotswold. They are all here, on my grounds. Cows, sheep, cocks. . . . even the normally wild denizens of the forests seem to have chosen this as a meeting place for some mad ritual of their own!

On the way home I passed at arm's length by a fawn, a soft-eyed, light-footed creature of beautifully mottled dun and brown. He did not flinch from me. He did not even seem to notice me. He was walking slowly, as though hypnotized, as though transfixed by wonderment, toward the woods that abut my estate.

There was a weasel, too. Rabbits, squirrels, chipmunks. All bound, as though magnetically attracted, to the same spot. To some secret Sabbath of the beasts. . . .

I hear footsteps outside! I almost cried aloud my joy to hear them. It is the priest, head bowed, plodding up my gravel walk. Then I am not alone . . . not alone. . . .

I must get control of my emotions before he arrives. This music . . . this everlasting, piercing-sweet, alluring damn music . . . has been throbbing in my brain with the soft, caressing fingers of a siren. And—I confess it now—I have been afraid. Horribly afraid.

He knocks on the door. I must let him in. . . .

Later

I MUST not write this!

If ever it is found, it will hang me. Later on, when all this madness is forgotten, my own words will destroy me—

Destroy me? I am already destroyed. It does not make any difference, now, whether I write or not. I might as well make my narrative complete. . . .

THE priest came with a warning. But this time, also, he came with proofs. With letters. With records. With the faded remnants of a journal not unlike that which I am keeping now. After his greeting, he handed these to me silently. He said only, "Read, my son."

I read. And learned the explanation, the reason, for all that which has been. I turned to him at last with frightened eyes.

"Can—can this be true?" I choked.

He nodded slowly.

"All too true, my son. This is evil we combat; fearful evil from ages long past. You have opened the Gateway to free that —Certain One—" He crossed himself piously. "Now it must be closed again, before the shire falls beneath the thunderous-hooves of the Evil One."

I cried, "But there was no Gateway, Father! I swear to you, I opened no—"

Then my eyes jolted wide. My nervous fingers plucked at a letter on my desk. I saw it, and gasped. The letter was from my London chemist. I said:

"No! I see, now! There *is* a Gateway! Dolphin and I *did* open it! The well!"

"The well?"

"In the woods. Come—"

Together we left the house, crossed the level patch of sward, entered the cool serenity of the woods. It was still broad

daylight, but the sun was beginning to glow more redly in the last, ruby *riposte* that pierces the canvas of the sky ere night darkens all. The trees above us soughed and lamented. Soft footsteps sounded about us. There were curious flutterings in the patchwork of the boughs. A mongrel cur brushed blindly by us, unseeing; beckoned beyond by the endless piping now distant in the woods.

We reached the well. I point at it.

"Here!" I cried. "Here is the Gateway. We opened it in all innocence, Dolphin and I. And now it has allowed Him to come through. He—"

"Say not His name!" The father barked the words. Then, more gently, "Men in common circumstance may call upon His name, my son, and fear no reprisal. But here, in His very sanctuary." He shook his head. ". . . it were better to refuse him entirely. Come, let us work."

He bent to the task. He was an old man, white with age, but strong in the love of good. He helped me tug the iron plating back over the mouth of the Gateway. We got it halfway over; stopped for a breath. . . .

I do not know what madness seized me then. I know, only, that the sun was beginning to fade behind the hills and that darkness stole into the tiny grove on ghostly feet. And that the piping, which had been far away, grew closer. Grew closer and ever closer; until its madness was singing in my brain; churning through my veins like tiny bubbles of joy.

I felt an overwhelming desire to stop work; not just for now, but for all time. A gloating, hideous little voice within me seemed to bid, "Rest. Rest and play. Civilization is false. Only the woods and the trees and the flowers are true. Play. Play shamelessly, endlessly, like the animals and birds. Strip off your stifling clothes, and—"

My work faltered; then stopped entirely. The holy father noticed me. He, too, stopped work. Looked up at me, a furrow of perplexity and fear in his eyes. Not fear *of* me; *for* me! He said gently, "My son—"

AH, BUT I was clever then. With an effort, I forced a smile to my lips. I said, "It's all right, Father. Just a giddy spell—" I bent over, watching him surreptitiously.

He, too, returned to his work; tugged at the shield which should once more bar the Gateway. I bent over and got a huge stone. He didn't notice as I started to bring it down upon his head. . . .

But I could not! It was as though a force withheld my hand. Tiny bells rang in my ears; that daemon voice whispered, "The cross!"

Ah, but I was clever! I laid down the stone, begged the priest to turn around. When he turned, I was kneeling before him.

"I cannot do this with unclean hands," I told him. "Father, I have sinned. Absolve me, that I may better help to still this evil peril forever."

"Let us make haste, my son," he pleaded. "The darkness falls. We must finish our task before—"

"Forgive me first!" I cried. "Forgive me, kneeling here before you. Give me the cross to hold in my hands—"

He smiled patiently; slipped the crucifix from about his throat.

"Very well, my son. In the Name of—"

There was nothing to it. The crucifix still clenched in one fist, I raised the stone; brought it down. Again. And again. His eyes found mine once before he died. There was no reproach in them. No blame. Only sorrow and ineffable pity—

Something burned my palm; seared it with the fires of hell. I dropped the cross

to the ground, howling. There was no scar on my hand. The piping grew nearer and nearer; seemed to swell over and about me; through me. Become a part of me. I laughed wildly . . . deliriously. . . .

Eight hours ago! That was eight hours ago. But it seems as though it had been eight centuries, or eight aeons.

I have lived how many lives since then? I have been gifted of all mortals. I have been companion of the grasses, friend and confidant of the trees.

I have roamed the garden walks, the forest glades, garmentless as the day that gave me birth. I have listened to the singing of the brooks, and understood its message.

I have conversed with the birds; heard giddy laughter in the language of the fawns, the foxes, and the mole.

All Nature has been mine to know, and love, and be a part of, and understand. I have lain with my panting body pressed to the bosom of the earth, have felt its cool, green lips answer the passion of my own. All this and more. I have heard the mystic meaning of his pipes; have danced to the bittersweet music of his devising. . . .

But there is a price to pay.

I AM waiting here, now, in the living hall of Anston Hollow manor. There is a price to pay.

An inescapable price. I know that price, and I am waiting to pay it.

I know who he is, now. I know who it was who came through, when Dolphin and I—how many ages ago?—opened the sealed Gateway.

And I know his ways. There is but one payment for those who serve him. A single night of knowledge, and of joy supernal. And then—

There was Syrinx, centuries ago. Yet she, too, supplied the living reeds on which he might blow to lure his next love. There was Belle. Those stemless flowers . . . the fresh, new tone of the pipes the following night.

For the women—immortality in his blinding-sweet piping. For the men who look upon his face—death. Dolphin looked upon him, and died. Centuries ago, another master of Anston Hollow looked upon his face. And the floor bears the stains of—

Stay, is that footsteps? It is. It is. He comes! I can feel his very presence singing in my bones, in my veins, in my blood! The haunting music of his endless piping draws nearer. I tremble, whether with joy or fear I cannot tell. I wait here suppliant; bowed and ready. The clatter of his plunging hooves comes nearer. . . .

The air is intoxicating with the scent of a million blossoming flowers. The green odor of spring, the fleshly allure of full-breasted summer, the parched and dessicate dry sweetness of autumn. Yet through it all, the musty reek of the beast. The coarse, the hairy scent of the goat.

Nearer, now. Nearer. The pipes spin a maddening reel in my brain. My pulses leap, my heart throbs like the jetting fountain; thrills like the curveting mountain brook. The great oaken door swings open. A vast breeze from outside tingles the fibers of my flesh, brings weird horripilations to my naked, crouching body. My head lifts. I look up slowly, fearfully. . . .

It is he! I see the cloven hoofs; the grotesque, black, incredibly thin shanks; the matted thighs. My hands tremble. I can write no longer. He is here! My eyes seek upward to his belly, to his chest, to that impossible, elfin face puckered endlessly over the reeds of madness. . . .

That scrawny beard! Those hands! That horned gargoyle face and dancing eyes. My master—Pan! *Pan!*

He comes! The goat-feet lift. Their hooves are as a steely M—with edges rounded. No, master—no! *A, culpe mea—*

Pan!

AMERICAN CONSULATE, LONDON
April 30th

David Brannock, Esq.,
C/o Authors' Club,
New York, N. Y.
Dear Mr. Brannock:

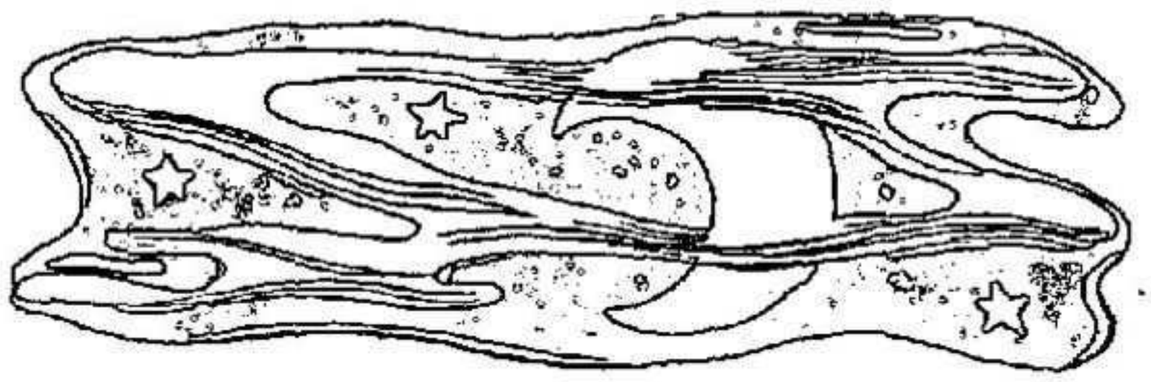
We enclose herewith the notebook of Peter Chandler, whose strange death you asked us to investigate.

After perusal of this abnormal manuscript you will readily agree that Mr. Chandler was, as the inquest decided, hopelessly insane. Police authorities are convinced that it was he who, during seizures of homicidal mania, murdered not only Father Jeremy of Cotswold, as is herein confessed, but also the three servants of his household.

A confusing facet of the case is the fact that Mr. Chandler could not have perpetrated upon his own body the outrages responsible for his demise. Not only was his body horribly crushed and mangled, but scores of tiny imprints in the form of a curved letter "M" were found upon the body and the flooring beneath.

Police, urged by the terrified Cotswold villagers, have closed the "well" which was such an obsession to Chandler's deranged mind. The investigation, too, is closed, but if further information is later available we shall communicate with you.

Yours very truly,
T. R. Elliot,
Under-Secretary, U. S. Consulate.



The Hidden Player

By ROGER S. VREELAND

"The chessboard is the world; the pieces are the phenomena of the universe; the rules of the game are what we call the laws of nature. THE PLAYER ON THE OTHER SIDE IS HIDDEN FROM US."—Thomas Henry Huxley.

Heading by A. R. TILBURNE

The next time you sit before a chessboard, remember . . . your opponent is a mysterious being of the occult

IT WAS late at night. The big house stood in complete darkness—all but one corner of the drawing-room. Here a low lamp lighted the top of a small table, over which were inclined two shadowy faces.

The light was selfish, depriving the surrounding darkness of the smallest ray, seeming even loath to divulge details of the impassive countenances. But the squares of alternate ebony and mother-of-pearl and the pieces and pawns of chess shone clearly. Most of the chessmen were lined on the margins. Evidence of heavy battle.

A single spot of dull red in a nearby hearth was the sole surviving ember of a fire which had been roaring but a few hours earlier. A cold meerschaum and remnants of cigarettes were other evidences of the late hour.

Latent, however, in this quietness, a great battle raged to its climax. A battle of brains. Twenty minutes had passed since the last move was made. Both men were tense. The long silence was not disturbed even when Justin, the younger player, stole a nervous glance at Ivan, his superior, and thought he had never seen Ivan's face look so strained.

At last the venerable Ivan raised his head slowly. "I concede," he said deeply, and did not smile. Anxiety vanished from Justin's eyes, and with an impulsive smile he held up his five spread fingers, inquiringly.

"Yes, five moves," rumbled Ivan. "You have beaten me! The fifth move will mate me!" Only men who really knew the game could calculate like this.

"So, I have beaten my master," Justin breathed humbly. It was a significant victory. Ivan was a great man to Justin. There was an affection between them.

"You surprised me," said Ivan. "You played the most masterly game I have ever known of you." His dark eyes, and silver hair brushed straight back from the temples, and his small gray mustache, suddenly shone in the darkness as he lighted his pipe.

"No," replied the modest Justin, "I think that I was merely more patient than usual. I tried a slight alteration of my old attack, using the knights sooner, and letting you take my queen's bishop."

"You realize, of course," said Ivan, "now that you've beaten me, you are eligible to the Prince Henry Chess Club?"

Justin nodded, and thought he noticed a queer smile settle upon his host's face. But the match went out and he couldn't analyze it.

"There was no one to witness," Justin said.

Ivan frowned. "The members of the Prince Henry Chess Club trust one another," he answered.

SEVERAL days later, and after an hour's journey, the two men arrived at a strange low building at the end of a mountain road. Justin read weather-dimmed words over a rustic doorway: "The Prince Henry Chess Club." His curiosity was high. Often he had heard of this legendary place, chiefly from Ivan, but had hardly dared hope that he ever would be admitted. A servant in uniform bowed almost reverently to Ivan and led them from the carriage. He was a curiously wizened individual, who spoke with French accent. He whispered to Justin, as they went through the door: "Ah; so Monsieur will meet the Prince too!"

Justin resented the liberty, but was mystified by a chuckle from Ivan. Then, as the queer servant took the newcomer's coat, he added: *"Monsieur! Be sure to guard your queen!"*

"Is your man interested in chess too?" asked the puzzled Justin.

Ivan appeared surprised. "Georges? Oh, yes. I should judge he does moderately well—from his conversation, that is. We've never played."

They were met at the inner door by a Mr. Scott who ushered them into a large low-ceilinged room. Massive beams—paneled walls—an expensive room. Smoking stands, book tables, and huge comfortable chairs and lounges were scattered informally. Fires burned in three hearths. Game trophies cluttered the mantels. There was warmth and cordial spirit. Twenty or more men, most of them passed sixty, were at leisure. The novice was introduced, served wine, made the object of sustained hospitality. Justin saw little more of Ivan—until later, in the chess room.

A clock struck nine and Mr. Scott raised his hand for silence. He made a brief speech of welcome for Justin, who, he mentioned, was the first new member to join the club in over a year. He was made eligible, Scott told the members, by defeating Ivan. Several men murmured surprise.

"And now, Justin," he went on, addressing the initiative, "we are all going to the chessroom. To prepare you, you will find this an unusual place. In that room no two of us have ever played together—*yet we all go in there and play chess!*"

Most of the men had lighted tobacco, and all eyes were keen upon Justin.

"Here is the explanation," continued Mr. Scott. "We have in our service a most distinguished, indeed, a most extraordinary master of chess. He is known only as Prince Henry. He is what you might call a mystery. His identity is unknown. The only three members who once knew who he was are now deceased. None of us has ever seen him, yet every member has played many games with him."

Faces were solemn as the speaker divulged the secrets of the club to the new member.

"Prince Henry, our common opponent, plays every member simultaneously. In fact—" He paused to consider his words. "In fact, Mr. Addison, we will not deceive you. *Prince Henry always wins!*"

Justin was speechless. The men filed into the room. The moment Justin found himself within it, he became steeped with an atmosphere he couldn't identify. It was a small room with simple but unconventional furnishings. The sides were covered with maroon drapes. On two sides, facing the drapes, were rows of heavy walnut chairs. A shaded lamp hung over each one. Between the chairs and drapes stretched a long mahogany panel, horizontal, bearing chees boards.

"Let us sit next to each other," said Ivan to Justin. "It will make you feel more at ease."

A STRANGE quietness came over all the men as they took their seats. Chess men were distributed, each player selecting his color. Ivan whispered to Justin: "There is a corridor behind the drapes. Prince Henry is back there." He pointed to slits in the curtain, one in front of each player, through which the Prince would extend his arm to make his moves. "A little higher," continued Ivan, "is a small aperture through which he studies your board."

"Astounding!" exclaimed Justin under his breath. "Are you sure this is not an initiation trick? How can I believe that one man is able to play us all—all at one time? It's beyond reason to suppose that he could defeat us all!" He reflected on the servant's behavior, and cast a skeptical look around the room.

Ivan smiled. "I'm glad that your mind is in good working order," he replied. "It will need to be. Now, have patience, and don't become nervous."

All the members now were seated, back to back, heads bowed over their set-up boards. Justin was about to whisper a reply to his friend, but the weight of the hushed room forestalled him.

Suddenly a black object appeared over Ivan's board. Justin started as he beheld a human arm covered with a tight-fitting

sleeve and glove of black satin—extending from the slit in the drape.

Ivan had black pieces, so it was therefore Prince Henry's first move (whites always moving first). The gloved fingers advanced the king's pawn two. Ivan came to attention.

Justin, with white pieces, hurriedly made his conventional first pawn move. The arm shot out and moved a black one. All along the line, silently, the seemingly bodiless arm moved in and back from the slits in the curtain. Its action were quick and certain.

The game was on.

The next day Justin dined at Ivan's mansion. The younger man had a great deal to say.

He was brimming with enthusiasm. "At first I thought I was going to hold the upper hand," he said. "I advanced both my knights and even castled before he seemed to have done anything worthwhile. Then he closed in from nowhere. All my efforts of resistance were futile. I had no power whatever. It was utterly weird. He seemed to divine every motive I could invent, and proceeded in his own way."

Ivan smiled patiently. "He was merely toying with you," he said.

"Without seeing this myself, I'd have declared it impossible." Justin's eyes grew wider as his admiration of Prince Henry took deeper hold of him. "Good Lord—he is more than a genius—he is perfection—perfection of unerring judgment, clairvoyant penetration of others' minds. His mind must be an omnibus of remembrance!"

This also revived Ivan's flame of enthusiasm. In him it had developed into a profound reverence. "Prince Henry is without question," he agreed, "the greatest chess player who has ever lived."

"I should very much like to see him."

Ivan's face grew strange, and he looked down at his plate. "So would I," he said. "So would all the others."

"He must have some very good reason for remaining so mysterious."

"Yes, there must be *some* reason. But no one has ever discovered what it is. He travels unseen, and the members have been pledged for years never to seek his identity. You will sign the pledge too. It is a matter of great honor among us. But the Prince is paid well for his service."

"But, it is bound to become known some day, who he is. Don't you think so?"

"Yes," pondered Ivan. "I suppose—some day. Perhaps he is some one we all would know. I've wondered if he is not really of royalty; a prince who for political reasons dares not reveal himself."

MONTHS passed, and Justin became one of the most devoted members of the Prince Henry Chess Club. But there was always that insatiable curiosity concerning the Prince. They longed to hear his voice. If they could but meet face to face this super chess player, their god. They worshiped him.

Whence did he come? Where did he go? Why did he demand such secrecy? These and others were the questions they pondered, and as time passed he grew more exalted to them.

Justin was right. Some day the reason for the Prince's secrecy would become known. When it did, the truth so confounded the members of the Prince Henry Chess Club that they never recovered.

The catastrophe—for such it was—occurred four years after Justin joined the club. The mystery was cleared; the club was ended.

The fact was that Prince Henry was beaten. He was beaten by Justin. Early one morning Justin had journeyed to a nearby city on personal business. Late that afternoon he was in an old part of the city, making his way toward the stable where he had left his horse and carriage. It was a gloomy street of dark stone buildings,

straight square buildings, coldly ornate with weathered cornices and gargoyles—buildings that had outlived their fine purpose and now served miscellaneous, grimy, and mundane enterprises.

One of these, which Justin was about to pass, was a morgue. The carriage and team in front of it was vaguely familiar; a long, heavy, and dark carriage—but not a hearse.

The driver was holding the reins as though impatient to start.

Suddenly, as Justin was about to pass in front of the steps, the morgue doors were opened, and two men emerged carrying a rather small coffin. Justin paused to let them pass. They placed it in the carriage, closed the door, and signaled to the driver to start.

At that moment Justin's eye happened to meet the driver's—and he recognized the wizened creature—none other than Georges, the servant of the Chess Club. Justin called a friendly hello, and then stared in perplexity. Although Georges had looked directly at him, he showed no sign of recognition—only gave his horses an emphatic lash and started off abruptly over the cobblestones.

Moments later Justin was in his own carriage making his way out of the city. He drove briskly, for he had an appointment that night—a meeting at the Prince Henry Chess Club. On the outskirts of the city he unintentionally overtook the dark carriage driven by Georges, and in passing he turned to look at it and at the peculiar little man. Georges sat straight—never turned his head.

AN HOUR later, well into the country, the mystified chess player came into trouble. One of the wheels of his carriage had struck a deep rut and was wrenched off balance. It wobbled dangerously and threatened to be torn from the axle. But Justin drove on precariously to the next village, where he found a wheelwright who repaired it in a half hour's time.

As he paid the fee, Justin asked: "Do you know where the Prince Henry Chess Club is?"

The man nodded.

"I'm going there, and I'm late," said Justin. "Can you by any chance tell me of some shorter route than the main road?"

"That I can," replied the wheelwright. "But it's a hazardous way, and to be honest I don't recommend it. Three miles from here, at the foot of the mountain, a road branches off to the left. If you take it you'll find that it climbs up the mountain from the back side, and that's the steep side. It will save you a few miles and some time, but the road is steep and rocky and seldom used. You can try it if you like, but mind I'm not recommending it."

Justin took the road, and found that the old wheelwright hadn't exaggerated. His light carriage was not made for such stony, tortuous, and steep going, and his horse was weary long before the mountain was half climbed. Finally he reached the cabin of a woodsman, and he stopped to give his horse a drink and a rest. It was already dusk.

The mountaineer was a bewhiskered, uncouth old soul, but he was polite enough to the traveler. He called to his mate: "Come on out—it ain't him after all!" And a small fattish woman hobbled out as though glad to greet a friendly stranger.

"We thought you was *him*," said the woodsman, without modifying the emphasized pronoun. "It ain't often anybody else comes this way. And *he's* a bad omen. We don't never come out when *he* goes by."

Justin didn't have time to ask for explanations, for a sound suddenly broke through the woods below them; the sound of groaning wheels, the shrill squeaks of agonized springs, and the noise of iron against stone, of digging hoofs.

"Here he comes now! In the name of all the saints—here he comes!" the old man called hoarsely, ar. ' the woman, her face sobering, turned back to the cabin. "You'd better come inside with us," the woodsman invited. *"It's* an evil thing. I don't want to see another good man go to the devil! Come on!"

"Wait!" said Justin. "What is there to be afraid of?"

"He comes this way every fortnight. He's been coming for years and years. A dozen years ago my nephew was helping here with the wood. He stopped them and looked into the back of the carriage—and —whatever it was he saw—it made him scream as though he'd seen the devil—and he ran off yelling into the woods and never came back. But come on, now, stranger. See! Here he comes around the bend. If you're set on staying outside here, you'll have to stay alone." With that the old woodsman hurried into his cabin to join his wife.

But Justin remained by the road while his horse lapped more water from the spring.

The noisy coach, drawn by a team, hove into closer sight, the horses straining as though not only to climb but to hurry. Justin stepped back to view it better. It was a long, dark, and heavy carriage. In fact, it was the one he had seen leave the morgue in the city, driven by Georges!

IT CLATTERED past him, the shriveled, stoic Georges holding the reins high, and looking neither to right nor to left.

Soon Justin took to the road again. It was still a long ride, and he arrived at the club just in time for the gathering of chess players. Near the rear of the building he saw the carriage Georges had driven. *He realized now that this was where he had seen it before.*

When he joined his colleagues his head was in a whirl of perplexity. But he said nothing. Nor little did he realize that the events of the day were leading toward a climax.

The games were started as usual. But—as was said—the fact was that Prince Henry was beaten—by Justin. The scene would never die in the memory of any man present that night. For some reason Mr. Scott wasn't there. Justin, however, has verified the details. He had won the game fairly. The Prince was guilty of a technical error. Early in the game Justin had taken his unseen opponent's queen. He had used good strategy and clever play. Then a situation arose which he had seen months before in a similar game. It had been too late to attempt the maneuver at that time.

Even so, Justin failed to realize the significance of the move, the overwhelming advantage it gave him. He noticed that from then on the black arm, reaching from its slit in the curtain, acted queerly. The Prince knew, Justin later realized, that he had made a serious blunder, and that it would be impossible for him to take the game if Justin maintained his usual alertness.

The great moment lived in death-like silence before the shattering crash. When Justin checkmated the Prince he himself was so astounded that he gazed at the situation for several moments before uttering a sound.

He arose shaking with excitement.

"Men!" Justin exploded. *"I have won!"* His voice echoed briefly, and the members turned black faces to him.

Again silence, and the air seemed thick and weighted. Coldness and paralysis swept over each man. Something more than the uttered fact was penetrating them. It was like being in the presence of something harrowingly supernatural.

A sound, then. It came from behind the curtain. Not pleasant. Not human. Rasping respiration like the panting of a jungle beast. Scuffling—commotion. The draperies

parted, and a bulging form pushed itself awkwardly into the center of the room.

The members of the Prince Henry Chess Club jumped to their feet and stood frozen. Chairs fell over. Chess men clattered to the floor. This noise, then again silence—as if a fine invisible net had dropped from the ceiling to strangle every person.

Now the members of the Prince Henry Chess Club beheld for the first time the person of Prince Henry himself! Some groaned. Some closed their eyes. Those near the door staggered out. For that which they saw was a deformity, monstrosity.

The ugly figure squatted in the middle of the floor and turned its repulsive head—wrenched it in a semi-circle. The red wrinkled skin of its short neck formed nasty folds. Its hideous, gargoyle expression met every face, with red gelatinous eyes bulging from a frightfully misshapen skull, drastically out of proportion to the rest of its body. The mouth, distorted and toothless, grimaced and snarled. It seemed wholly unpossessed of intelligent vocal ability.

The thing was imbecile, squalid, evil. A few filthy strands of hair exempted its shiny moist pate from utter baldness. The long black covered arms—now horribly familiar—dangled awkwardly. And, this inhuman object was plainly fraught with a forbidding emotion.

Transfixed with horror, the chess players stood pale and dumb while an instinctive loathing crept up their spines. What a crushing and humiliating anti-climax to their noble and refined career in the art of chess!

HERE, at last, was their master—an abnormality—a freak. While nature had, perhaps supplied a full share of energy in the making of this creature, she had been careless in the matter of proportions. The thing had an uncanny intelligence, but this intelligence was squeezed into a single narrow furrow. That proportion of the brain in charge of the faculties of logic, calculation, and memory, as applied to chess, was developed to the extreme.

Suddenly Justin's own words of four years ago echoed mockingly in his ears: "Good lord! He is more than a genius—he is perfection!"

Then another figure appeared in the room. It was Georges. The thin, pallid man, usually humble, strode in with imperial wrath; he glared at the now cringing men and then at the repugnant prince—who cowered at the sight of him. There was something spectral about the wizened man. He seemed to have grown in stature, and he inspired a terrorizing awe. He pulled aside a curtain, and pointed to a long black object on the floor. Justin beheld the coffin he had seen carried from the morgue that afternoon.

"Back into your box!" he shouted to the heavily breathing thing. "Bungling filth! Back into it—and stay in it. Your days are over! You're of no further use to me!"

It scuffled toward the coffin, then as a beast at bay it turned, faced its master and the men whose master he had been.

A change was taking place within the powerful mind of the monster. The lurking thought was beyond the ken of every normal man there, save Georges. Or *was he* normal?

At any rate the eyes of the gruesome creature rose slowly and met those of Georges—and a gurgle caught in the throat of the carriage driver. A meaningful revelation had struck him. The men saw defiance kindling in the bulbous eyes of the chess wizard. They saw it grow to something burning and terrible. Georges, again a shrunken and withered man, was white and still.

Justin and the others were riveted

where they stood. The monster's eyes grew larger, seemed to take in the whole room, and threw the occupants into a state of ecstatic delirium. A whirling motion possessed everything until the monster's eyes became the vortex of a spinning blur. He was hurling an uncanny power over them, calling desperately upon some great reserve of his mind, until all virtually were bound in his spell. Then a powerful, transitory function began. No one dared guess what weird, metaphysical secret was being invoked.

Gray blankness closed about them, and they lost all sense of time and place though they retained their consciousness. The monster's eyes had faded from sight. The single definite sense of which they were aware, was speed—terrific speed, like an interminable falling—yet without any "down" about it.

AT LAST stillness came, mists parted, and they saw rocks and cliffs, bright and russet in the sun. Their eyes followed upward. Mountain peaks towered into the blue. They gazed in wonderment, grouped just as they were in the chess room.

Hot breezes struck their faces in this narrow desert valley. Barren ravines cut jaggedly through the rocky foothills and enormous canyons rose between the mountain towers, spreading into the gleaming deltas of crystal azure. Through a gap at the distant foot of the valley and far beyond they saw white domes and turrets of a city.

Justin's astonishment was so great that it was several moments before he thought of Prince Henry. Then the monstrosity's motion caused them all to turn. There he was hobbling off with Georges at his side. Little whirlwinds of dust danced fantastically on the sand. The air was vibrant with a distant monotone. Then from the black mouth of a ravine a fast-moving object appeared. It sped toward them and took the form of a chariot drawn by small horses. It raced toward the monster and Georges, who had by now advanced several hundred feet from them, and halted in a great cloud of sand.

A lean figure leapt from the chariot. He wore a tall peaked cap, a tunic reaching to his knees, and shoes with upturned ends. He was a fierce looking individual, with receding forehead, large nose, marked-cheekbones, and protruding upper jaw.

He snatched the monster and sprang with him back into the chariot, while Georges boarded the ornate two-wheeled vehicle voluntarily. The charioteer stared momentarily at the men, then sped off toward the city.

Justin and his companions had no time to find their voices, hardly enough to move, when the mists began closing about them once more. Again the sensation of speed, the whirling blur, and a space of timeless ecstasy. Abruptly, they were back in the chess room. They looked at one another, stupefied, and about the room. Prince Henry and Georges were gone.

Ivan was the first to speak:

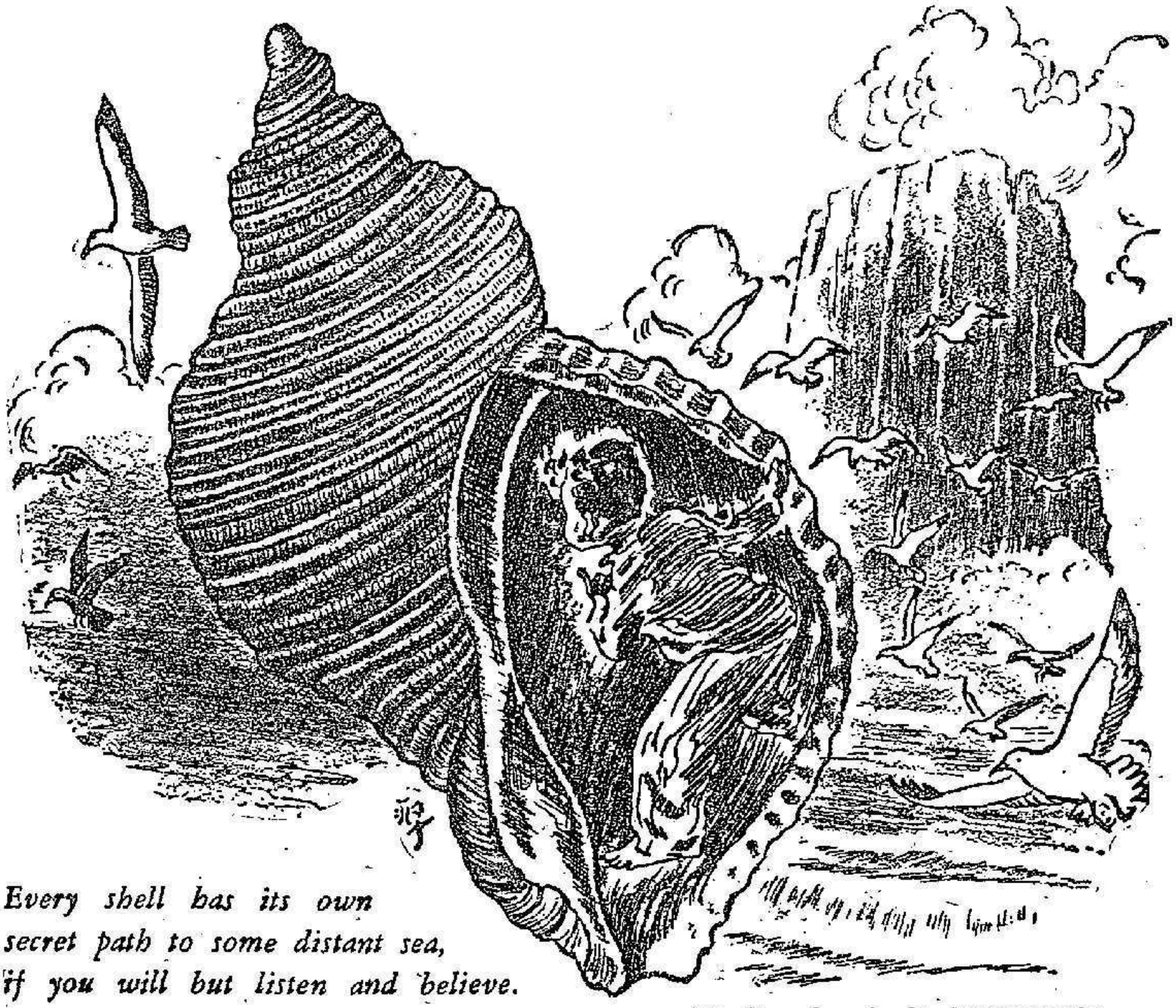
"My friends, I think our fears may be over. I am piecing together some bits of knowledge I have acquired on the occult, some of metaphysics, and on the history of chess—one moment."

He moved toward the coffin and peered into it. Finally he reached into a corner and withdrew an object about four inches long. It was of yellowish ivory.

"As I thought," he said, examining it closely. "This is a Persian chess queen. The head rises from a pulpit of acanthus-leaf design. And I assure you it is at least 2,000 years old." He drew a breath. "Now do you understand? It was Prince Henry's talisman. They should have taken it with them. It must be destroyed by fire as soon as possible!"

The Sea Shell

By RAY BRADBURY



Every shell has its own
secret path to some distant sea,
if you will but listen and believe.

Heading by A. R. TILBURNE

HE WANTED to get out and run, bounding over hedges, kicking tin cans down the alley, shouting at all the windows for the gang to come and play. The sun was up and the day was bright, and here he was swaddled with bed clothes, sweating and scowling, and not liking it at all.

Johnny Bishop sat up in bed, sniffling. Orange juice, cough medicine and the perfume of his mother, lately gone from the room, hung in a shaft of sunlight that struck down to heat his toes. The entire lower half of the patch-work quilt was a circus banner of red, green, purple and blue. It practically yelled color into his eyes. Johnny fidgeted.

"I wanna go out," he complained softly. "Darn it. Darn it."

A fly buzzed, bumping again and again at the window pane with a dry staccato of its transparent wings.

Johnny looked at it, understanding how it wanted out, too.

He coughed a few times and decided that it was not the cough of a decrepit old man, but a youngster of eleven years who, next week this time, would be loose again

to filch apples from the orchard trees or bean teacher with spit-balls.

He heard the trot of crisp footsteps in the freshly polished hall, the door opened, and mother was there. "Young man," she said, "what are you doing sitting up in bed? Lie down."

"I feel better already. Honest."

"The doctor said two more days."

"Two!" Consternation was the order of the moment. "Do I hafta be sick that long?"

Mom laughed. "Well—not *sick*. But in bed, anyway." She spanked his left cheek very lightly. "Want some more orange juice?"

"With or without medicine?"

"Medicine?"

"I know you. You put medicine in my orange juice so I can't taste it. But I taste it anyway."

"This time—no medicine."

"What's that in your hand?"

"Oh, this?" Mother held out a round, spiraled gleaming object. Johnny took it. It was hard and shiny and—pretty. "Doctor Hull dropped by a few minutes ago and left it. He thought you might have fun with it."

JOHNNY looked palely dubious. His small hands brushed the slick surface. "How can I have fun with it? I don't even know what it is!"

Mother's smile was better than sunshine. "It's a shell from the sea, Johnny. Doctor Hull picked it up on the Pacific shore last year when he was out there."

"Hey, that's all right. What kind of shell is it?"

"Oh, I don't know. Some form of sea life probably lived in it once, a long time ago."

Johnny's brows went up. "Lived in this? Made it a home?"

"Yes."

"Aw—really?"

She adjusted it in his hand. "If you don't believe me, listen for yourself, young man. Put this end—here—against your ear."

"Like this?" He raised the shell to his small pink ear and pressed it tight. "Now, what do I do?"

Mother smiled. "Now, if you're very quiet, and listen closely, you'll hear something very, very familiar."

Johnny listened. His ear opened imperceptibly like a small flower opening, waiting.

A titanic wave came in on a rocky shore and smashed itself down.

"The sea!" cried Johnny Bishop. "Oh, Mom! The ocean! The waves! The sea!"

Wave after wave came in on that distant, craggy shore. Johnny closed his eyes tight black and a smile folded his small face exactly in half. Wave after pounding wave roared in his small pinkly alert ear.

"Yes, Johnny," said mother. "The sea."

IT WAS late afternoon. Johnny lay back on his pillow, cradling the sea shell in his small hands, smiling, and looking out the large window just to the right side of the bed. He had a good view of the vacant lot across the street. The kids were scuddling around over there like a cluster of indignant beetles, each one complaining, "Aw, I shot you dead first! Now, I got *you* first! Aw, you don't play fair! I won't play unless *I* can be Captain!"

Their voices seemed so far away, lazy, drifting on a tide of sun. The sunlight was just like deep yellow, lambent water, lapping at the summer, full tide. Slow, languorous, warm, lazy. The whole world was over its head in that tide and everything was slowed down. The clock ticked slower. The street car came down the avenue in warm metal slow motion. It was almost like seeing a motion film that is losing speed and noise. Everything was softer. Nothing seemed to count as much.

He wanted to get out and play, badly. He kept watching the kids climbing the fences, playing soft ball, roller skating in the warm languor. His head felt heavy, heavy, heavy. His eyelids were window sashes pulling down, down. The sea shell lay against his ear. He pressed it close.

Pounding, drumming, waves broke on a shore. A yellow sand shore. And when the waves went back out they left foam, like the suds of bear, on the sand. The suds broke and vanished, like dreams. And more waves came with more foam. And the sand crabs tumbled, salt-wet, scuttling brown, in the ripples. Cool green water pounding cold on the sand. The very sound of it conjured up visions; the ocean breeze soothed Johnny Bishop's small body. Suddenly the hot afternoon was no longer hot and depressing. The clock started ticking faster. The street cars clanged metal quickly. The slowness of the summer world was spanked to crisp life by the pound-pound of waves on an unseen and brilliant beach.

This sea shell would be a valuable thing in the days to come. Whenever the afternoons stretched long and tiresome, he would press it around the lobe and rim of his ear and vacation on a wind-blown peninsular far, far off.

Four thirty, said the clock. Time for medicine, said mother's exact trot in the gleaming hall.

She offered the medicine in a silver spoon. It tasted like, unfortunately—medicine. Johnny made a special kind of bitter face. Then when the taste was modified by a drink of refrigerated milk he looked up at the nice soft white face of mom and said, "Can we go to the seashore some day, huh?"

"I think we can. Maybe the Fourth of July, if your father gets his two weeks then. We can drive to the coast in two days, stay a week, and come back."

Johnny settled himself, his eyes funny. "I've never really seen the ocean, except

in movies. It smells different and looks different than Fox Lake, I bet. It's bigger, and a heck of a lot better. Gosh, I wish I could go now."

"It won't be long. You children are so impatient."

"I can't help it."

MOTHER sat down on the bed and held his hand. The things she said he couldn't understand fully, but some of them made sense. "If I had to write a philosophy of children, I guess I'd title it impatience. Impatience with everything in life. You must have things—*right now*—or else. Tomorrow's so far away, and yesterday is nothing. You're a tribe of potential Omar Khayyam's, that's what. When you're older, you'll understand that waiting, planning, being patient, are attributes of maturity; that is, of being grown up."

"I don't wanna be patient. I don't like being in bed. I want to go to the sea shore."

"And last week it was a catcher's mitt you wanted—*right now*. Please, pretty please, you said. Oh, gosh, Mom, it's elegant. It's the last one at the store."

Mom was very strange, all right. She talked some more:

"I remember, I saw a doll once when I was a girl. I told my mother about it, said it was the last one for sale. I said I was afraid it would be sold before I could get it. The truth of the matter is there were a dozen others just like it. I couldn't wait. I was impatient, too."

Johnny shifted on the bed. His eyes widened and got full of blue light. "But, Mom, I don't want to wait. If I wait too long, I'll be grown up, and then it won't be any fun."

That silenced mother. She just sort of sat there, her hands tightened, her eyes got all wet after a while, because she was thinking, maybe, to herself. She closed her eyes, opened them again, and said, "Sometimes—I think children know more about

living than we do. Sometimes I think you're—right. But I don't dare tell you. It isn't according to the rules—"

"What rules, Mom?"

"Civilization's. Enjoy yourself, while you are young. Enjoy yourself, Johnny." She said it strong, and funny-like.

Johnny put the shell to his ear. "Mom. Know what I'd like to do? I'd like to be at the seashore right now, running toward the water, holding my nose and yelling, 'Last one in is a double-darned monkey!' " Johnny laughed.

The phone rang downstairs. Mother walked to answer it.

Johnny lay there, quietly, listening.

TWO more days. Johnny tilted his head against the shell and sighed. Two more whole days. It was dark in his room. Stars were caught in the square glass corrals of the big window. A wind moved the trees. Roller skates rotated, scraping, on the cement sidewalks below.

Johnny closed his eyes. Downstairs, silverware was being clattered at the dinner table. Mom and Pop were eating. He heard Pop laughing his deep laughter.

The waves still came in, over and over, on the shore inside the sea shell. And—something else.

"Down where the waves lift, down where the waves play, down where the gulls swoop low on a summer's day—"

"Huh?" Johnny listened. His body stiffened. He blinked his eyes.

Softly, way off:

"Stark ocean sky, sunlight on waves. Yo ho, heave ho, heave ho, my braves—"

It sounded like a hundred voices singing to the creak of oar-locks.

"Come down to the sea in ships—"

And then another voice, all by itself, soft against the sound of waves and ocean wind. "Come down to the sea, the contortionist sea, where the great tides wrestle and swell. Come down to the salt in the glittering brine, on a trail that you'll soon know well—"

Johnny pulled the shell from his head, stared at it.

"Do you want to come down to the sea, my lad, do you want to come down to the sea? Well, take me by the hands, my lad, just take me by the hand, my lad, and come along with me!"

Trembling, Johnny clamped the shell to his ear again, sat up in bed, breathing fast. His small heart leaped and hit the wall of his chest.

Waves pounded, crashing on a distant shore.

"Have you ever seen a fine conch-shell, shaped and shined like a pearl corkscrew? It starts out big and it ends up small, seemingly ending with nothing at all, but, aye lad, it ends where the sea-cliffs fall; where the sea-cliffs fall to the blue!"

Johnny's fingers tightened on the circular marks of the shell. That was right. It went around and around and around until you couldn't see it going around any more.

Johnny's lips tightened. What was it Mother had said? Children. The—the philosophy—what a big word! of children! Impatience. Impatience! Yes, yes, he was impatient! Why not? His free hand clenched into a tiny hard white fist, pounding against the quilted covers.

"Johnny!"

Johnny yanked the shell from his ear, hid it quickly under the sheets. Father was coming down the hall from the stairs.

"Hi there, son."

"Hi, Dad!"

Mother and father were fast asleep. It was long after midnight. Very softly Johnny extracted the precious shell from under the covers and raised it to his ear.

Yes. The waves were still there. And far off, the creening of oar-locks, the snap of wind in the stomach of a mainsail, the singing chant of boatmen faintly drifting on a salt sea wind.

He held the shell closer and yet closer.

MOTHER'S footsteps came along the hall. She turned in at Johnny's room. "Good morning, son! Wake yet?"

The bed was empty. There was nothing but sunlight and silence in the room. Sunlight lay abed, like a bright patient with its brilliant head on the pillow. The quilt, a red-blue circus banner, was thrown back. The bed was wrinkled like the face of a pale old man, and it was very empty.

Mother looked at it and scowled and stamped her crisp heel. "Darn that little scamp!" she cried, to nobody. "Gone out to play with those neighbor ruffians, sure as the day I was born! Wait'll I catch him, I'll—" She stopped and smiled. "I'll love the little scamp to death. Children are so—impatient."

Walking to the bedside she began brushing, adjusted the quilt into place when her knuckles rapped against a lump in the sheet. Reaching under the quilt she brought forth a shining object into the sun.

She smiled. It was the sea-shell.

She grasped it, and, just for fun, lifted it to her ear. Her eyes widened. Her jaw dropped.

The room whirled around in a bright swaying merry-go-round of bannered quilts and glassed run.

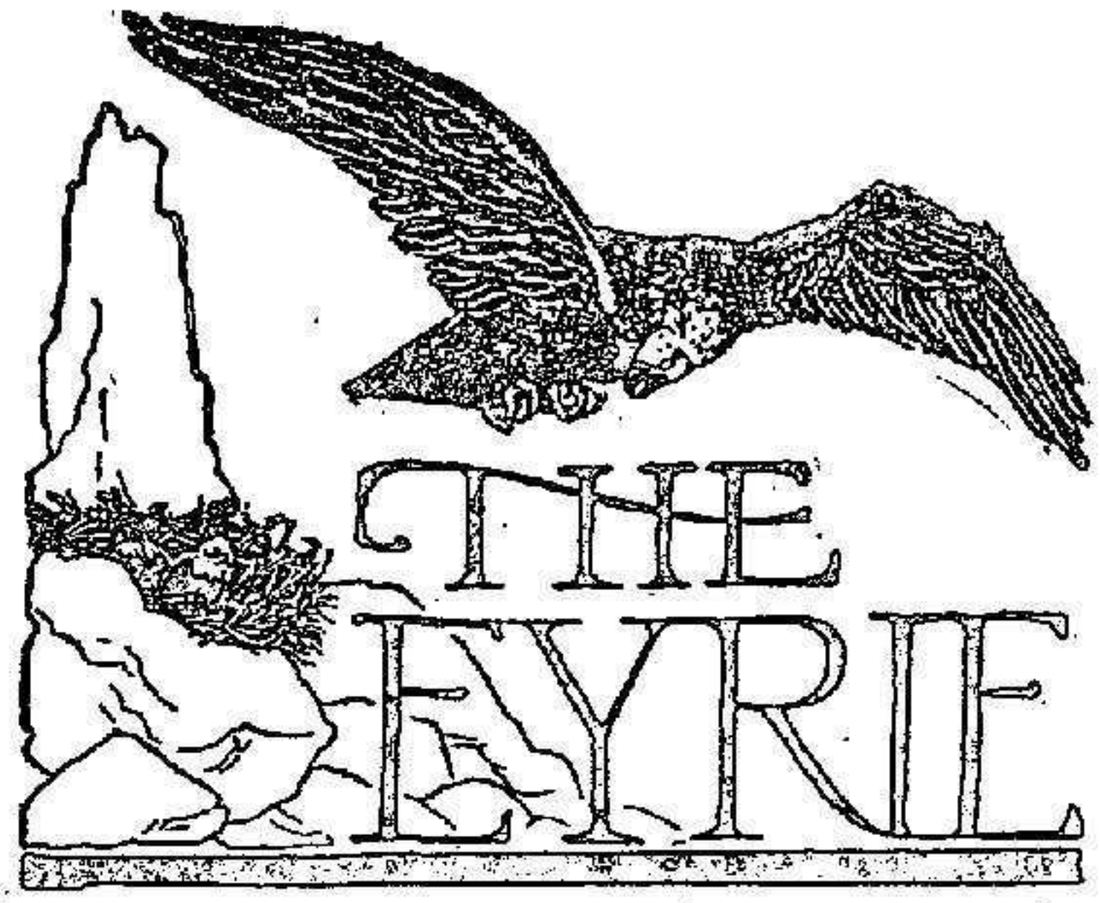
The sea-shell roared in her ear.

Waves thundered on a distant shore. Waves foamed cool on a far off beach.

Then the sound of small feet crunching swiftly in the sand. A high young voice yelling:

"Hi! Come on, you guys! Last one in is a double-darned monkey!"

And the sound of a small body diving, splashing, into those waves. . . .



Bond and Familiar

NELSON BOND, author of some of our best liked WEIRD TALES yarns over the past three years, sends us these notes on himself.

Despite the fact that it is written in the third person, we have good reason to believe that Mr. Bond actually wrote the following, perhaps with the aid of the small, green familiar identified below:

Nelson Bond, whose *Master of Cotswold* in this issue is anything *but* brightly amusing, is, nevertheless, better known to readers of WEIRD TALES and other magazines for his typical light, whimsical fantasies.

Among the first—if not *the* first—to leaven the supernatural tale with comedy, his tales have blazed a new and interesting side-trail along the fantasy pathway.

He lives in Roanoke, Va., with his wife, year-and-a-half-old son, Lynn Nelson, a disdainful Afghan hound, Ch. Barberryhill Phillip, and a small green familiar named Jorkins who sneers at his literary efforts. A roamer by nature, he is tied to his native heath for the duration by travel restrictions, but assures us that with the collapse of Totalitarianism he is (like the notorious "Monk from Siberia") going to "bust from his cell with a hell of a yell"—and go fishing in Newfoundland with his friend and agent, Captain Joe Shaw.

What Shaw thinks of this plan is not known, as dire things have been known to happen to unhappy souls who vacation with writer Bond.

Nelson Bond.

Long Time

THOUGH his stories have been missing from this magazine for some time, Frank Belknap Long is no newcomer to WEIRD TALES. Nearly twenty years ago Mr. Long sold his first story to WEIRD TALES. And since then there have been many of his yarns in these pages. We hereby accuse Mr. Long of being a veteran "weird tales" writer . . . at least in years of experience, if not in age.

Says Long:

Several months ago Mr. Seabury Quinn brought forcibly to my attention something I've been trying to forget—the realization that my first story was published nearly a quarter of a century ago. Mr. Quinn achieved this feat of gruesome exhumation simply by mentioning the date of *his* first WEIRD TALES story in an Eyrie letter.

My mind instantly went back across wide wastes of time, and recalled that I'd also had a story in one of those early issues. Now the fact that my first published tale appeared in W. T. and was adorned with a cover illustration by Brosnatch (perhaps the most brilliant of the magazine's initial crop of artists) caused me no grief. Indeed, I've always harked back to it as a glowing milestone in my writing career, for I was younger than you'd suspect when I wrote it, and the editorial policy of WEIRD TALES was as mature and discriminating in those days as it is now.

It was simply the date of publication which chilled me, because it strengthened my conviction that I was past the age when I could hope to write stories the facile way—depending on sheer youthful exuberance to carry me over the quagmires which keep opening out in the path of every writer, but can usually be straddled in one terrific leap when you're very young, and write in a fine frenzy.

At forty you become a more conscientious craftsman, and your stories are probably better after you've whipped them into a shape that satisfies your mature judgment. But the wear and tear is greater, and I've always envied certain brilliant young writers of my acquaintance their almost continuous ability to turn out stuff as rich in imagery as the best work of the old-timers, and—often stories quite as good structurally too.

Robert Bloch is one such writer (I've never met him personally, but we were both mem-

bers of the Lovecraft circle) and I could mention a dozen others. What I'm really trying to say is that there has been no falling off in quality in WEIRD TALES since its inception, and that I'm proud to return to its pages and can't kid myself that I'm not facing the stiffest kind of competition.

As for biographical data—there isn't as much of it as there should be because I've done all my strategic maneuvering for a variety of markets in New York City for the past twenty years, and have remained a free-lance writer every foot of the way. Imagine I've contributed about 400 adventure, detective, supernatural horror and science fiction stories to about fifty magazines in the United States and Canada, and occasional articles and verse.

As for ancestry—old New England stock, including a notorious tinsmith and counterfeiter and the first man to fight a duel on the American continent. My paternal grandfather, a building contractor, erected the pedestal of the Statue of Liberty in 1883, and was the statue's superintendent until it was taken over by the government several years later. I still have the flag which was draped around Miss Liberty's arm at the time of the unveiling, and have a dim recollection of being carried up into the torch to look out over New York Harbor at the age of three.

I'm unmarried, look quite a bit younger than my years (my gray hairs seem to be turning yellow) and my interests range down through anthropology and natural history to a dozen (to me) less interesting sciences, and an entirely scholarly interest in the Fine Art of Murder, as defined and set forth in the pages of Roughhead, Pearson and Joseph Shearing. *Frank Belknap Long.*

WEIRD TALES CLUB

9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y.

WRITE TO MARTIN WARE, SECRETARY

o This is your club — a medium to help you get together with other fantasy and science-fiction fans. Readers wanted it — they wrote in telling us how much they would enjoy meeting others of similar tastes.

o 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.

o 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.)

NEW MEMBERS

Andrew MacDonald, 27 Niagara St., Hamilton, Ont., Canada.
LeRoy Crue, 721 West Sixth St., Chester, Pa.
William Himes, Route No. 3, Mechanicsburg, Pa.
Elizabeth J. Trainor, 351 Park Ave., Elkhart, Ind.
Ruth E. Arnott, Brandywine Sanatorium, Marshallton, Del.
Marguerite Short, 1460 N. Felton St., Philadelphia, Pa.
Marvin Henry, 1812 N. Camac, Philadelphia, Pa.
Ronald P. Maddox, 87 Utica St., Hamilton, N. Y.
Charles Daniel, 214 Oak St., New Glasgow, N. S., Can.
Bruno Fatini, 1252 Stanley St., New Britain, Conn.
S. Schmoltz, Avon, S. Dak.
Philip Gowen, Knobel, Ark.
Ellen Bowers, 1053 Jackson Ave., Bronx, N. Y.
Adella Tooley, R. R. No. 2, Claremore, Okla.
Buddy Locke, 1411 Devon Road, Winter Park, Fla.
Phil Bronson, 1710 Arizona Ave., Santa Monica, Calif.
Bert A. Slater, Box 28, Payson, Ariz.
Norman L. Barrett, 467 Bonaventure St., Three Rivers, Que., Can.

READERS' VOTE

BON VOYAGE, MICHELE	THE GOLDEN GOBLINS
DIMENSIONAL DOORS	HOUSE OF HATE
THE MASTER OF COTSWOLD	HE CAME AT DUSK
	THE HIDDEN PLAYER

THE SEA SHELL

Here's a list of eight stories in this issue. Won't you let us know which three you consider the best? Just place the numbers: 1, 2, and 3 respectively against your three favorite tales — then clip it out and mail it in to us.

WEIRD TALES
9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York City 20, N. Y.

Mrs. B. Chiasson, P. O. Box 61, Liverpool, N. S., Can.
Arland Hicks, Box 224, Satanta, Kans.
R. C. Smale, Box 15, Pt. Stanley, Ont., Can.
Joseph Halperin, 5125 N. St. Louis Ave., Chicago, Ill.
W. Mack Hatten, Houston St. Ext., Trailer 198, Mobile, Ala.
Bob Schreiber, 340 Northland Ave., Buffalo, N. Y.
Ernie Crooks, 155 Springdale Blvd., Toronto, Ont., Can.
J. W. Bradley, Route 2, Box 169A, Lebanon, Ore.
Norman Arnew, Tilbury, Ont., Can.
Glenn Martin, R. F. D., Rt. 2, Robinson, Kans.
Lloyd Alpaugh, Jr., R. F. D. No. 4, Somerville, N. J.
John Linker, 13 University Circle, University, Va.
Keats Williamson, c/o S.S. *Sloga*, Dominion Coal Co., Sydney, N. S., Can.
Velna D. Anderson, 8 E. Fulton St., Gloversville, N. Y.
Pat Costello, P. O. Box 134, C. G. Station, Shreveport, La.
S. Roewer, E. Crystal Lake Ave., Crystal Lake, Ill.
Rodger H. Feahr, 23 College St., Charleston, S. C.
Alan B. Stewart, c/o H. Haywood, Plumas, Man., Can.

We're sorry that lack of space prevents the inclusion of the names of all New Members. The rest will appear next time.

STATEMENT OF THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, CIRCULATION, ETC., required by the Acts of Congress of August 24, 1912, and March 3, 1933, of WEIRD TALES, published bi-monthly at New York, N. Y., for October 1, 1943. State of New York, County of New York, ss.

Before me, a Notary Public in and for the State and county aforesaid, personally appeared William J. Delaney, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the President-Treasurer of WEIRD TALES, Publishers of WEIRD TALES, and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management (and if a daily paper, the circulation), etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, as amended by the Act of March 3, 1933, embodied in section 537, Postal Laws and Regulations, printed on the reverse of this form, to wit:

1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business manager are: *Publisher*, WEIRD TALES, 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York, N. Y.; *Editor*, D. McIlwraith, 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York, N. Y.; *Managing Editor*, None; *Business Manager*, William J. Delaney, 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York, N. Y.

2. That the owner is: SHORT STORIES, INC., 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York, N. Y. Stockholders owning or holding one per cent or more of total amount of stock: William J. Delaney, 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York, N. Y.

3. That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 per cent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: None.

4. That the two paragraphs next above, giving the names of the owners, stockholders, and security holders, if any, contain not only the list of stockholders and security holders as they appear upon the books of the company but also, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting, is given; also that the said two paragraphs contain statements embracing affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner; and this affiant has no reason to believe that any other person, association, or corporation has any interest direct or indirect in the said stock, bonds, or other securities than as so stated by him.

(*Signed*) W. J. DELANEY, *President*.

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 27th day of September, 1943.

[SEAL] (*Signed*) Hy. J. PAUROWSKI,
Notary Public, Bronx Co. No. 13, Reg. No. 51-P5, Cert. filed in N. Y. Co. No. 227, Reg. No. 180-P5.
My commission expires March 30, 1945.

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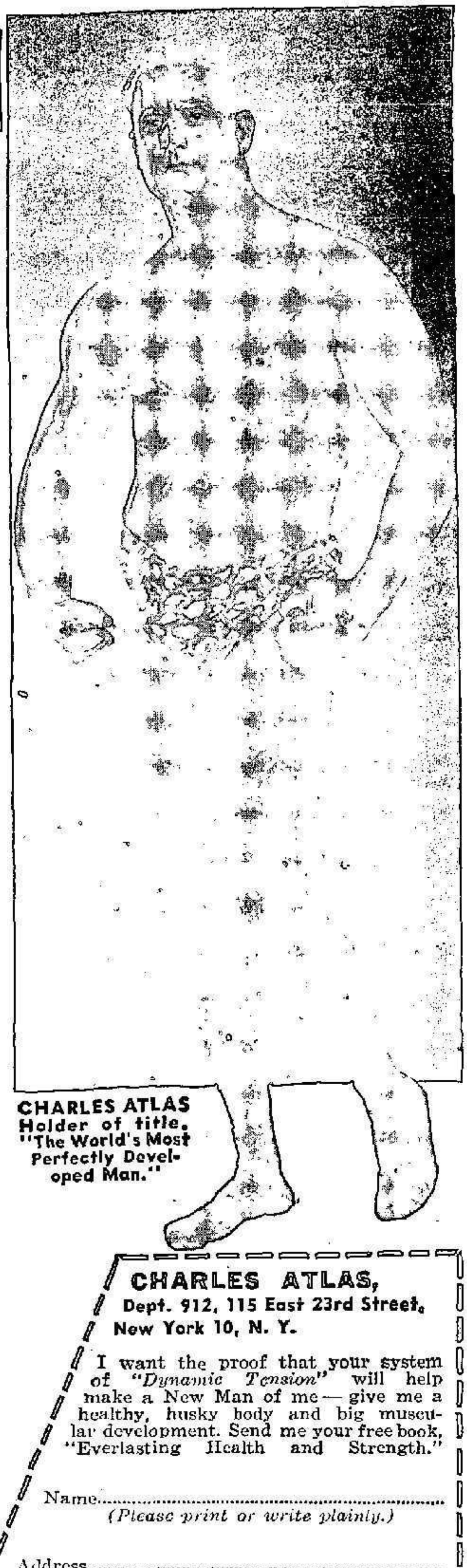

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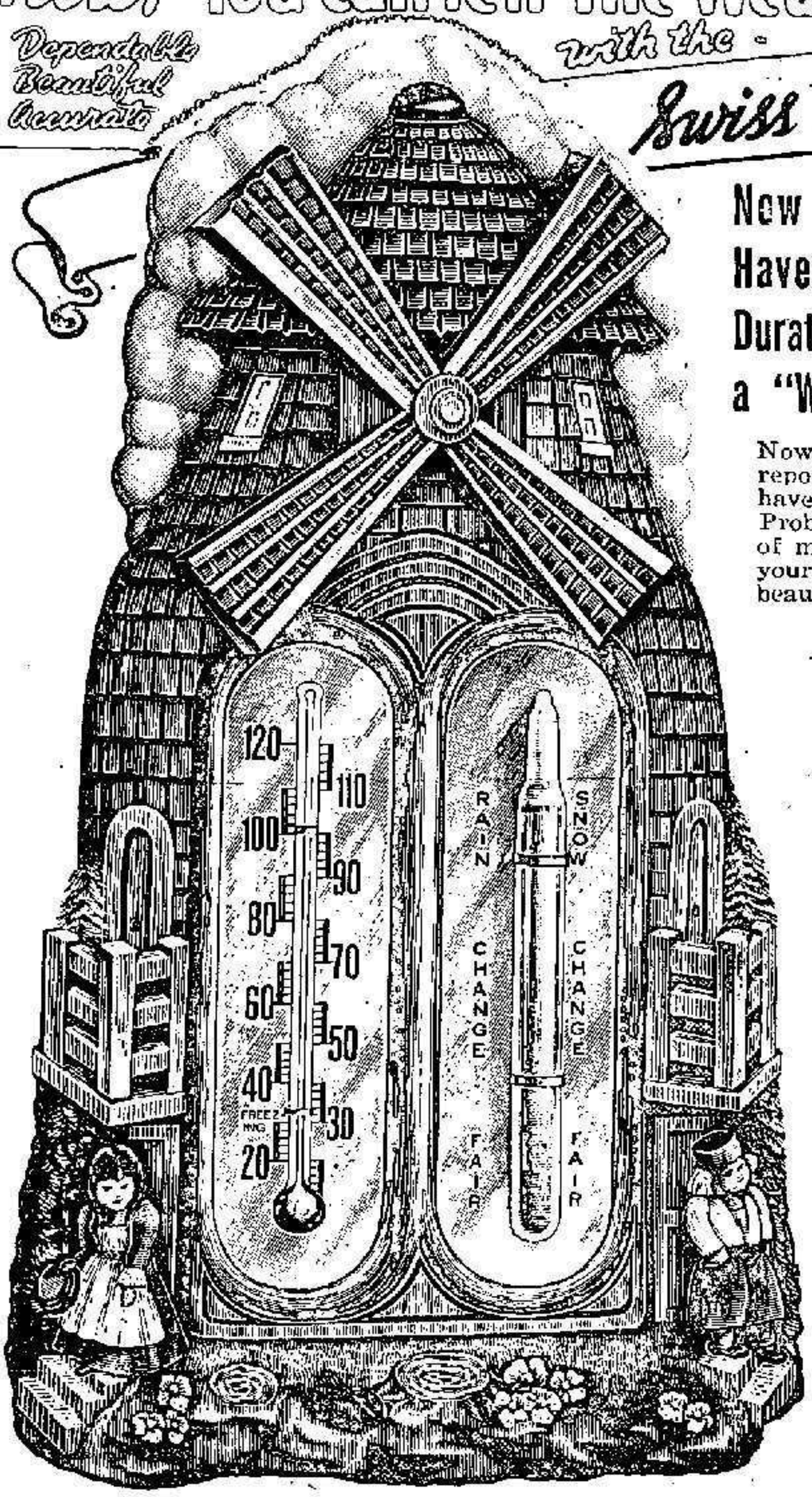

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