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BLACK HARVEST OF MORAINE . . . . . Arthur J. Burks 4
When the ice-age retreated, who could know the forces it left behind to plague and outwit men of the scientific age?

SHORT STORIES

THE ORMOLU CLOCK . . . . . August Derleth 22
Hatcher felt nothing in his past could account for the mystery; but could a clock have a past?

IN THAT SAME MOMENT . . . . . Manly Wade Wellman 27
Conquered time is your doormat, your toy, your pocket piece. . . .

THE SMILING FACE . . . . . Mary Elizabeth Counselman 33
The deep Brazilian jungle had swallowed up the woman he loved and the man he hated—the crippled explorer could only wait.

THE URBANITE . . . . . Ewen Whyte 43
The terrible, meaningless scream and cry of the City, its endless vibrations, at last have brought forth upon itself this ultimate inevitable product of itself.

THE MYSTERIOUS MISS MALTA . . . . . Stanton A. Coblentz 50
Auction sales fascinate a lot of folks; who can resist the "Going, going, gone!"—even to death?

THE LAST TRAIN . . . . . Fredric Brown 59
There comes a time in every man's life when he decides to break with the past—how complete the break depends on the man and the state of the world!

THE MASK OF DON ALFREDO . . . . . Mal Bissell 62
Of the husband and wife, one had died fifty years ago, one only last night. But which. . . . ?

OUTSIDE OF TIME . . . . . Carroll John Daly 68
Let it be said everlastingly that the "impossible" of today may well be the commonplace of tomorrow.

THE FAMILY . . . . . Margaret St. Clair 77
. . . flooded by an emotion, even more poignant because he could not be sure if it were anguish or bliss.

THE CACTUS . . . . . Mildred Johnson 80
The police rout something from another universe, another stratum of existence; the law command the supernatural?

DARK ROSALEEN . . . . . Seabury Quinn 86
Was he flesh and blood—an artist's concrete conception of something abstract, tenuous, allegorical?

THE EYRIE 93

VERSE

SEA KING'S DAUGHTER . . . . . Dorothy Quick 49

THE VISION . . . . . Leah Bodine Drake 67

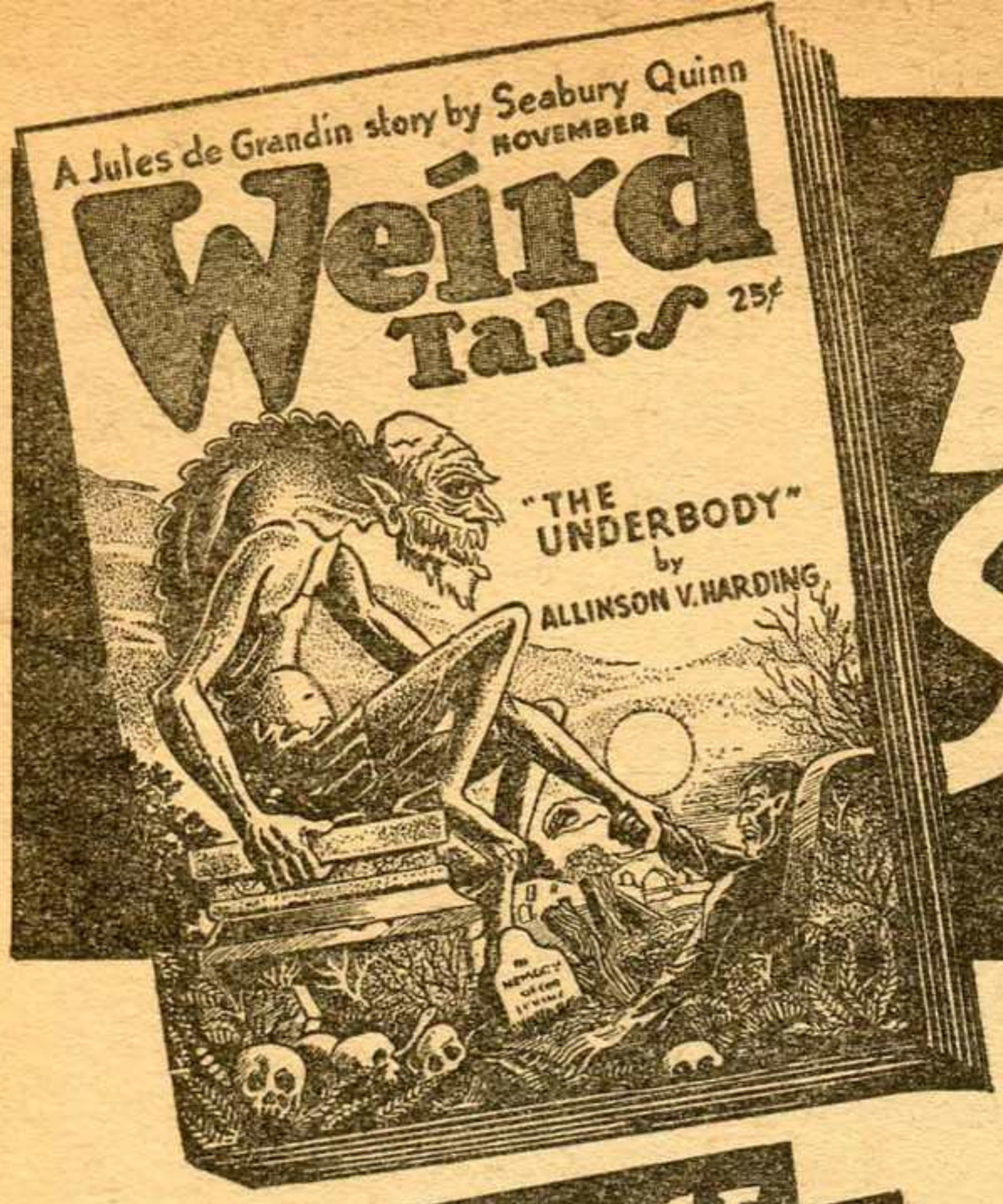
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173

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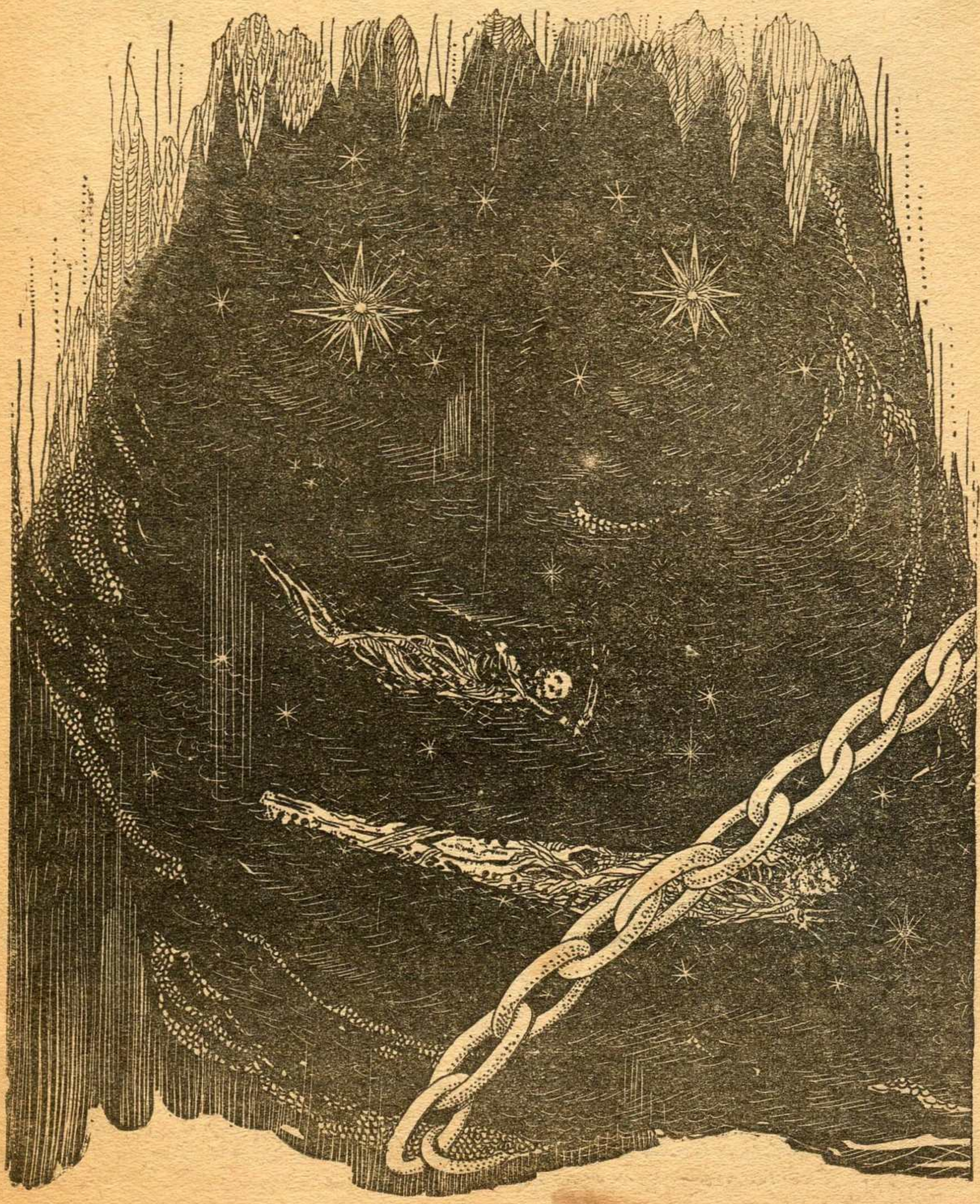
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Black Harvest of Moraine

By Arthur J. Burks



Heading by Vincent Napoli

I

THE HATED DRAW

I HAD been afraid of that particular field since I could remember. It was atop a mounded promontory where two whispering draws met. It looked like a monstrous brazen bosom spangled with pebbles of many colors, all of them round and smooth with age. My uncle's farmhouse sat in the side of the draw, perhaps seventy feet below the surface of the field, but sufficiently above the draw's floor to escape sudden inundation. I hated the draw, called Toler Draw, and the nameless other draws that came into it from the east, but both fascinated me so that when I visited my uncle I could not be satisfied without venturing onto the pebbly bosom of the shoulders of the high field and down into the secondary draw.

A "draw," out West, is a deep ravine or gully.

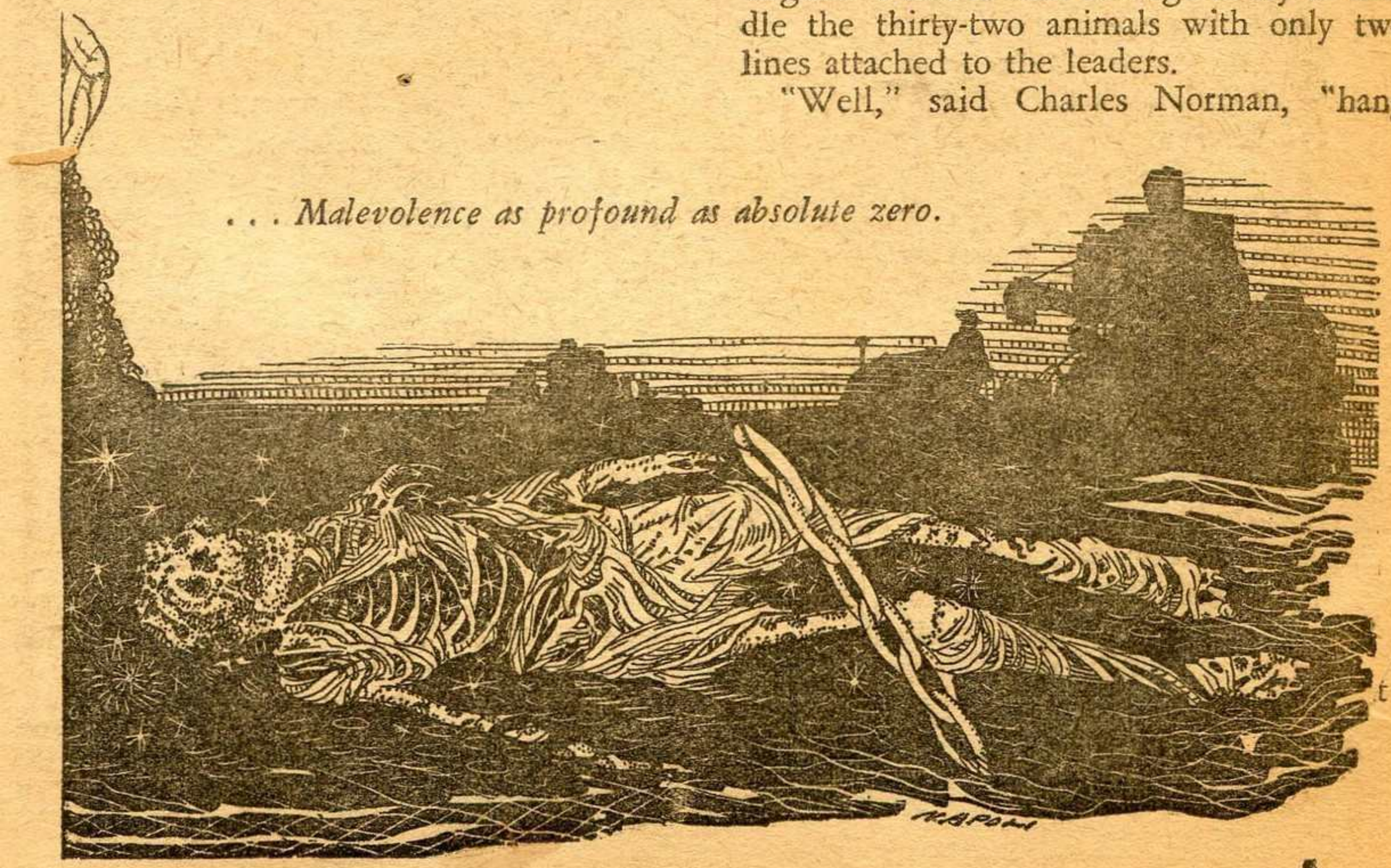
I was fifteen years old when my fear of the field between the two draws came to a head because I could see my ancient fear in the faces of the other harvest hands. I watched Charles Norman, my uncle, who acted as separator tender of the combined harvester. He stood atop the combined harvester and stared moodily out across the half section of wheat we were about to harvest, *if* he gave the word. On the lefthand side of the separator, on his little platform, the sack sewer, a Norwegian, sat on his little box under the twin spouts and watched Charles Norman. He had tried his best to talk Charles out of harvesting this half section. Apparently he had failed, but he had done his best.

Lonnie Keel, fourteen, tended the header. He had affixed a seat to the railing above the open maw of the cylinders at the inner end of the header; he sat on it now, hands engaged in the spokes of the wheel, watching me. I could see he was afraid, too, but excited as only an ambitious youngster can get.

I had tended header the two previous harvests, but now I drove the whole shebang, thirty-two head of horses and mules, five teams of six animals each with two leaders. The separator was run by a distillate engine set just behind the teams, at the base of the slanting ladder that led up to the dizzy seat where the driver, myself, Cappy Payne, tried to still the hammering of his heart.

Even yet Charles Norman had not decided for sure. There was danger in the high wheat, nobody knew just how great or varied. Then, the crew was untried, even to the horses and mules. Only the oldest animals had worked ahead of the clamoring engine. I felt it took courage to try to handle the thirty-two animals with only two lines attached to the leaders.

"Well," said Charles Norman, "hang



. . . Malevolence as profound as absolute zero.

onto the jugheads, we're getting under way!"

I faced the front. Charles Norman, a man of forty or so, climbed down to the distillate engine, cranked it. My horses and mules almost jumped through their collars when the engine broke into raucous song and the hidden machinery of the combined harvester began its roaring. Out of the harvester rose the dust left from last year's last work in the fields, to form a brown cloud about the ponderous machinery.

"Steady, Kate! Hold it, Jerry!" I spoke softly to my leaders, one a sensitive horse mare, the other a steady old mule who had been combined harvester leader since my uncle first owned one of the roaring monsters. I had handled all these animals on other farm equipment, so they knew my voice. I managed to keep them steady.

The blades of the header were tapping at the first of the wheat in the field, folding them back onto the canvas of the conveyor. Even this gentle hammering, for the wooden blades were intended only to keep wheat stalks from bending away under the reaper and being lost behind the machine, emphasized the thing all of us feared: for out of those few heads came the bronze, slick-looking, sooty smut which had turned the old field into a horror.

We all stared at the field as Norman climbed back onto the separator. As far as we could see the heads of wheat which should have gone fifty bushels to the acre, should have been white and firm under the hulls, were a sullen black that threatened to burst from the heads in an ebon inundation.

None of us had ever seen a field so smutted.

"Charlie," John Cavick, the sack sewer had said, "the best thing you can do with that field, for the good of the neighbors if not for yourself, is set it afire! You won't save ten bushels to the acre, and you'll scatter smut from Hades to breakfast!"

"Even ten bushels will keep me out of the red," said Norman. "I've got to take the risk. Of course, if you're afraid to tackle it, maybe I can hire someone else in Waterville."

"I'll do any work anywhere anybody else will," said Cavick, but he kept right after Uncle Charles to the moment I actually started pushing those thirty-two head of animals around the huge field.

There was a weirdness about the field we all recognized. It was surrounded by vast fields of neighbors, and on the north, across the main road, was another half section belonging to Norman, too. No other field in the county suffered smut! How did it happen that this one field alone should be so ridden with it? And why should an aura of *waiting*, of *threat*, of psychic terror, hang over this one particular field? I confess my own terrors went back further than those of Cavick, Lonnie, Uncle Charles or anyone else. I kept remembering from childhood, my secret adventures into the two draws, around the mounded bosom of the high field. I remembered badgers drumming into the holes among the sagebrush along the wash at the bottom of the subsidiary draw. I had flushed skulking coyotes, jackrabbits, cottontails, and almost scared myself to death when an occasional sagehen whirred out of hiding in some area of eerie silence. I had heard old tales of strange walkers among the brush, tales told around late supper tables for the sole purpose of scaring kids of the dark.

CHARLES NORMAN, atop the separator, hesitated again. I was looking back at him. I held a small rock in my hand. Above the roaring of the engine a man couldn't hear himself think. Charles Norman nodded to me. He had made his final decision. The die was cast.

"Kate! Jerry!" I heaved the rock out ahead of my leaders, careful not to hit either of them. The mules and horses hit their tugs. The huge combined harvester began to move. I had to hold back the animals to keep them from traveling too fast to catch the grain. It was almost as if they, too, feared the field and were running away from it. But for them, as far as I know, it was the motor they feared, and the fact that they could not seem to outrun it.

Almost instantly the harvester and everybody on it, including myself perched out there atop that ladder far in advance of the main body of the machine, including the horses and mules, disappeared into a

black-bronze pall, a towering smut cloud that was utterly terrifying. The header, an eighteen-foot "cut," which meant that it cut a swath eighteen feet wide if I held the team so that the header cut its entire width —a driving trick I made up my mind I could manage—laid the smutted wheat back on the drapers, the reapers cut off the stalks, the drapers bore the fallen wheat up the short feed into the body of the machine where the threshing took place. Out of the main body of the machine straw fell into a trip behind the separator, where the header tender, with a long rope attached to his railing, dumped it at intervals in piles behind us. The wheat, separated from the stalks and fanned of chaff, poured into the sacks on Cavick's platform, to be sewn, slid into the carrier beside him, which slanted down to within a few inches of the ground, and tripped when there were six sacks.

Separate from the harvester was the sack-buck, a husky man with a team and a flat-bed wagon, who hauled the sacks to central piling areas.

Nobody aboard the harvester saw the sack-buck, Karl Orme, while the harvester moved, because we could not see out of the pall of smut. That cloud, as smut burst from the wheat inside the harvester, belched out of every nook and cranny. Some of the spores burst on hitting the drapers, some when touched by the fanning blades, some burst on the first contact.

The rising smut cloud, which followed us like Nemesis because there was no wind, was worse than any dust storm I had ever witnessed. Looking back and down to the right it was all I could do to see the inner end of the header, to know whether I was cutting too wide a swath and missing some, or using less than I should of the "cut." I could just see. But up ahead, when I tried to see my laboring animals, I could scarcely see Kate and Jerry, my leaders. The horses and mules, even those directly under me, which included the first twelve animals, six abreast, were vague shadowy phantoms in the sooty pall.

I COULD make out the back of Cavick as he worked like some imp out of hell there on his little platform, fighting the sack-jigger from which poured a stream that would have been wheaten gold if it had not been for the smut. Even with all the fanning, vast amounts of smut went into the wheat sacks. Cavick had turned black and hideous within a few minutes. He had a bright red bandanna about his neck; it became black-bronze in no time. Atop the harvester Lonnie and Uncle Charles were black gnomes in the cloud, and when Uncle Charles walked back to the rear of the separator to study his mazes of wheels, sprockets, belts and pullies, he mingled so closely with the cloud that I could not see him unless he moved an arm suddenly.

I leaned back and looked up. The sun itself was a blur through the horror. Horror? That's what I said. True or not, there was a terror about smut. Most farmers believed that it could be ignited, that it might at any time explode, if there were enough of it, by spontaneous combustion. No farmer would allow his hands to smoke where there was even the vaguest hint of smut, and every last one of us, before coming to the field, had supposedly ditched his matches at the farmhouse. I could just imagine what it would be like even if the smut did no more than take *fire*. It expanded outward, that thick cloud, to hold us within its heart and travel along with us around the field, clockwise. A series of swaths had already been cut around the field, some weeks earlier, with a binder. Good hay had been the result, and this was another one of the fear-provoking facts about this particular field. There had been no evidence of smut in the *hay!*

The smut had apparently come full into being between a night and a morning!

Horses, mules and farm hands, especially in harvest time, become accustomed to choking dust. I had driven for hours in clouds of ordinary dust as thick as this without much discomfort, though a doctor would have thrown up his hands and uttered all sorts of dire things. I hadn't even coughed. Mules and horses coughed occasionally, but it never seemed to be anything that a good long drink of water at noon and night would not arrange.

Now, though, before I even reached the first corner and started the ponderous swinging of that team—there'd have been fifty-six head if Uncle Charles hadn't "modernized"

by attaching the engine to run the separator —everyone on the separator was coughing. Lonnie sounded as if he had whooping cough; deep, rasping, tearing coughs burst from apparently the very bottom of his lungs. Cavick coughed as if he was swearing. Uncle Charles coughed like a consumptive, as if he would spit blood any instant. I coughed as if I were young again, and lost, and sobbing.

But the worst was the coughing of the mules and horses. Men can help themselves. They can stop work. Animals are slaves and must obey their owners and masters. Thirty-two head of mules and horses then, about half of each, struggled grimly through the sooty pall and coughed, deep and drumming, out of their very guts.

I made the first turn. The cloud went with us! It should have gone straight ahead, mind you; why should the *cloud* have turned the corner? I wondered if anybody noticed it but me.

THERE were tiny draws in the great field. When we slid down into one I could reach out to right and left and touch the backs of my rearmost animals. When we rose out of the ditch I leaped at the sky like hay on the end of a pitchfork, legs hooked around the jacobstaff to keep from being thrown. These ditches and steep sidehills were why Uncle Charles did not use tractors to pull the harvester in this particular field—mules and horses could manage better.

By the time we reached the second corner of the huge half section, with all its wheat-covered knolls, deep pitches, steep hillsides where the leveler had to be worked like crazy to keep the monster from overturning, I was conscious of something new in the cloud of smut: in some eerie fashion it was *in tune with the chugging of the motor and the drumming of machinery in the guts of the separator, with the low murderous growling of the cylinders especially.* These cylinders now, for the benefit of the mechanically minded, were not the cylinders of the engine; they were the two sets of opposing concave and convex metal "teeth" just behind the short feed from the drapers, through which the wheat passed—the heads to be ripped asunder by the teeth to separate the roughest wheat from the straw. I had known of men to go through those cylinders, come out in fingertip-sized pieces behind the separator.

There was, as I've indicated, an eternal murderous growl about those cylinders when the separator was in gear that made me afraid for the header tender, Lonnie. I'd had that job for two years myself, and always the cylinders had seemed to me to be too close under me for comfort. A bit of dizziness, a fall, and the machine couldn't be thrown out of gear fast enough to keep a man out of the metal teeth.

But why should I fear that now? Because of the sound I *felt* in the sooty cloud —keeping time with the roaring of the cylinders!

The cloud stayed with us as we traveled the far side, slow, ponderous, noisy, every living thing of us coughing his guts out, and started back on the fourth side, which paralleled the subsidiary draw that had always held such terror for me as a child. The side of the draw was steep. I had plowed and seeded it myself, plowing and seeding down as far as I could, to where the streambed was just too steep for anything but a goat—where only sagebrush and rye grass grew. Down there I knew was the perpendicular wash with badger holes in the banks, and big mounds on the streambed. Down there was land that to me, even at fifteen, was terror-land.

You see, I had always, from earliest memories of visits to Uncle Charles' place, been conscious that the entire high field resembled a monstrous grave-mound! It was a feeling I could not escape, of which I could not rid myself. If my feeling had any basis in fact—and I doubted it too much ever to mention it to anyone—*what was buried under it and how far back did it date?*

As we fought our way back to the starting corner, around that gargantuan bosom, or grave mound, I had the strangest feeling that the deep freshet-bed, into which I could not see because of the borders of sagebrush and rye grass, was a-crawl with something. Badgers? Coyotes? Sagehens? Rabbits? What else had I ever seen or heard in the sandy hot wash? Nothing, save in imagination. But in imagination there had

been Indian bones, stalking warriors out of elder time—and things man no longer remembered or had heard about, dating back and back and back.

THIS part of the Big Bend country of the Columbia River was the tag-end of the Great Moraine, almost the exact line on which the Ice Age from the north died, began slowly retreating back to the Arctic.

Why I should remember that in that high field of strangely smutted grain I had no idea, *then.*

Uncle Charles signaled for a halt at the starting spot. The mules and horses, black with sweat all over their bodies, sweat into which the smut was worked like boring maggots, stood and coughed horribly. We all coughed.

The smut cloud did not move on, as it seemed it should. It just stayed there as we stayed, a dome of ebony glisten over and around us. There was a whiteness about the mouths, eyes and nostrils of men and beasts. Our hair and lashes were beaded with smut. Our lungs were afire with it. It tasted bitter as lye on our parched tongues

I expected Uncle Charles to call it quits, but he was a stubborn man. He signaled for the second round.

II

EBON EXODUS

THE same stubbornness, suddenly, was in all of us. We refused to be beaten. How could any of us, simple farm people, have realized *what made us stubborn?* We were just people, descended from pioneer stock, who wouldn't allow a little thing like smut, to which all farmers were occasionally accustomed, to keep us from the harvest. The world was hungry, must be fed, and feeding the world gave us money for luxries. That was the simple truth of it.

It wouldn't have made any difference, I ealize now, if Uncle Charles had given orders to knock off, had decided to let the field rot, for once we had rounded the field we were *committed.* The damage, which we could not even guess at then, was already done.

I'll never know now how we got around that second time. It's a long drag around a half section. At first, if you can make three "rounds" without leaving half the wheat, in half a day, you're doing all right. We made three rounds and that smut cloud never left us. The coughing was hideous. Lonnie especially felt it. He bent double as he coughed. He had had whooping cough that winter, I knew, and his lungs had been weakened by it.

The cloud had expanded and deepened unbelievably. I felt that every spore we had released from the wheat had joined the cloud. I felt that the rhythm I had sensed in the cloud was faster, should have been an audible sound to everybody on the separator, but everybody was too hard at work, too busy coughing, to pay any attention.

We were coming around the shoulder where the two draws merged when the first catastrophe happened—and I was to remember with horror that I had so often thought of this very possibility. *Had I made it happen?*

I heard a scream and whirled on my high perch to see Lonnie Keel fall upon the drapers, bounce, grab for the sides of the feed, ride the canvas into the maw of the machine. He screamed all the way in, until the cylinder teeth got him. His screaming made the mules and horses unmanageable for a full minute, and though Uncle Charles hurried to throw the machinery out of gear, there was no use. Lonnie Keel was doomed from the moment he fell.

And yet, he should have been able to grab the sides of the feed, haul himself out. He had tried, but as I thought of it later it seemed to me that his hands were *snatched* back, the clutching fingers *prevented* from pulling the boy out, saving his life. But of course every farmer knows how to compare hindsight with foresight. I was always one to do a lot of imagining.

The animals wouldn't stop until we made that last corner. Uncle Charles and Cavick were both off the separator, running back behind it. No doubting what they would find—the tiny bloody pieces of Lonnie Keel!

I swung the horses and mules to a halt finally. I fastened the two lines to the whipstock in the rock box, climbed down and killed the distillate-burning engine. Then,

sick, coughing, my fear a tangible thing now, I raced back to Uncle Charles and Cavick.

They were bending over something in the stubble.

I bent down, too. I got even sicker. There wasn't enough left of any part of Lonnie Keel to wad a shotgun! And yet, attached to some of the smallest bits were shreds and patches of his shirt, overalls and shoes!

We three were very close together.

"God!" said Uncle Charles. "Go ahead, Cavick, say you told me so! But that don't explain what made the kid fall! There was no reason. I saw him go, and it looked as if he was *pulled* off his seat, *thrown* into the cylinders!"

"I couldn't see," said Cavick, "there's too much machinery between me and the header tender—and the smut's too thick anyway!"

We moved back from the combined harvester, the three of us, and noted the pieces of Lonnie Keel, but I think I was the first to notice the real horror of what was just now really starting.

I was staring at a lump of flesh when it seemed to *move*. Then I realized that it wasn't a tiny piece of *Lonnie* that was moving, but something else that was moving *onto* the crimson flesh! It didn't take two shakes to figure out what it was. The smut was alive! It was a tiny glistening army. It crawled onto those pieces of flesh, covered them from sight, *fed upon them!*

Uncle Charles cried out. John Cavick swore savagely. There was nothing we could do for Lonnie, but even so the next move seemed cruel—at *first*. We heard one of the horses scream like a woman in pain. We all three straightened, whirled to look. Several of the horses and mules were down on their bellies in their harness, threshing, coughing—and now several of them followed suit of the first one and screamed. It isn't often, thank God, that a farmer hears a horse scream; usually only when the animal is dying in a fire.

"Get them out!" yelled Uncle Charles. "Get them out of the smut, down to the troughs!"

We didn't forget Lonnie, mind you, nor ourselves. I realized that I was more or less burning up myself, with something more than the heat. A steadily increasing inward pressure was all over my body, and its warmth, too, was increasing.

Uncle Charles didn't ordinarily help with the draft animals, but he did this time. Lonnie usually handled eight head, while Cavick and I took twelve each; but Lonnie wouldn't be doing that kind of work ever again. Uncle Charles had to.

The animals were half crazy but they knew us, knew we were trying to save them, so they stood, fretting a little but not so much, until we had all the tugs unfastened and folded back inside the back-bands.

I mounted Kate. Uncle Charles mounted one of the others, Cavick a third. The rest were apportioned among us, held together by their halter chains. I gave the word to Kate when the rest signaled they were ready.

My twelve head of animals, as if at a signal, broke into a dead run from a standing start. It almost threw me. But behind us the rest came on just as fast, as if invisible whips had suddenly been laid upon the backs of every last one!

My twelve headed for the gate and the main road. I did not try to hold them in. It would have been no use. I yelled ahead for the chore-man we had left in the barnyard to have the yard gate open. I could see it start swinging inward as we started down the steep rocky grade into the draw. Our galloping had thunder in it, and danger. If one horse or mule even stumbled we would have a murderous pile-up.

I looked back once. Cavick and Uncle Charles were clinging to their riding animals for dear life. I expected somehow to find the smut cloud still with us, but it had halted, rather oddly I thought, partly in and partly outside the field gate. The cloud reached fully a thousand feet into the air and seemed to hover over the entire field.

I thought, as we swung crazily into the gate like chariots taking a dangerous turn, that the smut cloud, on whose sides the sun shone as on the back of a smoothly curried horse, was beginning to sink down upon the field. I saw Karl Orme, the sack-buck, come racing through the gate, standing spread-legged in his flatbed sack wagon, his horses apparently crazy with fear. I saw him fight the lines, turn and face the field from which all of us had just escaped. Yes,

even then I used the word, "escaped!" Then Karl Orme did an odd thing, though I didn't see all of it because I had things of my own to do. He jumped from his wagon, lashed his animals into a dead run, and moved slowly back, afoot, to the gate in which the smut cloud seemed to hesitate. It was afterward I remembered that slow, queer return.

Then I lost Karl Orme behind the barn as my animals reached the huge circular galvanized tank in the barnyard, so big that all of Uncle Charles' animals could drink from it at once. I flung myself from Kate's back as Cavick and Uncle Charles swung their animals in against the tank, too.

Uncle Charles yelled at Cavick and me while he himself ran awkwardly toward the blacksmith shop where he kept tools, hoses, odds and ends always needed around a farm.

"Into the tank, both of you!" Uncle Charles yelled. "Get your clothes off! I'll be right back!"

Odd, but I had been wanting to fling myself into the tank. The water in it was about three and a half feet deep. The horses and mules pushed their nostrils clear under. I saw all their eyes bulged. There were lines of white about them.

AUNT CLAUDIA and my two gal cousins came running from the house to ask silly questions just as Uncle Charles came from the shop with a length of hose. He yelled at his wife and daughters:

"Get back away from us! Don't stop for anything, but go on past the house to the next neighbor's. Stay by the telephone there. I'll let you know what to do! *Run!*"

Naturally they thought Uncle Charles was crazy, and I thought so, too, but they turned and fled as their forebears must have fled from charging Indians. Women and girls can run when they're scared.

Uncle Charles flung himself into the tank with Cavick and me.

Cavick and I had both dived in, going clear under, much to the amazement of the horses and mules. Then, standing, we stripped off our clothes, and began to wash our hair, bathe our bodies. Uncle Charles followed suit, but his first thought was of the animals. He affixed one end of the hose to the faucet, turned it on full, and began spraying the horses and mules. The water had plenty of pressure and the stream was strong, but each animal seemed to realize at once that again their best interests were being taken care of.

While he worked on himself Uncle Charles handed the hose to me. I worked on the animals, too. I watched the smut which had covered them vanish into the longer hair under their bellies. I washed that off, too. Karl Orme's team reached the tank, hauling back to stop the wagon as if Orme had still been in it.

I washed them off, too, then John Cavick took a crack at it. Still there were no explanations of anything.

Soon Karl Orme, hatless, his legs pumping like those of a college sprinter, came through the gate, pushed past the animals and flung himself into the trough. Was all this crazy, even a little humorous? Not if you remembered Lonnie Keel and the creeping smut spores which had started devouring his remnants.

Karl Orme stood in the tank, began ripping off his clothes. I noticed that Uncle Charles, standing there in the tank from which now rose the odor of smut, stared up the rounded mound of the drawside at his smutted field. Over the field hung a tremendous black cloud, into which shot tongues of flame. Uncle Charles whirled on Karl Orme.

"What happened, Karl?" he choked. "You were the last out of the field. Did it just take fire?"

"No, Charlie," said Orme grimly, "I took the law into my own hands. Your stubbornness might cost lives. I saw Lonnie Keel tumble, read sign when you went back to look. The rest was just common sense. I dashed out of the field, freed the horses, turned back and took the greatest chance I ever hope to take. *I threw a match into the cloud!*"

"How dared you do such a thing?" demanded Uncle Charles hoarsely. "You're a hired hand! You've set fire to a half section of wheat. My loss will run into thousands—"

"And how many lives?" said Karl Orme softly. "Listen, Charlie, while I tell you something. I picked up those smutty sacks that John here sewed and dropped. There

was smut in all of them. I had piled maybe a hundred in one area, when what do you suppose happened?"

"How would I know?" said Uncle Charles sulkily.

"The sacks began bursting their seams!" said Karl Orme. "They just exploded like over-inflated toy balloons, *and the smut began creeping out, to spread on the ground!* I knew if I didn't take steps your stubbornness would return us all to the field of smut, and no telling *what* might happen!"

"And now," said Uncle Charles hoarsely, "you've completely released the *things* in the wheat!"

"Things?" said Karl Orme. "What are you talking about. I've burned out that half section, or will have within an hour. The smut won't spread to neighboring fields. The fire—"

"Fire won't do anything to *this,"* said Uncle Charles. "It will just complete, a lot faster, the exodus of the——"

WHAT he was going to say I didn't know then, couldn't even guess, for all four of us noticed the same thing at the same time. We had washed from ourselves the smut which had been driving us crazy. We had drunk deeply to wash the stuff out of our gullets. The smut had lain, a thin film, atop the water in the tank. Now we all saw that the stuff had drawn together atop the water, moved slowly to the sides of the tank where it became a thick brown mass. And that mass began crawling up the side of the tank to escape! The horses and mules saw it, snorted, backed away.

We couldn't find a thing to say. We moved to the side of the tank, watching that stuff—and as if it watched us also, and were afraid of being captured, *it gathered speed like some shapeless spider, slid over the rim of the tank, dropped to the ground beyond!* We heard it, and the sound had a kind of jeer in it, strike the ground.

We put our hands on the sides and looked down—just as the smut we had washed off the animals gathered in one place, joined that which had come out of the tank! The mass of smut was dark bronze. It formed a circular smudge, the center of which began to rise perceptibly.

As we stared, our mouths hanging open, the smut-mass doubled in size, doubled again!

"John!" yelled Uncle Charles. "Get a stick of dynamite out of the shed. Cap it, fuse it, bring it here fast!"

It didn't look silly, not now, to see a naked man racing to the blacksmith shop. The mules and horses—as Karl Orme unhitched his two—retreated to a far corner of the barn yard. Orme started for the gate; he, too, was naked. Soon, we hoped, we could get to the house, get into fresh clothes.

John Cavick came running back. He raced to the house to get matches. He had cut the fuse awfully short. The smut-mass was now five-feet across, still roughly circular. Then it was ten feet across. Then Cavick was back, and all of us ducked into the water as the stick of dynamite was dropped into the mass.

After the explosion we looked out. The smut-mass was nowhere to be seen. Even then I felt I could hear queer jeering laughter in the very air.

Cavick swore again. Uncle Charles began to pray. I felt like it myself. Not much explanation was needed. Scores of circular smut-masses suddenly sprang into being in the barnyard, and as far in all directions as we could see. That dynamite had blown the mass into tiny bits. But already each bit had grown, expanded, until we could see it.

As each of us noted this, each circular smut-smudge *jumped* in size, its center rose like the crown of a hat, a *peon's* hat, pointed!

"The telephone!" said Uncle Charles, almost moaning. "We've got to have help! And clothes!"

Uncle Charles was an old man as he crawled out of the tank, started a dripping run for the house. As we ran we watched the smut-masses *jumping, spreading, growing,* all around us—and I for one wondered if even we started now, and ran faster and faster, we could ever again escape them.

"Look!" said Karl Orme, as he turned at the door to look back the way we had come.

There was now no smoke, no fire, on the high field. There was no smut cloud. But a fringe of bronze extended all along the edge of the field we could see—and as I

looked the fringe crept noticeably down the mounded side of the hill where the two draws met!

III

HOPELESS STRUGGLE

BY noon of the next day it seemed to me there had never been a time when we hadn't been fighting the smut. We still called it "smut" because that had been the manner of its appearance, but none of us really believed that's what it was—not any more. An agricultural expert from Port Orchard flew in the next morning after Uncle Charles appealed for help by telephone. He put some of the "smut" under his microscope.

"It's not kernel, covered or naked smut," he said. "It's not *tilletia tritici* or *levis*. It's not *Ustilago tritici* or *Urocystis tritici*. In fact, Norman, it's not smut at all! I don't know what it is!"

The horror surrounding the death of Lonnie Keel had long since become a minor thing. Too much else had happened since. In the first place, firing the smut had released every bit of it simultaneously from the wheat by destroying the wheat around it. Fire seemed to have no other effect on the stuff.

First, the smut-masses we had washed off ourselves and the horses and mules had widened, spread, grown upward, to meet the brown-black fringe which seemed to be *overflowing* from the high field. That smut, creeping down the bosom of the field like molasses running down outside the neck of a jug was a hellish thing to watch.

Birds, animals, everything in the area, became aware of the creeping horror. Grass on the hillside disappeared, devoured by the stuff. By the next morning, after Uncle Charles had told Aunt Claudia and the cousins to bed down with neighbors, they'd be in the battle line soon enough, hundreds of men and women were helping to fight the smut.

The entire field, which I had seen from an airplane—one of a dozen that constantly circled above the area of spreading spores—was blanketed with the stuff. Moreover, the center of the field was now easily two hundred feet in height. The stuff had moved inexorably out in all directions. Charles Norman's own wheat on the north was being devoured. Some of the men who fought the creeping smut insisted they could hear the stuff *chew*, as if the smut were animal and equipped with a myriad of infinitesimal mandibles. Every kind of fire fighting equipment was on the job that was within reach. Flame-throwers from the nearest army base had been tried. Everything had been hurled into that mess except an atom bomb. It was bent on reaching in all directions, we were all sure, but it would travel slower if we fought it and didn't deliberately spread it.

The smut-mass advanced without the slightest harm into the hottest tongues of flame from the flame throwers which had wrought such havoc among Japs and Germans in World War Two.

Brave men faced the slowly advancing horde with clubs, rifles, wet sacks. They sprayed it with water, with kerosene, gasoline. They fought themselves to a standstill, but the stuff seemed invincible. When the fighters against the growing smut-mass thought they had found the answer, the whole mass shuddered, and extended itself in all directions.

Casualties were somewhat high. A dozen men, daring too greatly, had come in contact with the smut and vanished into it, utterly possessed and destroyed by it, as Lonnie Keel had been.

I THINK every conceivable kind of machine was turned loose on that growing, rising, spreading mass. X-rays, some special secret rays used by the army and navy the exact nature of which I was not informed, were turned on the stuff—and without effect.

The smut-mass did not seem to devour inanimate things—for hours, that second day, we could see the shape of the combined harvester through the growing mass, right where we had left it on the rounded bosom of the hill.

"The smut," said our agricultural expert, and scientists of more kinds than I knew or can remember agreed with him, "is an entity or a vast community of entities. If we don't solve the secret there is no way of

telling how far the stuff may go. But where did it come from?"

"It came out of the wheat," my Uncle explained. But when he made it clear, and his neighbors backed him up, that only his field, in all the thousands of acres held by him and his neighbors, had been possessed by the blight, science admitted it had come to a dead end.

"It has to come from somewhere," said Doctor Larsen, the man whom the government entrusted with the secret rays that had been used without effect on our smut-mass. "I can't escape the feeling that in the sudden appearance and spread of this 'smut' there is clear evidence of *intent!*"

Up until I heard that I would not have spoken my thoughts for anything in the world. I'm ordinarily a bit shy. But now I offered my own two cents worth.

"Not only intention," I said, "but scientific implementation of it!"

Larsen whirled on me. "I've been thinking the same thing, kid!" he said. "Just what are you driving at?"

"The field," I said, somewhat breathlessly "lies in the general line of the ancient ice fields which came down, ages ago, from the north. The draws have been dug by ice action and seepage from glaciers. That's what my geology teacher said in high school last term, anyway. If there were intelligent life in the land before the ice came down, what happened to it?"

Tired men, resting for a few minutes from fighting the creeping mass, heard me and snorted.

"Cocky kid!" said someone. "Probably write poetry when he grows up, like his utterly useless old man!"

"Do any of you gentlemen," said Larsen, "have any idea about these secret rays I've been using to fight against your smut?"

They shook their heads.

"Then," Larsen continued, "there may be other things ye also wot not of! Go ahead, kid, what's on your mind?"

"I've always felt that the high field was part of some huge grave mound, just because of the shape of it. I've thought since I was little that strange things might be buried in it. Now I wonder what may be a crazy thing—"

"Let us judge what's crazy and what isn't," said Larsen. "Every pathfinder has been crazy in the eyes of his contemporaries. Go on."

"I think there's something under the hill, deep down," I said. "I think it's been there for thousands, maybe millions of years, dormant, resting. Now it has reached out. It is life, whatever life it was that ice destroyed, or forced to flee. The intelligence locked under the hill set a trap for us—the smut! We stepped into it and got caught. It reached up somehow from down under, manifested itself as smut."

"You talk as if this isn't new to you," said Larsen, interrupting. "Why isn't it?"

"I've always felt something in the draws, Toler Draw and Norman Draw, the one coming into it from the east," I hurried on. People were close to me now, listening, and I had help from an unexpected quarter.

"I always hated what the kid calls Norman Draw, myself," said Herb Slasser, Uncle Charles' neighbor to the west. "I used to go in there, twenty years ago, before Norman broke the land around it, to get myself a sagehen. *I always felt like running out!* I know there can't be anything in there bigger than badgers or coyotes, yet I finally got so I wouldn't go in there for a sagehen if I was starving!"

"I used to feel," I said, "as if there was someone behind me, who always ducked out of sight when I whirled to look. I always thought I'd run into something hideous around the next turn ahead. I never did, but I always knew why—*it kept just out of sight!*"

"What nonsense!" said the army colonel who commanded the flame throwing equipment and operators. "What can a yokel who has something like second sight tell us that will help combat this stuff?"

A GROUP of people was standing now on the side of the draw opposite where we had left the combine. The draw itself was filled with the smut mass to within a few feet of our level. There was danger, and we all knew it, that it would surge up and out and swallow us all, but the danger was so constant, so commonplace now that we almost ignored it.

"Certainly what he suggests," said Lar-

sen, "can't accomplish less than we have! We've tried now to destroy this creeping stuff with every vibration controlled or operated by man—sound waves, electric currents, X-rays, gamma rays, even cosmic—"

Nobody could think of a destructive implement or technique that hadn't been tried on the smut-mass. As we talked there the sooty, shining, ebony-stir stuff in Toler Draw lurched, came within a few feet of our bodies. We stepped back. I stooped again to look. Tentacles so small, so tenuous as to be almost invisible, were reaching out at us through the interstices of the soil on which we stood! And others were coming upward through the soil. I was right, I had to be right—the source of the danger was somewhere underground, maybe far underground.

Larsen more or less had charge of the sector in which we fought the smut-mass. He put his head together with the heads of the plane crews trying to probe the cloud with radar and sonar, trying to get some picture of just what it might be.

"Can you find out for me," he asked, "whether there are any caverns hereabouts?"

NOT until the next day, when three Sprengnether earthquake seismographs were set up at the apices of a triangle several miles on each side, with the high field in the triangle's center, was this question answered. Then they did something they called "seismic prospecting for head waves," carried out under Larsen's supervision—he seemed to know everything about everything—and the seismologists all agreed that there were caverns under the high field, not very far down, either!

No sooner had the word passed than half of Uncle Charles' neighbors said they had always known it. They had walked over the field years before and distinctly heard hollow sounds below! No local yokel was going to get ahead of the oldtimers, even if they had to lie a little.

Even my uncle said there had been times when he had felt hollow vibrations come up through the combined harvester and other heavy machinery. He could also remember times when mules and horses had shied, while working the high field, away from odd underfoot sounds!

But just what did it matter one way or the other? The entire mounded hill was now deeply buried under a sooty, glistening mass several hundred feet deep all over it! There wasn't a chance of any kind of penetrating the hill into a cavern that might be occupied—*by what was such a cavern likely to be occupied?*

When somebody thought to ask that question a dreadful silence settled over everybody, a silence so deep you could hear the little chewing mouths of the smut.

"Find a way or not," some farmer put it in words, "you wouldn't get me even *trying* to get into it for all the gold in the world!"

"There must be some kind of material," I averred, not feeling as smart and cocky as I must have sounded to the others, "in which men can move into and down under the smut-mass. It apparently doesn't eat metal, plastic, things like that."

"But if there happens to be joints, anywhere at all, through which the stuff can reach your body," said Larsen, "you're just the more firmly trapped in something. You have some idea like a diving suit of steel, or plastic, or something, maybe?"

"Yes, sir, and I'll help get into those caverns if somebody will go along, with lights, weapons, and whatever scientists think we need!" I wished I hadn't said that, even before I started, but a kid sometimes gets too big for his britches and keeps right on getting too big when he knows he is.

Larsen started working by telephone on the Navy at Bremerton. Yes, they could furnish water-tight suits, but would they be smut-tight? And how, if the suits worked, would we penetrate the scores of feet of soil, shale, clay and solid rock which intervened between the covering smut and the caverns in which, I think everybody now believed the smut originated, or from which it was directed?

We did some gambling on a wild theory: those entities down under had sought sanctuary from the Ice Age. Therefore they were averse to ice. We could establish a bridgehead on the surface of the ground from which we could operate, if we could freeze the area and keep back the smut at the right spot. That's a little obscure, but for the time being there's no help for it. And I've said it was a wild gamble on a wilder theory

—every bit of which might be utterly wrong. We had tried dropping dry ice on the smut-mass and it had had no more effect than fire, rays, explosions, or anything else we had tried.

The three seismologists gave me a thrill, believe me, when I heard them say that the cavern was nearest the surface at a spot deep in the Norman Draw! They made a map for us, covered with what they called "microseisms" which meant nothing at all to me, but Larsen could read without trouble. I was perfectly sure, at this point, that I must have sensed the presence of that cavern when I first sneaked into Norman Draw when I was about six years old.

We were about twenty in number when we finally dared the smut-mass in our air-conditioned diving suits. I was allowed to go along because I knew Norman Draw, badger-hole by badger-hole, better even than Uncle Charles knew it. Besides, Aunt Claudia wouldn't let Uncle Charles even *offer* to go.

I held my breath when the twenty of us, looking like something out of other worlds, put our feet into the smut-mass, walked into it as we would have walked into a lake.

Gradually the stuff crawled up our bodies as we walked down into Toler Draw. I couldn't feel anything getting in, but horror rose up to my heart from my feet as the smut-mass rose and rose and finally covered the eye-pieces of my helmet.

Then I had to lead the way, fumbling with my feet, while behind me all the others clung to a rope which kept us from losing one another, perhaps forever.

IV

SANCTUARY OF THE AGES

I COULD see nothing through the eye-pieces but stygian darkness. But I knew the draws as I did not know the palms of my own hands. There were sandy stream-beds in each of them. I walked down the west side of Toler Draw, my unseen companions following me. There were times when I waited for the man immediately behind me to come up, bump into me. I had a horror of being lost from the others, of being alone on the deepening bottom of the smut. It would have been dreadful. As it was, it was bad enough. It did not seem to me that there was any more weight on us as we went down into night-darkness, but there must have been some. I came to the steep sides of the first draw, which led away southeastward. I dropped down into it, with a sudden sickening feeling that there might no longer be a bottom; a thought that vanished when my heavy feet struck and sank leadenly into the sand. I turned right. I felt rather than heard my helpers drop into the wash behind me.

Now I moved to the east side of the wash, held out my hand against the dirt bank, moved along, guiding myself with my hand. As nearly as I could tell there was no material resistance to our advance. We strode through the smut far easier than if it had been water; as easily as if it had been the darkness to which I likened it. I sensed opposition; the same sort of opposition, only many times stronger, one knows exists in a parent or teacher who opposes what one wishes, but says nothing about it —just sulks and opposes!

It must have taken an hour to reach the place where Norman Draw merged with Toler Draw. My left hand found it. I turned into it, memories of old terrors flooding back. Here at this place I had often stood for what seemed hours, mustering up courage to travel into Norman Draw.

I had that same reluctance now, multiplied by the years since I had been a six year old. But I set out. I had fixed in my mind, from the microseism, just where we would face the mounded breast of the hill which we could no longer see, might never see again if we did not conquer the smut, and I held steadily on the tiring course until we reached it—and I visualized it in mind from old memory. It was in the area where badgers multiplied through the years, where literally scores of their burrows led back into the side of the hill, where mounds covered areas of fifty feet per burrow.

I faced the side of the hill, stood very still. The others came up and I knew they formed to my right and left, by the way the segments of rope pulled against the back of my diving suit.

Out of those holes, I was sure—smut was pouring like water from a big hose under

high pressure! That was just a feeling I had, based on sensitivity, and a steady pushing against my body from head to heels.

I TAPPED the man next to me on my right. We had a fairly good set of prearranged signals. This man had a fire-drill, a new government contraption which would eat into almost any metal known as it would eat through air itself. He walked ahead and now I clung to his belt. There was no sound, but he touched me with his elbow when he started using his fire drill. And then the ground ahead of my feet became level and I knew we had started into a stope made by the fire drill.

I extended hands from shoulders. The cut into the hill was about four feet wide, plenty. And soon I had to stand on tiptoe to reach the roof. We ate back under the hill, back under the high field, almost as fast as we could walk. I felt that we had hit the microseism location right on the nose. I tapped again when my feet told me we were in the rock. Almost instantly we slanted downward at a thirty-degree angle. Where we now were we were safe from cave-ins for the moment.

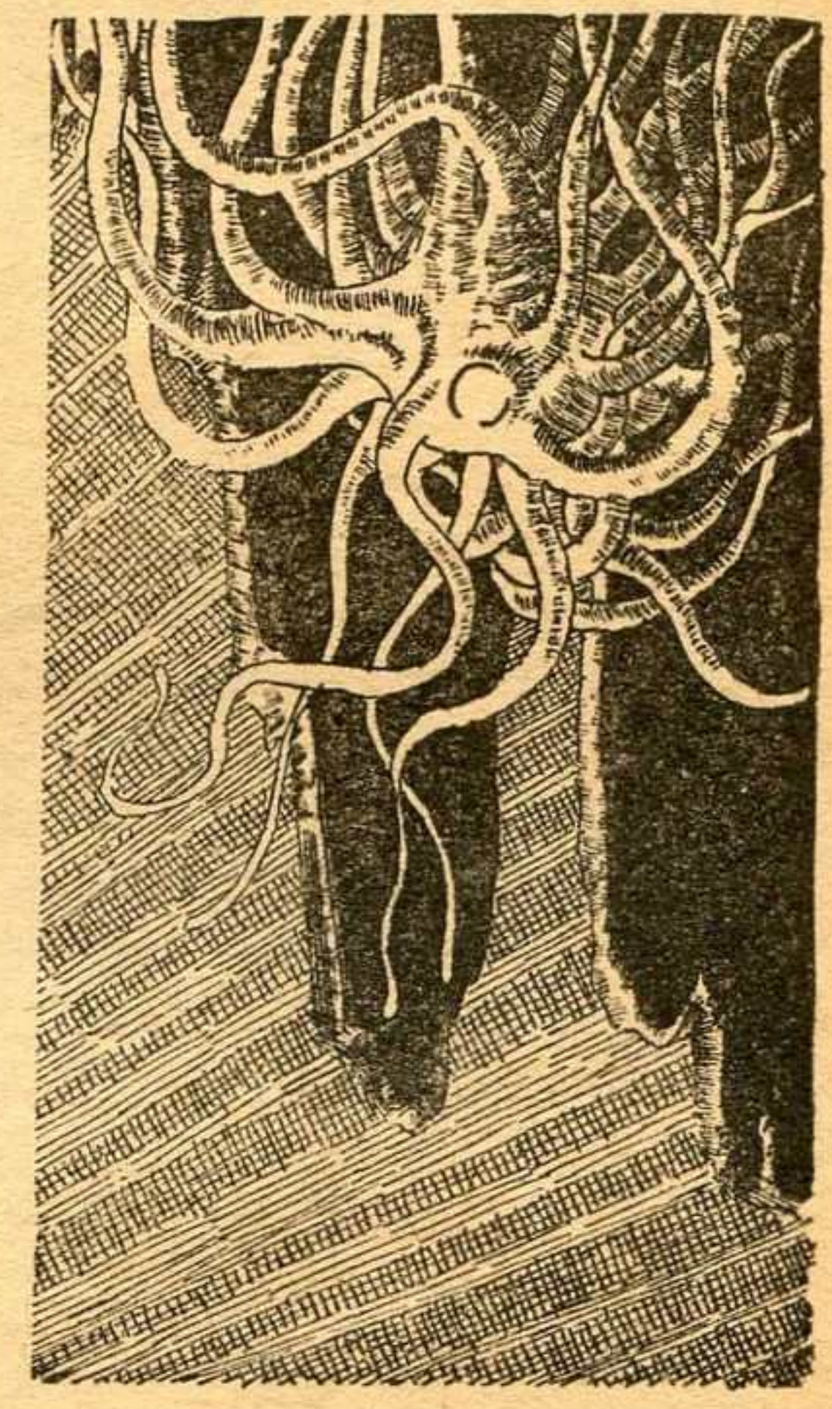
When I estimated that we were perhaps four hundred feet down and five hundred feet back under the hill, I signaled for our lights expert to come forward with his equipment. Mind now, the blazing hell from the fire drill had not been felt by any of us, nor had any of us seen the flames. Nor had we felt the heat along the shaft where much of the stone must have been close to molten.

But when we stopped abysmal cold began to seep through our thick diving suits! One second and they were almost unbearably hot for their own sakes; then the coldness came in and two terrific emotions rose in me at the same time: fear and excitement.

I knew the others felt it also because we closed in to touch one another and both the fear and excitement were communicated through our contacting hands. Also, we all wished to go on and on.

My fire-drill man traveled more slowly. My lights expert had tried to pierce the gloom with his lights with utterly no effect whatever. Now, suddenly, my fire-drill man stopped, tapped me again. He stood, his tapping indicated, inside the cavern! He fumbled forward and I had a chance to marvel at the miracle of mathematics; we had struck the cavern at its base level!

The cold was even more intense. I took the lead now, feeling my way with my feet, not wishing to step into a bottomless pit. I still moved with that effortlessness by which we had made progress through the smut outside. And on a sudden hunch I moved toward the feeling of greatest cold. If the smut-entities were averse to cold, if



we entered areas where it was great enough we would be free of them! So I reasoned, if a fifteen-year-old can pride himself on reasoning.

WHEN I began to stiffen with the cold I came up solid against the acme of cold. I ran my hand over a smooth surface. My hands seemed to freeze against it. I signaled for my lights man. He came forward, switched on his light magic—and for the first time since dropping into the smut-mass we could see! I could see, there in the blackness, all of my companions. They looked like something out of Inferno and no mistake. But when we looked around us and saw into what we had come, nothing human, or made by humans, could ever again look anything but commonplace! How does one

describe something with which one has nothing to compare?

First, the cavern was vast. I knew, all of us knew how it had been formed. Ice from those ancient glaciers had, by glacier action, been wrapped up in dirt, rock, sand, and all the drippings and dregs of the great moraine; the dirt and rock had been churned, crushed, piled hill on hill, until a world of ice was incased in a world of cataclysmic earth. Then, after ages, the ice outside had receded and the dirt and rocks, miles deep all around, had preserved the ice within, like some unbelievable pig-in-a-blanket.

But what had been preserved in the ice itself?

I knew, all of us knew, that the churning I have referred to, the piling of dirt on dirt, rock on rock, hill on hill, to encase the world of ice, *had been deliberate!* We all knew it because our minds had been prepared for it. We knew it before there was any proof. The black face of ice that had been ages old when Lemuria sank beneath the Pacific, stared out at us with baleful eyes. Oh, I know how ice twinkles and stares when it reflects light, but this was different. The "eyes" were so close together, yet each one distinct, and the balefulness so unmistakable, that I began to shiver with something that was not entirely the cold.

We were surrounded by ice. The cavern in which we stood must have been twenty acres in extent. The ice ceiling was a hundred feet overhead. In spite of the cold some sort of melting was taking place in this cavern, slowly, surely, enlarging it.

The floor underfoot was a-crawl! Water, black water, dripped from the roof, seeped endlessly from the entire surrounding wall. Maybe it came out of the floor, too. But on the floor itself, it *moved and grew!*

I knew we stood in one of the birth places, maybe the only one of the smut! The others knew it with me. We stared at one another through our eye-pieces now. The other faces were all reddish in the reflected light, strange, fearful. The stuff on the floor was not ice, but it had just been ice, and it was colder than any ice we knew on the surface. The coldness crept up our feet into our bodies. It had an added coldness, as profound as absolute zero.

I noticed an outward flow from the center of the mass on the floor. I realized that on the floor of this great mysterious cavern the drippings from roof and walls, the seepage, formed in a kind of reserve poll—and then spread slowly, inexorably outward in all directions! I knew what happened after that. Somehow it slid out under the ice, worked its way down into unfrozen soil—then moved up through the interstices of rocks, however solid, up into the clay, the sand, the gravel, then, by capillarity, the soil itself—into the roots of wheat, up to the heads where it appeared as *smut!*

But why this particular manifestation? How had *selection* been made? The choosing of just one particular field, *all* of it, but no more, indicated what Larsen had suggested: intention. But what was the entity or entities that intended?

Were we standing even now inside some laboratory of a far-off forgotten day? The ice was alive, I was sure, frozen solid through the centuries, against a set time of wakening! But what was the entity? The frozen part that we regarded as ice? Or the separate portions of it we had first regarded as smut spores or *sori* until Larsen said it was not smut?

I signaled our fire-drill man to use his apparatus on the material on the cavern floor. He blazed his flames upon it. The whole cavern, in the light, looked like some unbelievable hell. But the effect of the fire on the mass was astounding. There was instantly faster movement! The stuff on the floor, without diminishing, began to move faster in all directions, out under the ice, as if the fire gave it new life. I saw, and Larsen saw, and signaled me with his fingers against my suit, that the fire caused the material on the cavern floor to increase. Each "spore," it appeared, divided when touched by the flame, reproducing like the amoeba, by division.

Quickly my man played the flame all around the cavern wall—and before he could turn it off the moving mass on the floor, which had been no higher than our knees, rose to our shoulders! The flame, melting the ice, had released the smut and so quickly that it had almost flooded the cavern. And we had no way, down here, to reverse the process. But the flames were

quickly turned off—*in spite of a sudden mental message that came to my mind—and I heard later to the minds of all the others —as if the entire ice face were pleading for more and more of the releasing flame!*

I signaled for the fire-drill man to concentrate on a stope cut straight into the ice wall.

He asked by signal if it should be about the same size as that by which we had penetrated the hillside. I nodded. He adjusted his light, played it against the ice face at a spot selected by Larsen.

The flames ate their way in, but it wasn't water that came out of the shaft behind us —it was a steady stream of smut! Our "ice" then, was not ice at all, but the material we had called "smut" frozen solid. And it was sentient. It knew who and what we were. It had known for all the ages of historic man. It communicated with us telepathically somehow! *It? They?* How could we tell? The material was immortal, that was clear—as any cellular thing that reproduces by halving itself is immortal.

WE deliberately drove back into the ice face until we came to solid rock! We must have gone in a mile behind the face of the "ice." I think we all realized that we were thus traveling into the very heart of some antediluvian monster of which no record had previously come down to man in the rocks. This monster, whatever it was, was a community in itself. It was one as a community, one in each of its tiny separate entities—each of which became two at will, to add to the strength and size of the community.

A chill coursed through me as I remembered that man himself is a community—of nobody really knows how many billions of cells. This community could be some weird progenitor of man himself, easily. Else how could twenty of us—nineteen of us scientists including the greatest, Larsen —have been so sure of telepathic communication from It-Them to our brains?

The Thing welcomed the breath of the flame which released it. The dripping from the flame, from the heart of the pack, seemed almost to sing as it flowed back past us, under our feet, to the cavern, there to flow outward and upward to add to the mass which grew upon the high field, spreading in all directions across Central Washington.

I could just imagine the people on the surface now, noting the increased activity of the smut-mass, wondering what dreadful things were happening to us. We were releasing more of the materials from the elder world, but we did not see how it could be helped. We had to have some idea of this or be utterly defeated at bringing it under control.

But if the ice closed in around us, back there in that tunnel, and our fire-drill suddenly went out of condition! We must all have thought of that at once, for no sooner had realization come than we started backtracking. We could be trapped anywhere between here and the surface! And on the surface the traps were just as thickly set! There was no doubting the danger to us, to our people above, to all the neighboring counties, to the nation, for all we knew.

Nothing could destroy this entity or community of entities; but cold, if sufficiently intense, could immobilize It-Them. Cold was our answer. As we fled back through the tunnel into the great cavern I felt as if the entire pack, with millions of tiny voices, were shrieking silently after me:

"Set me free! Set me free! I will serve you always! You, too, shall be immortal!"

But there was a very human element of stupidity in It-Them, also. For if it had any consideration at all for creatures that were mortal it would certainly not have slain Lonnie Keel and the dozen other human beings the smut-mass had devoured on the surface—and then had any idea that we would listen favorably to It-Them's appeal for release! But the appeal was made. It fled after us, begging, beseeching, promising that immortality which it so plainly knew.

I did not care for its immortality, however, nor just then did my co-workers. For It-Them's immortality had kept it locked underground, like some monstrous black Prometheus chained, for ages mankind could scarcely count. Was immortality worth such restrictions?

I KNEW then the solution to the smut-mass, a solution that was only temporary, that must be kept active to the end of man's life on earth if black Prometheus were to

remain chained and thus deterred from possessing the globe.

Engineers who had worked on Grand Coulee Dam were among my nineteen co-workers and I felt sure the idea would have occurred to them also—they had used it on the east bank of the Columbia where briefly, it flowed into the north. It would work here in Norman Draw and Toler Draw. It had to, or who could say how far the doom we had released from the old moraine, in the high field above it, would eventually extend?

V

SUCH BITTER COLD

WE HAD one very obvious and highly dangerous duty to perform before we returned to the surface. Doing it would release more and more of the queer black hell-harvest, but if we didn't find out the truth it wouldn't matter much how little or extensively we freed the smut. In a short time it would possess the world anyway, limited, I supposed, only by the food it would need while "alive," while not frozen into immobility. Our duty was to find out something of the limits of the underground smut field, to check against later efforts of our seismologists.

So we started just inside the cavern, where the tunnel by which we had entered it from the surface was running almost full of the smut, and made a tunnel against the solid rock, behind the "ice," to see whether there were branching caverns—to find out, in short, whether this cavern was the only pocket of It-Them, or whether it might not be that all the land under what had once been fields of ancient ice, from side to side of the continent, was inhabited by It-Them! The stuff might never be released within the lifetime of man. It might be released everywhere simultaneously, by tomorrow morning! We must be prepared. It was our duty to take risks.

So behind the eating flames which released more and more of the ebon horror, we followed the rock face around the inside of the cavern. We learned that there were scores of branching tunnels and caverns, each one tightly packed with the black ice!

Some sort of message, some sort of mapping job must be done to assist the seismologists. I was the only one of those twenty who could return to the surface with any chance of finding my way back. So I went out alone, sick with fear, to the surface. There I procured three sticks of dynamite, fused, capped, spoke briefly to the seismologists, did not take time to explain, and returned to my co-workers in the cavern.

In the cavern we took fresh risks, risks that one or all of us might be crushed by the falling in of the cavern roof. We set off one of the sticks of dynamite at each of three most widely separated points in the cavern. These little explosions, shaking the earth, would reach each seismograph on the surface and write its wave-record thereon. Those who knew how to read the jigglings would know, then, how far the explosion waves of each of the three had traveled to each seismograph, through what media it had traveled—whether rock, clay, sand, gravel or ice!—and a complete map could be made of the dwelling places of It-Them, across all the vast North American Moraine! Thus only could the world protect itself against what we had first known as smut.

Well, then we came out, and I waited, as a youngster should, for science itself to provide what seemed to me to be the only answer. Here it is: During the building of the Grand Coulee Dam, millions of tons of material poured into the hole where the engineers were trying to build an abutment. The material came from the hill on the eastern bank of the river. It could not be removed as fast as it slid into the pit.

So engineers had simply driven pipes into the mountainside, attached them to a special refrigeration plant—*and frozen the mountain solid!* Here, however, we must freeze the hill solid and keep it thus frozen through the ages. If ever alertness relaxed we were done!

I WAITED for somebody, probably Larsen, to say what we should do, after we came out of that cavern, reported to our people, to newspaper reporters and thus to the world, what we had found. Our seismologists were already studying the records of our three cavern-explosions.

Toler Draw and Norman Draw were both filled with smut when we came out.

The stuff had pushed its fighters back more than five miles in all directions during the time we were down there in the cavern.

When we had done, I waited, and Larsen, grinning at me, said: "I suppose you know the answer, kid?"

I felt shy about the whole thing. "Grand Coulee Dam," I offered, "but *you* know; it's better, coming from you!"

Well, then Larsen told them, and before that same day was ended scores of gallant engineers had gone down into the smut, down into Toler and Norman Draws, to turn the high field and all the land under it, into a gargantuan refrigerator capable of delivering nearly absolute zero cold.

It was easy to tell when they began making cold, for the smut ceased its advance. Then it began to retreat! Its retreat was faster even than its outward charge had been from the moment we began releasing it with the combined harvester, then with the fire Karl Orme had set in the wheat, then with our fire-drill in the cavern.

But not all the ebon horror got back into the cavern-sanctuary before the hillside-refrigerator was completely efficient and operative. A field of it, varying in thickness from inches to feet, covered the high field like a cooling lava flow—a constant threat, a constant reminder, to those who knew.

Scientists often stopped along the road past my Uncle's place, to take note of the ebon blanket over the now useless high field. Invariably they said to Uncle Charles, somewhat loftily:

"Volcanic action here, ages ago! That's black basalt!"

Uncle Charles always widened his eyes as with great surprise.

"I wonder," he invariably answered. "what makes it so cold you can't cross it without freezing?"

They always had some learned explanation. Everybody always had explanations for everything. Only the army of seismologists which planted its seismographs across the North American Moraine offered no explanations of their work. They knew the truth would certainly be laughed to scorn.

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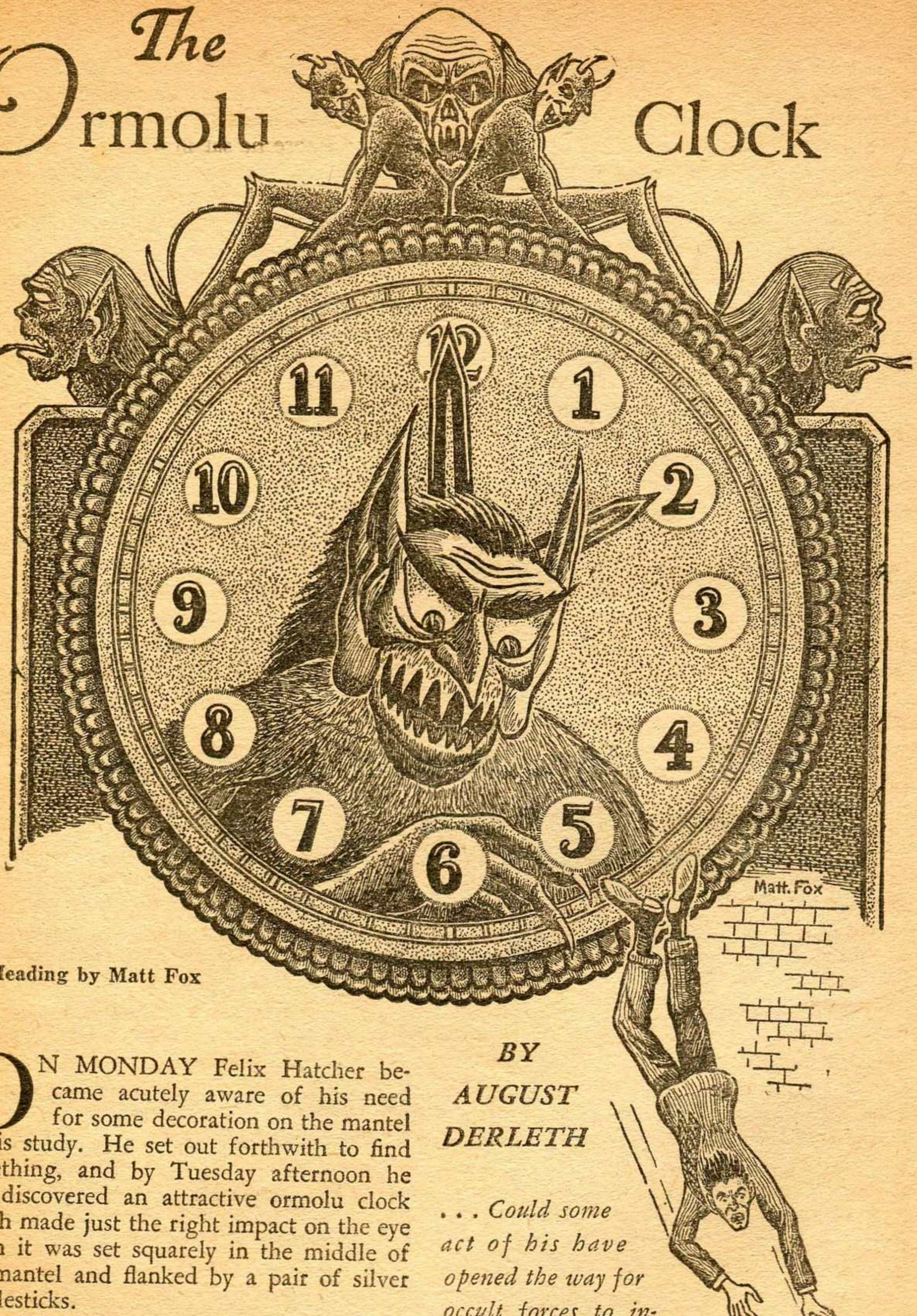
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The Ormolu Clock



Heading by Matt Fox

BY AUGUST DERLETH

. . . Could some act of his have opened the way for occult forces to invade his privacy?

ON MONDAY Felix Hatcher became acutely aware of his need for some decoration on the mantel in his study. He set out forthwith to find something, and by Tuesday afternoon he had discovered an attractive ormolu clock which made just the right impact on the eye when it was set squarely in the middle of the mantel and flanked by a pair of silver candlesticks.

By Wednesday, he had quite another problem. After a quiet little dinner party to celebrate his settling down in his new quarters, he had gone to bed at the reasonable hour of midnight, only to be awakened two hours later by circumstances quite beyond his wildest dreams. He told Blakeslee about it at their club.

"I thought I heard somebody below stairs,

and went down. It sounded as if someone had got in, and from the stairs I did see someone in the study. I went quietly round to the threshold and looked in.

"Frankly, Blakeslee, if I hadn't been cold sober I would never have trusted my eyes. There were three people in my study. There was a woman—she had been shot, or something. There were two men—one of them was in the act of bending over the other when I came, and it looked as if he, too, had been shot. I assure you, I was petrified; I simply stood and stared; I quite forgot about my being visible. But as luck would have it, I was not seen.

"And then, just like that, the whole thing vanished. So I can only conclude that this charming house of mine is haunted."

Without a flicker of his eyelids, Blakeslee looked down the length of the long nose in his equine face. "Common occurrence," he said weightily. "Too much *paté de foie gras* or Welsh rarebit. These hallucinations or walking dreams are usually brought on by over-indulgence." He looked meaningly in the direction of Hatcher's slightly rotund waist, which contrasted his own thinness.

"But it was as real as you are," protested Hatcher.

"I don't doubt it. But then, if it had been real, you'd have seen something afterward in the room to show. Was there anything? Blood on the rug, for instance?"

"No, of course not."

"As for haunted houses—you may take my word for it, Hatcher, they never did exist and never will."

Blakeslee offered cold comfort. If his house was not haunted, then what explanation would account for what he had seen? Hatcher, who was a cinema critic of the most inoffensive kind, was a man of moderate imagination. He was not given to wild flights of fancy, and he knew very well he had seen in his study something which could not be accounted for by any rational explanation of which he was aware. Blakeslee was his one venture at telling anyone; fearing ridicule, he said nothing more.

That night he watched.

He concealed himself in that corner of his study which both afforded him some protection and enabled him to view the room with comparative ease. His quarters were typical of those a bachelor might find desirable: spare, sparsely furnished, somewhat austere. The corner of his concealment—where he sat in the only really comfortable chair in his flat—commanded the threshold from which, on the previous night, he had seen the little drama he was convinced was spectral.

He spent a dull evening. He had not anticipated that anything would happen before midnight, but at eleven o'clock he put away the book he had been reading, turned out the light, and waited.

But midnight struck and nothing happened.

One o'clock struck; still nothing.

He dozed off.

When the clock struck two he opened his eyes. The sound of the clock's notes had not yet died away when he beheld an extraordinary movement, like a visible agitation in the semi-darkness—for some light from the street-corner straggled into the room. And then the agitation coalesced, and three people stood in the room, evanescent, he saw now, for the faintly lit door-jamb showed through one of them. The tableau held but for a second—the woman broke away from the near man's arms, the second man who had evidently just made a surprise entrance, grinned diabolically, whipped out a revolver, and shot the woman, who crumpled. The near man started forward to grapple with the intruder, but, he too, was shot, at close range. He fell, and the other bent swiftly over him to put the weapon in his dying hand. And then, as speedily as it appeared, the scene vanished.

It was extraordinary. As a cinema critic, Hatcher was fully aware of its drama. He wanted to tell someone about it, but he did not know to whom to turn since Blakeslee had scorned his tale. But above his excitement and a modicum of reasonable fear, he was curious. Why had he never observed this spectral phenomenon before?

He spent part of the next day making discreet enquiries. Had former tenants of the house ever reported anything amiss? Never. The agent was positive. Not content with this, he sought out two former tenants, but it was manifest from their puzzled astonishment that they did not follow the drift of his questions, and hence, knew nothing of

supernatural phenomena. At the end of his enquiry, he was more puzzled than anyone he had approached. As a quasi-believer in certain mystical concepts, he was almost persuaded to believe that some act of his had opened the way for occult forces to invade his privacy.

But this, of course, was absurd; he had not altered his way of life in two decades.

After the theatre that night, he watched again.

Promptly at two o'clock in the morning he witnessed the same apparition. He timed it. It lasted little more than a minute from beginning to end.

HE WATCHED yet another night, but this time nothing happened. He could not understand the absence of the phenomenon any more than he could its appearance. It was only when he got stiffly up to leave his corner for his bed that he missed the clock's ticking; he had forgoten to wind it, and it had stopped at one-thirty.

He took the ormolu clock from the mantel, wound it, and set the hour by his wristwatch. Then he moved the hand up to strike two o'clock and on past to where it should be, at a quarter past the hour.

On the instant of the clock's striking two, he was aware of the same uncanny disturbance in the air, this time like a rushing of air from the clock itself and turning, saw over his shoulder, precisely the same scene he had witnessed three times previously.

And at once he thought: *the clock!*

He restored the clock to the mantel, trembling a little, and stood looking at it. It presented a bland, inscrutable face to him, like the face of any clock. Its voice ticked away pleasantly at the same pace as any clock's. There was nothing whatsoever about it to suggest that it was anything but a perfectly ordinary ormolu clock, somewhat more attractive than most such clocks, but that was all.

But he was convinced that it was more than coincidence that the appearance of the unusual apparitions in his study should follow his acquisition of the ormolu clock. He did not know how the events could be related, but he determined to find out, if possible.

Early the following morning he went around to call on Stanley Milward, who had written several curious books on the subject of time and its relation to space. Milward had been a guest at the club on several occasions and had spoken to the assembled members on various abstruse subjects.

Hatcher plunged at once into his thesis: did Milward believe that events were recorded in a kind of time-flux and could be seen again?

"Oh, it's common scientific knowledge that someone viewing earth from a powerful enough telescope on Mars would see events taking place which had actually taken place decades before. Light travels only so fast, after all," said Milward patronizingly. "And I suppose that if you could intersect traveling light at any given point it might be possible to re-view events which were in your own past."

"It's very difficult," conceded Hatcher with appropriate humility.

"But you have something definite in mind, haven't you, Hatcher?"

Hatcher explained, choosing his words well.

"Sounds like psychic residue, which is pure bosh," said Milward with crushing authority. "You are suggesting that somehow that clock has become a time portal, and that at the precise hour at which a shocking crime was committed before it, the scene is repeated. There is no known scientific concept which would satisfactorily account for anything of the sort. And you have seen this phenomenon four times?"

Hatcher asserted that he had.

"How do you sleep otherwise?"

"Oh, very well."

"You've not been seeing too many crime cinemas? These disgusting films seem to be on the increase, particularly since the American variety has invaded our market."

Hatcher assured him most solemnly that he was and had been sane, sober, and in good health.

"The psychiatrists tell us that such hallucinations usually derive from something hidden in our past. I must confess, Hatcher, you have the perfect look of a man without a past."

"Well, it's nothing in *my* past," said Hatcher, refusing to take offense. "But it may be something in the clock's past."

"A clock has neither past nor future in that sense," said Milward coldly.

"I should have thought," answered Hatcher mildly, "that those were just the things a clock most certainly did have."

"Ah, and what *is* that clock's past?" isquired Milward.

HATCHER did not know, but there was a way of finding out. As he made his way to the shop where he had bought the ormolu clock, he pondered Milward's positiveness. Despite the marked air of scornful disbelief which had characterized Milward's comments, Hatcher was convinced that he had hit upon the solution to the mystery: there had been a crime committed before the ormolu clock at two o'clock in the morning, and somehow, by natural, or supernatural means, since Milward denied the natural, the recurrence of that mystic hour recreated the scene in its impact on the clock, the clock as time itself, the symbol of time, so that in its inevitable round the scene must recur and recur until the clock itself stopped.

At the shop he found the dealer unusually reticent.

"We sell so many clocks, sir," he said. "I doubt that I could remember."

But Hatcher was positive the man remembered very well, for he had noticed an unmistakable glint of recognition and apprehension in his eyes at Hatcher's entrance. Hatcher was a patient man. He described the clock minutely down to the very last detail.

"An ormolu clock," said the dealer, shaking his head helplessly. "I don't suppose you remember the day you bought it?"

"Tuesday week, at about three o'clock in the afternoon. The day was somewhat foggy, and it turned to rain right afterward. I carried the clock away with me. You sold it to me. And you know very well all about the clock."

The dealer sighed. "I'm sorry, sir. We do not customarily give out such information."

"Where did you get the clock?" persisted Hatcher.

The dealer went to bring a ledger to his counter, but both men knew that the very act was unnecessary. Yet the dealer leafed patiently through the ledger until he came to the information he sought.

"The clock was one item among a number of things which we acquired from Harold Penton."

"Thank you," said Hatcher soberly and withdrew.

The name Penton rang a bell in his memory. It had been in the newspapers.

He went directly to his own newspaper's office and began to hunt up the files. It took him a while to find what he sought, and he had to go back through nine months of the paper. But it was there, unmistakably—the whole distressing story of Mr. Harold Penton's return home at eight o'clock one morning only to find his wife and her lover dead in what appeared to be a suicide pact or murder and suicide. The pictures were con-



clusive—the dead woman of the apparition was Mrs. Penton, the dead man was her "lover," and Penton himself was undeniably the man who had shot them both.

Hatcher was shaken.

The papers were quite positive. There were statements from the medical examiner, from the police sergeant; the proceedings of the inquest were set forth in considerable detail; it was no secret that Mrs. Penton had been seeing Francis Richardson; the evidence showed that she had been shot first, and then he had evidently shot himself, for the powder burns were marked on his skin. The whole matter seemed very pat, and the verdict of murder and suicide was inevitable.

But Hatcher knew better. Hatcher and Harold Penton, wherever he was.

The thought that there had been a grotesque miscarriage of justice profoundly

troubled Hatcher. And such additional facts as he managed to unearth were not calculated to ease his mind. He learned that Penton had been having an affair with a young actress for some time before his wife's death; he had married her six months after the tragedy, and they were now living in a handsome apartment in Princess Court. There were certain whispered tales which conveyed the sinister suggestion that Richardson's presence at the Penton house at two o'clock in that fatal morning had been arranged by "someone"—that is to say, Penton himself, so that the tragedy had the look of something very convenient indeed for Penton. There had been a substantial insurance paid to Penton on his wife, too.

Hatcher felt that he should do something.

But what could he do? He could certainly not go to the police. He could imagine what they would make out of his narrative. Ghosts, after all, could not very well give evidence from the witness stand. Besides, the clock—

The clock! Of course, that was it. Did Penton know about the clock?

Very probably not, since the papers stressed his profound upset, how he had left the house immediately and never returned, how its furnishings had been disposed of in such haste, and the like. He was very likely completely unaware of the clock's peculiar property, of that horrible arrested moment which was destined to repeat itself forever whenever the clock reached that fatal hour.

Next day he called round at the apartment in Princess Court. He did not actually present himself, but merely took occasion to acquaint himself with the habits of Mr. and Mrs. Harold Penton.

After several days he learned that Mrs. Penton was absent from the apartment from two o'clock to four every afternoon, and that Penton himself was gone for most of every day.

Accordingly it was mid-afternoon that Hatcher presented himself on the following Monday, introducing himself as a clocksmith, who had come for Mr. Penton's clock, and had brought another to be used during the time that the clock was away from its mantel. For Hatcher reasoned that Penton would very probably cling to certain aspects of his long-time milieu, of which a clock was an essential part.

In this he was not mistaken. The manager duly conducted him to the Penton apartment, and there on the mantel over the fireplace stood a clock which was very much indeed like the ormolu clock under Hatcher's arm. In a very businesslike fashion, Hatcher crossed the room and exchanged clocks.

He thanked the manager gravely, tipping his bowler almost obsequiously, and took his departure with the Penton clock under his arm.

It was very simply and easily accomplished, and, unless the manager took occation to say something, it was doubtful that either of the Pentons would notice that an exchange had been made.

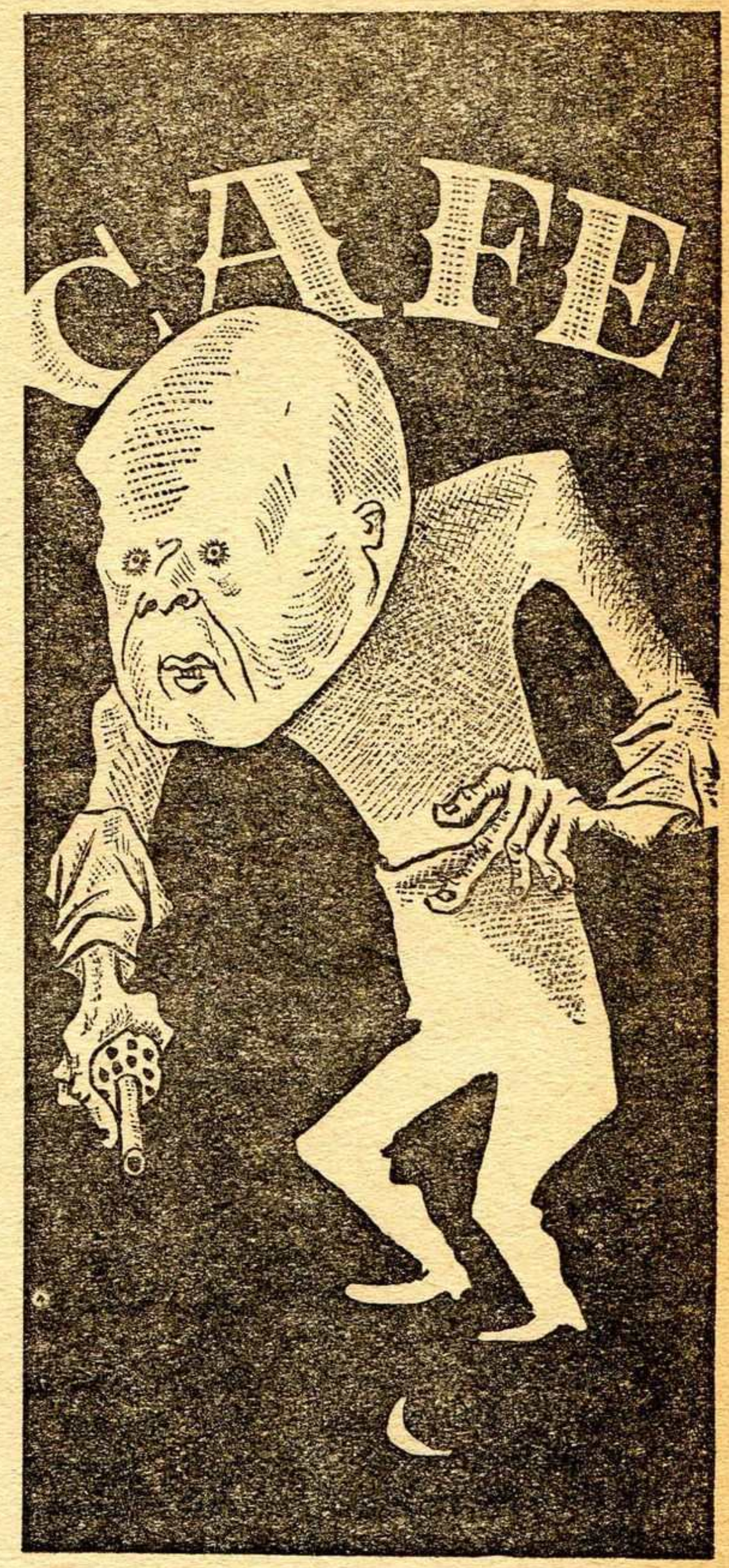
Hatcher had an instinctive belief that his gambit would achieve results. He settled back to wait, relieved of being free of the horror in his study.

ON THE second morning after his exchange of clocks, Hatcher found Penton's picture in the paper once more. This time it was in connection with a brief and somewhat garbled account of Penton's death. He had fallen or thrown himself from a window of his apartment sometime in the morning, it was assumed at or shortly after two o'clock. One late homeward-bound wayfarer asserted that Penton had come to the window of his apartment and attempted to throw something out, had overbalanced, and gone out with it. Not far from the broken body lay all that was left of an ormolu clock.

Hatcher felt obscurely justified. Reviewing an incredibly bad cinema that day, he wrote that it had a "singularly satisfactory conclusion." His regular readers thought he had slipped a cog. But, of course, he had not been thinking of the motion picture.

In That Same Moment

BY MANLY WADE WELLMAN



Heading by Lee Brown Coye

I WALKED out of my lonely little cottage into my lonely little yard, and lounged against the sycamore, watching the birds. I thought about the fellow who called himself Last Man, and his claim to have mastered time. "Once done," he'd told me, "and it's permanent. Conquered time is your doormat, your toy, your pocket piece. I made it run backward for me; I can make it run forward for me, or stand still for me, or anything." Remembering as I lounged, I decided to take him seriously enough to disbelieve him.

In that same moment the birds that had fluttered and dodged before and above me stopped fluttering and dodging, and hung there like stuffed dummies on invisible wires.

If that sounds unthinkable, that's how it should sound; for unthinkable it was, to see them stop short in the air, wings frozen in mid-beat and become birds in those super-show-window exhibits at museums—the ones where a whole landscape, complete with plants and creatures, is somehow sealed and caught, true to life except for the utter immobility. I jumped and started forward, and muttered something out loud. It sounded sharp, almost deafening, for it was the only sound in a world gone suddenly dead still. Still in sound as in motion.

A bird stuck in the air, at about the height my lifted hand would reach. Indeed, I half raised a hand toward it, but felt I'd better not. Beyond was the magnolia tree, and every broad, shiny leaf of it as rigid and motionless as though stamped out of green metal. I looked back at the house. Smoke was coming from the chimney—no. The smoke hung like a great blob of dirty fluff. If you've seen stereoptican views, you've seen such things. Three-dimensional, utterly natural in every way but one. Things were frozen.

"What's coming off?" I asked somebody, though nobody was there. I wished, wildly

The Last Man had lived in the far future, in a world too terrible to hold humanity.

wished, for company. This nightmare was not one of the endurably vague ones. Everything was clearly, sharply cut to the sense, and absolutely silent and unmoving. Company—if there'd been another human being—

Ruthie had said she was coming. She had smiled last night, and said she'd see me today. On her doorstep I had tried to make a dignified impression by remarking that her interest in Ted Follett must be an absorbing one, and that my future absence from her side wouldn't be noticed. I'd meant to sound aloof, but Ruthie had smiled more sweetly than I had thought possible even for her, and had said, "Well then, I'll come and see you tomorrow before noon." There were a million promises in what she had said. Or a million mockeries. Suppose she'd been here right now—would she be frozen, locked, stricken into statue-stillness? Wouldn't she? Would she? Ruthie would be different, somehow, from the rest of the frozen landscape—or was I the only mind that thought her different? My mind, and Ted's?

I walked around the house toward the sand road that led down to the highway and its four or five little business buildings grouped there, two filling stations and a store and a country cafe. I moved in complete silence, except for the slap of my shoes on the sand. Up ahead I saw a shiny sedan, blue and chromium. Ted Follett's. Between the car and me a figure moved, in that silent color-photograph of trees and landscape.

The movement, against all the quiet, was uncanny enough to bring me to a halt. I glanced away from the figure's approach. Right at the roadside, within arm's reach, hung a tiny ballshaped openwork design of motes—insects. Gnats or midges, caught as if in colorless amber, the way insects have been preserved through immemorial ages. Below, at a tree root, a rabbit reared itself as though to hop over a fallen pine cone. Its open eye was as hard and bright as black glass.

"Ahoy," came a voice, high and mocking, a voice I knew. The figure was striding close, and I recognized its slenderness that cheap mail-order clothing couldn't disguise, the childish smoothness of the face, the mocking twist of the grin. It was Last Man.

HE CALLED himself Last Man, he once told me, because that's what he was, the last of all men. And he'd lived in the far future, in an age, when all else of men and women had died in a world too terrible to hold them; but before he could die, he'd mastered time and come back, back, back, through eons and ages, to our year and century, and he chose to live in our community because it was peaceful and cheap. He told me more, but that was its gist, and no additions or ornamentations could make it seem more improbable. Yet he half convinced me when he talked, and to me alone did he tell the story, one day when I'd fallen into conversation with him at the cafe on the highway.

"You have a dreamy imagination," he said. "You're the only one in this region who can comprehend, or half comprehend, my story. I don't ask you to believe me, though. Indeed, I'd prefer you didn't, it's more amusing that way." And he talked on about time traveling, and said what he had to say about mastering time. "It's a skill that becomes no skill at all, like swimming or rope dancing or adding up big columns of figures. Once done, and it's a permanent ability . . ."

I remembered these things as Last Man strolled up to me and smiled with his thin rosy lips in that face that was smooth and delicate like a child's, but old and mocking like a devil's, and held out his slim hand with its soft, pink palm. "Well," said Last Man, "you see now that I can do it."

"Do what?" I asked stupidly.

"This." He gestured. "I've stopped time. Locked it. I made it run backward for millenia once, and for a few weeks let it go forward. Now, for a change, I've—made it stop. For everybody and everything, except our two selves."

I felt weary and cripple-brained. "Why me along with you?"

"Because you can be made to understand. You've listened and sometimes commented, when I told how I came to this time. And it might not be awfully good, all alone. I needed another living creature with me."

"Why not a dog?" I asked him, just to say something.

"Why not, indeed? But you'll be as useful as a dog, and less trouble. Come on back along the road to the highway."

I started back with him. I gazed at the car ahead of us, and he read my mind—he often read minds. "There's something that will interest you," he said.

He was right. As we came near, I saw for certain that it was Ted Follett's car, and that Ted Follett sat at the wheel like a wax-work of his pudgy, trim-tailored self, and that Ruthie sat beside him, sweet and lovely and summery-dressed, but as motionless and rigid to the look as a carved jewel. Even her honey hair looked as permanently set as the finest of dusty gold wire. I turned away from her with a sense of faintness and dread.

"If you'd touched her, that might have spoiled things," said Last Man at my elbow. "Come away, leave them locked in the moment." I was glad to follow him away past the car. "Locked in the moment," he said, as if savoring an epigram. "But you and I pass through a moment of time."

His manner was lofty, mocking and earnest all three, like that of an adult talking down to a child—or teasingly misinforming a child. And, myself childlike, I was vexed and argumentative.

"Of course we're passing through a moment of time," I said. "We're always passing through moment after moment—"

"When you misunderstand I despair of you, and yet you have more sympathy and mental pliability than anyone else I've met in this age. No. You and I alone pass through the moment. Nobody else has ever done that. It has always been the moment that passes the material creation. One stands and waits, while moments flash upon him and break over him like wave after wave."

"Why did you tell me to come away from Ruthie in the car?" I asked.

"So brief is a moment," Last Man continued, "that men think of it as small, infinitesimal, a point. But it's unthinkably, illimitably vast, a universe—only our view is small. In a single moment, while you might sit down to dinner or take a book from a shelf, I might be buying beer in the cafe; miles away in the next town, a garage is changing a tire. Across the ocean in Europe, a young lover greets his mistress. On the world's far side, a little child sleeps away the night. In the tropics, a tiger crouches to surprise an antelope. In the arctic, a bear scoops a fish out of a hole in the ice. These are but a handful of events on a tiny planet. On the sun, spots spread and shrink, larger than our oceans. On a far world, waters run, plants sprout. Comets dash through space. Stars are born or die. All in a single moment."

"Why," I said again, "did you tell me to come away from Ruthie in the car?"

STROLLING along, he smiled sidewise at me, crafty as Satan. "But no human being—save myself—comprehends the moment's complexity and size. Your brain grasps but one idea or sensation at a time, and not even that for long. Not until this present moment—arrested and locked—has it been possible to develop every potentiality in the moment, and the relationships of potentialities to each other. It is like the universe in the atom, the living organism in the cell—"

"Why did you tell me to come away from Ruthie in the car?"

Stopping, he let his eyes glare at me. I realized, perhaps for the first time, how brilliant and large they were, how dark and living and bitterly wise. "Oh!" he snorted, in one of his rare losses of temper. "You're failing me. She's the only idea you'll entertain in this moment. If I make it last forever for you, she'll occupy your mind forever, the tiny trace she makes in the moment will be everything."

Then he smiled again. "Set yourself at rest. I'll tell you later how to waken her into the eternal moment, along with you. Meanwhile, attention to what's all around us."

He led me on, toward the highway. We passed between houses with grimly motionless jewel-flowers in the yards, smoke like puffs of cloudy gray cotton over them. We passed a statue-like dog, its nose bent toward a stump. A bird or two held its place in the air. "Don't touch anything," Last Man bade me again.

An idea came to me, despite his sneer that I thought only of Ruthie. "I touch things every mo—I mean, I touch things constantly. The molecules of atmosphere," I elaborated. "If they're locked, why don't they oppose my passage?"

"Your fluid field, that allows you to move in the moment, affects them by your contact. They adapt themselves to you. Look," and he pointed toward the window of a house as we passed. "Inside the glass you see a bowl of fruit. It looks as massive as fruit of glass or stone. But if you touch it, it will become fruit again, pulpy and edible. Fruit like that in passing moments."

"And if I touch Ruthie—"

"At last you begin to use your mind," and he grinned at me. "I feel the glimmer of renewed hope in you. You comprehend how this moment, locked as it is, can be your moment. You can rule it and the universe it contains." He smiled the more broadly.

We had reached the highway. I looked along it. A truck stood near us. Beyond, a bus. Beyond that, two private cars, close together. And beyond, out of sight—what towns, what regions of locked quiet? I remembered a boyhood fancy I used to trade with playmates: *What if everybody in the world went to sleep except us, and we could break into the candy store. . . .*

Last Man read my mind again. This time he actually chuckled. "Your candy store is ready at hand, but select carefully. Think among your acquaintances as to who to touch and bring into the moment first. No, not Ruthie. Let her wait. She will be best wakened after you have roused a little band of dependents, among whom you will be ruler. Think well, I say. Because if you do as you should, this moment will be your kingdom, your empire, your conquest, your world-mastery."

"A touch will waken things, then?" I sat down on the bench in front of the cafe. Almost at my toe poised a big spider, rigid as a metal toy out of a box of prize candy. I stepped toward it, but for some reason decided against touching it. "Look here, Last Man. How did you manage all this? If time stands still in this district, it must stand still everywhere. The world, the universe—"

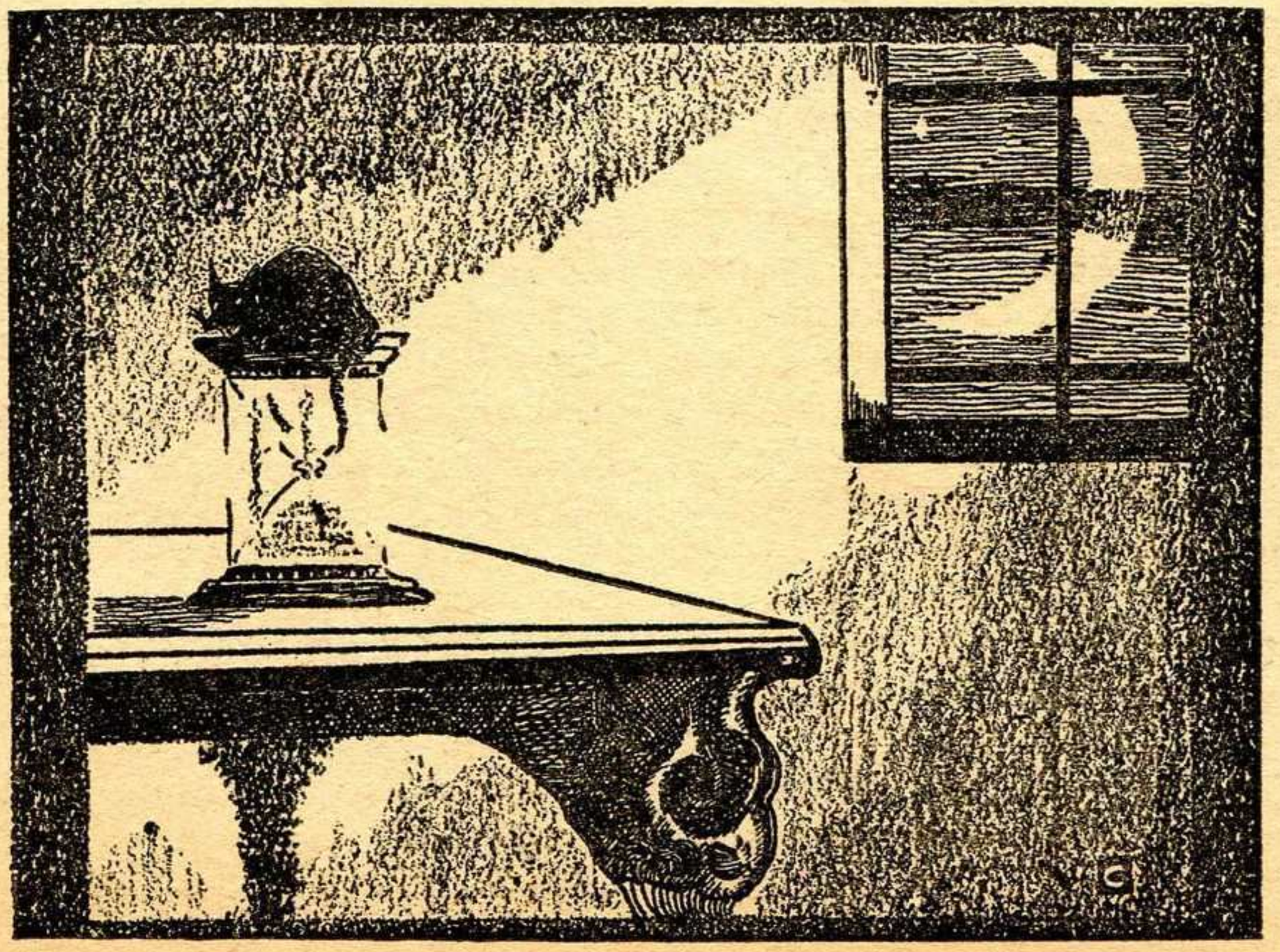
"It's too simple for you to comprehend," he interrupted with what, in someone else, might have been pomposity.

"But your machine—"

"Must there be a machine? Of course, that's what you'd expect. Some wonderful device that can conquer time and space, and once understood be a wonder no longer, like a walkie-talkie radio or the like. No, it's a principle. I involved myself in it, and you. Let me see how to illustrate . . ."

He shut his brilliant eyes, his lips moved slightly.

"Maybe I can draw a rough parallel," he



said after a moment. "Imagine yourself travelling, by train or car or afoot. You are going from one place to another. The landscape you see changes, moves, replaces itself. In some such way you go through time. You stop—in your journey, or in time—and all stands still. That need not mean a change in the landscape, or awareness of change. You yourself are pausing, that's all. You and I. Or else, you and I have been accompanying the world in its time-journey, and we've stopped and let it go ahead. We occupy the bit of time-landscape the rest have left behind."

"I get something of that," I told him. "The world moves ahead without us."

"Without us," he agreed. "At least, I suppose so—don't ask even me to explain what goes on in time while you and I have left those moments up ahead. I daresay that, after some hours or even days, they'll be aware that we're not in the community any more. A mystery, eh? But they won't know that they left themselves back in this moment with us, and that we can do with them as we will, here and now."

I SANK my body forward, elbows on knees, chin bracketed in my hands. "How did you manage to include me in this —this phenomenon?"

"I almost didn't." He made a little grimace. "Suppose, when it happened, you'd have stayed rigidly still wherever you were, frozen with astonishment. You might have failed to free yourself. Of course, I'd have come along and set you free by touching you. After all, I did it as much for you as for myself. We'll be partners in—"

"In bringing this waxwork back to motion?" I barked at him, and jumped up. "Look here, you've given yourself away. You did it as much for me, as for yourself. You want to rule in this situation."

"Why not? I didn't like the world as I'd found it when I came back to it—"

"Curse you for meddling with nature!"

"That primitive belief in curses," he snickered, and I took a sudden step toward him.

I may or may not have meant violence as I moved, but he read my mind more clearly than I had it made up. He leaped back against the door of the cafe, darted a hand into his pocket, and whipped it out with something small and shiny in it. "Make one wrong move," he warned me, "and you'll be disintegrated out of this moment and every other."

What he held was at once strange and wicked-seeming. It looked like a round, palm-sized metal egg, with keys or studs on its surface and a narrow hollow tube. When Last Man closed his hand upon it, his fingertips covered the studs and the tube thrust out between thumb and index finger toward me, like the muzzle of a gun. I moved no more, but bode tense, angry, waiting for—

"You're waiting for me to get off guard, you stupid, ungrateful animal," he said to me. "You think to attack me, to stop all this. You've judged me in your poor, simple, limited apology for a brain, and found me wanting. Isn't that so?"

It was so. I nodded.

"You won't realize that the world and everybody in it is headed for misery and then destruction; that you and I have our chance to save it—"

"For what?" I asked. "We're to waken up a handful of people and try to do things better than the universal system has done? Is that it?"

"Exactly. And—"

"And I can't do the job. And I don't trust you."

HE SMILED. "You were wiser than either of us knew when you said that a dog would be better for me than you. I gave you life, didn't I, when everyone else was frozen? Aren't you grateful?"

"Call it off, Last Man."

"I'll call you off." He came toward me, stood at the end of the bench. He pointed the shiny thing in his hand. "You'll drop out of sight, out of reality."

I lifted a foot and put it on the other end of the bench, and set my elbow on my upthrust knee. I meant to pose with scornful nonchalance, but it did not work. He wagged his head mockingly.

"You're afraid to die, and you're going to. I'm disappointed in you, and in myself for thinking you'd serve. Now—"

The strange weapon lifted in his hand, and involuntarily I started back. My foot pressed down the end of the bench, and the other end flew up and struck his fist. He cried out, and the shiny thing flew away out of his grasp. I never saw where it went, then or later, because I jumped upon him.

His slim body was like a mass of living wires, but I tripped and threw him, and held him there, my hands at his throat. He struggled under me, caught my wrists in his own hands, trying to pry himself loose. His face writhed into a furious distorted mask of pain and fury.

"No—" he said. "No—if you—don't let go—"

I dragged him upright and slammed him against the front of the cafe, meaning to strike him hard in the face, hard enough to bash the back of his head against the wood and stun him. He dodged free of me with a catlike agility and ran, stooping and looking for his weapon. I leaped and brought him down with a flying tackle, scrambling upon him again.

"Then I'll go—" he said. "Some other age—"

Did you ever clutch at mist, thinking it solid? Just so did he dwindle in my grappling arms. I clamped them tight, and he was less than empty garments in them, less than film or web, less than air. He was gone. I rose, feeling stupid and tricked, and looked around for the weapon he had dropped. It was gone, too. Perhaps it vanished with him into whatever place he had gained.

That place—where? He had spoken, while he dwindled in my grasp, of some other age. Maybe he had achieved it, travelled again in that time he claimed to master. And I was left alone, in the locked moment.

I headed home, knowing how strange home would be. As I came toward Ted Follett's car, I resolutely refused to turn aside, even to look at Ruthie. If I touched her, she'd waken, Last Man had said. I'd have her in this suspended moment of horror. What then? Better never to find out. Back I came into my own yard back to the sycamore, near which the birds hung suspended in motionless mid-flutter.

I wanted to get away from it, to forget, to pass out of existence. I combed my memory for some hint of what to do. Last Man had dropped one or two half-clues, true or false. *Suppose, when it happened, you'd have stayed rigidly still wherever you were.* . . . How then had I stood? *You might have failed to free yourself.* . . . By chance I'd come free and moving in the motionlessness of the eternal moment. From a stance against the sycamore, yes. The thing to do was get into the same position, as nearly as possible. Then, perhaps, I'd be locked into the moment and be as other men and other things, not alone. Would it work? I dared not wonder what would follow if it didn't work.

I saw, at the root of the sycamore, the prints of my feet. Turning, I set my feet back in them, and rested my shoulders against the trunk. My hands—the right had been in my jacket pocket, so, and my left hanging down. And I'd been looking at the birds, my head tilted at this angle. Now. If I held my breath, possibly—

With an abrupt suddenness, the birds began to dart, whirl and wheel before me.

Once again I started away from the sycamore. I jostled a myrtle bush, and it waved and rustled. Out along the sand road I heard the rumble of a motor, and nearer at hand the whicker of an insect. I glanced up at the roof. The smoke was lazily curling and spreading there, as it had done before, in a bewilderingly natural way.

Release, release—all was as it had been, because I'd come back to fit into the proper place in the moment—all was as it had been, save for Last Man, who had never belonged among us anyway, not in our age and moment.

A car was stopping around the corner of the house. I started to walk in that direction, heavily and wonderingly. I saw the door of the car open, and Ruthie getting out. Ted Follett backed his car away and departed.

"I said I was coming," Ruthie called to me. "If you won't come to me, I must come to you. Ted was big about it, he even said he'd drive me here—wished us good luck."

The Smiling Face

BY MARY ELIZABETH COUNSELMAN



Heading by Fred Humiston

SIR CEDRIC HARBIN, the British archaeologist, rolled his head from side to side irritably on the canvas cot. It was the scream of a *jaru*—jaguar—that had waked him this time. Two hours ago it had been the chittering of night-monkeys; half an hour before that, some other weird jungle-noise.

The new guides belonged to the tribe known as the Vulture People. . . .

From the supine position in which he had been lying for eight sweltering nights already, he glared up at the young Chavante native who was fanning him with a giant fern, to keep away the mosquitoes and the tiny vicious little *pium* flies that swarmed about him. At his look, the boy grinned apology and began to ply the "shoo-fly" with more energy, the capivara tooth in his pierced lower lip bobbing furiously. Harbin cursed, blinking away the sweat that kept trickling down into his eyes. He tried to sit up despite the adhesive strapped over his bare chest like a cocoon, but sank back with a groan.

Instantly the tent flap opened and a girl hurried in out of the humid night.

"Darling? I thought I heard you groaning. Are you in pain?"

"Not much. Just—bored! And disgusted! Haven't you gone to bed yet?"

Sir Cedric looked up at her wearily as she bent over him, gently mopping the sweat from his face and neck. She was small and blonde and exquisite, strikingly beautiful even in her rumpled shirt and jodhpurs. It was when she smiled, however, that one stopped seeing anything else. A quiet humor seemed to emanate from her broad sweetly-curved mouth and sparkling blue eyes, as though they invited one to share some joke that she knew and was about to tell. The Brazilian Indian boy beamed at her, visibly attracted. Harbin, her husband though he looked old enough to have been her father —caught at her hand gratefully.

"Diana," he sighed, "my dearest. How the devil you can be so bright and cheery, after the confounded mess I've made of this expedition? Walking into that boa constrictor like a—like a damned tourist who'd never set foot in the Matto Grosso interior!" He scowled in self-condemnation. "Don't know why I ever let the Foundation talk me into this jaunt, anyhow. On our honeymoon! What was I thinking of, dragging you out into this steaming hell?"

"Now, now, darling!" Diana Harbin laid two fingers over his mouth. She lifted his head tenderly, gave him a sip of *herva matte* through a *bombilla* stuck in a gourd, then riffled through a month-old magazine. "Here; do try to read and relax. You can't go hunting your precious Lost City with three broken ribs, and that's all there is to it. So stop fretting about it! Mario has the situation well in hand."

A look flashed over Sir Cedric's middle-aged face. It was gone before his wife observed it, but she did notice a peculiar tense note in his voice.

"Mario— Oh yes," the archaeologist drawled. "Our handsome and dashing young guide."

"Handsome?" His wife laughed—so lightly that Sir Cedric gave her a quizzical look. "Is he? I hadn't noticed . . . Why, Cedric!" She returned his look, eyes twinkling. "I do believe you're jealous! Of *Mario?*" She nalf-closed her eyes, imitating the sultry attitude of a screen romeo. "'Ah-h Senhora! You are like jongle orchid!' " she mimicked, then burst out laughing. "Darling, he's so corny!"

HARBIN did not share her mirth. His gray eyes iced over, and narrowed.

"The devil!" he exploded. "Did he really say that to you? Insolent half-breed swine! Send him in here; I'll sack him right now!"

"You'll do nothing of the kind!" his wife laughed, kissing him on the forehead. "Cedric, don't be absurd. All Brazilians makes passes at every North American girl they meet. It's—it's part of the Good Neighbor Policy!" She gave him another sip of the nutritious tea, looking fondly amused. "Mario," she pointed out, "is a very efficient guide. He's kept these war-happy Chavantes from traipsing off to start something with other tribes we've passed. He's kept a supply of *mandioca* and *rapadura*, without trading half our equipment to get it. And he's the only guide in Belem who had the vaguest idea how to reach that Lost City of yours—if there is one," she reminded drily. "Remember, all you have as proof is that silly old paper in the Biblioteca Nacional in Rio. Mario doesn't believe it exists."

"Mario!" the archaeologist snorted. "If Lt.-Col. Fawcett and his sons died trying to find it in 1925, there must be something to— Oh, if only I were off this ridiculous cot!" he fumed. "We're only two days' march from the place; I'd stake my life on it! I—"

"Oh well," his pretty wife patted his arm

soothingly. "There'll be other expeditions, dear. We'll try again; but right now you must get well enough to be carried back to Belem. There may be internal injuries we don't know about. Ugh, that horrible snake! Dropping on you from that tree, crushing you—" She shuddered, then knelt beside him with a little sob, pressing his hand to her cool cheek. "Oh Cedric, you might have been killed!"

HARBIN relaxed, caressing her long wheat-blond hair, the bitterness and frustration ebbing slowly from his face.

"My dearest," he murmured, "I'll never understand what a lovely little Yank like you ever saw in a crotchety, dried-up old—Limey like me! But my whole outlook was changed, that night at the Explorers' Club in Rio, when you turned away from that ass Forrester, and smiled. At *me*! When —when I first saw you smile, Diana, the most wonderful thing happened. It was as though the—the sun had come up for the first time in my— Oh, rubbish!" Sir Cedric broke off, embarrassed. "Never was much at expressing my feelings."

"You're doing all right!" his wife whispered. "Remind me to tell you how I felt when I first met the famous Sir Cedric Harbin. Ah-ah!" She dodged his quick embrace. "Not now! After Mario and I get back from Matura with supplies. Darling, do go to sleep so I can! We're starting at daybreak, you know."

Harbin returned her smile of gentle humor with a hungry possessive look. "All right. But you'll hurry back? I mean— Oh, dash it!"

His wife bent over to kiss him once more lightly. "Of course I will," she whispered. "Next Thursday is our first anniversary; we've been married a whole month! You don't really think I'd spend that day with Mario and a lot of grinning Tapirapes babbling *'Ticanto! Ticanto!'*—which isn't my idea of a snappy conversation to put in my diary!"

Sir Cedric chuckled and lay still, his eyes following Diana as she left the tent to complete plans for the short journey at dawn.

The river village of Matura, he knew, was only a few miles down the Rio das Mortes, the River of Death, which had once run red with the blood of a Portuguese party of mining engineers massacred by Indians. Now it boasted a small trading post, run by a fat one-eyed Dutchman. There Diana could send a wireless message via Belem to the Foundation, saying—Harbin sighed bitterly—that he was crippled up; that he had made a complete botch of the expedition. There also Mario could replenish their dwindling stock of supplies—coffee, quinine, mandioca; perhaps even a few trinkets for the new native bearers Mario had recently added to their party. The Chavantes had not appeared to like it much, but even their *capitao,* their chief, Burity, could see his men could not carry both the equipment and the injured white explorer on their return trip.

HARBIN sipped his *matte,* and thought about the new porters. They were ugly stunted little Indians—the four Mario had hired—their loin cloths dirty and ragged, their greasy black hair hanging long and snaky under their braided headbands. They were Urubus—Sir Cedric frowned, trying to recall what the Inspector of Indians at Belem had said about that tribe; the "Vulture People," he had called them. Was it something about a history of cannibalism? Harbin could not remember. All four of the Urubus had been fully armed—with bows and five-foot-arrows, with spears, and with blowguns—when the Brazilian guide had happened across their hunting party. In fact, a poisoned blowgun dart (presumably aimed at a silver and black iguana) had barely missed his shoulder, Mario had reported uncomfortably.

"And good riddance!" Harbin muttered half-aloud, glowering up at the patched roof of the tent. "Never did trust those pretty-boys where a woman's concerned! Not one as lovely as Diana—so young and romantic and impressionable."

"Hanh? Senhor speak?" The Chavante boy startled him, waving his fern rapidly and flashing white teeth in a dark brown Mongoloid face.

"What? Oh! Nothing. Just talking to myself," Harbin snapped. "Swat that damned tarantula over my head, will you? It's going to drop on me."

"Si, senhor!!" The boy hastened to obey, his solicitude born of the fact that Diana had promised him a pair of her husband's cufflinks for his pierced ears.

Harbin closed his eyes, now lulled by the throbbing hum of frogs and cicada, now startled awake by the moaning hiss of a near-by anaconda or the splash of an alligator in the river washing sluggishly against the sandbank where they had made camp. Presently, in spite of the *pium* flies, Sir Cedric drifted into a troubled slumber—and a recurrent dream in which his lovely young wife was lost in a tangle of undergrowth and looped lianas. She kept calling him, calling and laughing, somewhere just ahead, just out of reach. And he slashed away helplessly at the green wall of jungle with a *facao*, a cutlass-like machete, which kept turning to flimsy rubber in his hand—

WHEN he awoke, torpid and headachey, the tent was steamy with midmorning heat. The Chavante boy was setting his tray of breakfast—roast crane, *farinha* gruel sweetened with the toffee-like *rapadura,* and coffee with fermented sugarcane. Harbin made a wry face, and squinted at the boy, whose black eyes were gleaming with a curious excitement. His calm voice, however, betrayed nothing.

"Bon dia! Senhor durmiou bem?" he inquired politely.

"Muita bem," Harbin grunted, yawning. "Where's the Senhora? She had her breakfast yet?"

The boy smiled brightly, his face an inscrutable mask now, mysterious and unreadable as the jungle itself.

"Senhora pé, pé," he announced, then elaborated in a painful combination of Portuguese and English. "Senhora es agone. Senhora, Senhor Mario. Es agone. Say let you esleep, you seeck, no wake."

"Oh! Gone already, have they?" Sir Cedric looked disappointed, then shrugged. "Well—they should be back by tomorrow at sundown. Matura's only a few miles down the river. They—" He broke off, puzzled again by the sly look of amusement on the Chavante boy's face. "Eh? What are you grinning about?" he demanded.

For answer, the boy ran to the door of the tent and beckoned. An older, nervous-looking Chavante—possibly the boy's father or older brother—entered warily, braced as to dash out again if the white man appeared angry.

"Senhor? Pliz?" the man stammered; he was Burity, the chief; Harbin recognized him suddenly from the dried palm frond stuck in his pierced lower lip, like a spiky beard from his hairless chin. "Senhor?" he began again. "Geev present? Geev present if Burity tell?"

"Tell what, you gibbering ape?" Sir Cedric snapped. He tried to prop himself up on his elbows, a sense of foreboding suddenly knotting his stomach muscles. "Yes? All right, all right—a present! Speak up!"

The Chavante chief swayed, steadying himself against the tentpole. He was drunk, Harbin perceived; a strong whiff of fiery native rum reached his nostrils. Twice Burity started to speak, blinked and grinned foolishly, then blurted out:

"Senhora. Senhora et Senhor Mario. Es no go *down* rio, es go *op*. No go Matura. Es take boys—" He held up one finger, then two vaguely. "Es ron away, go Goyaz. Es no come bock."

"What!" Harbin wrenched himself to a sitting posture, oblivious of the pain that knifed through his broken ribs. "You're lying!" he roared. "I'll—I'll beat you to a pulp, you lying scum! I'll cut your tongue out for saying a thing like that!"

Burity cringed, shaking his head violently. "No lie! No lie, *Capitao!* Es atruth! Senhor *zangado?* No be *zangado* for Burity. Me no do *nada,* me *manso*—good Indian!"

Sir Cedric glanced about wildly for something to throw at him. But the Chavante whirled and darted out of the tent, followed by the explorer's angry curses.

HARBIN fell back on his cot, breathing hard. Pain clutched at his chest under the strapping; he had probably torn loose those half-mended ribs again. The fury of complete helplessness wracked him for a moment. That Indian was lying; of course he was lying! Diana would no more desert him in this condition than—than—— Or, would she? Could a middle-aged husband

ever really be sure of a young and beautiful wife?

Sir Cedric forced himself to lie still, teeth clenched, fists knotted at his sides. The Chavante boy crawled out from behind a trunk where he had hidden, and began timidly fanning him again. Harbin waved him away irritably, then called him back.

"Boy—?" He hesitated, flushing at his own lack of reserve. "Boy, did you—? Do you happen to know which way my—the Senhor Mario went? Up river, or down?"

"No, *Capitao.*" The Indian boy lowered his eyes respectfully, but Harbin could detect a secret contempt in his impassive face.

"Is there anyone who could find out for me? A tracker? A tracker could tell which way the *bataloa* took off, couldn't he?" Sir Cedric pressed.

"A tracker, *Capitao?*" The Chavante was standing before him, still outwardly respectful. "Yes; tracker tell. But—Brujo know more better. Ask Brujo look upon Senhora's *batalao.* Brujo see all theengs —today, yesterday, tomorrow."

"Bru—? Oh yes. Quite."

Sir Cedric suppressed a smile. This was not the first time he had heard marvelous powers attributed to the Brujos, the witch-doctors of these Matto Grosso native tribes. The Inspector of Indians had advised him to take one along on this expedition—as arbiter, medico, and general adviser to his Chavante bearers. Brujos were usually old men with wrinkled faces and mystic eyes —half-crazed from addiction to *yagé,* the deadly topaz-green drug brewed from liana pulp. Murika, the Brujo of his Chavantes, was no exception.

But Murika, Harbin considered swiftly, would know about Diana and that sneaky Brazilian, if anyone would. All rumors, all remnants of local gossip, found their way quickly to those wise old ears—to be palmed off later on the credulous as knowledge gleaned from supernatural sources.

"Of course, Murika!" Sir Cedric nodded eagerly, snapping his fingers at the Indian boy. "Well? Go fetch him! At once!"

The young Chavante nodded and dashed out of the tent. He dashed back presently, but more reverently, holding the tent flap aside for a wizened old Indian to enter.

Murika was a very small man, for a Chavante, most of whom stood well above six feet. But there was something about his erect bearing, about the serene wrinkled face under its feathered headdress, that commanded respect. The old man's face and chest were heavily pigmented with red and black, blue-black stain from the *genipapo* fruit and red from the *urukú* berry. A jaguar skin, with the tail dragging, was wrapped around his skinny loins, and a great deal of stolen copper telegraph wire coiled around his arms from wrist to elbow. In his pierced lower lip was a rather large bone from a howler monkey, which affected his speech but slightly. He evidently knew no English at all, but spoke perfect Portuguese, probably learned at a Christian mission school before he took to black magic. His voice was deep and mellow like the music of a distant oboe, and Sir Cedric was impressed in spite of the smile that twitched at the corners of his mouth.

"Murika?" he greeted the old Indian haltingly. "I—I called you here to—to—"

The aged Brujo nodded matter-of-factly, stuffing some kind of fibre shreds into his cigar-holder-like pipe. He sat down cross-legged beside the explorer's cot and leaned back comfortably against the tentpole. Without a word he closed his eyes, puffing slowly at the pipe. A peculiar acrid odor filled the tent, making Sir Cedric feel suddenly light-headed and queer. He frowned, annoyed.

"Now, see here," he said. "I've no time for a lot of mumbo-jumbo. Just tell me if you know which way my—"

The Chavante boy hissed sharply, shaking his head and making a silencing gesture. On the opposite side of Harbin's cot, he whispered in obvious awe:

"Senhor—do not espeak! Brujo esmoke the *ayahuasca.* The drug of second sight—"

"Oh!" Sir Cedric snorted, impatient. "I've heard of that—damned lot of nonsense. Or," he smiled wryly, "maybe it isn't. Maybe it works something like sodium pentothal. Releases the subconscious mind. Helps dig out facts the conscious mind's forgotten. Hmmp!" He rolled over on his side, wincing, to watch the old man as he sat, swaying and smoking, in utter silence.

Presently, however, the Brujo's eyes opened. They had a weird doped look staring unseeingly at Harbin as though they gazed through him, through the stained tent walls, and farther, much farther, through the matted jungle outside. Very slowly the old witch-doctor began to speak, chanting a curious singsong now in Chavante, now in Portuguese. Harbin made out the Portuguese with an effort, but the Indian was beyond him.

". . . They go toward the rising sun. The *batalao* moves slowly. There are three bearers, Chavantes. The Smiling One sleeps under the *toldo.* The man watches . . . Now he shoots the gun, killing a blood-red *arara.* He brings the feathers to the Senhora. She laughs, thanking him and putting the feathers in her golden hair . . ."

SIR CEDRIC cursed, heaving himself upright again furiously. It was all a lot of silly patter, meaningless and without any foundation on truth, he told himself sickly. Or, was it? *Toward the rising sun,* the old man had said. Then the *batalao* was being paddled east toward Goyaz, just as Burity had said; not west to Matura. Did the Brujo know for certain, from tracks he had found along the riverbank amid a network of other spoors—the round cup-like tracks of jaguars, the broad three-toed marks of a tapir, the splayed track of the capivara, those sheep-sized water-guinea-pigs of the jungle? Or was he only guessing?

". . . Now she sings," Murika droned abruptly. "She sings this song, it is plain to hear . . . " He began to hum. And Harbin's scalp prickled as he recognized the halting strains of Noel Coward's *Never Try to Bind Me,* an old favorite of Diana's. The very tune she had been dancing to, with young Forrester, at the Explorer's Club that night—that night—

Amazingly, unbelievably, Murika was even singing the words now, although he knew not a phrase of English:

"Never try to bind me,
Never try to hold . . .
Take me as you find me,
Love and let me go . . .

The sound of those words, their import so obviously meaningless to that wrinkled Chavante singer, stabbed at Sir Cedric like a knife thrust.

"Stop!" he yelled furiously. "That's—it's a lot of damned nonsense! How . . . how could you possibly hear them, if they set off down the river—or *up* the river, as you say—four or five hours ago?"

The old Brujo closed his eyes, for answer. In a few moments, when he opened them and looked at the white man again, their weird faraway look was gone. He rose from his cross-legged position and stood quietly beside Harbin's cot, waiting. Sir Cedric glowered at him, then shrugged and thrust a cheap plug of tobacco at the old Indian, who took it with a gracious air of bestowing a gift rather than of receiving one.

"Is there more which you wish to know, *Capitao?*" he asked softly. "Murika has looked into the past—and has seen the *padre* in Rio speaking the marriage vows. The *Capitao* drops the ring, in his eagerness to place it on the Smiling One's finger. A man with a golden mustache picks it up and gives it back to—"

Harbin started, his scalp prickling again. "Kimball!" he murmured. "He—he was my best man. And I did drop the ring . . . How could you possibly know . . .? Did you ever overhear Diana and myself . . .? That must be it," he broke off, surreptitiously mopping at his forehead. "Of course. Nothing . . . supernatural about it!"

Murika's bland expression did not change. He merely stood quietly, waiting, looking more sure of himself than Harbin had ever felt in his whole life. In fact, the quiet wisdom in that wrinkled face made him feel more unsure of himself now than ever.

"Do you desire that I shall look into the future, *Capitao?*" the old Chavante asked gently. "The *ayahuasca* sends the eyes in all directions. One is able to see what was, what is, and what is to be."

"The devil you can!" Sir Cedric snorted, more to convince himself than to scoff at Murika. "All right!" he snapped. "What *is* to be? My wife's run off with a damned Brazilian, you say. Is she coming back?"

Murika took another puff at the pipe

his eyes again taking on that opaque drugged look, the pupils widening until the iris had disappeared. Harbin watched him, fascinated, trying to feel amused and scornful, trying to deny that hollow sick feeling in the pit of his stomach.

Murika opened his eyes wide, swaying. His voice sounded very thin and echoing as he spoke, like the voice of one shouting down a mine shaft.

"I see . . . " he intoned. "I hear . . . the Smiling One . . . screaming. It is written in the stars . . . that the *Capitao* may keep before him, for all the rest of his days, the smiling face of his senhora. But . . ."

"Yes?" Harbin urged tensely, as the Brujo paused. *"Yes?"*

"But it is also written in the stars," Murika said thinly, "that the sight of it will drive the *Capitao* into madness. This I see, and no more."

Sir Cedric expelled a quivering breath. Rubbish, all of this, sheer rubbish. And yet . . . That bit about the Noel Coward song, and the dropped ring. And Kimball's blond mustache—he and Diana had certainly never mentioned *that* in Murika's hearing, though it might have been only a clever bit of guesswork. Still—

He lay back on his cot, battling for self-control. At his sides his hands were clenched so tightly that his nails bit into his palms. Two drops of blood oozed from the broken flesh and ran down his wrists, unfelt. But Murika noticed them, and approached the white man's cot. He made a few curious passes in the air with a monkey skull produced from somewhere under the folds of his jaguar skin, then laid the skull gently on Harbin's forehead.

"Capitao," the old man said. "Forgiveness is better than vengeance . . ."

The archaeologist jerked his head away savagely, the monkey skull bumping hollowly to the ground as he glared up at Murika.

"Get out of here!" he grated, sweat popping out on his forehead and upper lip. "What are you trying to do to me, lying here trussed up? Are you trying to drive me crazy? *Get out!"*

He wrenched himself up again, panting and cursing. The Chavante boy dodged behind his trunk again, but the old Brujo merely bowed slightly and backed toward the tent opening.

"Jealousy," he said in his soft mellow Portuguese, "is like a poison, *Capitao*. The Senhor stands where the trail forks. Think well!"

"Get out!" Harbin roared, hurling his gourd of *matte* at the old Indian's head. The missile described a peculiar curve as it neared its target, however, and fell harmlessly to the floor. Again the white man shivered; he had heard before how a Brujo can deflect the flight of an arrow or a blowgun dart. Impossible, of course.

HE FELL back, gritting his teeth against the pain of his ribs. Sweat poured from his forehead now; the tent was like a steam cabinet. From outside he could hear the faint splashing of an alligator somewhere upriver, the dismal hiss of a flock of *ciganas,* the mew of a hawk sailing enviously above where some of the bearers were shooting fish with their short bows and five-foot arrows barbed with the tails of *arrays*—sting-rays. Harbin's mind sailed upstream, following a *batalao* where a lovely blond girl and a handsome young man sat very close together under the palm-thatched *toldo* awning. Perhaps they were kissing now; perhaps only clinging together, in the way of young lovers.

A groan escaped him, half rage, half pain. Diana, Diana. Of course it had been too good to be true. The first handsome, virile young idiot to come along, and she had left him—the glamor of his reputation worn thin, now that she had seen him make such a botch of this expedition. He would never hold her again, never see that dazzling good-humored smile of hers that had caused the Chavantes to call her *Rissante,* the Smiling One.

Harbin's eyes chilled. Dammit, she was always smiling! Had she actually been cheerful and courageous, or was she merely laughing at him? These American girls, they were so light-hearted, so unconventional—unlike all the strait-laced British women he had known. Perhaps she had merely married him for a lark, planning all along to leave him when she became bored! Leave

him to face all these grinning natives, to get back to Belem the best way he could —without a guide.

At the thought of Mario, Sir Cedric's face hardened. Damned insolent Brazilian! If he could follow them, if he could only get his hands around that tanned neck! His fingers flexed with the desire to kill, and suddenly he let out a roared command:

"Boy! *Boy!* Where the devil are you hiding?" The Chavante lad scrambled out from behind his trunk, quaking. "Get me Burity again!" Harbin snapped, then shook his head. "No, no— he wouldn't go. It's Urubu country. Ah—!" His eyes glittered. "Those new porters! Send them to me. *Now!*"

The Indian boy dashed off to obey, eager to placate and worried about that gift of cufflinks. He was back with the four squat Urubus in five minutes, and Harbin looked them over, still quivering with rage. He blurted his order in Portuguese, then in a few halting words of Chavante, but the Vulture Men shook their heads, grinning foolishly. Harbin scowled, resorting to sign-language.

"Senhora . . ." He drew the form of a woman in the air. "Understand? I want you to . . . bring her *back*," he made scooping motion toward himself.

The leader of the Urubus, a stocky evil-eyed Indian with deep scars cut from eye-corners to mouthcorners, nodded suddenly, and jabbered a few words to the other three. They nodded eagerly, gabbling—and sounding for all the world, Harbin thought with a shudder, like the nauseous, hideous-looking birds they worshipped. The leader edged forward, beady eyes gleaming.

"Turi?" he asked slyly, then brought up an English word, pointing to Harbin, then vaguely out into the jungle. "Mon?"

"Oh—the white man? Mario?" Harbin's face was contorted. "The devil with Mario!" he growled. "I don't care what you do to him!" He made a broad gesture of dismissal, at which the Urubu chief grinned delightedly, nodding and replying with a throat-cutting gesture. His face held the unholy delight of a child given permission to pull the wings off a fly.

Then they were gone, like a flock of gabbling scavenger-birds, and Harbin lay back on his cot, closing his eyes wearily. In a day or so the Urubus, in a light fast *montaria,* could overtake the other slower boat. And well, if they were cannibals, if that was what the Inspector of Indians had warned him, the devil with Mario! Luring a man's wife away from him as he lay helpless, unable to follow! Diana, they would bring back with them, and—well, he could take it from there.

TEARS of reproach seeped from between Harbin's closed lids. Diana—how could she have done this to him? But she was such a child, easily impressed, overly romantic. Forgiveness? What was it old Murika had said about forgiveness being better than vengeance? Sir Cedric smiled wryly. Well,



after a time, perhaps he would forgive her. They could build a life together, even with the memory of her having run off with that handsome guide standing like an impenetrable wall of jungle between them. It wouldn't, really. Harbin's smile became peaceful, almost eager. He was a civilized man, he told himself. The daily sight of

his wife's smiling face would not, as Murika predicted, "drive him into madness." Probably, after he forgave her for this outrageous escapade, she would love him all the more, really love him.

"Acu!" one of the Chavantes in the river-shallows was shouting; he had evidently speared a *pirara*—or else been bitten on the bare leg by a man-eating *piranha*, those murderous little fish that could strip a man's skeleton in a few minutes. *"Acu!"* they were forever shouting, these savages—the word meaning "Hello!," or "Hooray!," or merely "Ouch!" according to the events of the moment. Harbin smiled at their simplicity.

Sighing, settling himself to wait and to forgive, the archaeologist drifted into a restless slumber, with the Chavante boy plying his giant fern once more timidly. His eyes on Harbin's sleeping face were wide and shocked, and warily respectful now.

ALL night Sir Cedric dreamed of his lovely wife. All the next day, and the next two following, he lay docilely on his cot, taking the last of the quinine and eating what was brought him without a murmur. A hundred times, sentimentally, he made up speeches to chide Diana, ever so understandingly, for her unfaithfulness. She would cry, then fling her arms around his neck and beg him to forgive her. Which he would, Harbin told himself wearily, humbly. All he wanted was to have her back, smiling at him, smiling in the old way as if none of this had ever happened. A small prickle of conscience nagged him now and then, thinking of the Urubu's gesture when he spoke of Mario. Suppose Diana loved the blighter? Had he any right to—? But what sort of life would she lead with a jungle guide? Harbin snorted. Whatever the rotter was going to get, he richly deserved! Killing a man, or having him killed, for seducing your wife was the accepted thing, here in hot-tempered Brazil. Besides—Sir Cedric gave a hard laugh—he could say he hadn't really given that order to the Urubu chief; that the Indian had misunderstood him.

On the fifth day after the Vulture Men had set out, old Murika walked silently into his tent. He stood for a moment, staring curiously at the supine white man, then walked slowly over to him.

"Capitao," he said softly, "you have given an order to the Urubu men, and it is not good. The Senhor stood at the forked trail, and he has taken the wrong turning."

Harbin started. Had the old blighter been hovering outside his tent, eavesdropping? He scowled, ordering the Brujo to leave with an impatient gesture. Arrogant old devil! Give them an inch and they'd take a mile!

But Murika did not leave. His large vague eyes were troubled, and again they had that faraway look. Again Harbin's nose wrinkled as he smelled the acrid odor of *ayahuasca*, from the Brujo's pipe. Murika was staring at him—and through him.

"I see . . ." the mellow voice intoned. " see . . . a Lost City, which the jungle has eaten. There are great blocks of stone, carven with strange writing. The Smiling One stands before it, while the man takes her picture."

"The devil you say!" Sir Cedric pulled himself erect, glaring. "So the rotter's not only stolen my wife, but he's jumped the gun on my expedition, eh? Going to claim the credit for finding my—" His eyes glittered coldly. "Well, then—it's good enough for him, whatever they'll do to him!" he muttered under his breath. "I'm glad I sent them! I'm *glad!"*

Murika said nothing, but shook his head very slowly.

"They are but children," he said quietly. "Do not condemn the forest people, *Capitao*, if they do not understand. They go only to do the Senhor's bidding."

Harbin nodded impatiently, eyes narrowed. "All right. So I told them to kill him! What's it to you, you shriveled-up old fool?" he snapped, waving Murika from his tent. "Get out of here! They should be back here with my wife by tomorrow at sundown—and that's all I want!" he muttered. "I—I'll never let her out of my sight again, and that's certain! Romantic child. Doesn't know her own mind."

He reached for his gourd of *matte*, sipped at it, then lay still. Through the long sweltering jungle-night he lay, sleeping little, his heart pounding with eagerness. Through the steaming day he waited, trying to peruse the old magazine he had read through twice already. The pain in

his ribs had subsided now; the broken ends of bone were knitting again. Well, the devil take his confounded ribs! Tomorrow he'd have the bearers lift him into the boat, and he and Diana would go back to civilization. They'd follow the river, even if it took longer. He'd not keep her here in this green hell another day longer than necessary. Back at Belem, in a decent hotel, he'd make her forget all about Mario. He'd shower her with presents, make subtle love to her.

ABRUPTLY, a cry reached his ears. He had been straining for the sound, praying for it to come. The Urubus were back. Now, darting to the tent opening, his Chavante boy turned and nodded, wide-eyed and subdued.

"Capitao?" he announced, in a respectful whisper; almost as he addressed the Brujo, Harbin noted with a grin of self-satisfaction. *"Capitao?* The—the Senhor Mario is not with them. The three bearers of our tribe were slain, or escaped. But—the Smiling One, they have brought back as the Senhor ordered."

"Oh? Good, good!" Sir Cedric mopped at his face, nervous and eager. "Have they landed? Send them in here. Hurry! *Hurry!"*

He braced himself for the sight of his wife, perhaps being dragged angrily in between two grinning Urubus. But the chief came in alone, to present him with a crumpled sheet of paper. Harbin frowned, reading it swiftly. His heart leaped. It was a note Diana had evidently been writing to him when the Vulture Men overtook them at the Lost City; a note proving her innocence, her loyalty, the love he had doubted.

Flushing, miserably ashamed but grateful, Harbin's lips moved, reading:

My darling—

I'm sending this message back by one of the Chavantes. By now you must know we didn't go to Matura, and never planned to go. I persuaded Mario to take me on to your Lost City, so your expedition need not be a flop. My dear, it seemed to mean so much to you, and I couldn't bear to see you looking so disgusted with yourself. I didn't tell you because I knew you'd stop me from trying it alone.

Mario has taken some pictures, and I've copied a few hieroglyphics off the stones, also some pottery. Darling, you and Lieutenant Colonel Fawcett and your silly paper in Rio were right. There's a sort of temple here, Inca, I believe. The altar stone, for sacrifice, is inlaid with gold and silver—I wish you could see it. But I've made maps, and we can come back after your ribs ha—

The note broke off, significantly. Sir Cedric raised his eyes, looking up at the grinning Urubu, beaming down at him like an evil stunted child of some forest-demon. Again he nodded happily, pleased to have carried out the *Capitao's* orders so well. Again he made the throat-cutting gesture—and suddenly, like a cold hand on his heart, Sir Cedric remembered what the Inspector of Indians had said about the Urubu tribe. Not a history of cannibalism. Of head-hunting!

Harbin swallowed on a dry throat. What had he caused his young wife to witness, what horrible rites? Would she ever forgive him, ever look at him again without a shiver of revulsion? Would she——?

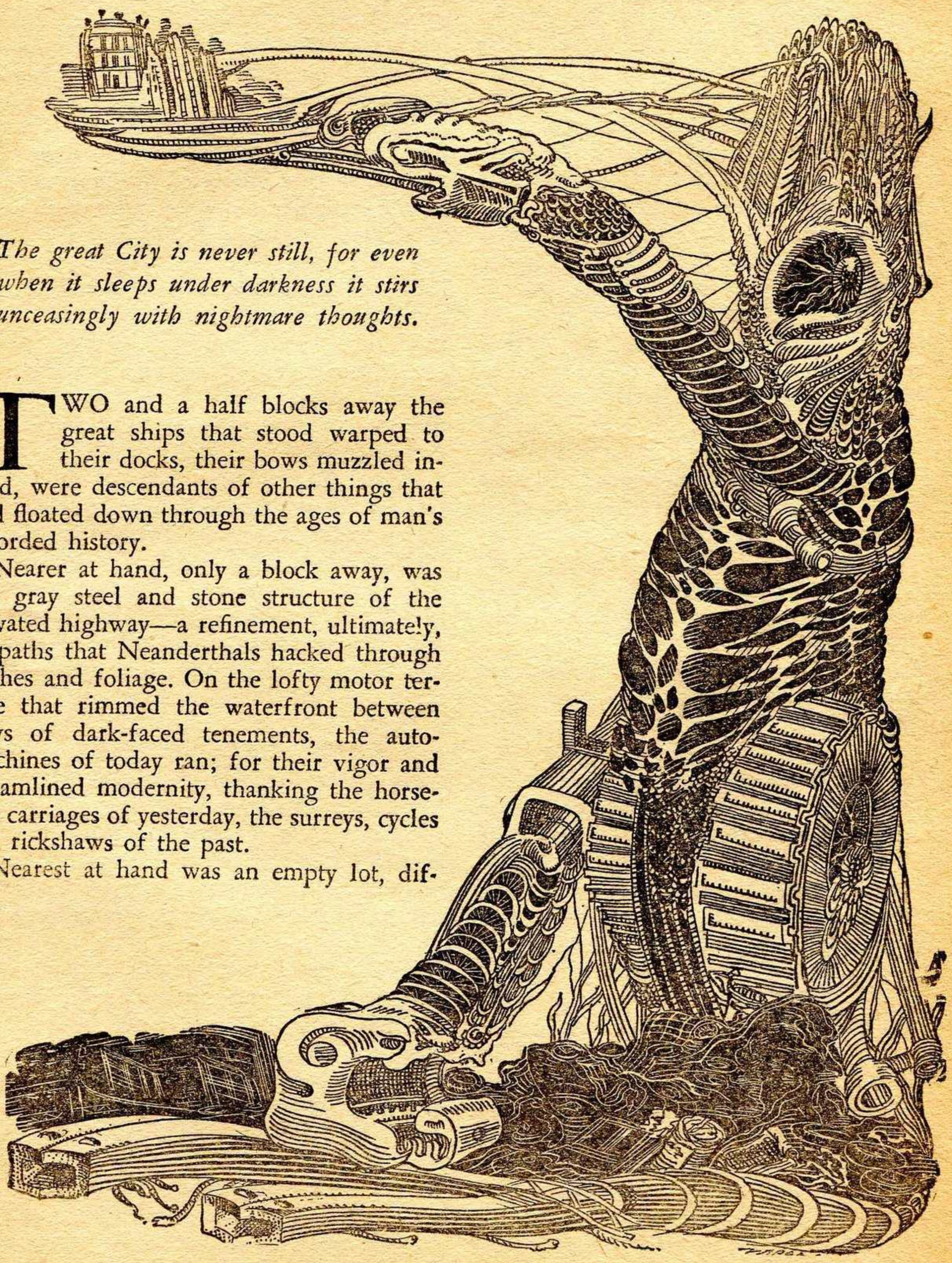
"Rissante?" he asked hoarsely. "Where's —where's my wife?" He made the sign of a woman's body in the air hurriedly, pointing to himself. "Tell her to come in! Bring her here! Quickly!"

The Urubu grinned evilly, nodding several times like a small boy proud of the homework he was handing in to Teacher. He called out a few words of his dialect, and one of the other Indians entered, carrying a small wicker basket.

Even before he jerked off the lid and saw the shrunken thing inside—lips stitched together in a hideous travesty of a smile, the long blond hair unbound and carefully brushed clean of blood-flecks—Harbin began to scream. . . .

The Urbanite

BY EWEN WHYTE



The great City is never still, for even when it sleeps under darkness it stirs unceasingly with nightmare thoughts.

TWO and a half blocks away the great ships that stood warped to their docks, their bows muzzled inland, were descendants of other things that had floated down through the ages of man's recorded history.

Nearer at hand, only a block away, was the gray steel and stone structure of the elevated highway—a refinement, ultimately, of paths that Neanderthals hacked through bushes and foliage. On the lofty motor terrace that rimmed the waterfront between rows of dark-faced tenements, the automachines of today ran; for their vigor and streamlined modernity, thanking the horseless carriages of yesterday, the surreys, cycles and rickshaws of the past.

Nearest at hand was an empty lot, dif-

Heading by Vincent Napoli.

ferent as is a city empty lot from any other such, for it is never empty, having a strange and heterogeneous collection of junk bearing testimony to the mechanical genius of an age that takes so much for granted. Metal parts from the metal monsters that ran by on the network of streets and the elevated highway, fenders and wheels and spark-plugs, discarded parts of all sorts; and other things—barrels and barrel staves, bottles and cans; the residue of garbage now surviving its kerosene and flame ordeal with a smoldering, pungent smoke.

Sitting in the lot, his back against a discarded packing case, was Happy Charlie taking the sun here as it filtered down through the soot and smoke haze and mist of the city to brown-leather his face, instead of at Bermuda or Marseilles or Carmel, because he was just Happy Charlie—a bum.

But Charlie, who got his other appellation of "Happy" possibly because of his long sad horse's face, was as those others in their flowered trunks on their yachts and their beaches; just as the ships, land-warped in the river nearby or plying its turgid currents and the cars that whooshed by on the elevated highway itself belonged to other, earlier things.

He was the same as those flowered pantied, over-rich—though they would have laughed largely at this.

BUT go back, skeptics, go back only a few hundreds of thousands of years to the wetness and warmth of the Then, to the shallow lagoons and pools along the coasts of first-formed seas to the slime and the sub-life that slowly came from that slime, that became jelly wherever there was a little pool or a tide or a shallow sea, and on to the vertebrates.

Happy Charlie was no different, for he had come from the same beginnings. That his chronically whiskey breath was tolerated around the place next door where it said with big orange letters, peeling now from the weather, "Steaks & Chops—Wines & Liquors," because he ran occasional errands for Mr. Rostelli who ran the restaurant, made him basically no different from the biggest, toughest trucker who thumped his ham hand on the counter for quick service, or the boss of the truckers or the owner of the whole chain who was worth a million and might—or could if he wanted to—sail his own yacht on the river that sent its damp, dank smells up these narrow, cobblestone streets to mix with the odors of inland machines and the people who worked them and lived by them in a great concentrate known as a city.

Happy Charlie in his most sober moment never concerned himself with his origins. He was neither interested in biogenesis nor would recognize the word if he came upon it written, instead of the rightful trade name, on a can of his favorite beer. That the living matter of which he was such an insignificant moleculic but present-day offshoot had been originally brought to the earth from some other planet by meteorites or was an emergent from a complex of physical-chemical processes was one of several such worries he had never had.

There! Rostelli was calling him. Happy Charlie reluctantly lurched to his feet muttering under his breath. The sun had lulled him back to a happier day when he'd been a rail bird at local trotteries with an occasional winner keeping him away from the ignominy of honest work. But these errands kept him in sustenance, in hamburg and spud and best of all, in beer or something stronger.

As Charlie rambled towards the door and went under the neon bars that advertised "Rostelli's Restaurant—*Q-u-i-c-k Service,*" there was nothing about him to suggest that he was the refinement of countless centuries of growth, starting with the amoeba and the one-celled animal of the pre-Cambrian era.

HEAT lay across the city, keeping haze and soot and smell down, fresh air and breeze out, like a wool buffer. The machines that ran the city were overheated and grew balky. People brawled and cursed and were tired by their own anger. Their sweat seared them and mingled with the filth that lay across windows and window ledges, tables and walls and floors. Cars and trains surged and rumbled in and out on the street arteries that led here and there. People walked the boiling streets and didn't need the every-season's newspaper gimmick

of the reporter frying an egg on the downtown sidewalk, for the fire of the pavement could be felt through the thickest shoe leather.

But there was no end to it. The lifts went up and the lifts came down; elevator boys and bus drivers and subway trainmen were replaced, but their machines kept moving. And the people themselves, the last one at any hour of day or night, never disappeared around the corner. There was always another person, another train, another car, and the gaseous, acrid effluvium mixed and settled on dry throats and streets and empty lots and huge hotels alike.

Happy Charlie ran his errand—at a slow, snail's pace—returned to Rostelli's and had a cold beer leaning against the extra-strong bar that the proprietor had had built in because "these truckers are big, strong guys. They got big heavy feet and arms."

By and by Happy Charlie took himself out back to the empty lot again. They had long ago stopped wondering about him. Where other people avoided the terrible scorch and burn of the afternoon heat, Charlie's old, bent frame soaked it up and his face and wrinkled arms, bared to the elbow, grew browner and browner like well-used saddle leather.

Occasionally he would poke through the junk yard with a stick, worrying the metal parts that collected there, salvaging a piece here and there and occasionally selling it for a few pennies. Most of the time, though, Happy Charlie just sat, his bloodshot whiskey eyes half shut, his mouth open a bit, perhaps to breath better the stale second-hand air that lived poorly over the city, exhaled by a million motors, by a million human lungs.

As noted, Happy Charlie's mind, sober or otherwise—mainly otherwise—was not concerned with the vitalistic or mechanistic theories of human origin, including his own. But through a state of almost chronic alcoholic befuddlement—don't they say liquor, too much and too long, does something to the brain?—Happy Charlie did think of old days in his own life. It took him occasionally and was a laugh-provoking thought, that when he'd been younger, much younger, oh, just a kid, he'd had a chance to go to a camp sponsored by some charitable group. As an indigent even then, he'd qualified—quite despite himself—and was on the verge of being sent to some wooded, far-away spot where, as the uplifted counselors for the project described in glowing terms, "Birds sang and brooks babbled and God's good clean earth set everything at rights."

It had been a close call, but Happy Charlie had beaten the rap. To be sure, it took some explaining at the neighborhood settlement house. A fat woman there had argued with the then-youngster, Happy Charlie, but at the end, she had shaken her head and he had won.

"Well, if you don't *want* to go, there are plenty of others who'll be glad to take your place," she had sighed. "You don't know what you're missing, young man!"

BUT then, advance courses in psychology and something-or-other had prompted her to say importantly and to impress him, for there was no one else: "I guess you're just one of those chronic urbanites—" and then talking down to him condescendingly as she dismissed him at one and the same time, "—one of those who *comes* from the city and just *likes* to live in the city!"

The word "urbanite" was a big, new thing, and she had called him it. The word drove Happy Charlie for his first and last time into the public library. He had looked it up. It was probably the biggest, most unusual word he knew, but he'd never forgotten it. That's what he was—an urbanite, one who is a product of, who lives in, who *likes* to live in a city. It made laughter to himself often to think of this, and Happy Charlie's open mouth formed a smile even now back in the lot, and the cars on the elevated highway a block away did the laughing for him with their whoosh and scream of tires on the hot cobblestones, whispering, grinding and screeching that *they,* like him, belonged here in this place of built-up steel and concrete and cement, with black fronts for the poor and marble fronts for the rich and brownstone anywhere where age still stood and the bright young college-trained surveyors had not yet ripped

out with their plumb-lines and maps to build newer things higher.

Whaddya know? There'd been a car hop the highway just here not too long ago. Landed right in this empty lot whose far end dwelled forever in shadow under the extended apron of the elevated highway. Damn auto jumped right over the wall, it did, and landed down there with its three broken people all screaming and their dreadful harmony made into a quartet by the soon-siren of the ambulance coming to see what could be done after such a dreadful mistake.

Happy Charlie, from his siesta spot at this end of the lot, had been first over to the smashed, over-turned car at the other end. He'd been there before the faces appeared on the express highway, others who'd stopped and looked over. Well . . . well, those things happen. It's the way of Life, and Happy Charlie had considerable of the philosopher in him though he might be unaware of it. It was a nice job of demolishing automobile, and the noise of the people who'd misled their auto soon died away as they were hauled and hoisted and lifted out of the wreckage into the white-sided, almost clean-looking ambulance. Left behind was a car there was no use hauling away and fixing up.

NIGHTS since then people plucked at it and they took tires and any parts they could take away. Maybe insurance folks came—Happy Charlie didn't know. He lost track with errands for Rostelli and drinks of beer and whiskey. The twisted frame was left and what remained recognizable of the broken car body; a little more glass sprinkled around the half-earth, rocks and junk heaps of the yard made no difference. It was hardly noticeable.

Happy Charlie's reveries were broken into by the harsh voice of Rostelli. Again? Another errand? He got up, slower this time, stretching his sun-stiffened frame out. His way of life had caused him to forswear many of the emotions, but deep inside, if you dug beneath the leathery skin and the old sinews, the rheumy bones, there was a hate smoldering for Rostelli that came from fear. He felt the same way about some of the truckers. Rostelli used him and paid little for it, knowing he owned this derelict by means of occasional meals and much more than occasional drinks, without which Happy Charlie could not survive, and for which he would do the interminable odd jobs and run the errands that a wise-faced, sharp-minded high schooler would charge the restaurant proprietor a fat something to do.

But Rostelli and some of the other truckers—there was one giant man, in particular—had a contempt for Happy Charlie they were free to express when the opportunity presented itself. Happy Charlie knew it intuitively as that superiority that otherwise inferior people feel for subordinates. Happy Charlie was "an old bum." He was "an old drunk, no-good sot," a "vag," a "bum," and other assorted and pungent terms of the waterfront, of a low-life restaurant, of the trucking world, of circles where strong, explosive men move, and, with the hint of their own limitations, take that fleeting knowledge out on the nearest weak thing.

Rostelli, who'd had a hard day and suffered from the heat, sent him off with a cuff, and a trucker who'd wandered in to spend a few hours before taking off on his night run, roared with laughter and threw a potato chip at old Happy Charlie as he lurched off on his ordered quest.

HAPPY CHARLIE made better time than usual but was greeted only with Rostelli's bad temper and another sneer from the big trucker. Old Charlie's request for another beer got him shoved out the door of the restaurant. Oh well—and he settled himself in the sun again. Times were good, times were bad. That was the way things seemed to go. To him it mattered not. In moments like these came feelings of delicious superiority. Rostelli worried about business slowing up. Not so many of the longshoremen, the truckers, the laborers came in, and not so early did they come and not so long did they stay nor so much money did they spend as once upon a time. And the boisterous, cursing thick and muscle-armed men themselves with their shouting and noise making. They had their own worries locked up too. "Did you hear?

Ace Company laid off fifteen last week! Hear there's gonna be more . . ." and so on.

Maybe they'd get to realize *his* way was the best, and Happy Charlie settled himself contentedly on the other side of a pile of debris, chuckling at his own thoughts of himself, pleased at his smartness, and after looking furtively this way and that, reaching into the piles to fetch out a bottle. Warm to be sure, even in its shadowed hiding place, dust and plaster and dirt-covered, but inside when it was uncorked, the liquid was wonderful.

He ah'd and smacked his lips as the last two inches of the bottle burned down his throat and hit his stomach with that impact that raw whiskey always has. He settled himself lazily in the sun. It was still stronger and hotter than ever even now in the late afternoon; they'd have to call louder to make him hear them here. Rostelli and that big trucker could bump their heads together for all he cared!

The warmth from within and the heat from without met. His eyelids were at half-mast and his body felt luxurious resting in the fold of a rusted fender with his head against a barrel's back. The pile ahead, directly ahead there was what was left of the car that had jumped a week ago. Imagine a car jumping like people do!

The heat sent shimmers of itself from the ground upward when new waves of burning hotness came down from the airless heavens. The shimmering gave to the junkpile a strange appearance as though it moved, as though the steel frame at its core was in slight motion, like railroad tracks in the distance on a scorching day.

Happy Charlie stirred comfortably in his cocoon of splendid warmth. As his eyelids sank lower, his mouth opened more, and the scene took on the early visitations of dream-provoked unreality, but he was not sleeping, did not intend to. For it was too good to feel the heat and hear the sound of the cars whooshing by, occasional noise from the river as one of the great liners whistled so that none would be unaware of its great bulk and importance. A tenement radio blared blastingly before being turned down. The words were "Heat spell . . . temperature setting record," and Happy Charlie lay there lolling, enjoying every moment of it.

The not-empty lot and its junk made his home. He felt familiar here, secure. There was no reason to think or be aware of anything else.

BUT as Happy Charlie lay there, and as Rostelli and the big trucker griped to each other back in the dark coolness of the restaurant, an epoch was being marked here near the river wharves and the elevated highway in the heart of the great city. It was as with those long-ago small pools and lagoons, the rain-filled trenches and swamp places.

But then there was no one to Know, but only hundreds upon hundreds of centuries later, the eye to look backward and reconstruct. Or if there had been life *preceding* life and a brain, would it have been cognizant of what was happening anymore than was Happy Charlie now filled with his whiskey and the heat of the day, lying with his arms and fingers against orange rind and discarded paper parcels, in dirt and wood and nails and the overflow of civilization which must always find its way to places like these?

Charlie *saw*, but he did not *believe*. He did not believe because he could not know, nor could any great scholar in fancy clothes and with fancy language know. For it was at this extraordinary and so-right moment —just now—for all this to change from nothingness to somethingness. The particles of the city-raped air, the particles from blast furnaces, the shavings from steel and iron, chips from concrete and macadam, chunks of tar and the smell from these; exhaust from all the machines, the molecules of structural things—millions upon millions of them all together, and the people, numbers beyond counting, breathing in and out the already effluvious mass, warming with their grime-coated noses and throats and lungs, warming and nurturing and expelling for another to breathe in. And here, all here, concentrated under this sky in this heat, recipient—*the pile at the far end of the lot.* Moving, Happy Charlie! *Moving*. Not heat shimmers, but *moving*, the steel gathering

to itself other qualities—the scrap, the exudate of countless eons of human progress.

Charlie saw these things in motion. He *saw* them moving, gathering themselves with a sinuous purposefulness, but he did not believe—being a human; he *could* not believe.

In his ear at last was the far-away but shrill sound of Rostelli calling him. The bellow grew louder and louder. He bestirred himself automatically even as his mind tried to cope with this new thing. As he rose to his feet to walk back to the restaurant in obedience, the full terrible and fatal weight of what he saw now came upon him, cutting the heat and whiskey-induced fogginess from his brain as a scalpel cuts flesh, and for a fleeting second, Happy Charlie with all his humbleness of intellect knew a moment of sheer terror unsurpassed by any man for thousands of years. . . .

ROSTELLI drummed on the counter. He was alone in his restaurant with the big trucker. They had been deploring the times, keeping civility between each other by directing their bitterness and hatred towards a common cause. Now, it was Happy Charlie.

"Where's that drunken bum!" Rostelli snarled and went to the window again to holler out of it.

The trucker, from the depths of his peanut-brain, thumped his great hands against fat thighs and said, "You gotta treat one of him like a kid. You treat 'em good, they treat you bad. Gotta show 'em who's boss!"

Rostelli shook his head angrily.

"By God, I will! Get my hands on his old skinny neck . . . I'll twist his head off!"

The trucker roared with laughter. He was well along on beers now; they had inflamed his head with delicious thoughts of violence.

Rostelli bellowed out the window again, and then finally . . . finally, after a long wait, the trucker cocked his head.

"Here's someone comin'. Guess you finally woke up that dead-beat, Rostelli!"

It had been a poor day, and there was no money in the till. The proprietor's hands gripped and ungripped with the desire to take his wrath out on something tangible. The cheap wire-netting door of the restaurant slammed open.

"And I've told him not to bang that door thataway!" Rostelli muttered under his breath.

They looked towards the entrance past the four or five tables set around the room, the booths at one side, the fire-engine red juke box, and they waited in the semi-darkness for Happy Charlie.

But it was not Happy Charlie. The trucker's eyes narrowed and Rostelli blinked. There was for both of them no more words and a countable number of breaths, for *he* —you say *he,* oh, so loosely—was not of their experience or ken.

The limbs were iron and steel, but not as in the figure of speech. The thighs and legs were of metal, of cement. The trunk was something else. There was no man here; in fact, only a *thing,* but men must describe everything else through their own eyes. It must either be a man, an animal, and inanimate objects don't *move!*

THIS incredible birth had taken place this late afternoon. From the dirt eddies, from the dust lying thick across the metropolis, from the impregnated air, the noise, the endless vibrations; from all these this obscene thing had come. Out of the hate from the man-curses dying in mid-air, conceived by their hate and wicked yearnings; born of the sperm of the city, of the thoughts and people and machines too close-packed here—this new life, this urbanite had come.

The trucker rose from his place by the bar, his eyes opened wider than they had for twenty years; his great hands held wide as though to shape a question mark, to help his brain and eyes realize they saw and knew it couldn't be.

The face of the thing? There was no face; instead, a brickish structure, but men have to see faces or make them up in things that move. Even animals have faces.

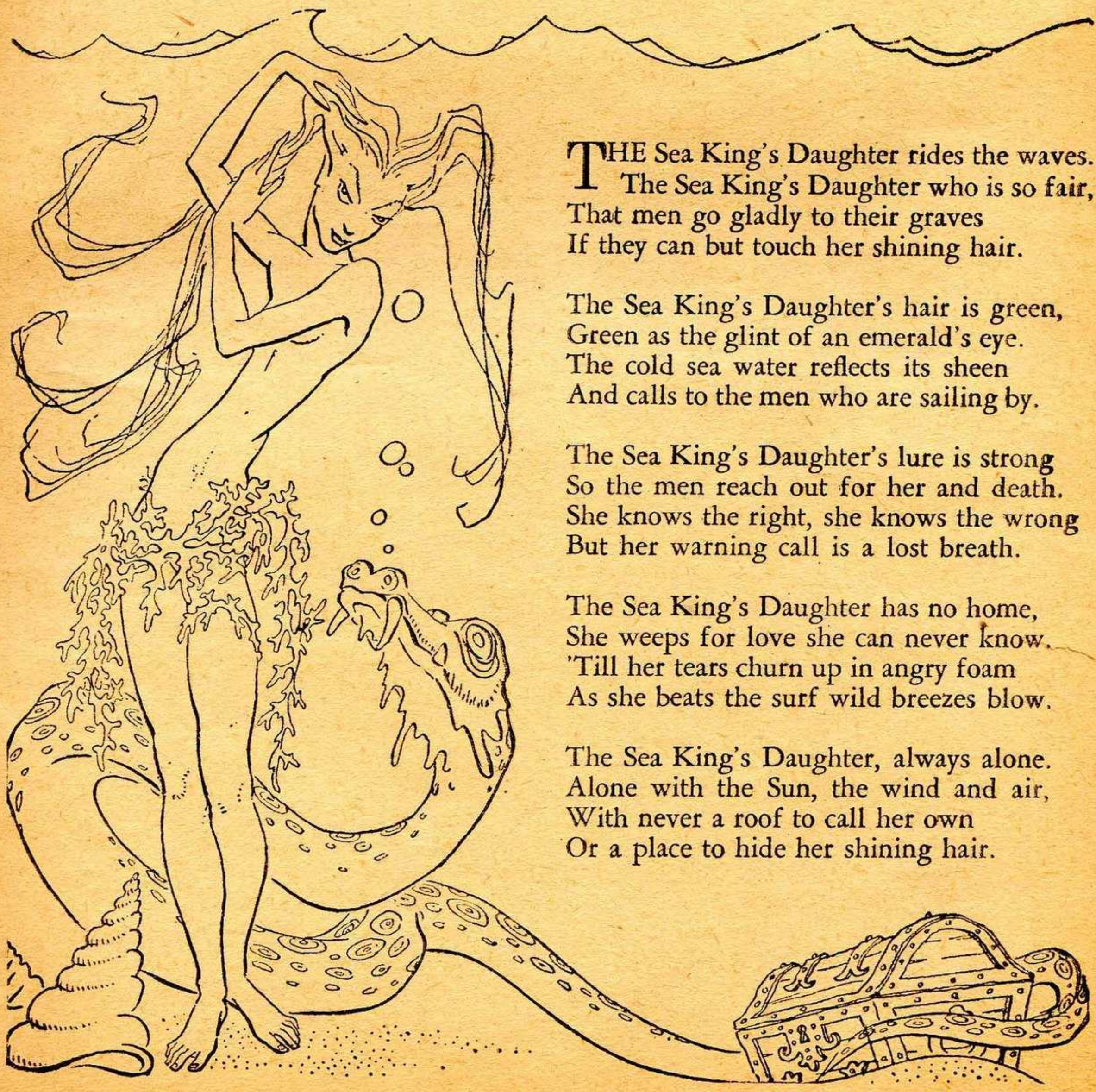
The trucker had a moment, and then he was spread-eagled against the extra-strong bar which had been built for the likes of him—spread-eagled and then squashed by the intruder in a methodical way with one, two, three, four pistonlike sweeps of a steel and cement thing where arms grow on men.

Rostelli thought of a prayer word but never got it out. He, too, was caught in the corner of the room, noting with a supreme irrelevance before his own doom fell upon him that in the other massive, pistonlike appendage, the *thing* held an arm clenched in chrome and aluminum fingers—an arm unmistakable because of its brown, leathery skin drawn tightly over skinny bones.

And then Rostelli died as the trucker had died and Happy Charlie before them, by the hand—and of course the concrete and steel thing was *not* a hand—of one who'd grown from the very things that men build and command in cities . . . the machines and the metals mixed with the exhaust that comes from hate and hope and hurry, all put together *just right, precisely,* this one day in all of history to create something, not of this millenium but of the next.

Sea King's Daughter

by DOROTHY QUICK



THE Sea King's Daughter rides the waves.
The Sea King's Daughter who is so fair,
That men go gladly to their graves
If they can but touch her shining hair.

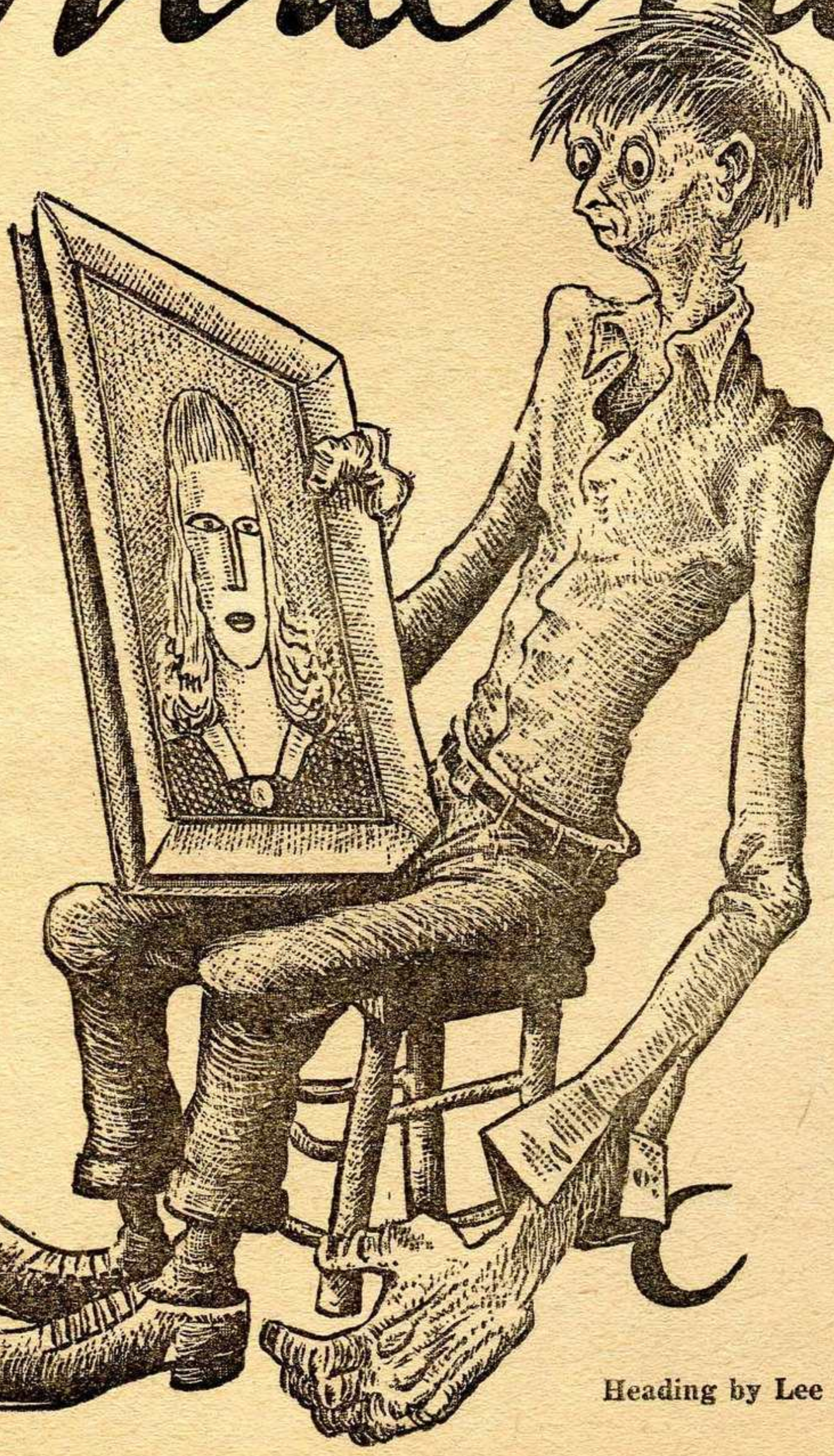
The Sea King's Daughter's hair is green,
Green as the glint of an emerald's eye.
The cold sea water reflects its sheen
And calls to the men who are sailing by.

The Sea King's Daughter's lure is strong
So the men reach out for her and death.
She knows the right, she knows the wrong
But her warning call is a lost breath.

The Sea King's Daughter has no home,
She weeps for love she can never know.
'Till her tears churn up in angry foam
As she beats the surf wild breezes blow.

The Sea King's Daughter, always alone.
Alone with the Sun, the wind and air,
With never a roof to call her own
Or a place to hide her shining hair.

the MYSTERIOUS miss Kraltza



By Stanton A. Coblentz

All a lover's fervor in a glance at a picture bought at an auction sale.

Heading by Lee Brown Coye

I

IF DONNY and I hadn't chanced to drop in at Scruggs' Auction Parlors, the whole damnable adventure never would have occurred. And if Donny hadn't let those mild blue poet's eyes of his fall on the one object out of all the hundreds which it was his accursed destiny to see—

But first let me explain. Don Maclaren was my especial chum. He was as sweet a lad as you'd want to meet—tall, slim, sandy-haired, with eyes that were always laughing out at you from under their overhanging bushy brows. Some folks thought him a little queer because he dashed off sentimental verses now and then; but actually his feet were solidly enough on the earth; otherwise, he couldn't have made his living as a salesman for Tower Home Appliances, Inc.

We had been sauntering together down Central Avenue one fine Saturday afternoon when we saw the sign: "BIG AUCTION SALE TODAY. All the Treasures of the Curley Mansion Going—at a Sacrifice!" Now an auction is one of my weaknesses, and it wasn't a minute before I had shepherded Donny into the place. There really were some fascinating objects there, for the Curley Mansion had been one of the city's oldest and richest. I managed to pick up some handsome bits of bric-a-brac at bargain prices; while Donny, chaffing in the crowded, overstuffed atmosphere, kept tugging at me to leave. But when I actually did turn to go, it was he that couldn't be dragged away.

He had pulled a dusty painting from a corner behind some vases and books, and I saw how the blue veins stood out on his blond forehead and how his eyes bulged from their sockets as he held it up and gazed.

"My God!" he muttered, so absorbed that he seemed not to see the milling crowds that nudged his elbows. "Just look at that! Boy, isn't she simply wonderful!"

But all that I could see was an ordinary young woman's features—at least, she didn't particularly strike me at first with her small face with the undersized mouth and little up-tilted nose; and her pointed, elfish chin. Yet I'll have to confess that, as I stared, something about the eyes did hold me. They were gray-green, and disproportionately large in the tiny face, so that they stood out a little like fawn-eyes; and as I peered at them I had an uncanny sensation —yes, a sort of unearthly, shivery feeling, as if actual living eyes were scrutinizing me from that canvas.

"I've got to have her, Carl," Donny whispered into my ear. "I've got to have her, no matter what the price!"

I don't know why, but a chill passed along my spine.

"But who is she?" I demanded. "Who's the artist?"

Then for the first time, I noticed the title: "Self-portrait. By Maltra."

"And who the devil is Maltra?" I prided myself on more than the average knowledge of art, but the name was strange to me.

"All I know," Donny startled me by whispering, while his eyes still devoured the painted features, "is that she's the girl I'm going to marry."

I'D KNOWN Donny to do things before on sudden crazy impulses, as once when he'd tossed a twenty-dollar bill to a beggar who just happened to take his fancy; and I knew that you couldn't do anything about his whims. And so I said nothing when, an hour or two later, he emerged from the Galleries with the "Self-Portrait" firmly in hand. From the ecstatic look in his spark-lit eyes, you'd have thought that, at the least, he'd picked up a new Venus de Milo.

"Invite me to the wedding, old pal," I gibed, as we stepped into the street.

He stared at me with the most serious intentness.

"Don't you try to make fun of me, Carl," he protested. "From the very first second, I knew it—I heard it thundering all about me —she and I are meant for each other! It's one of those weird things—one of those inevitable things you can't explain. I'll never rest till I find her."

"But the auctioneer couldn't say who she was," I reminded him.

"Those auctioneers are a lot of old rummies. Suppose we step round to the art dealers."

But it turned out that not an art dealer in town had ever heard of Maltra. None of their catalogues, not even those dating back many years, had listed her name. They all admitted, on seeing the painting, that it was

an accomplished piece of work, but couldn't be sure how recent a performance it was.

"Oh, it's quite recent, never fear," Donny assured me, still with that other-worldly look in his tyes. "I tell you, I just feel her—I feel her as if she were walking right here with us now. She's waiting for me, I'm as positive of that as I could be of my own soul—and *I'm going to find her*"

There was something in his manner that you just couldn't argue with. Beneath those mild blue eyes and that smooth placid skin I felt all the fervor of the fanatic—yes, and a fanatic who was also wildly, desperately in love. Then suddenly, I don't know why, fear gripped at the pit of my stomach—a fear for Donny as fierce and deep as if I'd seen him being wrapped in the coils of an invisible web.

II

FOR nearly a month I didn't see Donny again. Somehow, whenever I stepped around to his rooming house, he happened to be out. But I did get words a-plenty from old Mrs. Blodgett the landlady.

"Don't know what's getting into Mr. Maclaren of late," she confided, as she wiped a tear from the corner of one of her watery blurs of eyes. "He's not himself at all any more, he's gotten so absent-minded he don't even seem to see you—just looks right through you, like there was somebody in the empty air on the other side. Or maybe stands looking out into space, and don't hardly hear you when you talk to him. Why, last Wednesday evening, poor dear, he was going to pay the rent, and seemed surprised when I told him he'd paid on Tuesday."

This had me worried; for Donny had never been so forgetful before. I was all the more troubled since he did not seek me out, in his usual way; and when at last one night I did find him in, I fully expected to call him to account for his neglect.

One glance at him, however, and I changed my mind. He was looking worn and thin—shockingly so. The expression in his gentle blue eyes was a haunted one—yes, haunted is the only word I can give it; and a sort of invisible shadow seemed to lie across his firm-cut, Byronic features.

"Oh, it's you, Carl?" he greeted me, in a dull, indifferent way, as if we'd scarcely been parted for five minutes. And after I'd flung myself into a chair and tossed out some quips that fell flat, he sat across from me on the bed, trying to make conversation; but his words had a toneless, spiritless quality, as if he wasn't there at all and it was merely a robot speaking.

All the while, his eyes were not on me but on the opposite wall, which held them with a charmed fascination. It gave me a shock to see Maltra hanging there above the desk, in a new frame all glaring with gilt. Maybe it was only some trick of the light; but her large gray-green eyes shone in the tiny face as if there were a lamp behind them. I could almost have sworn some fire was burning inside—yes, once more I could almost have sworn she was alive.

Noticing my interest in the painting, Donny at last warmed to life.

"Doesn't she look fine in her new frame?" he enthused, in the dulcet tones and doting manner of a man praising a sweetheart or a bride. "Don't you think she's just marvelous?"

"Been able to trace who she was?" I parried the question.

The sparkle left his eyes. He shook his head sadly.

"No, and it's not for lack of trying, either. I've written or wired every art critic and museum in the whole damned country. I've pored over art books and catalogues till my eyes were sore. But it's the queerest thing, Carl, I haven't found one reference to her name—no, not one!—nor come across one of those jackasses of critics who'll say he's ever heard of her."

"Well there's still another possibility," I pointed out. "Have you thought of consulting the original owner of the Curley Collection?"

Donny sighed. His head drooped. "Of course, I haven't overlooked that bet. All that I could find out was that old Bryce Curley died last year. His only heir was his son, Bryce, Jr. But what did that damned fool do, after selling the mansion and everything in it, but go and join some crazy scientific expedition just a few weeks ago!"

"Where to?"

"Headwaters of the Putomayo, or some such infernal stream, down in those cursed

South American jungles. One of the most inaccessible spots on earth, they say. No possible way to get in touch with him down there—not for many months at least."

"Well, it's doubtful if he could help you anyway," I surmised.

I was astonished at the vehemence with which Donny leapt up from the bed and began ranging the eight-by-ten room.

"But somebody's got to help me. Somebody's got to, I tell you! I've got to find out about her. I've simply got to! Lord in Heaven, Carl! I haven't been sleeping nights! I've been seeing her face floating before me, like the dear sweet features of someone I've known and loved. In the daytime, too, it's just the same—I see her then too, with that clear, fairy-like face of hers, till I can hardly attend to business any more!"

Remembering Mrs. Blodgett's complaints about Donny's absent-mindedness, I was becoming more concerned minute by minute.

"Listen here, old fellow," I appealed, rising and putting one hand about him, yet not all reassured when I found how he was trembling, "listen here, you've got to shake yourself out of this obsession! You can't let it prey upon you—turn your life upside down!"

Almost savagely, he flung himself out of my grip. There was an ecstatic glitter in his face as he gazed up at the painting, whose gray-green eyes stared back at his with a glitter that, oddly, seemed nearly as ecstatic as his own.

"But it's not an obsession!" he raged. "Can't you understand, Carl—it's real! Real! Maltra is real—I know it! I still feel her presence! She's somewhere waiting for me, Carl! I must—I must find her!"

There was all a lover's fervor in the glance which he cast at the picture on the wall.

"But how in thunder you going to find her?"

He stared at me imploringly, as if silently begging me not to throw dust on his hopes.

"Oh, never fear, I'll find ways. Why, you don't know, Carl, how many hours I've passed roaming the streets downtown, looking into every woman's face, hoping the next one will be her. Once or twice, for a moment, I even thought I'd found her—and would you believe it, my heart almost stopped beating. But when I looked again, somehow she'd always disappeared."

"I predict you'll never find her that way."

IN THE glance which he threw back at me there was something I had never seen in Donny before—a zealot's light, remote, beyond argument, almost fierce in its intensity, such as I had once observed in the eyes of an old gardener about my father's place, who, after reciting scraps of doggerel, confided to me that he was the reincarnation of Shakespeare.

"Well, old boy, I wish you luck," I tossed out, as I made my discomfited retreat. But Donny did not even see me go. His gaze was fastened adoringly upon Maltra, whose gray-green eyes stared back at him with a glow that surely I only imagined to be as tender as his own.

III

KNOWING that ordinarily none of the boys were more congenial than Donny, or quicker to go off gallantly on the trail of any young charmer, I naturally got the idea of interesting him in some fair damsel who would take his mind off Maltra.

But no, a very devil of perversity possessed him. He wouldn't look twice at Adele La Rue, the dancer, who was about the daintiest thing I knew; and he showed no more than a bored politeness to Annie McCloud and Roberta Bloomington, either of whom would have been a runner-up in a beauty contest. And as for meeting other girls—you'd have thought I wanted to introduce him to man-eating tigers. "I'm busy, Carl!" he snapped, when I mentioned a certain delectable night-club singer. "Can't you see, I haven't time to play around!" But the far-away light in his eyes showed clearly who he was thinking of.

Finally, in desperation, along in the late spring, I suggested taking him down for a day or two to my week-end cottage at Honeywood, about twenty miles out of town. I don't know what fatality was in me, that I always made the moves which wound themselves about him like a dragnet. First I'd led him to that damnable auction; and

now I was the means of getting him to Honeywood! If I could only have foreseen!

At first, however, he resisted the invitation like seven fiends; and I don't know what it was that weakened him in the end—some mystical element inside him, I'd say, something I couldn't ever quite penetrate. "I've just got a feeling, Carl, maybe I'd better go," he finally yielded, a glow of anticipation in those soft ingratiating eyes of his, after he'd sworn by God and the Holy Ghost he couldn't possibly make it.

At Honeywood, I thought, there would be enough to keep his mind on wholesome things: a pool, a tennis court, and miles and miles of good clean forest trails to roam. Just the same, I did have my misgivings as we set off together in my car. In addition to his tennis togs and an overnight bag, he was carrying a huge flat package neatly packed in wrapping paper.

"What the devil d'ye think you're taking?" I grumbled. "We're not going on a Grand Tour of Europe."

"I know," he answered, simply and sweetly. "I've got something here I couldn't let myself be parted from, not even for a night."

I cannot say why, but a chilling premonition shot over me at the knowledge that Maltra was to make an uninvited third in our party.

IV

IT WASN'T till the next morning that my forebodings found any confirmation. We'd enjoyed a good enough afternoon, Donny beating me in three sets of tennis, 6-4, 7-5, 9-7; and after that we'd had a delicious plunge, and in the evening he seemed jovial enough as a group of us sat spinning yarns around a campfire. But in the morning, awakening at five thirty, I was surprised to see that Donny wasn't in the cot beside mine. He was nowhere about the cabin, either; and in the dim light of dawn I couldn't make out any sign of him in the surrounding woods.

"The damn fool evidently likes early-morning strolls," I growled to myself. "Guess I'll get another snooze."

But at seven, when I awoke again, he still wasn't anywhere in sight; and as I pottered around preparing the bacon and eggs I began to get really annoyed, as a man will when he's hungry and breakfast is needlessly delayed.

But he wasn't to have breakfast with me that day. By mid-morning I had become seriously alarmed; for Donny was usually the soul of consideration, and it was most unlike him to be gone without notifying me. And so, along with some of the boys from neighboring cabins, I'd been combing the woods for a mile around, in the belief that my friend had met with some accident. But still no sign of Donny.

It was just before noon, when I'd returned to the cabin half exhausted, that I saw him sauntering along the trial out of the pines. Or maybe "sauntering" isn't the word; he was gliding ahead so lightly he almost seemed to be floating; for a moment, I thought of a bodiless spirit. My first glance showed what a change had come over him. His face was literally blazing, illuminated, yes, glorified with a splendor as of one who'd looked upon heaven. His eyes seemed to gaze not so much at me as at the sky above my head. His whole being was transfigured with joy.

As he moved swiftly toward me, I didn't notice at first the leaves, twigs and burrs that clung to his sweater and slacks; the blackberry scratches on his sleeveless arms; the sweat-stains on his face; and the mud on his shoes. I even forgot my indignation at all the anxiety he'd caused me, for I saw at once how completely unaware he was that he'd done anything at all out of the way.

"Carl! Carl!" he panted, coming up and grasping my shoulders in the manner of one who has some great, some unbelievable truth to impart. "What do you think? What on earth do you think has happened?"

"Nothing except that you've driven us all half wild—" I was about to say.

But his rapturous look cut me short.

"I saw her!" he burst out. "I saw her! Yes, I saw her! With my own eyes, I saw her!"

"Saw who?" I demanded, in a startled, automatic way. But, of course, I already knew.

"Saw *her*! I recognized her at once!

Couldn't help recognizing her! I'd know her anywhere!"

"Come on in out of the sun, old chap," I urged. "Better tell me quietly inside the cabin.'

But he continued to range excitedly about in the open.

"I saw her, with her straw-yellow hair, her elf's face, her wonderful big burning eyes! Oh, Carl, what a thrill! It was early in the morning; I couldn't sleep and something told me to get up, and I slipped out quietly so as not to wake you. There in the twilight I saw her, just beckoning at the edge of the trees—"

"If it was still twilight, how could you be sure?"

Ignoring my interruption, he rushed on.

"I could see her beckoning, so I followed. I followed through the woods—I don't know how far, I didn't care, it was such joy to see her. We went on for miles and miles, and I could never quite catch up. Sometimes she disappeared, then I'd see her again, still gliding ahead. From the way she beckoned, I knew there was something she wanted me to see, so I wasn't surprised when at last we came to a wonderful old chateau in the woods, all ivy-covered, with turrets in the Medieval style, and fountains in the garden, and a little green lake with swans swimming on it, and peacocks on the bank. There she paused, and I could hear her voice for the first time. Such a delicate tinkling voice, almost like a fairy's! 'You'll have to go back now, but you must come again. You must come again.' Then in a flash she had slipped around the side of the chateau, and was gone."

"Where did you say that chateau was?" I asked. For I had scoured the district for all of ten years, and had never come across any place like he'd mentioned.

"Over that way," he answered, pointing vaguely to the west. And then, with a passionate joy, "Oh, isn't it wonderful, Carl? Isn't it wonderful, I've found her after all! Now I'll see her often, often! Now at last I'll make her mine!"

"But what sort of girl is this," I asked, "that goes leading you off for miles on a mad chase through the woods—"

"It wasn't mad—it was divine! Divine!" he swore. And then, with a naive pleading innocence in his warm boyish eyes, "Won't you let me stay here all week, Carl? I've got to stay! I can't go back now! Tell them at the office—tell them I'm sick! Tell them I'm in no condition to work!"

As I saw the fervid light that shone from his whole face, I knew that he really was sick, that he really was in no condition to work. But I too felt sick—sick at heart—when I re-entered the cabin and saw Maltra staring out of her canvas, staring as if with a live and sardonic and somehow blissfully triumphant look in those gray-green witch's eyes of hers.

V

DURING the next few months, I could hardly pry Donny away from Honeywood. He not only stayed there week-ends; he insisted on staying all week—though the result before long was an indignant letter of dismissal from Tower Home Appliances, Inc. Not that Donny seemed to care; he had a sort of remote beatific light in his eyes when he read the news, as if it didn't concern him at all. "Oh, well," he shrugged, "I'm still not broke." And it didn't even seem to occur to him to look for another job.

However, he did have a full-time job now, though not a very paying one. I don't think a day passed but that he set off at dawn through the woods to westward. I'd followed him once or twice, and knew his invariable route through the pine groves, past the old mill, then along Fern Creek, then over a ridge heavily overgrown with oak, then down into a valley of hemlock and larch, then along Corkscrew River, which wound with snaky twists through a twenty or thirty-foot ravine. It was here that I always lost sight of him; I wasn't quite so slim or nimble as he, nor too agile about threading my way along those cliff-edges, where a misstep would send you plunging to the rocks beneath.

When Donny came back, there would always be a starry shining in his eyes.

"I've seen her, Carl, I've seen her again!" he would confide. "Oh, but she's exquisite!" Week after week he would report his progress. First it was, "She turned and smiled at me—and I tell you her face was like the

concentrated sweetness of all the flowers in the world." And then, a week later, "She spoke with me, in that elfin tinkling voice of hers, and said I was the one she's always been waiting for!" And again, "She led me into the chateau. Oh, what a place, with its huge halls and deep stained windows, and its tapestries showing armored knights in combat!

"She took me into a little nook all her own, with an arched ceiling of dark fretted woodwork; leather-bound books in a case at one side; and paintings covering the walls; also, an easel with a half-finished picture standing at one side."

Donny mentioned all this in a voice that sounded rational enough. But the gleam in his eyes was like that of a poet lost in a vision.

"Oh, but I wanted to hold her—take her to my heart!" he went on, so absently that I hardly knew if he were talking to me, or merely soliloquizing in my presence. "Wouldn't that be heaven! But when I almost put my arms about her, she always slips away. I can never quite reach her—never quite touch her. I ask, 'When can I take you in my arms, Maltra?' But she smiles in that gnome-like lovable way she has, and answers, 'When we're betrothed, my dearest, when we're betrothed. Then we'll never be parted.' 'But when shall we be betrothed?' I ask. And she smiles again, and says, 'Not yet for a while, beloved. Not yet for a while.' And she flits down the aisle and out of sight, sometimes hand in hand with a white-haired bent old man who bows courteously but somehow never speaks. Oh, how happy I'll be when Maltra and I are betrothed!"

There was no use talking when Donny was in one of these moods; I doubt if he even heard me. But as the weeks and months went by I was becoming more and more concerned. He was growing thinner; the hollows stood out under his eyes and on his cheeks, which were taking a hectic coloration. Meanwhile the exaltation on his face was such as, I knew, no human being could long sustain. It was getting so that he couldn't be lured from Honeywood even for a day. When I was away, he occupied my cabin by himself, and absently prepared his own meals—or more likely, so far as I could gather, ate them half cooked or uncooked. And when I was present it was much the same; he could do little but stare at that accursed painting, which he had hung on my cabin wall; he could talk of nothing but Maltra; and even in a rainstorm he would plunge into the woods for his daily rendezvous with her, to return dripping but radiant.

It was my hope that the biting autumn days, for which my cabin wasn't equipped, would drive him back to the city. Failing that, I would bring a psychiatrist from town to examine him. But the season hadn't advanced beyond mid-October, the nights chilly but not yet too chilly to endure, when affairs rushed to a climax.

VI

I COULD hardly have missed the double-columned item in the *Daily Banner*:

"LOCAL ORNITHOLOGIST RETURNS FROM AMAZON

"Bryce Curley, Jr., Flies Home from Para

"After spending six months with the Thorpe University Expedition that penetrated to the headwaters of the Putumayo River in South America, Bryce Curley, Jr., is back in town, where he is temporarily installed at the Plaza Hotel . . ."

I had scarcely finished the article when I reached for the telephone. And five minutes later I had an appointment with Bryce Curley, Jr.

Not that I expected much of the interview. But if only I could find out who Maltra was, and bring the news to Donny while there was still time to put some flicker of reason back into his bemused mind—

Curley was a distinguished-looking, hawk-eyed gentleman of about thirty-eight, who received me courteously but seemed surprised at my question, and at first unable to help me.

"Maltra? Maltra?" he slowly repeated after me. "Well, I do seem to have a faint recollection—but no, I can't quite place it. Dad made his house into such a museum of curios, you know, I never could follow half

what he collected. I suppose it was something he picked up cheap at some exhibition."

"Try to think hard. Please! It's dreadfully important," I urged.

Curley furrowed his brows, but to no effect.

Then, just as I was leaving in a hangdog way that may have fanned some spark of sympathy within him, he called me back sharply.

"Mind telling me about that painting again?"

Once more I described the picture of Maltra.

"By Jove," he declared, "it's just flashed over me. That must have been the painting Dad used to have in his study, just over the desk!"

"So you really do know something about it!"

"It was the large gray-green eyes that gave the clue. They used to sort of bewitch me when I was a kid."

"When you were a kid? Good Lord! Is the picture that old?"

"Anything from twenty-five to thirty years, I'd say. I remember how Dad used to tell me of some eccentric old English lord he knew—name might have been Maltra, for all I can say—who got into disgrace and left his native land. Built himself a chateau near here somewhere in the woods—a strange place with baronial halls, stained-glass windows, fretted ceilings, tapestries of men-at-arms, and that sort of thing.

"He lived there all alone, except for a servant or two and his daughter—a queer creature, they say, as wild and shy as a wood-thing, but a talented painter. As far as I know, however, this is her only painting that survived the fire."

"What fire?"

"Why, the one that destroyed the chateau. I remember the time exactly, because it was on my thirteenth birthday. Nobody knows how it started, but when it was all over there wasn't a thing left of the chateau, and not a trace was ever found of the old man or his daughter. They say the site is so overgrown with trees and brush nowadays you couldn't locate it if you tried."

VII

As SOON as I could stumble away, I made a bee-line for my car, which I pointed straight toward Honeywood. By sheer force, if necessary, I would drag Donny away from that devil's spot and his damnable hallucinations.

But as I shot into the car, a presentiment brooded in my mind; a gloom that grew deeper moment by moment as the miles between me and Honeywood were reeled away.

It was a sparkling autumn day, with the oaks and maples all a glory of scarlet, tan and golden. But somehow the very loveliness of the scene added to my forebodings, which rose to the point of an obsession when I had leapt out of the car and found that—just as I'd expected—Donny wasn't anywhere about the cabin.

I knew well enough which way he'd have gone, and I think some demon within me spurred me on as I took the foot-trail through the pine woods, past the old mill, then along Fern Creek, over the ridge of oak, down into the valley of hemlock and larch, and off toward Corkscrew River.

"Donny! Donny!" I kept calling. But, of course, there was no response.

"Guess you're plumb daffy, Carl old boy!" I tried to laugh at myself. "Looks like your nerves are going back on you. Why, there can't be any reason to be worse scared today than any time!"

Then, just to reassure myself, I called again, "Donny! Donny!" But only the ribald cawing of a crow came back, as if in mockery.

All the while, there was a goading voice within me, "Hurry! Hurry!" And my anxiety had grown until it was a nagging, gnawing thing that wouldn't leave me in peace for a minute.

Along Corkscrew River, my progress was slow. The stream, swollen by recent rains, foamed and plunged thunderously over its boulders many feet below; and I made my way cautiously along the razor-thin ledge at the top of the cliffs, particularly slippery today because of the rains.

Then once more I called, "Donny! Donny!" But how be heard above the roaring of the rapids?

Yet I knew that this was the way Donny ordinarily came. Besides, I could see man-sized footprints here and there in the wet earth. And so I pressed around turn after turn. The stream, growing wilder and more tumultuous as it was joined by tributaries, seemed like some frenzied, demented thing that shouted at me with crazy warnings.

I may have pushed a mile through that hideous ravine, and at last, all but exhausted, I could go no further. I paused, and stared about me. The footprints had suddenly ended, as if their maker had disappeared into the air. Baffled, I leaned against a tree, my uneasiness rising almost to terror. "Donny! Donny!" I screamed again and again at the emptiness. "Donny! Donny! Donny!" And then, all at once, I saw.

Down by the brink of the stream, forty feet below, a prone figure was stretched.

VIII

WITH perilous difficulty, I let myself down the steep slope. Donny was lying on a pebbly bank, the waters just lapping his feet; the crushed bushes and vines above him showed which way he had fallen. A single glance, and I knew the frightful truth. There was blood on his lips, and on his face a pallor that could have but one meaning. But he was still breathing faintly.

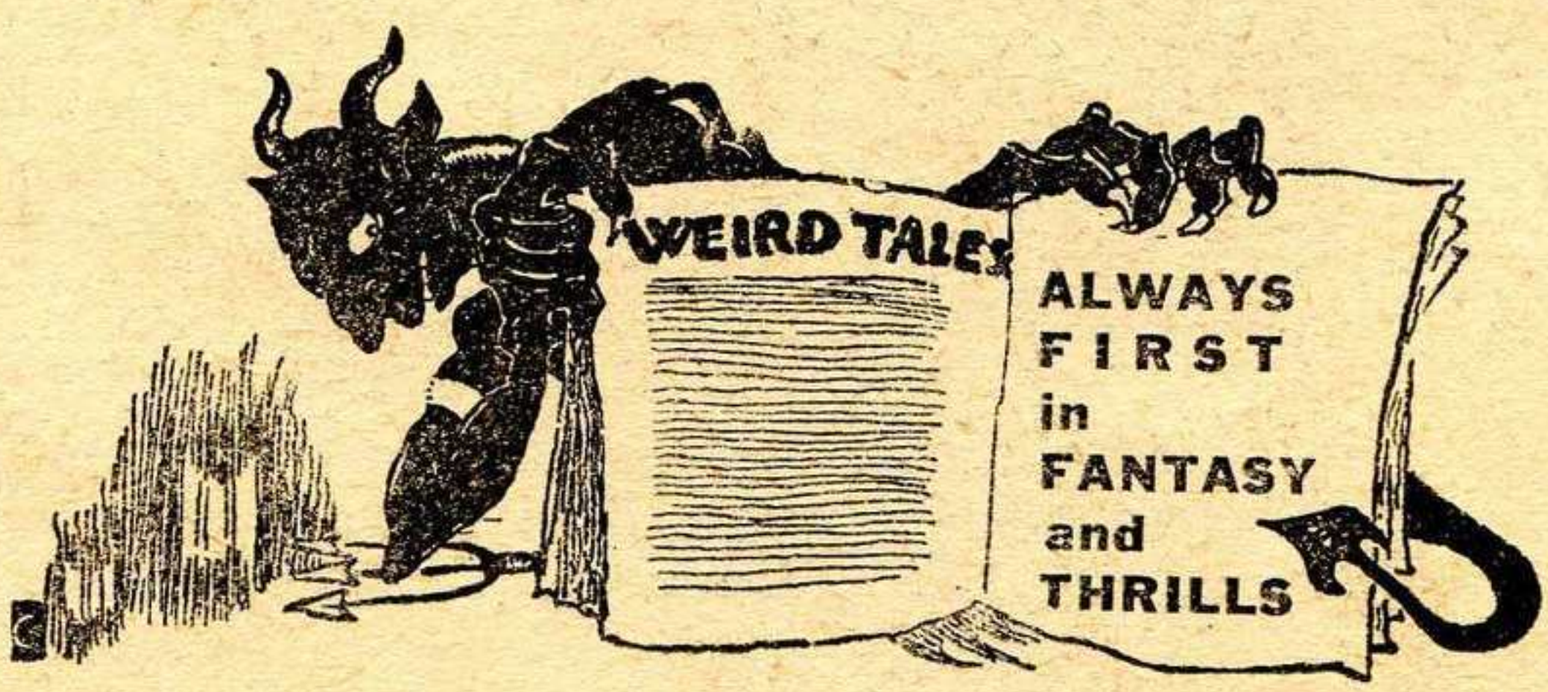
As I came down to him, he turned those mild blue eyes toward me with an expression I shall never forget. It was an expression of wonder, joy, thanksgiving—more than that, sheer bliss. He looked like a man gazing his first on heaven.

"Ah, it's you!" he cried, in tones that, by bending low, I could just make out above the droning of the torrent. "It's you! Maltra, it's you!"

And then his arms reached up, and closed on air. "Ah, beloved, I knew you'd come! Beloved, fold me close! Fold me in your arms—like that—yes, like that! Fold me in your arms! Now at last, beloved, we're betrothed! Now, now we'll never be parted!"

His voice trailed away in a long delighted sigh. His eyes, still beaming with the radiance of some divine happiness, stared their last at the blue sky above the treetops, and slowly closed.

As I flung myself upon him, unable to keep back the racking sobs, my gaze chanced to fall upon the rocks beyond the stream. And there—it may have been only imagination, or perhaps the stress of the moment—I seemed to see two gray-green eyes staring just above a boulder's mossy shoulder. A pixie-face smiled at me, and drifted away. And I thought I saw a slender form, like a deer's, gliding without a sound into the brush.

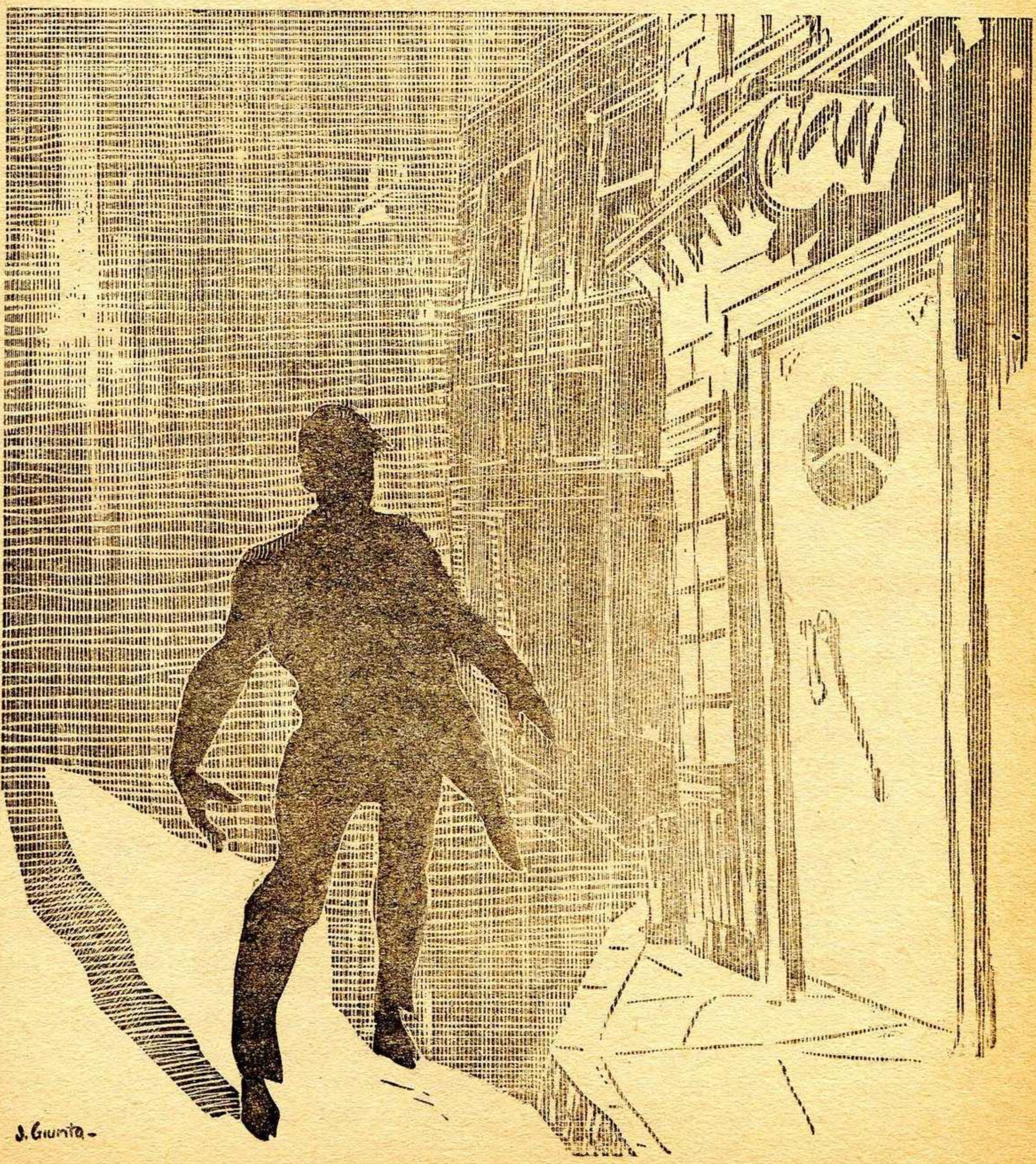


The Last Train

BY FREDRIC BROWN

ELIOT HAIG sat alone at a bar, as he had sat alone at many bars before, and outside it was dusk, a peculiar dusk. Inside the tavern it was dim and shadowy, almost darker than outside. The blue back bar mirror heightened the effect; in it Haig seemed to see himself as in dim moonlight from a blue moon. Dimly but

It wasn't a question of taking a later train!



Heading by John Giunta

clearly he saw himself; not double, despite the several drinks he had had, but single. Very, very single.

And as always when he had been drinking a few hours he thought, maybe this time I'll do it.

The *it* was vague and big; it meant everything. It meant making the big jump from one life to another life that he had so long contemplated. It meant simply walking out on a moderately successful semi-shyster lawyer named Eliot Haig, walking out on all the petty complications of his life, on the personal involvements, the legal chicanery that was just inside the letter of the law or indetectably outside; it meant cutting the cable of habit that tied him to an existence that had become without meaning or significance or incentive.

The blue reflection depressed him and he felt, more strongly than usual, the need to move, to go somewhere else if only for another drink. He finished the last sip of his highball and slid off the stool to the solid floor.

He said, "So long, Joe," and strolled toward the front.

The bartender said, "Must be a big fire somewhere; lookit that sky. Wonder if it's the lumber yards other side of town." The bartender was leaning to the front window, staring out and up.

Haig looked up after he had gone through the door. The sky was a pinkish gray, as though with the glow of a distant fire. But it covered all of the sky he could see from where he stood, with no clue to the direction of the conflagration.

He strolled south at random. The far whistle of a locomotive came to his ears, reminding him.

Why not, he thought. Why not tonight? The old impulse, ghost of thousands of unsatisfactory evenings was stronger tonight. He was walking, even now, toward the railway station; but that he had done before, often. Often he had gone so far as to watch trains depart, thinking, as he watched each: I should be on that train. Never actually boarding one.

Half a block from the station, he heard clang of bell and chug of steam and the starting of the train. He'd missed that one, if he'd had the nerve to take it.

And suddenly it came to him that tonight was different, that tonight he'd really make it. Just with the clothes he had on, the money that happened to be in his pocket. Just as he'd always intended; the clean break. Let them report him missing, let them wonder, let someone else straighten the tangled mess his business would suddenly be without him.

Walter Yates was standing in front of the open door of his tavern a few doors from the station. He said, "Hullo, Mr. Haig. Beautiful aurora borealis tonight. Best one I've ever seen."

"That what it is?" Haig asked. "I thought it was reflection from a big fire."

Walter shook his head. "Nope. Look north; the sky's kind of shivery up that way. It's the aurora."

HAIG turned and looked north, back along the street. The reddish glow in that direction was—yes, "shivery" described it well. It was beautiful, too, but just a little frightening, even when one knew what it was.

He turned back and went past Walter into the tavern, asking, "Got a drink for a thirsty man?"

Later, stirring a highball with the glass rod, he asked, "Walter, when does the next train leave?"

"For where?"

"For anywhere."

Walter glanced up at the clock. "In a few minutes. It's going to highball any second now."

"Too soon; I want to finish this drink. And the next one after that?"

"There's one at ten-fourteen. Maybe that's the last one out tonight. Up to midnight anyway, it is; I close up then, so I don't know."

"Where does it—Wait, don't tell me where it goes. I don't want to know. But I'm going to be on it."

"Without knowing where it goes?"

"Without caring where it goes," corrected Haig. "And look, Walter, I'm serious. I want you to do this for me: If you read in the newspapers that I've disappeared, don't tell anyone I was here tonight, or what I told you. I didn't mean to tell anyone."

Walter nodded sagely. "I can keep my trap shut, Mr. Haig. You've been a good customer. They won't trace you through me."

Haig swayed a little on the stool. His eyes focused on Walter's face, seeing the slight smile. There was a haunting sense of *familiarity* in this conversation. It was as though he had said the same words before, had had the same answer.

Sharply he asked, "Have I told you that before, Walter? How often?"

"Oh, six—eight—maybe ten times. I don't remember."

Haig said "God" softly. He stared at Walter and Walter's face blurred and separated into two faces and only an effort pulled them back into one face, faintly smiling, ironically tolerant. It had been oftener, he knew now, than ten times.

"Walter, am I a lush?"

"I wouldn't call you that, Mr. Haig. You drink a lot, yes, but—"

He didn't want to look at Walter any more.

He stared down into his glass and saw that it was empty. He ordered another, and while Walter was getting it, he stared at himself in the mirror behind the bar. Not a blue mirror here, thank God. It was bad enough to see two images of himself in the plain mirror; the twin images Haig and Haig, only that was now an outworn joke with himself and it was one of the reasons he was going to catch that train. *Going* to, by God, drunk or sober he'd be on that train.

Only that phrase too had a ring of uneasy familiarity.

How many times?

He stared down into a glass a quarter full and the next time it was over half full and Walter was saying, "Maybe it *is* a fire, Mr. Haig, a big fire; that's getting too bright for an aurora. I'm going out a second."

But Haig stayed on the stool and when he looked again, Walter was back behind the bar, fiddling with the radio.

Haig asked, "Is it a fire?"

"Must be. I'm going to get the ten-fifteen newscast and see."

THE radio blared jazz, a high-riding jittery clarinet over muted brass and restless drums.

"Be on in a minute; that's the station."

"Be on in a minute—" He almost fell, getting, off the stool. "It's ten-fourteen, then?"

He didn't wait for an answer. The floor seemed tilting a little as he headed for the open door. Only a few doors and through the station. He might make it; he might actually make it. Suddenly it was as though he'd had nothing to drink at all and his mind was crystal clear no matter how his feet might stagger. And trains seldom left on the *exact* second, and Walter might have said "in a minute" meaning three or two or four minutes. There was a chance.

He fell on the steps but got up and went on, losing only seconds. Past the ticket window—he could buy his ticket on the train—and through the back doors to the platform, the gates, and the red tail-light of a train pulling out only yards, but hopeless yards, away. Ten yards, a hundred. Dwindling.

The station agent stood at the edge of the platform looking out after the departing train.

He must have heard Haig's footsteps; over his shoulder he said, "Too bad you missed it. That was the last one."

Haig suddenly saw the funny side of it and began to laugh. It was simply too ridiculous to take seriously, the narrowness of the margin by which he'd missed that train. Besides, there'd be an early one. All he had to do was go back in the station and wait until—

He asked, "When's the first one out tomorrow?"

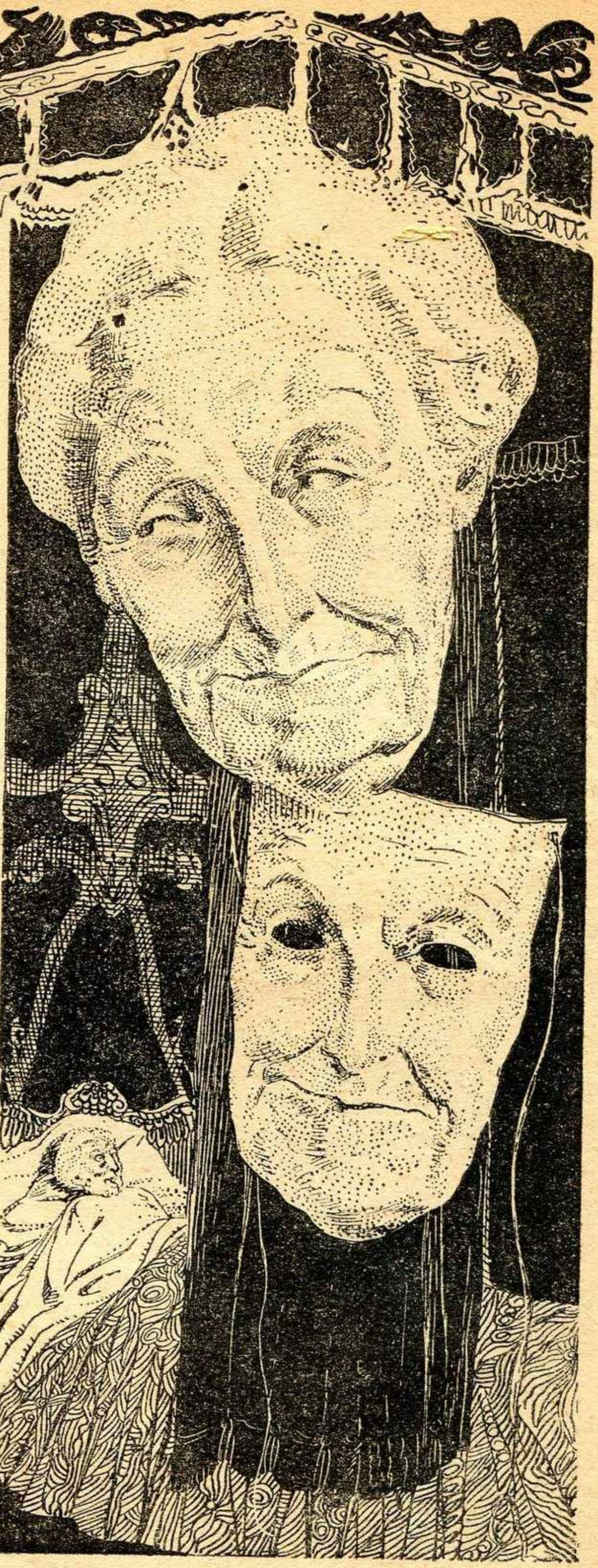
"You don't understand," said the agent.

For the first time he turned and Haig saw his face against the crimson, blazing sky. "You don't understand," he said. "That was *the last train.*"

Was the curse on the mine, the house, or its owner?

The Mask of Don Alfredo

BY MAL BISSELL



LA CHISPA was the most dilapidated mine I ever saw in South America. The mill buildings were roofless shells against the desolate yellow and purple mountains of the Bolivian Cordillera. The Indians said there was a curse on the mine, that Alfredo Gutierrez was the Devil's son and that it was a good place to stay away from.

I finally located the main building, a big U with the open end of the cobblestone courtyard facing the mountains. As I climbed off my mule an Indian woman appeared, her several dirty petticoats showing beneath her filthy red flounced skirt.

"Is Don Alfredo here?" I asked.

"*Momentito,*" the Chola woman replied. She turned and mounted a stairway that led to the balcony and disappeared. While I waited I studied the half timbered house. It looked like an eighteenth century German inn. Over a doorway the date 1797 stood between the bas-relief figures of what appeared to be two Hessian grenadiers.

Through the open end of the courtyard the sun was setting, and the mountains and

Heading by Vincent Napoli

mud huts of the Indians stood out like polished copper.

"Truly it does look like gold," said a soft voice behind me. When I turned I saw a slight man of at least seventy-five. His thin hair was white. A patriarchal smile, gracious and suggestive of cunning, marked the thin lips. As the last rush of sunlight died out from the huts and the hills he turned to me. "I am called Don Alfredo Romo y Gutierrez," he said. "Here you are in your own house." The formalities of the Spanish greeting sounded perfectly natural when he spoke them.

I told him I was looking over mining properties for the Southern Metals Company. Don Alfredo gestured easily and called the Indian woman who stood respectfully under the balcony. I untied my sleeping bag and the woman led my mule away.

The old man led the way across the balcony and into a room in the wing of the house. Straw and dust littered the floor and filled the corners. Cardboard and gunny sacks had been stuffed into the holes in the windows. We sat down at an ancient mahogany table and Don Alfredo produced a bottle and two glasses. The old man nodded toward the label, Otard 1892, as he poured the liquor into my glass. "You don't see this any more." Again he smiled with the same odd mixture of graciousness and cunning, almost an old woman's smile. "*A su muy buena salud,*" he said easily as he raised his glass.

"*A la suya,*" I replied. The brandy was rich and warm.

DON ALFREDO talked about the mine. The tin and tungsten ore came from an open pit on the mountainside. Mules carried it down to the site of the old flotation mills. The Indians ground and screened it by hand before it was loaded on mules again and carried to the railroad, thirty miles away.

"Here time goes backward," Don Alfredo concluded, his glass in his fingers.

"With machinery, some trucks and a good road to the railroad you could produce ten times as much," I pointed out.

The old man looked at me intently, a trace of suspicion mixed with contempt on his dried and wrinkled face. "A hundred years ago this mine was producing more than any other mine in Bolivia," he said. "It is still rich. I want no machinery, no trucks."

"You wouldn't have to do anything," I insisted. "Southern Metals would lease the mine and your royalties would pay you far more than the mine does now."

Don Alfredo reached for the cognac bottle and poured me another glass before refilling his own. He was silent for a while. Then he raised his glass to finish the last of the liquor with a gesture of finality. "You can sleep in this room tonight," he said. "Then you go on in the morning. There are other mines in the Cordillera to interest you."

It had grown dark. The Indian woman came in with an oil lamp. Don Alfredo pushed his chair away from the table and rose. "I am sorry I cannot offer you anything better than this room," he said as he left.

The bathroom was as ruined as the rest of the house. The fixtures were museum pieces, the old lead pipes corroded and covered with hardened dust. I washed myself, took the lamp back to the other room and went down into the courtyard.

A light shone through the doorway flanked by the figures of the two Hessian soldiers. Inside a young Bolivian was seated at an ancient roll top desk. He smiled as I entered and introduced himself as Castillo, the foreman. The office was filled with samples of ore, a few scattered tools and piles of old account books.

"How do you like our mine?" he asked quietly. He was tall for a Bolivian and his copper face was smooth.

"You don't see many like this," I answered.

"It works better than it looks."

"I should think you would want milling machinery," I said.

Castillo was obviously embarrassed. "That is a question for Don Alfredo," he answered.

I wanted to change the subject. "This is an unusual place. The architecture is certainly not Spanish."

Castillo smiled. "No. It was built by a German for Don Alfredo's great-grandfather. For a hundred years it was the greatest house in the Cordillera. Then Don Alfredo's father went to live in France and the building began to go to pieces. When Don Alfredo came back it was ruined."

"It's a pity it hasn't been kept up," I answered.

The foreman fingered one of the old account books. *"Los tiempos cambian,"* he said; the times change.

The Chola woman opened the door and announced that Don Alfredo and supper were waiting.

It was while we were smoking with our chairs pushed back from the supper table that I first noticed the painting on the wall. It was a large oil portrait of a woman about thirty. "That was my wife," Don Alfredo said quietly, his wrinkled black suit hugging his narrow shoulders. "It was painted in Paris just before she died."

"She must have been a beautiful woman," I answered.

"She was the most beautiful woman in Paris and Paris then was a city of beautiful women. She died of typhoid." The old man fell silent for a moment, then he leaned slightly toward me. His voice became more intense. "Without my wife there was no reason to stay in Paris. When I came back I brought everything that had been hers." He said nothing, studying the picture.

The woman had been beautiful. Her features, like Don Alfredo's, were fine and sharp. I guessed that like the old man across from me she had been small.

DON ALFREDO stood up and took the lamp in his hand. "I want to show you something," he said, his voice heavier and more vibrant. I followed him into his bedroom. Faded red velvet curtains hung from the high ceilings. Three heavy wardrobes stood against the wall. Don Alfredo opened the doors of one of the wardrobes and held the lamp so that I could see the long gowns that hung in it. "They are exactly as she left them," he said. He ran his thin hand along the line of dresses with a passionate tenderness. "It is a comfort to know that they are here."

He closed the wardrobe and moved toward a huge four poster canopied bed. "That, too, was hers," he said. He stood holding the lamp, transfixed, as though remembering the bed in Paris.

Beside the bed was a small table and the light fell for an instant on a box of cosmetics that stood out incongruously in the decayed room.

"I remember the day my wife died as though it had been yesterday," the old man said after we sat down again in the other room. His voice rose in pitch and took on a slightly hysterical tone. The richness of his Spanish added to the melodramatic atmosphere of the house. "I was mad with grief. For weeks nothing would comfort me. I wanted to die: Then I realized that my wife was still with me."

"I understand what you mean," I said.

The old man's hands clenched the edge of the table. "I don't think you do," he said. "I'm more than eighty years old. I've lived here nearly fifty years and yet I have never been alone, not for one minute. My wife is here."

There was a terrific tension in the old man's voice. I wanted to say something to calm him. "Yes," I said slowly, "some rare persons leave so much behind that it seems they have not really gone."

Don Alfredo shook his narrow head jerkily, as though restraining an impulse to scream at me. The huge ruined room seemed too small. "No! No!" he said in a high screaming voice. "I don't mean that. La Señor a de Alfredo Romo y Gutierrez left nothing behind her because she never went. She lives and breathes in this room!"

He half rose from his chair as if in anger then slowly he sank back into it, his long thin fingers clutching at the tabletop. After a moment he spoke again. "It is possible to die in one sense yet live in another. My son lives in England. My daughter is married to a countryman of yours, an American. To me they are both dead. My wife is not. You will never understand."

"Perhaps you are right," I said. I wanted to burst out of the room. Don Alfredo seemed to be trying to explain something that only he could understand, something unreal. The veins in his forehead stood out

against the wrinkles and his mouth twitched. I stood up.

Don Alfredo walked to the outside room with me, breathing heavily in the agonies of some emotion that only he understood. The lamp was still burning on the table where we had drunk the cognac. "I shall say goodbye to you now," he said. The thin hand he gave me was cold and it trembled. "You will be leaving early in the morning, and the one luxury I allow myself in this deserted place is the privilege of lying in bed in the mornings. It was a habit of my wife's."

After he left I crawled into my bedroll. I lay in the sleeping bag wishing I weren't so close to Don Alfredo's room. The old place had a disturbing quality about it and the Altiplano wind whistling around the house didn't help the dead, empty feeling of the building. I finally dropped off to sleep thinking about the cosmetic box beside the old man's bed. There was a woman in Don Alfredo's room.

I DON'T know what woke me. When I sat up in my bedroll the luminous hands of my wristwatch read 2:47. A light was moving in the room where I had eaten with Don Alfredo a few hours before. I felt for my flashlight, slid into my trousers and walked in my bare feet to the door.

Inside the room a woman was standing in front of the picture of Don Alfredo's wife. Her back was turned to me and she was holding the little lamp that had been on the table next to the old man's bed. She was dressed in a long black gown I was sure I had seen hanging in the armoir. A black shawl covered her head and shoulders. I watched her for a moment. Then I flashed the light and said, "Who are you?"

The woman turned quickly, and I could see her face in the circle of white light. It was heavily made up. The lipstick glared brightly and the eyebrows were solidly penciled in black. She stared at me for a moment as though in defiance.

Then a hideous smile spread out over the painted face. "I am the chatelaine," she said in a crackling falsetto, "the señora of the house. And who are you?"

Her question surprised me. I couldn't believe she was real.

She stood still for a moment and then came toward me, taking mincing affected steps. Her black eyes were brilliant in the paint that made a caricature of her face. She laughed again and raised her right hand to my face. "You may kiss my hand," she said.

Something prompted me to obey. My own hand seemed to rise without volition to grasp the cold fingers. Shivers of fear and horror ran through me as I slowly touched my lips to the icy skin. She sighed and withdrew the hand. "You are a gentleman," she said. "The first I have seen in long years. Let us talk."

She brushed past me and led the way to the table where I had sat earlier with Don Alfredo. I had not said a word. The whole thing was too unreal to understand. The old woman set the lamp on the table beside the cognac bottle and stood beside a chair. Mechanically I walked to the table and held her chair while she sat down. My knees were weak as I sank into the other chair.

The woman indicated the bottle and the two glasses, untouched since Don Alfredo had poured me a drink in the afternoon. "*Su servidor;* your servant," I mumbled weakly as I raised my glass to my lips. The brandy warmed my throat and gave me a feeling that at least it was real. Across the table the ancient painted face watched me seriously.

"Now," she said, "have the grace to tell what you are doing in this forgotten place."

I hesitated, wondering what to say. Then I explained that I was trying to lease the mine for an American company, that the owner would not hear of it and that I would leave in the morning.

The old woman was silent for what seemed a long time. "You cannot be right," she said at last. "I alone decide what is to be done with the mine."

I wanted to get out of the house, to find my mules and start for Oruro, sixty miles away. "Then who is Don Alfredo?" I asked.

"Don Alfredo was my husband, but he has been dead for fifty years."

"Then I have been mistaken," I said.

"All life is illusion," the old woman answered. Again she was silent, then her manner became more sympathetic. "Now, explain to me how you would lease my mine."

I felt unreal. All I wanted was to be rid of the old woman and to be on my way with the first break of daylight. "Let us talk in the morning," I answered weakly.

"No!" she said sharply. "Tomorrow will be too late."

I MOVED my hand in a gesture of hopelessness and briefly explained the lease.

"I will sign your lease on one condition and on that I insist," the old woman said tensely. "And it shall be that while I live the mine will be unmolested. When I die your company may work the mine and shall pay royalties to my children."

I agreed. I would have agreed to almost anything. I felt that I could not stand the strain of unreality much longer.

"It must be done at once." The old woman's voice was shrill and close to hysteria.

I took a printed agreement from my pack and added the condition demanded. She signed two copies with the name Graciela Vidal de Romo y Gutierrez and immediately rose. Once more she held up her withered hand and again I touched my lips to it. She picked up the lamp, turned and walked rapidly to the door of Don Alfredo's room, her long silk skirts making a swishing noise as she moved. The door closed behind her and the bolt clicked.

At last I went back to my bedroll. Sleep was impossible and I lay in the dark smoking cigarettes and listening to the wind rattling the old house. There was no other sound.

As soon as it began to dawn I rolled up my bedding and carried it down into the courtyard. The Indian woman had a fire going in the kitchen and offered me eggs and coffee.

I was loading the mule when Castillo came out of the little office across the courtyard. "You rise early," he said, studying the mule.

"I have a long way to go." I turned and looked at him. "Tell me," I asked, "is Don Alfredo insane?"

"I don't know," he answered slowly. "He keeps to himself. They say he lived a great life in Paris before his wife died."

"It must have shaken him."

The foreman did not answer but nodded in silent agreement, and I finished tying up the mule's load. I had a feeling that I had forgotten something and remembered the contract I had produced to humor the spectre. I wanted to take it along with me as evidence of a night that I could not believe was real. I excused myself and went back to the room where I had slept.

The papers were still lying beside the cognac bottle. The wavering signature of the old woman was still there, although I half expected to find the line blank. As I stuffed the papers into my pocket and started from the room, a groan came from beyond the old man's door.

There was no answer to my knock. The door was bolted. Another groan, half sigh came from inside the room. With a sense of panic I went to the balcony and called for Castillo.

We broke the door down. The old man was lying in the big canopied bed. His face was sunken, but the eyes moved imploringly. Castillo glanced at me. "It looks like a stroke," I said.

We gave the old man some brandy and laid his head back on the pillow. I glanced around the room but saw no evidence of the macabre woman. The box of cosmetics was gone. The faded black suit was laid neatly over a chair.

"There's nothing we can do," I told Castillo. "I'll ride down to the railroad and telegraph to Oruro for a doctor. There's one at the company mine, but he can't get here before afternoon."

IT TOOK me three hours to reach the railroad and another two to get the doctor down to the little station in the old Ford fitted with railroad wheels.

The doctor took my mule and headed for La Chispa. There was nothing for me to do but take the Ford back to Oruro. The doctor would telegraph for it in the morning and we could send down any medicines he wanted to send up to La Chispa.

In Oruro I told the company office that Don Alfredo would not lease his mine but decided to say nothing about his masquerade.

I saw the doctor the next day. He told me Don Alfredo had died the night before. He was silent for a moment, then he looked at

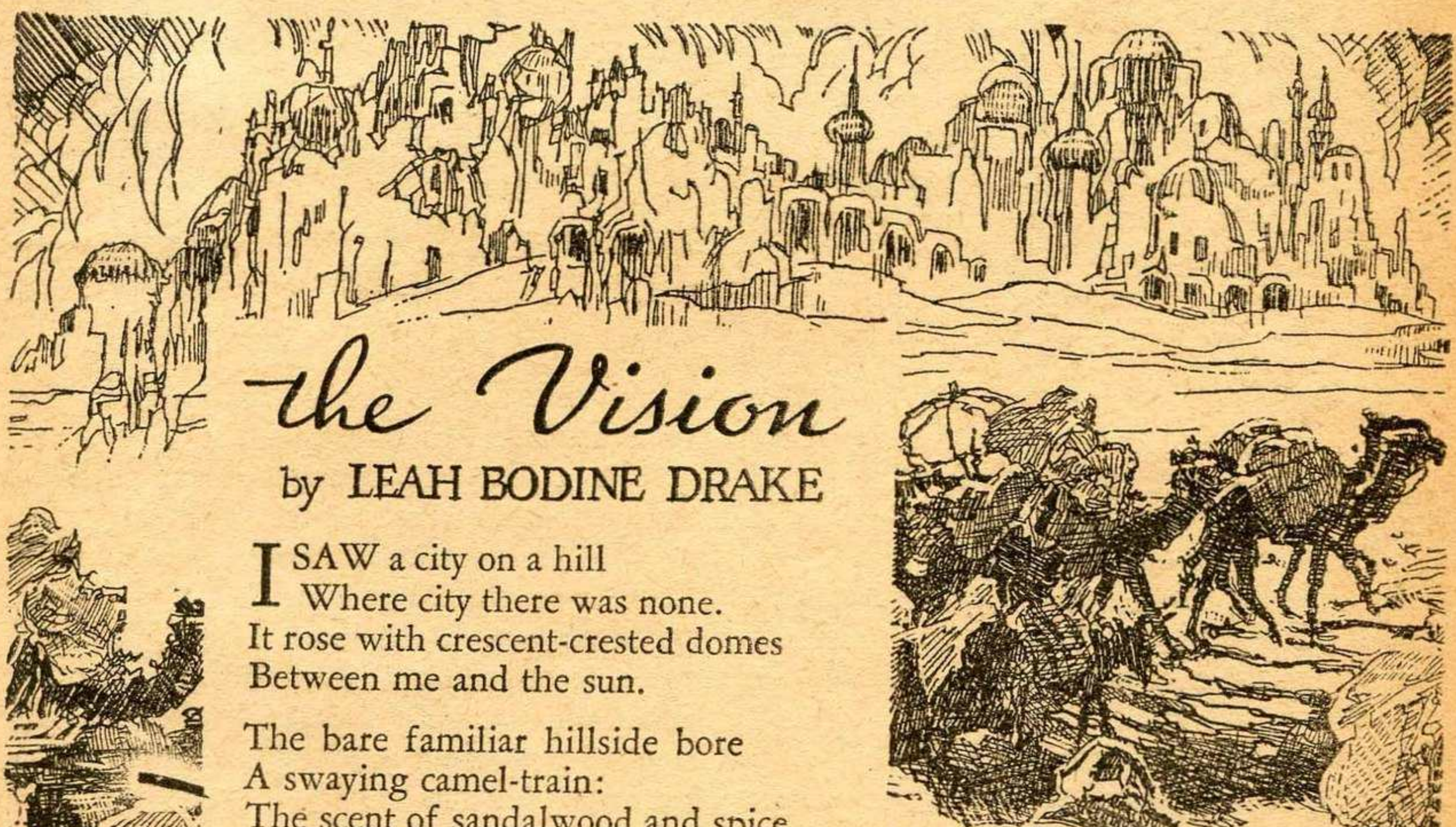
me. "We don't have time for problems of that sort around here," he said slowly, "but for fifty years apparently two persons have been tied up in one at La Chispa. I don't think either ever knew of the existence of the other. These things seem unreal until you actually come up against them with a case."

I nodded. "I suppose that when Don Alfredo's wife died he refused to recognize reality by keeping her alive in his own mind." The doctor looked at me quizzically, and I told him about the appearance in the night of Don Alfredo dressed in his wife's clothes.

The doctor was silent when I finished. He knocked out his pipe and began to refill it, then he looked up at me. "If you still have that lease you'd better turn it over to the company," he said slowly.

"No," I answered, "I'd like to keep it. After all, it has no significance to anyone but me."

The doctor lighted his pipe and flicked the spent match into a wastebasket. "You don't understand. Don Alfredo and his wife are both dead, but it was Don Alfredo who died in Paris. Doña Graciela died last night but for fifty years she lived in the guise of her dead husband."



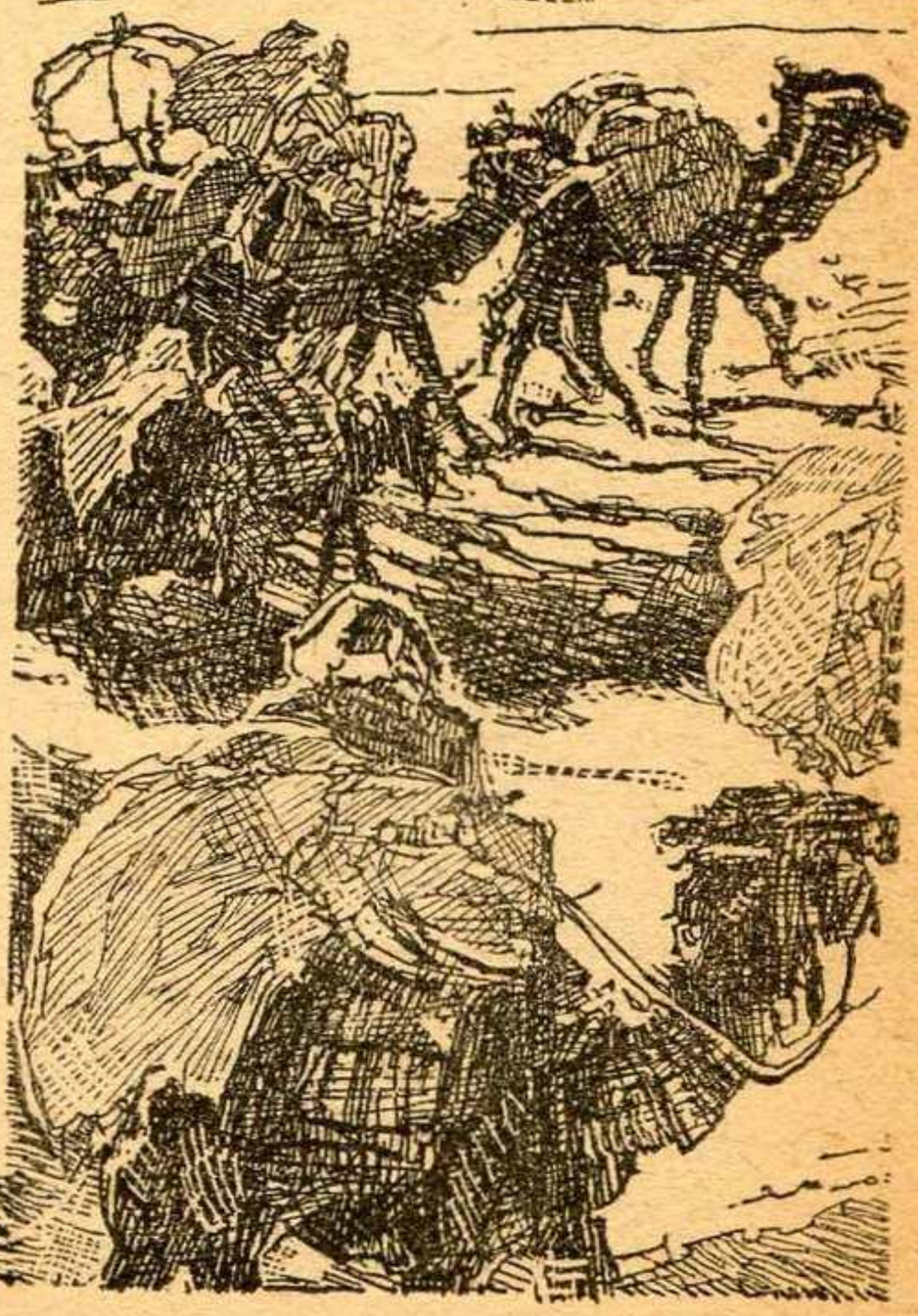
the Vision

by LEAH BODINE DRAKE

I SAW a city on a hill
Where city there was none.
It rose with crescent-crested domes
Between me and the sun.

The bare familiar hillside bore
A swaying camel-train:
The scent of sandalwood and spice
Blew in my face like rain!

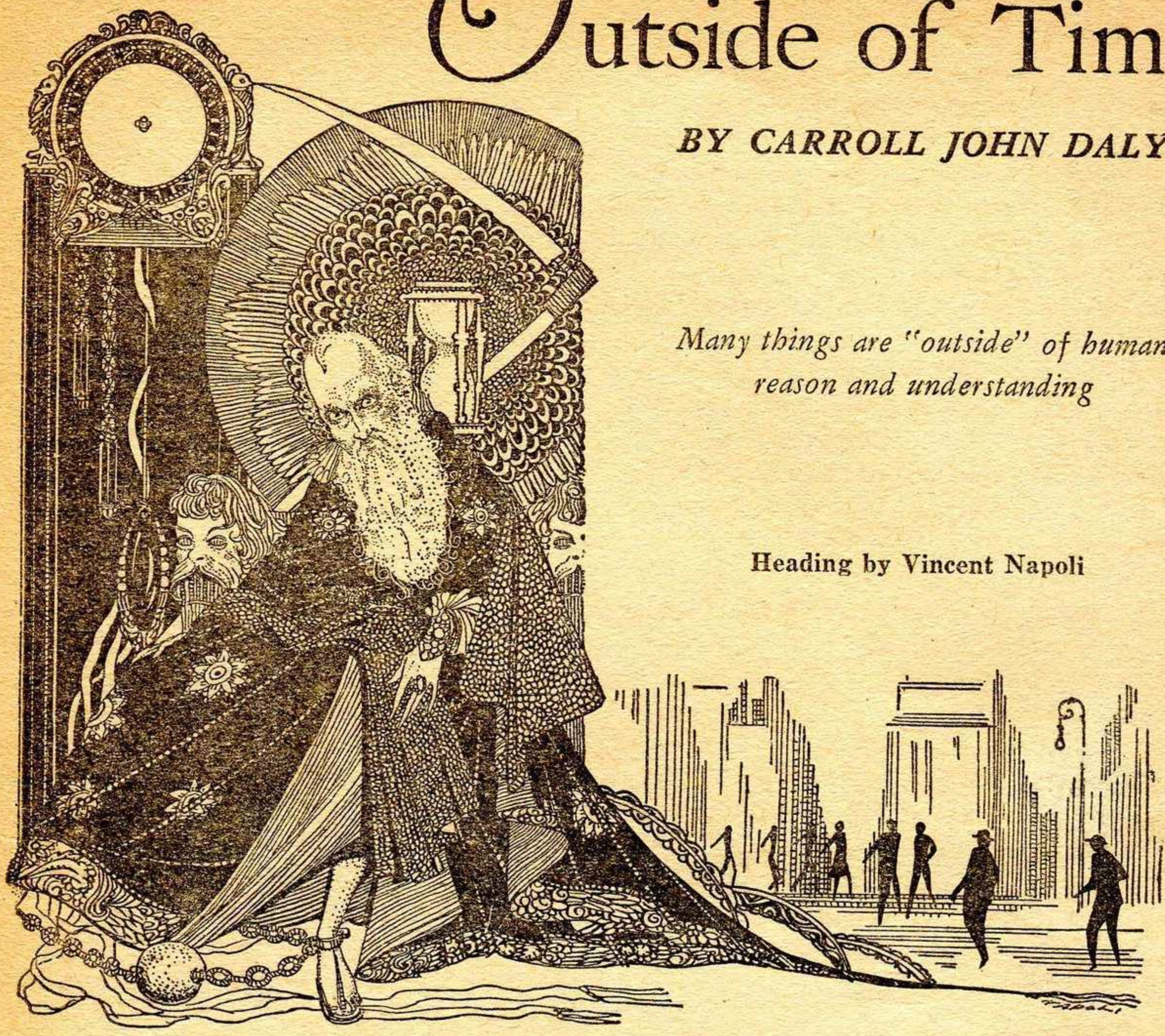
I saw the cloaked and fierce men
Ride through the dazzling light;
One turned and waved a hand to me . . .
Then vanished out of sight.



Outside of Time

BY CARROLL JOHN DALY

Many things are "outside" of human reason and understanding



Heading by Vincent Napoli

THEY call me simply L. D. or The Lazy Dean. I have come to accept it as a title both of esteem and affection. The boys at the university started it. The faculty took it up. They mean a lazy body and not a lazy mind. I am not so well informed on the happenings of the day. I use my reading time for the things that others do not read.

I am much more interested in what does not appear in the newspapers than what does appear. There are many better fitted to understand and explain the everyday happenings of life. I like to live by the side of the road—but the side of a side road.

For years I have enjoyed a very unofficial position at the school. I am a good listener and a good believer. Will I believe in the impossible? I don't have to believe in the impossible, for I have eliminated the word impossible from my own lexicon. I find things improbable but nothing more. Too many strange things happen.

It is a pleasant saying around the university when one relates anything that strains the credulity of the academic mind: "Tell it to the Lazy Dean."

So the boys often come to me with improbable happenings. Even the faculty, half-apologetically, with a pretense that it is all in good fun—but watching me furtively to see how I take it.

It is surprising how busy I am.

It is with a feeling of satisfaction and comfort that I sit down with my pipe and listen to one of our students confide to me things he would not even breathe to his closest friend.

So it was with that feeling that I opened the door of my rooms on the second floor of the museum building to Tommy Slater of the medical school. Tommy was a medium-

sized rather slim dark young man who if he avoided surgery and didn't specialize would make a remarkably fine family doctor. Easy going, pleasant of manner—mild, friendly bright blue eyes and a generous humorous mouth. He would never set the river on fire but then it was my opinion that a good doctor never would. Nature cures. A good doctor brings simply comfort and confidence to the sick.

There were lines under Tommy's eyes and the likable little twist to the corner of his mouth was more pronounced. Tommy was the school hero though he hadn't been near the university since it happened almost a week ago. He was New York City's hero. Indeed a national and international hero who had swept all other news from the press and the radio and no doubt from the minds of men and women.

He saw me look at the clock for although I kept late hours it was then five minutes before twelve.

"Come, come, L. D." His laugh was a forced one. "You never turn down your fellowman day or night. I know it is late and I expect it will be much later still before you get rid of me. I've come to smoke a pipe with you."

TOMMY assisted me in pushing the other easy chair close to the fire. Despite my gesture he waited until I was seated. Then he sat down opposite me—stretched his feet out toward the fire—placed a cigarette between his lips and lighted it. Though he always talked of smoking a pipe with me I had never seen him smoke one. I filled my pipe slowly, and lighted it, smiled over at him and waited.

"I hope," he said suddenly, "that you have read a paper lately—or if you haven't someone told you what was in it."

"Yes," I told him. "I have read all the papers; seen all the pictures—even went to the news-reel theatre twice. Surely you received my note of congratulation."

"If I did I never read it." He inhaled deeply. "I have had—literally thousands and thousands of letters. Hundreds of women want to marry me. Hundreds of people want to shower me with money—as many more want to deprive me of that money before I even receive it. I've been offered fabulous amounts from the movies—and one night club offered me ten thousand dollars for a single appearance." He sat up a little straighter and leaned forward into the light. "Look at me," he said. "And don't say I've worn myself out—run myself down mentally and physically by overwork here at the school."

"No—Tommy," I told him. "I would never say that."

"Of course you wouldn't." He permitted himself a weak grin. "Do you know I've been to see Dean Stone—that august head of this whole institution. I saw him once before from a distance. I didn't think he would breathe the same air with me, and do you know he tripped all over the foot-high softness in his rug trying to shake hands with me."

"He should." I nodded. "No matter how lightly you take it. It was a very courageous act—a very noble one—the school is proud of you."

"Baloney." The blue eyes sparkled into life. "I did nothing but reach up and lift the girl out of the air."

"Yes—you told that to the reporters. It has been discussed here at the university. There is general agreement that you put it very modestly, Tommy—and they have been proud of the way you have conducted yourself. Modesty—"

"Was not my strong point," he cut in. "I'm ashamed not to be modest. I feel like a crook and a cheat. That is exactly what I did do. Simply reach up and lift her out of the air.

"But the girl fell from the penthouse terrace—and you caught her in your arms and held her. The papers may play it up a bit for they say there was not so much as a scratch on her."

"There wasn't." Tommy nodded vigorously. "Not so much as a pin prick." And very seriously, "Did you read the number of floors she fell?"

"Yes—fourteen. I don't think you have anything to be ashamed of, Tommy. It was a remarkable piece of daring and courage."

"Fourteen stories," he said again. "I spread my legs apart—braced myself—my knees gave slightly and I stayed erect and

held her so. I'm quoting that from the newspaper accounts. Now—did you ever think what became of the force of gravity? Do you—do you think that possible?"

"Possible—well I would have thought it highly improbable—but it did happen. You did catch her. You didn't fall down. Countless people saw you. A news-reel camera—" He was looking intently at me. "What is it, Tommy?" I asked.

"Go over it for me please," he said. "Tell me what you read and what you saw in the news-reel. Tell it to me as you might to a stranger who hadn't heard the full account."

"Do you think there is such a stranger? All right, Tommy, if you want it that way. Wanda Lou Sherman, age eighteen, only daughter of Johnson H. Sherman, multi-millionaire steel magnate, was playing table tennis on the terrace of their penthouse apartment in the upper fifties on Park Avenue. It used to be ping-pong when I played it. In her enthusiasm for the game—or was it one of the few remaining English balls that made her dash to the little wall. But she did dash—jumped upon it—grabbed at the ball and for some unaccountable reason—and such reasons, Tommy, are always unaccountable—the heavy sturdy steel fencing bent over and she pitched out toward the street—fourteen floors below. So far we are correct?"

"Quite correct." Tommy was very serious. "Go on."

"Very well. It was before the dinner hour—rather five o'clock. The street was crowded, for there was a wedding across the way. The girl screamed as she fell. People looked up. The camera man turned and so got the picture. Then, Tommy, you dashed out. Caught the falling body—staggered—nearly fell. But held steady and saved the girl's life. Am I to go on about the part you are going to marry her and learn the steel business and—"

"No. We can skip that. How many people do you suppose saw me dash out and catch the girl?"

"Everyone who was there I suppose. Even those who didn't see you. That is human nature, Tommy. They said you just dashed across the street—I don't think any of them were questioned as to the direction you came from."

"Do you remember the old lady in the shawl—in the news-reel? What she said?" And when I seemed puzzled. "She said I just appeared as if from nowheres and had her in my arms."

"Is that important?"

"So important," said Tommy, "that it is the only true statement made. Besides mine that I simply reached up and lifted her out of the air."

TOMMY got up then and paced the room.

"Listen, L. D." He talked as he walked. "I am serious about gravity and the speed of the falling body. Common sense would tell anyone that a giant of a man, let alone a shrimp like me, could not have caught a girl—even though she was only five-feet-two and weighed little more than a hundred pounds—after she had fallen fourteen stories. We'd both have been dashed to the street, dozens of bones broken. Can you believe that?"

"I believe that nature can reach great heights at times. Let us say that nature suddenly gave you super-human strength. Or perhaps more simply that you arose to the occasion."

"Anything," he smiled at me now, the little wistful smile again, "is possible. But you see there is a simpler solution to the whole thing. The truth—that I just reached up and lifted her out of the air. I saw Dean Stone. I nearly blurted it out to him. I wanted to see how the truth would strike a cold-blooded, practical man. I actually threatened him with the truth. And do you know what he said? 'The truth can never hurt anyone.' Do you believe that?"

"Well—no, Tommy. It is simply a stock phrase of the good dean's. He couldn't very well advise you to lie about it." And after a long wait. "Are you going to tell me the truth, Tommy? I don't think it will hurt either of us."

"No," said Tommy. "It can't hurt you. You've talked to men who have seen so much—experienced—the—well other men would call them mad. And you didn't have them committed—or anything like that."

"No." I smiled. "Nothing like that."

"But it could be all an illusion, couldn't it?"

"If life is an illusion, yes."

"Could that be?"

"Anything could be—but I don't believe that probable. You see, Tommy, I hear a great many things from a great many people. Each one taken individually seems beyond belief—but when you take them altogether you have a great deal of evidence that makes you believe. We do not deny the stars because we cannot see them on a cloudy night."

"So you have heard about everything?"

"I hope not everything, Tommy." And I meant that. "Life would be very dull indeed if I did not expect—at least always hope—to hear something different, something new to me—new to man."

"Well I've got it." Tommy stood looking down at me. "If it weren't for the girl, and the newspapers and newsreels, I'd question my own sanity. But odd and impossible as it sounds it is the only thing that explains the truth about Wanda Lou Sherman . . . and my lifting her out of the air. It doesn't make a hero out of me—but it explains how I happened to take the girl in my arms—with such ease."

"Does it, Tommy?" I waited. And then, "Are you going to tell me?"

"I don't know," he said. And almost at once he sat down and told it to me. It was new to me. I think it will be to you.

"THIS is real," he started. "No dream about it. I was never more awake in my life. And never more sober. She saw to that."

"Who saw to it, Tommy?"

"The girl—Ruth. You know I met her in the Astor Library. Some research for Dr. Clasueman. I thought at the time I was rather clever about it—but later I knew she had arranged it. She told me that. I had hours and hours of copying to do. She did it for me—in no time. One hundred and twenty pages of typewritten material—in no time."

"Just how long is—no time, Tommy?"

"Well." His smile was certainly wistful. "I handed her the paper—the blank paper. She took it in her left hand and handed it back to me in her right—all neatly typed. In no time."

"That," I said, "was very remarkable." But I listened more intently.

"It was that much more remarkable when you consider that she didn't have any typewriter and they wouldn't have allowed one there in that room of the library."

"I suppose," I tried to help him along, "that you might have fallen asleep—or you didn't look at the clock. Or that she was a very beautiful girl."

"I did look at the clock. She asked me to. No time at all elapsed. Yes, L. D. She was a very beautiful girl. Ruth or no Ruth she's an Arabian. The sort of Arabian the movies would conjure up from their idea of a story from the Arabian Nights."

"I suppose there was some simple explanation."

"Oh, yes, L. D." He laughed nervously. "There was an explanation—simple enough at least from the girl's point of view. That was the beginning. I saw Ruth often after that. She looked about twenty but she was—we'll come to her age later. I don't want to give you more than you can swallow at one time."

"I've swallowed a lot in my day. I expect to swallow a lot more."

"You will." For a moment his smile was boyish. "I'll feed it to you in small doses. Anyway—as it was fed to me. Twice after that the same thing happened. Her doing my work in no time. You see we were going together steadily. Dining at little out of the way restaurants—foreign ones. By the way she spoke at least a dozen languages like a native—if that surprises you."

"It interests me. Go on."

"Well we had finals coming up you know and there was a lot for me to do—and I was complaining about not having enough time. Ruth laughed at me about that. She said—I remember distinctly what she said and how she put it. She said, 'You don't need more time, Tommy. You need less time. In fact what you need is the absence of time.' "

"Did she explain that?"

"No—not then. Later it was explained to me. But she did the hocus-pocus of receiving the blank paper and handing it

back to me with my rough notes and stuff I had to copy neatly and accurately all typed out for me. In no time, understand."

"I understand, Tommy."

"Do you?" The corners of his mouth twisted up again. "That is more than I did, L. D. Ruth was very wise and very clever—and we liked each other very much. I knew about myself—and peculiarly I seemed to know how she felt. She was not like her friend. Very serious of course—but lots of fun too."

"Her friend, Tommy?"

"Her friend was older. Still not over twenty-five. Calendar years I better put it. I felt as though I were on exhibition. This woman looked at me with eyes that seemed to peer from back through the ages. I thought of that when I first saw her. She was a very beautiful woman—but too serious—as if the burdens of the world rested on her shoulders."

"She had a name?" I asked.

"Yes—she had a name. Shall we let it go at that? Anyway I was with Ruth constantly. Then she gave me the first real jar. Do you know what she did, L. D.? She took me by both hands—looked long and steadily at me—and disappeared. Just like that."

"Just like what?"

"Well—she was there and then she was not there. I didn't know then—but I know now what happened. Exactly what happened."

He fastened his clear blue eyes on me as if to see ahead. Not how I was taking it so far. But how I was going to take it. If he would go on maybe. But he did go on.

"She came back." Tommy Slater threw himself down in the chair again. "She was holding my hands—and looking at me. Appearing out of thin air as the magician might say. I know I said something particularly inane like 'You should go on the stage' or something quite as silly. And adding something about it being rather embarrassing to be married to her.

"I remember her answer to that—and the soft ring of her laugh. She said, 'Oh, but it couldn't happen if we were married. We'd simply disappear from other people together.' Don't ask me to explain that now. I'll come to it soon enough. It's clear enough to understand if you accept it all—as a whole. I mean the whole thing when I tell it to you.

"CERTAINLY I was in love with her. Why not? Certainly I had tried to kiss her. And that frightened her. I don't mean that she was coy—or that she seemed to find me repulsive. I mean simply that it frightened her. She warned me against it very seriously—and very solemnly—held both my hands when she did." He seemed to think for a moment then. "It must have been along about that time that she put the question to me.

"'Tommy,' she asked me, 'would you like to live forever?'

"'I wouldn't mind if it was with you,' I told her, never being slow on the up-take. She looked at me a long time before she laughed. As if—well as if she wanted to believe it—but thought it came out too pat like a line. And it did come out like that—without much thought. But it wasn't a line after it was said. I meant it and I told her so—and I asked her to marry me. Anyway I made her believe it. I held her in my arms—and heaven help me, L. D. She was and is the only woman in the world for me. She made me say over and over that I would want to live forever—with her understand—and did I mean it.

"And there was the big love scene, L. D." He seemed in a hurry to run through it. "The most beautiful woman in the world in my arms and her lips very close. She said she had waited for me—two thousand years. Yes, two thousand years. It sounded natural and real and wonderful beyond words—and—and she lay there in my arms—not limp and lifeless understand—supple and unresisting—and whispered something about—the kiss of life everlasting." And almost in a certain hardness for I knew that Tommy hated a display of sentiment; "I doubt if that has ever been said about a kiss before—has it?"

"I don't know, Tommy. I am not of a romantic turn. My work—a long work—" I smiled. "When I find time for it—takes me among the Egyptian mummies—and their past."

"How far back?" he started to ask me then switched quickly. "That was the kiss.

I had no doubt then and I have no doubt now—about Ruth. I love her and she loves me." And with a laugh. "It seems a long time to wait for a man, doesn't it—two thousand years or more? You see, she does not know exactly—but one forgets in such a length of time. I suppose I should understand that and—" As if in sudden surprise. "Look at me, L. D. Do I seem any different?" He looked at the clock on the mantle. "It ticks on, doesn't it. And time passes when the hands move. I don't exactly feel the passing of time though." He looked a little perplexed. "Do you feel it?"

"One never feels the passing of time—one knows that it is gone—but one doesn't feel it, Tommy."

"Doesn't one?" Tommy didn't seem quite sure. "I never thought of it one way or the other. Now I can't seem to tell. But there should be a feeling—a sensation of some sort—something different. Or shouldn't there. But I forget. I'm ahead of my story maybe."

"Maybe—" I agreed with him. "Take your time, Tommy. It seems to bother you."

"Well," he said, "it does. I have not seen Ruth since—my leap into notoriety and the steel heiress' leap into space. And I don't know if it's an ordinary life or a life everlasting. And I have no way of finding out until I see her or—" He looked up at the big grandfather clock. "It stops ticking."

"It won't stop ticking," I said. "You can be sure of that."

"Can I? I have my doubts about that." He leaned forward then. "If there was no time, L. D., there would be no reason for the clock to keep ticking, would there? As a matter of fact if there was no time there would not be time for the clock to tick would there? That is sensible—isn't it?"

"If I accept your hypothesis about the time." I smiled at him.

"WE'LL come to that." He nodded vigorously. "Ruth talked a bit wildly then I thought. Her friend, this older girl, nameless for the moment—was all for having her tell me the truth first. Before it happened. But Ruth was against that. She said it should happen to me suddenly—out of a clear sky. That I was the sort of person who could take it. She didn't say 'take it'. I think it was 'adjust yourself.' Don't look so puzzled, L. D. I'm giving you the gist of it as I heard it—and if it puzzles you in my telling it think how it puzzled me listening to it there first hand. Yet I don't think I sported any such a quizzical look as you—keenly and intelligently quizzical I mean. I imagine I simply looked blank. Not thrown, you understand. It didn't matter. I was very much in love—and—well she looked at the watch on her wrist and said—and I remember these words.

"'We'll go out on the street, Tommy. Down to Times Square I think would be best. I want you to experience it first in all its force and grandeur.' That was five o'clock of a lovely spring afternoon, L. D. Crowds in Times Square—I want you to make a mental note of that. Times Square at the very height of the rush hours. I couldn't understand it. Not for two people who for the first time were in each others arms and sworn to each other for life—life everlasting.

"I've been avoiding the showdown I suppose. I won't any longer. It's with us now. Remember, right in the heart of New York City. Right in Times Square in the middle of the rush hour. Good humored people brushing against you. Ill tempered people thrusting you aside for fear they might lose a precious minute getting into the hole in the ground. One moment the roar and rush and tooting of horns and the clanging of bells and the loud harsh voices of people and then—a silence—a dead silence. As if a mighty hand had suddenly struck a great city—struck it dumb if not dead.

"Not a sound understand but the gentle breathing of the girl Ruth who held my arm. Gone were the horns of the traffic—the rumble of the subway below—the voices of the people. And gone too was the pushing, milling throng. The people were there all right. I felt myself push against them. But they didn't push back. That is it, L. D."

"EVERY LIVING THING WAS FROZEN TO IMMOBILITY

"Cars stalled and silent upon the street. People—frozen stiff in their tracks like so many waxworks in a museum or dummies in a store window. Still and silent there in

all sorts of grotesque positions—grotesque only because of the oddity of it I suppose. A man here with his foot raised in the air to take a step when the thing—whatever it was—struck and held him so. A woman climbing into a taxi—half in and half out. Frozen there.

"I don't think I could have described it but for a newsreel I had seen once. It was of the Grand Central Station. The moving picture projection had suddenly broken down and the figures on the screen had stopped in their tracks—a moving picture turned into a still one. That was what happened now. A living moving city—turned into a still one. Nothing moved. No living thing breathed as far as I could see or hear but Ruth and me.

"It was awe inspiring and terrible and over-powering all at once. It was as if we moved in a city of the dead—people rendered lifeless in whatever position they were in when the THING struck.

" 'What is it, Ruth?' I gasped.

" 'Time.' She gripped my arm and held it tightly. 'Time has stopped, Tommy,' And as I stared vacantly at her I guess, 'Maybe I should have told you before—maybe it is too much for you. Time has stopped—and those who live within Time have stopped with it. I—and a few of my kind live outside time. And now you. I have lived outside of it for over two thousand years. That is why I am still not quite twenty. Time never touches me.'

"Do you understand, L. D. what I'm telling you? Time had stopped—and Ruth and I were living outside of it—outside of Time. Do you believe it?"

"Go on," I said. "How long did this phenomenon last?"

"How long?" Tommy laughed. "That is what I asked Ruth. What do you mean how long? There was no time. It didn't last at all—and yet it lasted forever. Ask me how I felt. Perhaps I can tell you that. I didn't feel any different than I feel now—than I ever felt—except for being over-powered by the magnitude—the impossibility—of the impossible. The impossible that was happening right before my eyes.

"Above us a great transport plane hung in the air. I asked Ruth if it wouldn't fall. She simply clutched my arm tightly and pulled me along the crowded street between wax-like frozen figures of men and women. 'It can't fall,' she said. 'There isn't time. Time has stopped, Tommy—and every living thing you see apparently frozen in their tracks has stopped with it.'

" 'And—will Time come again—and what will these people think?'

"Since I was over the first shock Ruth was enjoying my confusion now. She laughed and explained.

" 'They won't know. They never have known. Why, Tommy, it has happened thousands and thousands of times over the years. It happened when I first did your work for you in the library. Time stopped—and I typed your papers. It happened in my apartment—when I held your hands and disappeared.' "

" 'Are there many like—like you—like us?' I asked Ruth.

" 'A few who live outside time yes. My friend whom you met lived outside time even before I was born. Come, let us go over to Eighth Avenue—and watch for a possible accident that we can void.'

"I can't tell you too much. What I saw and what I did explain some of the things we see in the paper that are called miracles. We found a child within inches of being crushed to death by a huge truck. Time had stopped—a second more and that child would have met a horrible death beneath a giant wheel. There were people there—people who saw sure death for that child. A mother no doubt running wildly toward that doomed child. The expression on her face—one of great agony. She was frozen in her tracks when Time stopped. I simply picked up the child and put her gently down on the curb. There was a stick in the papers about that. A miraculous escape and the naive statement that the wheel must mave brushed her aside without even a mark.

"THERE were other things too." The wistful smile was there now. "An enraged jealous woman firing point-blank at her husband in a crowded restaurant. We could tell by looking through the window. That was on Broadway. This is a tough one for you to swallow, L. D., but you might as

well take the hardest part of it. I lifted the bullet out of the air and have it here with me." Tommy put his hand in his pocket and a moment later placed a slug in my hand. "I unloaded the gun and put it back in the woman's hands. No, the fingers weren't stiff and rigid—but pliable like living hands—" And with a nervous little laugh. "And of course they were living hands.

"We met others, L. D.—like ourselves. Not many. One here and there. They seemed to have work to do. There was a middle-aged man who told us of a fire in a downtown tenement and a woman slipping back into the flames from a fireman's grasp. 'I straightened her up and pushed her over the fireman's shoulder,' he said. 'Another miracle for the papers—if the fireman isn't afraid of telling the story—for she was pretty well down in the flames.'

" 'Didn't it burn you?' I asked.

" 'No,' he said, 'there wasn't time.' "

Tommy Slater paused for a long time then and looked straight at me. He pinched out his cigarette and tossed it into the fire. Started to speak—paused and lit another cigarette. I didn't say anything. He went on.

"You must see now where we are heading. L. D." He inhaled deeply. "I haven't told it well. Indeed I'm surprised that I could tell it at all. You are a remarkable man, L. D." And very abrupty. "We went across town, dodging in and out among those still figures—not expressionless by any means. It is odd when you stop to examine a face—stare directly at it and see—but no matter. We walked up Park Avenue and into the Fifties. The wedding—the camera man—the crowds of people. I guess there had been screams but I didn't hear them of course. Time had stopped. Time had stopped just as the body of that young and beautiful heiress was hurtling toward the hard pavement below—a sure and a violent—and a horrible death.

"I didn't see her at first. It was the expressions on the faces of the people who had heard her scream and were looking up or over their shoulders. Those expressions were a study in themselves. The camera man had already turned the camera and continued to grind. What did they see—or what would they see again when Time started up. They had seen a falling body. They would see the body start to fall again. Do you get the point there?"

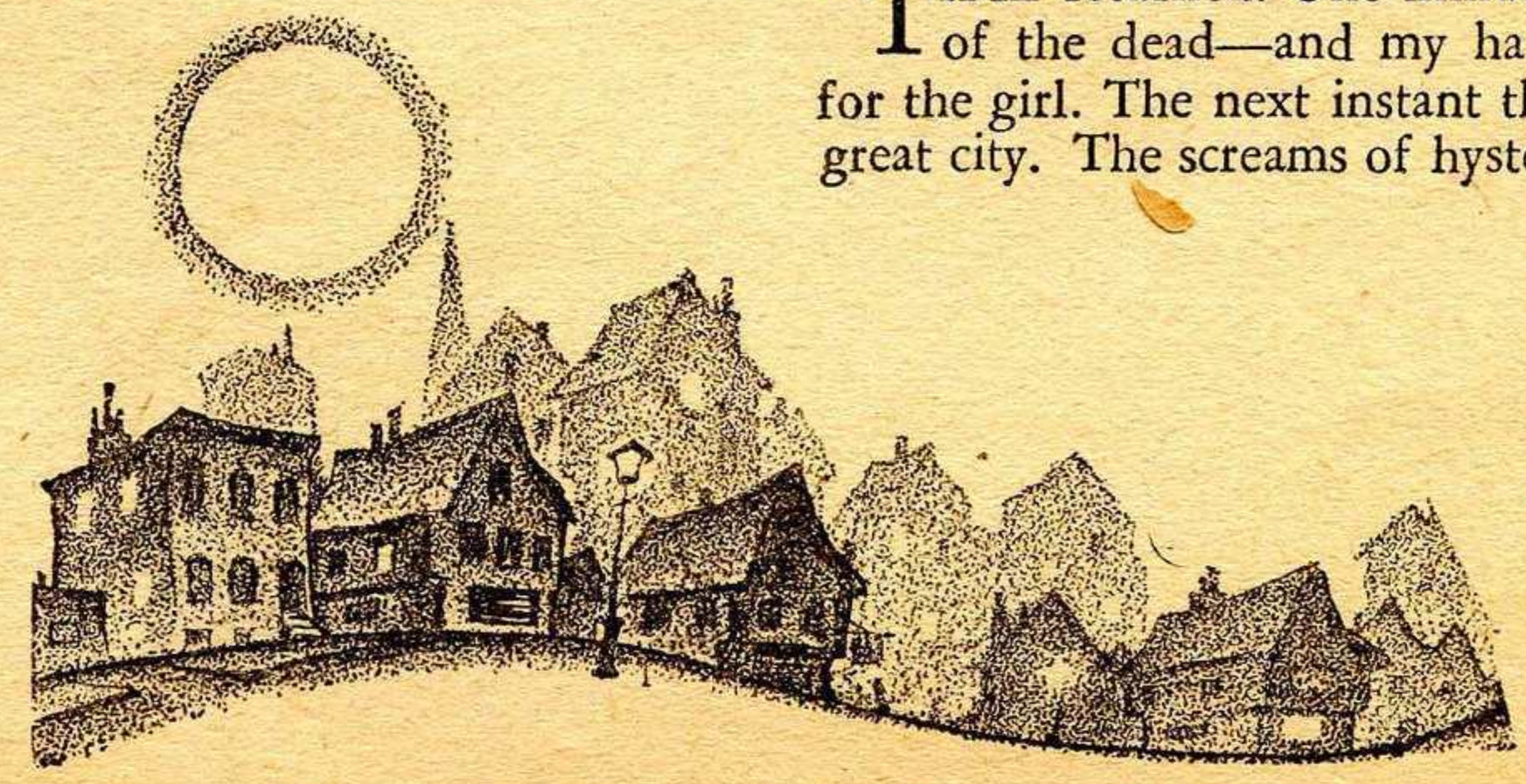
"Not—entirely," I told him.

"Well—" he said. "They would have thought they saw the girl fall the entire fourteen stories. But they wouldn't have. They would have seen her fall only about six feet—perhaps cut her arm—maybe even—twist an ankle. But certainly a six foot fall for a strong healthy young girl would not be—anything very awful. It would have been considered one of those miracles that we often read about. Time stopped when she was but a few feet from the ground. Naturally then when time started again she would drop simply that few feet.

"I guess I forgot about time. I guess I forgot those hundreds of people frozen there. I don't know what I thought. I only know what I did. I ran across the street—reached up to lift the girl out of the air—when it happened."

"What happened?" I asked.

"TIME returned. One minute the silence of the dead—and my hands reaching for the girl. The next instant the noise of a great city. The screams of hysterical women



—yes and men too. The cry of agony from that young girl's lips. And that is all, L. D. She dropped gently into my arms and I held her so. A boy of twelve could easily have done the same thing. And that—well that is it. That is the truth. That is why I say—I simply lifted her out of the air."

He waited for me to speak then. I said simply:

"What became of Ruth?"

"I don't know. I haven't seen her since."

I didn't take my eyes from his as I emptied my pipe into the fire—slowly and carefully refilled it. Then I asked Tommy.

"And the other girl—this older one?" And when he didn't answer me right away. "You heard from her, didn't you?"

"Yes." He nodded his head. "I heard from her."

I got up. Took plenty of time to light my pipe. Then I went to my little wall safe and taking the key from my pocket opened it, put in my hand and pulled out hundreds of pages of notes.

"An interesting story, Tommy," I said when I had returned to my chair, placed the pile of papers on my knees. "These notes have been gathered after an exhaustive study and research over a period of nearly twenty years. My book will have to do with Egypt, Tommy. I doubted if I would ever have time to finish it."

"Perhaps," the wistful smile was strong now, "you don't need time—but the absence of time."

"Perhaps." I was very serious. "I have a little story of my own. Not so dramatic as yours. Not so exciting as yours. But it has puzzled me a great deal. Within a period of a few hours while I slept someone got possession of these notes—made corrections and additions to them. Added material that I only dreamed about. Verified facts that I have not been able to substantiate in all those years. There is other data that I thought was beyond the knowledge of man."

"Something like my experience with my medical research, eh?"

"Very similar," I agreed. "There was, however, one clue. A scribbled pencil name on one of the pages. Almost undecipherable but I made it out. Is the name of Ruth's friend—Naomi?"

"Then you do believe." Tommy came out of his chair. "Yes—it was Naomi. I wasn't to tell you. You were to tell me. You—" He stopped.

"She told you to come and see me?"

HE LOOKED around the room, peered hard into the shadowed corners as if he half expected to see someone lurking there.

"Yes—she did, L. D." And then he blurted it out. "It's Naomi. I'm afraid of her. I don't think she has any interest in me—or even in Ruth. It's you. She questioned me about you for hours—and now—well I'm not to see Ruth again unless—unless—Lord, L. D., Naomi. She—she's interested in you."

"In me or my work." I smiled at him. "But she's right, Tommy. There won't be enough time in life for me to finish it." And I hope without immodesty. "It's an important work—a great work—a very great work."

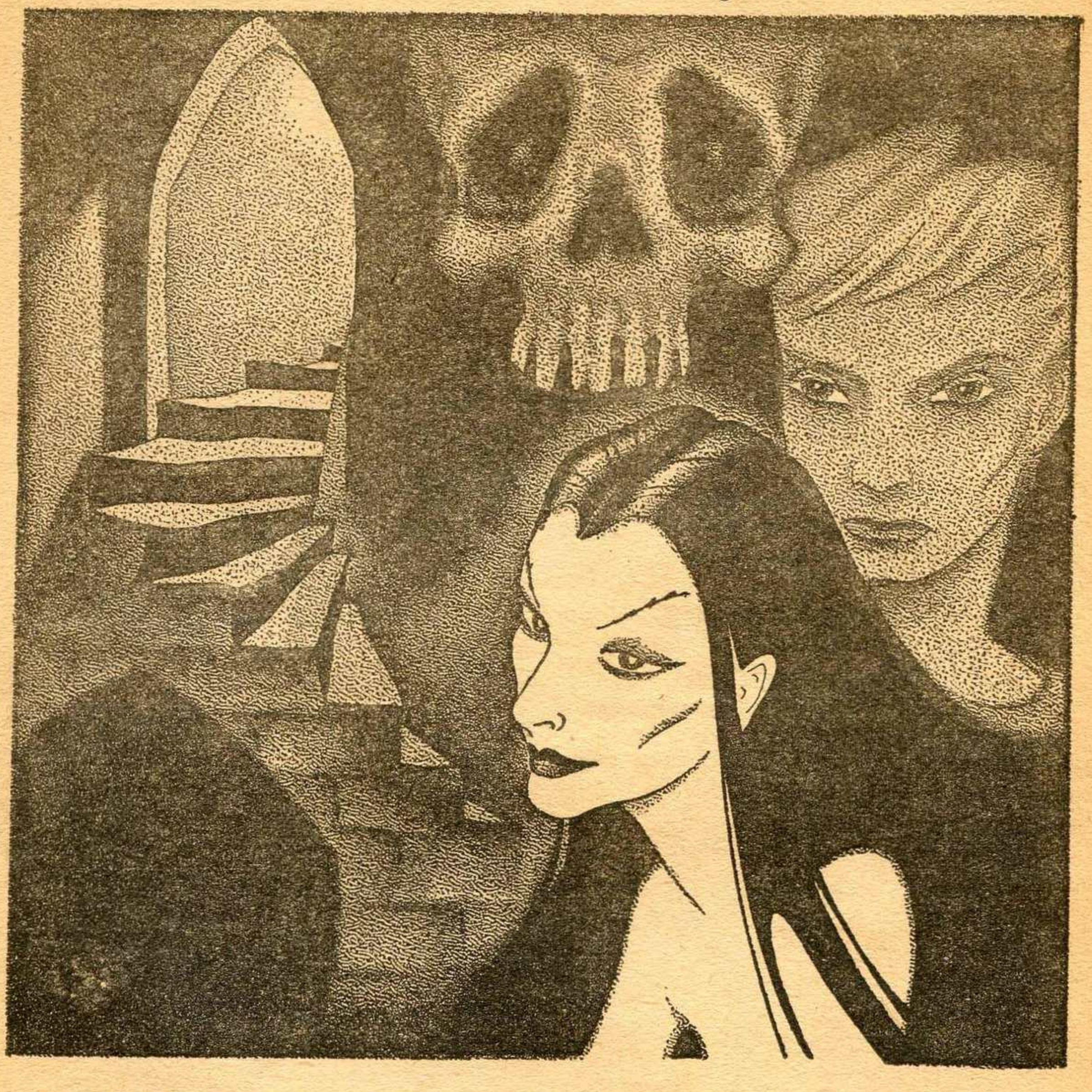
"I'm to call her up." Tommy was all excited as he looked toward the phone. "If I am to see Ruth again I must call Naomi at once. She sent me to you—and—and—" He paused then and swallowed his swallow. "I'm not so sure it's simply your work, L. D. Not the way she speaks of you. And I am sure—she's dangerous—a very dangerous woman. She wants you to step outside of time with—with her. Can you—will you—do it? She's hundreds of years older than Ruth. Dare you do it?"

An honest boy, Tommy. A romantic one too I thought then. And I who had listened to so much—and experienced so little. Perhaps I smiled as I thought of talking with a woman—well—say well over twenty-five hundred years old. And my work—my unfinished work.

I looked over at Tommy. He seemed so excited. It has been a great many years since I was excited—like that. I said, I think gently:

"Call up Naomi, Tommy. And tell her—I'll be very pleased to step outside of time with her."

The Family



BY MARGARET ST. CLAIR

. . . in the black-draped cellar was a sense of sweet inner surety

Heading by Boris Dolgov

"PERHAPS David really loves her," Mother said indecisively. "We wouldn't want our boy made unhappy, you know."

Kate threw back her head and laughed. The lamplight glinted brightly on her long, strong teeth. "Of course he does," she cried in her raucous voice. "Of course he does. Desperately, enormously. Otherwise, why would he want to marry her?" From the ceiling of the dim, raftered room came the obedient echo, "marry her . . . marry her . . ."

"Kate's always been in love with her brother," Lance said from the other side of the room. Lance was *thin;* David had

never known anyone as thin as Lancelot. "She really must learn to watch out for it. Our family name's Vlchek, not Volsung, Katharine."

Everyone laughed. A bright glance of understanding, of shared, familiar mirth rippled from face to face. Only Kate, rumbling in her throat, refused to see the joke.

"No offense meant, Katharine," Lance said with a touch of haste. "None at all. But it was agreed long ago that David was the only one of us who could pass for more than a day in the outside world. He has certain qualities which make him remarkably, outstandingly, attractive to the opposite sex. There's no occasion for heartburning. Whatever it is he does, he does for us."

"But if he really loves her—" Mother repeated, staring down at the worn greenish webs on her hands. "If he really does . . . ."

It was time for David himself to speak. "I like her, yes," he admitted. "More than I did any of the other ones. But that makes it all the better. As Lance said, whatever I do, I do for the family."

"You're a good boy, David," Mother said with a smile. "What would we do without you? Year after year, you always provide."

The others nodded in generous acknowledgment. David flushed with pleasure. What did anyone, even Elaine, matter when weighed against this?

"There won't be any trouble, though, will there?" Minna asked anxiously. "You remember what happened two years ago."

"No, no," David replied.

"Not if *David* prepared things," Kate said warmly. "Dear brown David. David is so clever. We can rely on him." She came up to him and began rubbing her head against his sleeve, her eyes half closed. Pleased, he reached out and stroked the short stiff hair on the top of her head. He had always liked Kate.

"And she's coming—?" Mother asked, getting up from her chair.

"Tomorrow night."

The nervous moment was always when they entered the house. Mother might air it, sweep, dust, polish—still it remained odd. That troublesome Gunning girl, two years ago, had sniffed and said it had a peculiar odor. But Elaine walked through the door without a murmur. Positively, she seemed to like the house.

"You're to help her dress, Kate," David said, meeting his sister on the stair. "She said you had pretty eyes. But remember, don't take your bandana off. We don't want to frighten her."

"I'll remember," Kate answered ardently. "Oh, David, she's ever so nice. I like her, like her too." Her throat throbbed.

"Good!" David gave her a little push. "Don't forget."

Everything was ready in the cellar. The black-draped altar, the black tapers, the big brass bowl. David felt gratitude invade him. Everything was going so well, with such seemliness, such decency. He hated inadequacies and scenes. The Gunning girl's behavior had been an ugly blotch on an ancient ritual. But there would be nothing of that tonight. He felt a sweet inner surety.

Mother came down the steps while he was still kneeling. "I forget the henbane," she explained. "Minna was worrying." She took a fat-bodied flask of mottled greenish pottery from a cupboard. "David, you're sure it won't be too hard on you, giving Elaine up?"

"No. He—" David nodded in the direction of the altar—"likes it better that way."

"I know." Sympathetically she took his hand in her cold, indented one. "Dear David," she said.

Elaine was wonderful at dinner that night. She ate, she drank, without urging, laughed at Lance's jokes, seemed not to notice Mother's hands. And how beautiful she was! Her arms were whiter than ivory, than parchment, against the black stuff of her dress, her mouth was dark wine, her hair shone like black satin on her head.

Kate, who was serving, was obviously enchanted with her. Once she forgot and rubbed slowly against Elaine, and Elaine, brightly, affectionately, smiled up at her.

Now came the delicate moment—delicate in spite of the henbane, which should have made Elaine responsive and suggestible—

when Mother suggested that they go downstairs. But Elaine stood up quite as if one's prospective mother-in-law always invited one to visit the cellar after a meal.

The cellar stairs had been mended since last year; that distressing squeak was gone. Solidly mother descended, gracefully Elaine followed her. Even Minna silent, the others trooped after them.

AT THE bottom of the stair Elaine halted. This was the place at which the Gunning girl, two years ago, had screamed and tried to run. It was certainly a delicate moment. (But then the evening would be composed of delicate moments, one after another, up to the piercing deliciousness of the last, most transcendently delicate of all.) Elaine turned her head to David. "How beautifully you've arranged everything," she said.

Had her eyes widened a little before she spoke? David found himself wondering. She had spoken with the practiced graciousness of a royal personage; and like the queen's loyal subjects the listeners behind had responded to her, looking at each other and smiling with pride, their eyes glistening as bright as those of bats. Or had the cellar's traditional decor found her utterly without surprise?

David would have liked to ponder this point, but he had no time. Elaine was moving slowly toward the altar, and he felt the others pushing him after her by a pressure which was as much psychic as it was actual and physical. The train of worshippers moved across the floor in a slow, skirling dance, while the altar receded and space itself seemed to flap around them giddily. Then David and Elaine were on firm ground once more and facing the cross with the impaled toad.

The chanting came softly up to them. Elaine let her cape glide slowly from her shoulders to the ground. In the light of the black candles her skin shone like alabaster and as she drew her midnight hair down from its pins Kate (David could see her heavy body from the corner of his eye) gave a little skip and moaned deliriously.

Wonderful Elaine. He loved her, they were all in love with her. He felt himself flooded by an emotion that was only the more poignant because he could not be sure whether it was basically anguish or bliss.

The chanting grew louder. It was time. Half-stifling, David took over the role of celebrant. He was submerged in emotion, drowning in it. In the midst of his passion he clung desperately to the words and symbols of the ritual, and wonderfully, unbetrayingly, the rite mounted from climax to climax in the old vertiginous way.

There came the moment when he picked up the knife. "Kneel," he said to beautiful, wonderful Elaine. And Elaine, smiling faintly, reached out and took the knife from him.

Did Kate gasp? No, there came no sound. And the strangest thing was that there was not the least change of emphasis, even when he knelt and she held the basin before his throat, the strangest thing was that nothing was in the least strange.

No, not even *there* was there strangeness. Whatever he had done had been done for the family. Year after year he had provided. Tonight, too, he would provide. The knife in Elaine's hand was descending. Relaxed and gratified, David closed his eyes.

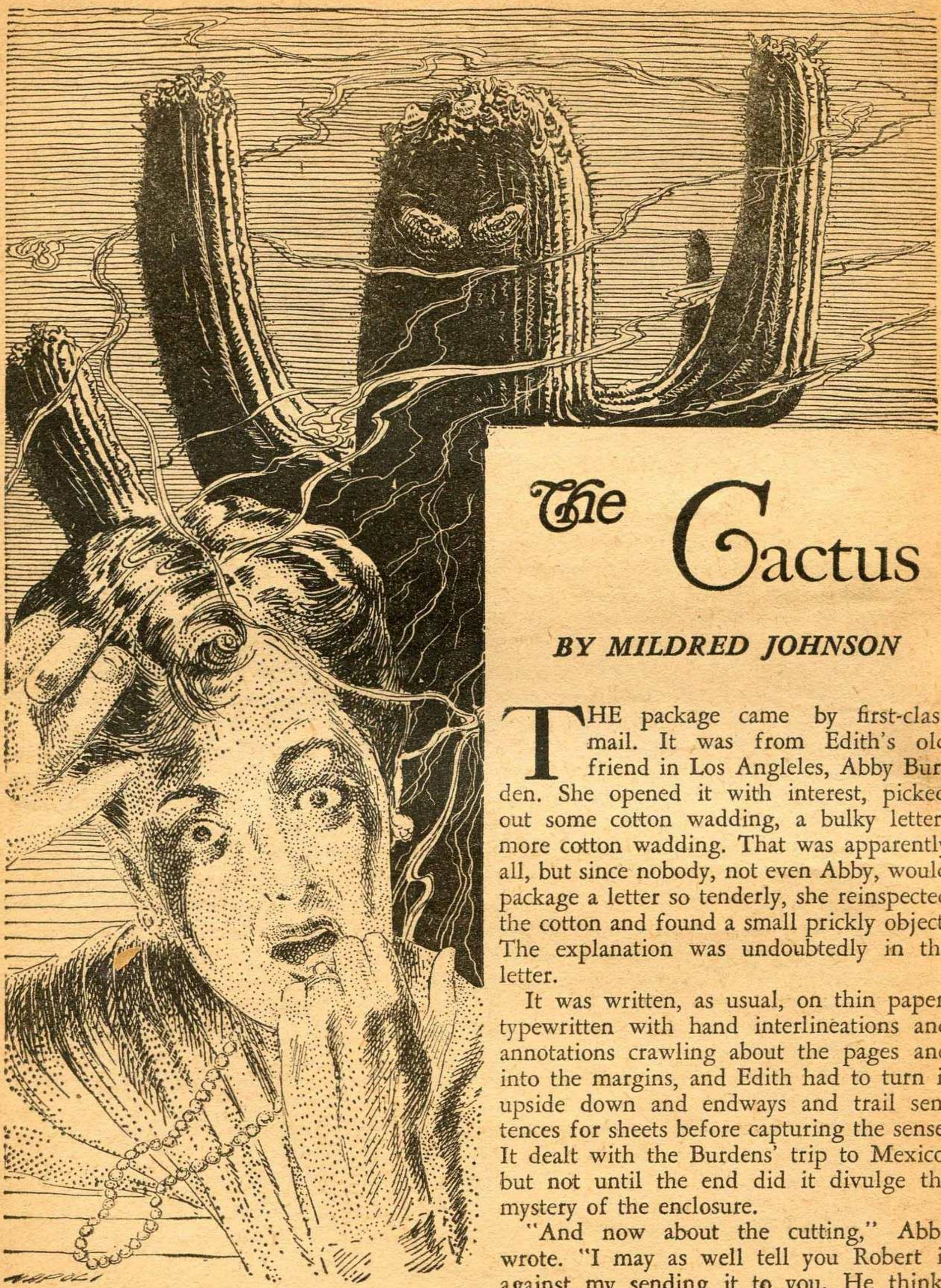
Horror piled on horror, for, next to humanity rats are perhaps best fitted to conquer and rule. . . . . .

"Home to Mother"

A novelette in the next WEIRD TALES

by MANLY WADE WELLMAN

It was a present . . . but it seemed to have horns.



The Cactus

BY MILDRED JOHNSON

THE package came by first-class mail. It was from Edith's old friend in Los Angleles, Abby Burden. She opened it with interest, picked out some cotton wadding, a bulky letter, more cotton wadding. That was apparently all, but since nobody, not even Abby, would package a letter so tenderly, she reinspected the cotton and found a small prickly object. The explanation was undoubtedly in the letter.

It was written, as usual, on thin paper, typewritten with hand interlineations and annotations crawling about the pages and into the margins, and Edith had to turn it upside down and endways and trail sentences for sheets before capturing the sense. It dealt with the Burdens' trip to Mexico, but not until the end did it divulge the mystery of the enclosure.

"And now about the cutting," Abby wrote. "I may as well tell you Robert is against my sending it to you. He thinks I'm very silly. Let me tell you about it, though:

"I picked it up in an out-of-the-way, God-

Heading by Vincent Napoli

forsaken spot about a hundred miles from Chihuahua, where we had a flat tire. It was desert country, ninety in the shade—although there was no shade—and there was poor Robert faced with the prospect of changing a tire. I offered to help but he said the best way for me to help him would be to keep quiet for a while. You know how cranky a man can get under those conditions. The car was like an oven so I took a little walk around to look at the vegetation, such as it was, but there seemed to be nothing for hundreds of miles but sage and scrub and sand, and heat rising and shimmering all about. And then, a short distance away, I seemed to see a kind of fog, an overhanging mist. I thought it was an optical illusion—because whoever heard of a fog in the desert?—but, since it wasn't far away, I walked over to it. And as I approached it I smelled the sweetest, sourest, muskiest odor I've ever known. Suddenly the ground dipped and I was looking at a strange and lovely thing. Do you remember the meteor crater in Arizona? What I saw there was the same thing, much smaller, of course. It was a scoop in the earth, like a great dimple, and it was filled with cactus growths, marvelous, unearthly, beautiful—eight, nine, ten feet tall—gray-green giants stretching their twisted arms to the sky. There were hundreds of them, some of them already blooming with dark red flowers. It was the latter that gave off the strange, sweet smell.

"Edith—actually I felt as if I were on another planet, and what with the heavy perfume and the heat, my head swam. But finally I pulled myself together and rushed back to Robert to beg him to come and see what I had found, and ask him to cut me a slip of one of those weird plants. But his reaction was most peculiar. You know how sensible Robert usually is, but for some private reason he took a dislike to the whole area and became very difficult about getting a cutting for me. He said he wouldn't want a thing like that. He said they looked like goats and smelled like them too. He was positively silly. He said there was something about the little valley and the phalanxes of tortured shapes that gave him the creeps. But finally he gave in and cut me a tiny piece from the nearest plant. He scratched himself doing so and that didn't make him any happier. The spikes on the stem are rather tricky, you'll notice.

"As soon as I got it home I planted it. Edith, it's the finest specimen I've ever seen and grows like—I was going to say like a weed but it's faster than that. In a week I had to transplant it to a larger plant pot.

"Robert is still angry about it, though, and that's why he thinks I'm crazy to send you a cutting of it. But knowing your fondness for cacti, I had to share my discovery with you."

EDITH folded up the letter and inspected the little cutting, holding it in her palm. It was no more than an inch in length, brown and shriveled, and so lifeless she doubted that it would grow at all. However, she would give it a chance. She found a small pot, pressed it in, watered it and set it on the shelf with her other cactus plants. "If you're going to be a giant cactus," she said, "you've a long way to go, little friend."

On examination the next morning, she was pleased to see that apparently its grip on life was secure. Watering it on the following Monday with the rest of her cactus collection she decided the infant was going to be a prodigy, for not only had it changed its wizened brown covering for one of healthy green but had straightened up and grown fully two inches. Its shape was somewhat comical: with the fat, spinous stem and the two little horns sprouting from the top, it resembled a rampant tomato caterpillar. Edith wrote to Abby that afternoon thanking her for the little plant.

Six weeks afterward, by the end of May, it was no longer little. In fact it had outstripped all the other cacti on the shelf. Now fifteen inches tall, it had been transplanted to a large urn and, in Edith's mind, was being groomed for a star appearance at the horticultural show in the autumn. Her friends admired it and, at club meetings, inquired about its health as they would about a child's.

When Mrs. Ferguson, her next door neighbor, viewed it, however, she asked the question: "When's it supposed to stop growing?"

"Well," laughed Edith, "my friend who sent it to me said they were eight, nine and ten feet tall—the ones she saw growing in Mexico, but I don't imagine it will grow so much. I haven't a container large enough for it, for one thing."

"And your porch roof isn't high enough." Leaning over and tentatively feeling the two parallel spikes at the head of the plant, she added, "Not that it couldn't bore a hole right through if it wanted to with these things. They're like daggers."

Her remark prompted Edith to ask Abby how the parent was getting along, and she heard, with slight dismay, that it too was hyperexpansive, already two feet high and showing no signs of stopping. When it outgrew the house, wrote Abby, she had plans for it in the yard, but Edith thought grimly: when it outgrows my house it outgrows me. Goodbye, cactus, in that case.

It blossomed early in June with flowers of a peculiar liverish color. Though she never would have admitted it publicly, Edith thought them unattractive, almost repellent. They were almost like sores, she thought. And their odor was pungent enough to cause comment, the baker's delivery man asking if gas was escaping, the meter reader wanting to know if she had something burning in the oven. But her handy man, Mr. Krakaur, who came on Mondays to put out trash cans, mow the lawn, etc., and who was the local philosopher on the side, stated frankly that it "stank." "Stinks like a goat," he said.

"Mr. Krakaur, how can you say that?" Laughing, she recalled what Robert Burden had said about it.

"And it looks like one too," Mr. Krakaur went on, shifting his cud reflectively. "Got horns and everything. Looks like a sick goat with boils."

But in two weeks the blooms were gone. Most of the smell went with them, although it lingered unaccountably in various portions of the house far away from the porch, in closets, in her bedroom, and seemed to be contained in air pockets for often, usually at night, she would smell it strong and musky, but in the next second lose it. It was as if the cactus itself had passed her open door. She smiled at her fancy, but was surprised to hear from Abby that Robert Burden had the same idea, although he was carrying it to ridiculous extremes, averring, for instance, that he had caught a glimpse of the cactus floating along in its own emanations like a jellyfish in an ocean current. Abby wrote that if he thought that frightening her would make her dispose of the cactus he was mistaken. He was being very stupid and unreasonable, she said. He was even threatening to warn Edith about the danger—"So if you hear a lot of nonsense from him you'll know what it's about."

SHE was not going to allow herself to be influenced by such palpable friction in the Burden household, Edith thought, but just the same, after reading Abby's letter, she went to the porch and took a good look at her cactus. It *was* a grotesque thing, she admitted, a frame on which mental aberrations could easily be hung. Cruciform in shape, its upraised "arms" were terminated in spiked nodules, like taloned fingers; the forward-sweeping horns were truly formidable; and the withered flowers at the "head" were arranged to suggest an evil face, a demonic, leering, loathsome face.

In sudden revulsion she decided she must destroy it but then, remembering her promise to exhibit it at the flower show and the admiration and interest of her friends, canceled the impulse by laughing herself out of it. "You're not going to pay any attention to Robert Burden's crazy notions, are you?" she asked herself, reminding herself in addition that she had always thought him neurotic. He sounded positively psychotic now.

But that night she dreamed about the cactus. It seemed that she was in bed and, awakened by a slipping, slithering sound from the hall, got up to investigate. In a shaft of moonlight there sat a tiny animal, like a chipmunk, all agleam with silver light, dainty and pretty, and she was about to approach it when suddenly Ted appeared. He looked young and slim, the way he had been when they were married, but his face was grave. Laying a hand on her shoulder, he shook his head as if to restrain her, but she paid no attention and walked towards the little animal clucking softly. But, as she reached it and was crouching to it, it began to swell and grow and in a second had be-

come the cactus, writhing with vile delight, its malevolent face close to hers, its long arms pinioning hers to her sides in sickening embrace. She screamed for Ted but he had gone. He had left her.

Choking, heart beating wildly, she awoke and lay shaking in terror. Oriented at last, she looked towards the door, and it was as if a hand clutched her heart for the area in the hall was bathed, it seemed, in a deep, oily fog, like a swamp miasma, behind which something gray and green was stirring. She sat up, stared hard, cautiously reached for the bedlamp and quickly turned it on. There was nothing.

There was nothing but moonshine and sinister groupings of shadows and her own heavy breathing.

IN THE sensible light of day she marveled and was ashamed of the mantle of fear she was weaving for herself out of odds and ends of suggestions, fancied resemblances and nightmares — she, Edith Porter, middle-aged, matter-of-fact, a professed scoffer at all superstition. Was she going to allow an odor, a shape and a bad dream to push her into unreason? And as for Robert Burden's vaporings, for all she knew he might be joking.

She would take hold of herself firmly and, in the meantime, try to rid the house of the meandering gamey stench.

It was nine o'clock on the following Sunday evening. Having spent the day riding in the country with the Fergusons, Edith was finishing reading the newspaper and was beginning to yawn with delicious weariness and plan early retirement when the telephone rang.

It was a girl's voice, blurred with crying, sharpened by hysteria, and Edith could not recognize it.

"Mrs. Porter? This is Nancy, Nancy Winnick, the Burdens' daughter."

"Oh, yes, Nancy—how are you? Is anything the matter?" Edith's mind skipped about frantically for an explanation.

The girl was apparently trying to control herself. At last she said. "The most horrible thing happened this morning. Dad's dead!"

"Oh, no! How—how did it happen?" She felt herself turning cold with shock.

"I don't know the whole story because Mother is half out of her mind and she's given it to us in bits and pieces. She's resting now under a sedative, but all afternoon she's kept begging me to call you and let you know. It's about that cactus she gave you. She wants you to destroy it, because she says—" Here Nancy burst into sobs and was a few seconds recovering herself. "She says it killed him. She knows it killed him deliberately, and it's all her fault. She's afraid something will happen to you too and she'll have two deaths on her conscience."

"But how? How did it kill him?"

"This morning Mother finally agreed that he could get rid of it. You know what controversy there's been about it. Mother said she wrote you about it, how Dad hated it so and Mother was set on keeping it. Well, this morning they had it out it seems and she told him to go ahead and destroy it if he felt so strongly about it. He didn't wait a minute. He took it out to the rubbish can—it grew to an enormous size, you know—and threw it on top of the rubbish, pot and all and then—" Nancy started whimpering again. "I don't know what made him do it, except that he wanted to get rid of it quickly and couldn't wait for the trash collection, but he set it afire and stood there watching it burn. Mother said she shouted to him from the window, but he seemed fascinated by the sight of the flames traveling up it, and then all of a sudden it broke in the middle and the top half flew at him, all ablaze, and landed on him—and it clung to him—he couldn't tear it off—it was all over his face and head—"

"Oh — how horrible—how terrible—" Edith broke down then and wept with Nancy, who at length completed the story:

"When my husband and I arrived we found Mother in a faint, and when she came to she just screamed and screamed; and then my husband went out into the yard, but he wouldn't let us see Dad. He himself was sick because his face and head were all—they took him away to be cremated. We thought that was best."

Lenitive words, condolences—what good were they now? And Edith could not say them; she was too shocked.

After hanging up she sat frozen, staring ahead; then she rose quickly, strode

to the porch, lifted down the cactus from the shelf, and, grasping the horns as one would the ears of a rabbit, tore it up by the roots. From the gaping hole there rose the fetid odor so concentrated and powerful that she choked and coughed, but her anger gave her courage and, without looking at the plant in her hand, holding it far off, she ran down cellar and threw it into the trash barrel. She returned for the pot and carried it down too, set it on top of the barrel, took a hammer and smashed it.

She was still panting when she sat at her desk in the living room to write to Abby all the sympathy she had been unable to express on the telephone and her hand shook so much she had to rest before beginning.

A hand touched her shoulder, gentle but firm—a warning hand; it rested there; she felt the pressure of the fingers. Slowly she unveiled her eyes. All about her was a mist pouring in ever thickening clouds from the area behind her and obscuring the light, and a foul stink wafted to her nostrils, but she could not move: in that growing fetor, that dankness, that accrescence of vileness, she sat still. The hand pressed hard, and, coming to her senses, she half-turned her head. On the wall, just behind her head, was the shadow of horns.

She lurched to her feet, tore open the casement and flung herself into the darkness, landing on her hands and knees in the soft earth of a flower bed, scrambling to her feet and hurling herself forward across the field separating her house from the Fergusons'. She stumbled, fell, clambered up, ran on and at last reached the back door and pounded on it. When it was opened to her she fell in and pressed against the wall.

Mrs. Ferguson was staring at her, plump, red-faced, round-eyed. "What's wrong?" Edith could not answer.

"Harry!" Mrs. Ferguson called. "Come here!"

Ferguson appeared and together they led Edith to a chair. "Somebody trying to break into your house?" he asked.

"I don't know," she gasped. "I don't know. I've just had a terrible fright."

She sipped the glass of water they gave her, her teeth chattering against the rim.

"Call the police, Harry!" urged Mrs. Ferguson as Edith Porter sat frightened.

Edith raised a protesting hand. The police to rout something from another universe, another stratum of existence; the law to command the supernatural? "Don't call the police," she said, setting the glass on the table and sighing.

"But if there's a prowler around—"

"There's no prowler I'm sure. I imagined it." She looked at these solid sane people and wondered if it were true. Perhaps she had dreamed it all. Nevertheless she could not return to the house. It was difficult to confess her fear of staying alone, but she had to do it. They said they understood, offered their guest room, but were puzzled. Ferguson went over and locked up and brought her keys back as directed.

When Mr. Krakaur put in an appearance on the street the next morning she joined him and walked with him.

"What you doing out so early, Mrs. Porter?" he asked.

"Last night I had a kind of brainstorm. I had a notion something—someone was breaking in, and so I ran over to the Fergusons and there I stayed. You know how we women get nervous at times."

"At times?" cackled Mr. Krakaur who fancied himself something of a misogynist. "I'd say all the time."

She was in no mood for badinage. Trying to be casual, she said, "I wonder if you'd be good enough to put out the trash barrel right away. I want to straighten up the cellar."

Standing fearfully in the kitchen, not daring to go down the cellar stairs but filled with curiosity, she heard him open the outer doors and come back for the barrel. She was not too surprised, though, when he called from the foot of the stairs: "Mrs. Porter, what happened to your cactus?"

"I broke it," she said from the door.

"Did it fall off the shelf?"

"Yes." If one waited others would always provide the answers.

Without realizing it she had moved to the head of the stairs and was peering over the rail just as he was picking up from the floor one of the pieces of the plant pot. Her heart leaped. It could not be coincidence this time, nor a dream. That every piece of the pot had remained in the barrel

and none had fallen out she was positive. The sickness of terror rolled over her.

"It don't look too bad," he was saying. "All you got to do is put it in another pot. I think it'll grow just as good."

"No," she said.

"O. K. You're the boss."

SHE must go away and rest, cleanse her brain of this viscid horror which kept her trembling, made her afraid to go to bed, had her staring hard at shadows, sniffing the air, starting and glancing over her shoulder. She was sure now that the hand on her shoulder had been Ted's and that only her enormous danger had enabled him to get through to her. But it was over; the peril was gone; and perhaps a summer in Maine, at the little hotel in Winter Harbor where she and Ted had spent their honeymoon, would eradicate its immediate effects.

When she took one of her keys over to Mrs. Ferguson the latter expressed approval of her decision. "To tell you the truth Harry and I have been worried about you. It's so easy to go into a nervous breakdown, you know." She gave some instances of friends who had slipped into them. She would step in once a week and water the plants and see that everything was all right, she promised. "That was too bad about your big cactus," she said then. "Krakaur told me it fell off the shelf. And after you set such store by it too. But that's the way it is: it's always the things we like the most that get smashed."

IT WAS September when Edith returned. Riding in the taxi from the station, listening to the church clock bong eleven in the clear air, she felt calm, able to pick up her life where she had abandoned it on that Sunday evening in June. It seemed far away now. The peaceful summer, the new friends, the fresh stimuli, they had helped her forget. And she was not afraid. Never again would she be completely sure of herself and of the order of existence, for something strange and unearthly had touched her she knew, but she was not afraid. There was good to surmount evil, a tender hand to warn her of its approach.

The driver set her trunk in the hall, took his money, thanked her for the tip and left, closing the door behind him. And now she was alone; but everything was in its place, familiar and dear and homey: the grandmother's clock tick-tocking in the corner (Mrs. Ferguson hadn't forgotten to wind it, then), the Meissen figurines, a man and woman, in their perpetual saraband on the table, the Regency mirror reflecting a portion of the living room and beyond it the porch with its greenery of plants. She released the breath she had been holding, smiled, walked to the mirror and took off her hat. Then she felt it, the hand on her shoulder.

"This is ridiculous!" she said aloud. "Now I'm sure I dreamed the whole thing!" The pressure was renewed and she wheeled about and shouted, "It's gone, don't you know that?" In hysterical triumph she ran to the porch and turned on the light. "See?" she cried, standing in the middle and sweeping her arm around. "It's gone, I tell you. It's *gone*!"

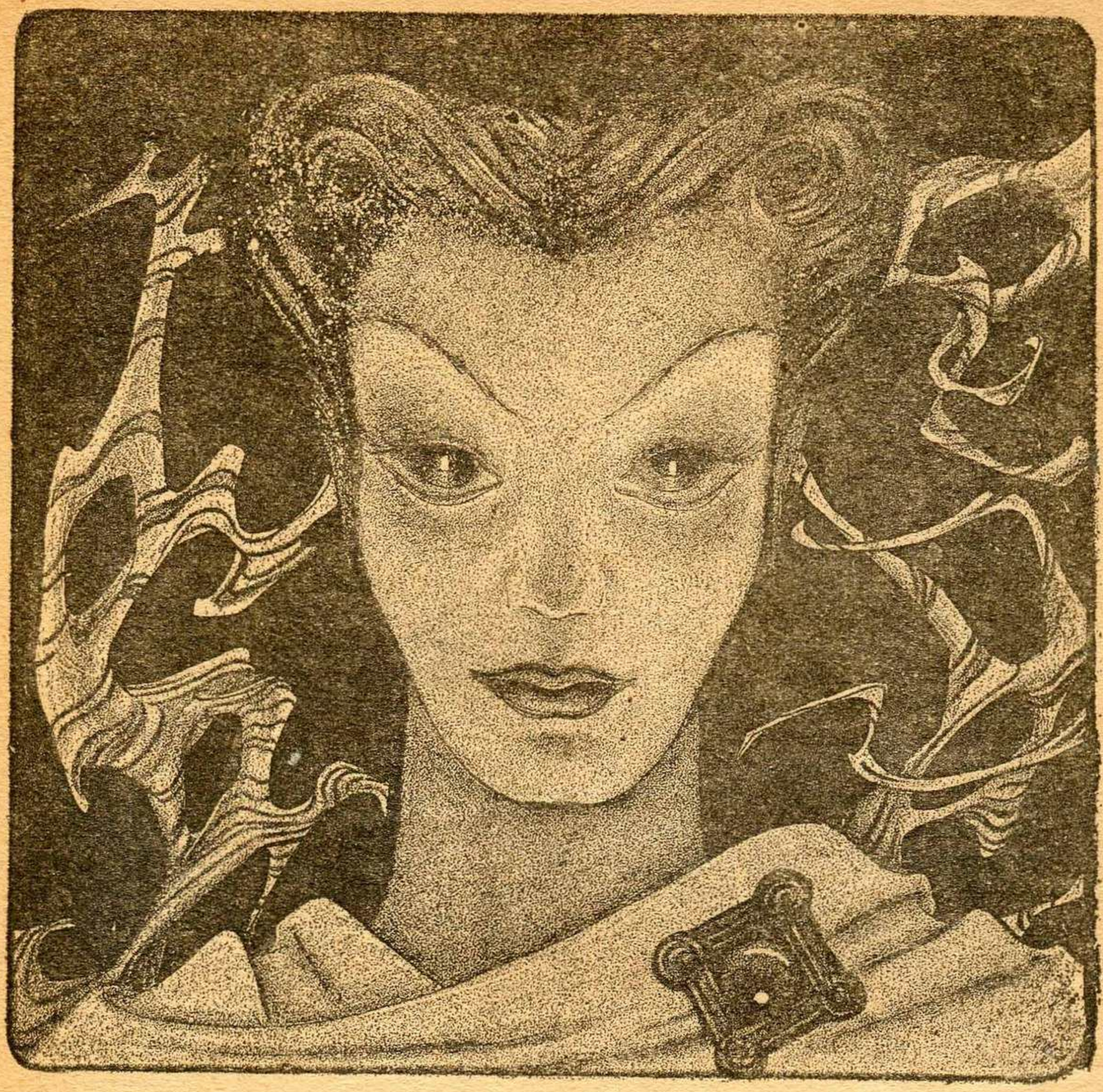
But, on the wall, she saw the outline of its horns and, simultaneously, smelled its sickly odor. Her cry was guttural. With hands stretched out protectively, mouth squared in fear, she stepped backwards, crashed into a hard object, turned, and in the last second of consciousness saw the cactus teetering and falling. . . .

"But I feel responsible. I feel that it's my fault." Mrs. Ferguson had said it over and over. She would never be done saying it nor forget the sight which had met her eyes when, seeing the light, she had gone over to welcome Edith home. Again she explained. "I knew she was fond of that cactus and when I found it growing with the rubber plant I was so pleased. I didn't tell her. I wanted to surprise her. And so I planted it in a pot of its own and it grew even faster than the other one. I should have let her know, though—shouldn't I?"

"It was an accident," Harry Ferguson said patiently. "You're not to blame. Anybody would have done the same in the same circumstances. It was an accident, that's all."

"But it would never have happened if I hadn't done it. Oh, God, when I walked in and saw her lying there with those spikes in her throat—"

. . . and a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.



Dark Rosaleen

BY SEABURY QUINN

Marcia

MARCIA hummed a snatch of tune as she let the long, swirl-skirted dinner dress slip down her sleek hips to form a circle on the floor about her feet. The old song had been ringing in her head all afternoon since they had picked it up on the radio as they left Maplewood, fitting its rhythm to the rhythm of the tires as the car sped like the shuttle of a loom across the Jersey highways, over Pennsylvania's brick roads, and up and down the rolling contours of the Maryland turnpikes:

Heading by Boris Dolgov

In thine arms enfold me, my beloved . . .
For thy loss a world could not atone . . .

SHE stood for a moment before the long mirror, looking at the slim perfection of herself reflected in the glass. "I *am* pretty!" she whispered, as if she had just discovered what she'd known for at least twenty of her twenty-three years.

The pleased exclamation was no overstatement. In her wisp of nylon garment and her gold-kid sandals she was as bewitching as a dryad; azure-eyed, with short hair yellow as new honey, pink-cheeked, slim of hands and feet and ankles, lissome, beautifully shaped, radiating health and happiness and eagerness.

She turned from her reflection, took the filmsy *robe de nuit* from her new pigskin bag and slipped into it, paused to study herself for another moment in the glass, then snapped the light off and crept into the big four-poster bed with its percale sheets and lace-trimmed pillows and the "wedding ring" design patchwork quilt. "Rex!" she called softly, and in the darkness she could feel the not entirely unpleasant warmth of a blush on her cheeks and brow and throat. "Rex!"

They had been married just at noon in Saint Justin's, and afterwards there was the ordeal by reception at the Blenheim Towers, then the frantic dash for escape in the new convertible that was her father's wedding present, shaking off pursuit somewhere between Coytsville and Bordentown, followed by the long drive to the cottage at Catoctin which Aunt Martha had lent them for their honeymoon.

The little house, less than a rifle's reach from the locale of George A. Townsend's novel, was ideally suited to their purpose as if it had been built for them. Stone walls a foot thick held the July heat at a respectful distance, the floors were odd-width planks of polished oak held to their joists with wooden pegs, in all directions there were vistas of the Blue Ridge as entrancing as a picture, the brick-walled garden was a fenced-in bit of paradise, with phlox and zinnias in riotous bloom and roses climbing over an old arbor.

They had dinner in the open air with Aunt Martha's maid Susannah in attendance, stepping softly as a cat for all her wrestler's bulk, and with a tender hand for food and china. Only in Maryland—and not often there—are such dinners to be had: Potomac bass fried saddle-brown in country butter, crackling-hot fried chicken breasts with creamy white gravy, served with stewed celery tops and quince-mint jelly, potatoes whipped in milk, tossed salad, beaten biscuit, and for dessert a deep-dish apple pie. Too, with the meal there was the true "wine of the country"—dandelion wine as white and well-nigh tart as Chablis with the fish, elderberry wine as red and fine as any vintage out of Burgundy with the chicken, and apple brandy of amazing potency with dessert.

They had dined late and lingered long after coffee, content to be alone at last, and, as children might deliberately prolong the ecstasy of anticipation by delaying to eat a sweet, putting off the time of going in until long after the midnight express thundered through the valley on its way to Washington. Now, as Marcia snuggled down between the cool, clove-scented sheets, there came the distant hooting of a diesel locomotive as it dragged a train westward, and the distant, eerie baying of a dog that found an echo somewhere farther off in the hills, then thinned out to a long drawn, wavering howl that echoed mournfully as the lament of a lost and wind-vexed ghost.

"Rex!" she called a little louder, just a little frightened by the grieving ululation. "Rex, dear!"

She knew the room reserved for him lay just beyond the bath. She had helped him unpack, hanging his tweeds in the closet and laying out his fishing gear for the next morning. "Get ready to eat fish till you grow scales!" he had warned her. "You're married to old Izaak W. Walton himself, young lady!" As she undressed she had heard him come upstairs and heard the latch of his door click. "Rex, dear!"

From his room came a sound, the sort of sound that had no business in a bridegroom's chamber; a low-pitched, controlled laugh that held a note of triumph, a woman's laugh that bore a freight of victory; of jubilant, exultant conquest. Then Rex's pleading, panic-stricken "No! No!" and that slow, soft, vaunting laugh once more.

"Rex!"

There was no answer.

The pitter-pat of her feet on the cool boards of the floor was panic made audible. "Rex!"

The door of his room swung a little open, and a single lamp upon the bedside shed a meager, honey-pale light. By the dim illumination she saw him sitting on the bed, stripped to his underwear, one shoe and sock removed. He leaned slighly forward, as if listening, but when she called he gave no answer. Then she saw his face, and her scream rose like the sudden flaring of a flame. It mounted in a thin, sharp spiral, piercing, poignant, shriller and more shrill until it seemed no human throat could stand the strain of it. When it was over it began again, or, rather, it never quite finished, but grew lower by gradations of agonized modulations, prolonging itself in a rhythm of monotonous despair.

The mask—it could not properly be called a face—into which she looked was lifeless as a plaque of molded clay. His features sagged as if they had been formed of wax and had slipped in the mold, or softened with the heat. His cheeks hung pendulously and his mouth was slack, his chin had dropped, and on the rim of his teeth his tongue lolled, almost as if he made a grimace. But it was his eyes that appalled her. Glaucous, expressionless, yet somehow deep as fathomless twin openings into hell they were; the eyes of one who lived without a soul or spirit or intelligence—the eyes of a breathing dead man, a zombie.

She made no effort to arouse, to waken him; she knew intuitively the soul of him was gone, that here was nothing but a physical residuum, as hopelessly devoid of life and future as a body lying in its casket.

So she stood there till Susannah, wakened by her screams, came to her with soft words of meaningless comfort: honey-chil'; po' lamb; Susannah's po' li'l baby-gal.

Rex

A JOURNEY of a thousand miles begins with a single step, the Manchu proverb says. Rex Moynahan's descent into Avernus began when his plane was forced down on its way from St. John's to Croydon. Officials of the Irish government were courteous, the airline's officers did everything for his comfort, but there could not be another flight that evening; he would have to spend the night in Limerick, or Luimneach, as they insisted on calling it.

He dined excellently at the airline's expense, mutton cutlet, potatoes, green salad and an apple tart that was the last word in perfection of the baker's art, with perhaps just a mug or two too many Guinnesses and possibly too many samples of John Jameson's product, but he was far from drunk—just comfortably fuddled—when he set out to explore the town.

The sweet, long Irish twilight lent an air of unreality to everything as he strolled through the streets, the cut of his clothes proclaiming him American and his air of tolerant sophistication tabulating him as a New Yorker.

He did not note the street's name, or even notice if it bore a sign, but as he turned from a wide throughfare he found himself in a small semilunar byway where trees seemed gossiping leafily, where red-brick houses stood side by side like guardsmen on parade. Here and there among the residences with their window boxes bright with nodding geraniums was a little shop with bow-front windows of small panes set in neat wooden frames; a fruiterer's, a green grocer's, a chemist's, finally an art store. Its window held but one exhibit, an unframed oil painting some eighteen inches wide by twenty-four in height, but as he looked at it he felt a dazed, almost enraptured sensation; his heart beat faster and there was an ache in his throat. The subject was a woman, young, perhaps; perhaps mature; he could not say, he knew only that she was like a sudden close-up view of something he had known vaguely in dreams, the concrete realization of a hazy ideal he had cherished almost since infancy.

SHE stood in an arched doorway, the ruined entrance to some long-dilapidated castle or abbey, perhaps, and the background shaded by gradations from the green, green grass of Erin at her feet to the young, tender, yellow-green of early leafage behind her. Her costume was the simplest, just a gown of white stuff flowing

from her throat to insteps, belted at the waist with a black sash. One hand was raised to rest against the stone jamb of the archway, and where the long sleeve fell away it showed a wrist and arm as white as milk and moulded with a perfection that would have sent Praxiteles into mute rapture. All black and white she was: black, misty hair drawn back from a high, snowy brow and gathered in a loose knot at the nape of her neck, black, brooding eyes between long, curving lashes, eyes that somehow seemed to express sensuousness and humility at once; white cheeks, white throat, white hands, white feet—even the nails of her long, tapering fingers and delicately shaped toes were vivid black, as if enameled with jet lacquer. Her lips, too, seemed black at first glance, but as he looked again he saw their black was underlaid with red, like garnets smeared with soot, or rubies dipped in ink.

The fascination of his wonder grew as he looked at the picture. Who was she? Flesh and blood? An artist's concrete conception of something vague and abstract, tenuous and allegorical?

The gallery's proprietor came from an inner room and greeted him with a smile. "Yis, sir?" His Irish accent was no brogue, but just the merest differentiation from the speech a cultured Londoner or New Yorker would use. He was a small man, rather old, Rex judged, for his hair, what there was of it, was as gray as pewter and his small, neat beard and mustache were almost white, while about his bright black eyes and on his brow and cheeks was a network of small wrinkles. "Yis, sir?"

"I—" somehow Rex found it embarrassing to state the question—"I'd like to know about that picture—the one in your window, you know."

The little man looked at him under lowered lids. "And what is it you'd like to know?"

"Why—er—what's it represent? Is it supposed to be a portrait, one of those neo-classic things like the French did in the Directoire and First Empire periods, or—"

The shopkeeper's small eyes burned with sudden intensity, perhaps with anger, possibly with ardor. "It's supposed to be an allegory, sir. Shawn Kennedy did it just before he went mad. He called it Róisín Dubh, and but for one thing it's a damnable libel."

"A libel—?"

"Yis, sir. Róisín Dubh, Dark Rosaleen, the Anglo-Irish call it, means the Little Black Rose, and symbolizes Ireland. She ought to be presented as a cold, chaste being, as lovely as an angel, and as sexless. He made her Circe o' the Isles, a seductress, a vampire-woman."

"Oh?" Rex sparred for an opening. How the devil could he come right out and ask about the artist's model? "You say the artist went mad?"

"Mad as a hatter, sir. He was one of our most promising young painters, exhibited in Dublin, London, Paris, New York—on his way to real fame when he came up with that picture." Abruptly, irrelevantly, it seemed to Rex, he asked, "D'ye know Mangan's poem, *Dark Rosaleen*?"

Rex shook his head.

"You wouldn't. Few foreigners do. Young Kennedy claimed he took his inspiration from that song, but I'm after thinkin' it came from a darker source. She who posed for that picture was no mortal woman, I'll be bound."

"How do you mean?"

THE dealer shook his head. "It's hard to put it into words, sir, and practically impossible to make a foreigner believe, especially an Englishman or American. Shawn Kennedy did that picture two-three years ago, and raised as much tumult with it as the Devil amongst the tailors. Next we heard it was a thing that he was marryin' Lady Frances Holahan O'Toole, an' married they were in the Cathedral, with the Archbishop's self celebratin' the nuptial Mass. *A mhuire!* on his weddin' night, afore he'd let his bride's hair down or loosed her girdle, he was stricken. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, his brain went soft like mush and he became a helpless, hopeless imbecile, just a livin', breathin' *thing*, without a mind or soul or spirit in him.

"So that's the end o' Mister Shawn Kennedy, one o' Ireland's foremost young painters, livin' out the wretched remnant of his life in a nursin' home, with her that was

the Lady Frances Holahan O'Toole bewailin' her virginity like Jephtha's daughter, for it's a maid-wife she is, held to him by the bonds o' holy matrimony, and held from him by his hopeless idiocy. He might 'a' known as much afore he set his brush to canvas for that picture!"

Rex had an eerie feeling, as if small red ants were racing up and down his spine. "I don't think I quite understand. What connection—"

"Musha, man," the art dealer leaned toward him confidentially, "I'm after tellin' you it was no mortal woman sat for that picture! 'Twas the very Leanhaun Shee herself."

"The Leanhaun Shee—"

"Precisely. The Leanhaun Shee's a fairy wife who comes out from the Sliábh-na-mban, the Hill o' Women, that is, to seek the love o' mortal men, and if they give in to her blandishments she binds 'em to her till the end o' time, when she and they and all the fairy folk and their changelings will vanish in the brightness of God's face like dewdrops in the risin' sun. 'Tis said that in the old days she was Princess Edáin, daughter o' the High King, who was stolen on her weddin' night and taken to Tir-na-n-Og, the Country o' the Young where age and death are unknown and there are neither tears nor loud laughter. I wouldn't know about that, sir; but this I know: It is an evil thing to see the Leanhaun Shee and hear the softness of her voice and feel the softness of her arms, for he who can resist her is a better man nor Saint Anthony, and he who succumbs to her is doomed to lose his soul—"

Rex could not hold his laugh back. "Well, all I've got to say," he chuckled, "is that it would be worth it. To be accepted as a lover by the Lean—whatever you call her—would be worth the price of 'most any man's soul, certainly I'd gladly give mine—"

"Ochone!" The little man stared at him aghast. "Out o' my shop! Out, I say!" He crossed himself and came from behind the counter. "Off with ye, an' quick! Sayin' things like that beneath this roof! It is an evil thing ye've done, so 'tis. The Leanhaun Shee's but waitin' to hear mortals talk like that—"

Still laughting, Rex went out into the soft, sweet twilight of the Irish evening.

Dark Rosaleen

THE tower clock of Saint Bridget's had sounded midnight, then a quarter past, finally one o'clock, but still Rex fought for sleep. Since his return to the hotel he'd had a feeling of malaise, not quite amounting to the jitters, but not far from it. The flight was scheduled for five-thirty in the morning, and he'd be a complete wreck if he did not get some sleep—confound this Irish hospitality! He knew he should have eaten less at dinner, and that Guinness, and the whiskey! He'd be glad to get back to New York where the martinis made you comfortably drowsy instead of tauting your nerves like fiddle strings.

Before he went up to his room he'd found a book of Irish poems in the hotel library, and read James Clarence Mangan's *Dark Rosaleen* for the first time. Now its cadences ran through his mind with an insistence not to be denied:

"Red lightning lightened through my
blood,
My Dark Rosaleen!"

"I'd give my life and soul anew,
A second life and soul anew,
My Dark Rosaleen!"

The four-barred chime that told the hour trembled on the air. It hung and clung and vibrated till he did not know if he still heard it or only imagined it, and would go on hearing it in his imagination till the end of time.

The sound stopped as abruptly as a cymbal's tintinnabulations cease when a hand is laid upon the quivering brass, and with the sudden, almost deafening, silence she came.

He'd locked the door of his room, and the key lay on the dresser, but the latch snapped back with a sharp click, the door swung open, and she entered, softly, soundlessly as a zephyr. The long silken gown that flowed back against her figure was white, dead white, and so were her slim throat and face and brow. Her hair, her

eyes, were black as rain clouds, and the nails of her slim hands and narrow, high-arched feet shone with the blackness of cut jet. Beneath the slumberous, brooding eyes, set in their ambuscades of curving lashes, her lips showed blackly, with an underlie of red, and back of the black lips was the white line of little, milk-white teeth. "*Ocuisle*—O pulse of my heart!" she whispered, and held out slim white hands to him. He rose to meet her, drawn as to a magnet.

Her warm, soft arms twined round him like the tendrils of a vine—the ivy vine that strangles the oak—and her lips were on his, soft and tender, mercilessly, avidly hungry. Heady perfume, laden with the scent of clover blossoms and spring roses, was in his nostrils like a drug, and he felt himself go weak to sickness with desire as the blackly-red lips moved against his own. . . .

AFTER a time came satiety, a feeling such as he'd known when coming out of anesthesia after an appendectomy; a subdued feeling, strangely calm, as if he were at rest after an ordeal. An immense weariness was on him, marrow-deep, exhausting, paralyzing.

She laughed softy as she rose and drew the black sash tight about her waist. Softly and triumphantly. "Thou art mine, Rex *omuirnin*—Rex my love—" she told him as she held her white feet out for him to lace the tiny black sandals on them. "Mine alone."

"Thine alone!" he answered in a voice more sob than whisper. "Thine alone, Edáin *mo muirnin*!"

"Another night I'll come for thee and take thee with me to Tir-na-n-Og, the land where no one grows old, where worldly wisdom has no place, nor prayer nor preaching; where bitter words and tears are unknown."

"Come soon, O pulse of my heart, breath of my life!"

"It may be sooner than thou thinkest, Rex *omuirnin*."

"Boy, what a dream you had last night!" he had told himself next morning as

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believes he has an invention, a search of the most pertinent prior U. S. Patents should be made and a report obtained relative to its patentability. Write for further particulars as to patent protection and procedure and "Invention Record" form at once. No obligation.

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he shaved. "You're getting out of Ireland none too soon, young feller. If you stayed here you'd be takin' dope to keep asleep and dreamin' twenty-four hours a day."

HE WAS tireder than he'd realized. The drive down from New York had taken more out of him than he'd bargained for. Slowly, almost reluctantly, he took his tweeds off, reached for the crisp, new pajamas he'd bought just two days ago, dropped down on the bed and began unlacing his shoes. Marcia was in her room; Marcia, his bride—

"*Omuirnin*!" The whisper came as softly as the echo of an echo, laden with a load of longing not to be gainsaid. "Rex *omuirnin!*"

Like the shadow of a wind-blown cloud she came toward him, slim, white hands outstretched, blackly-red lips smiling. "I've come to take thee, lover, pulse of my heart. The time is come for us to go to Tir-na-n-Og."

The perfume of her wafted toward him like an anesthetic, a paralyzing drug that stole his strength away, and in a moment he felt soft hands on his cheeks, soft lips on his lips.

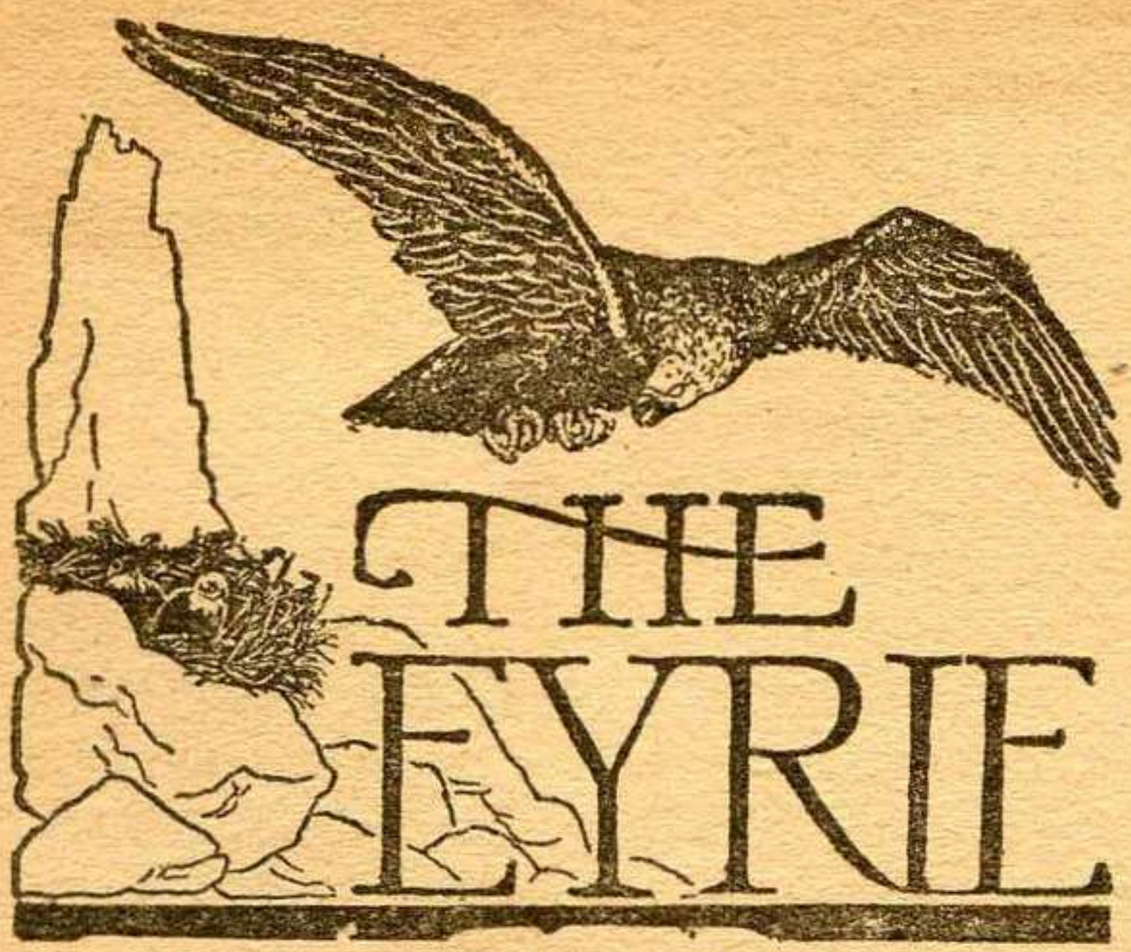
"No! No!" he gasped. "Not now, not yet, Edáin! I've just been married—"

A slow laugh crept from between her black lips. "Since the days when the Five Kings ruled Ireland no mortal woman has stood between me and my desire, *ocuisle*. Dost thou not remember what was said when first we met? 'Thou'rt mine!' I told thee, and, 'Thine alone!' thou answered. 'Twas then we made our compact, Rex my love, a compact that cannot be broken. Come." Her lips were on his lips, her arms were round him, tenderly, resistly. Her warm, perfume-laden breath was in his mouth.

For just a moment he fought, futilely as a man fallen in deep water fights drowning. Remembered words rang in his brain, "—afore he'd let his bride's hair down or loosed her girdle . . ."

"Rex!" he heard Marcia's frantic cry. "Rex!"

And then he heard no more.



One of the Regulars

WE RECENTLY saw a clipping from the Washington *Times-Herald* all about Seabury Quinn, and in it was said that he "sits in his office surrounded by little leering devils and stuffed bats and pictures of beautiful girls being dragged off by ape men, he reads books like 'The Other World,' 'The Devil,' 'The Dust of Egypt,' and he has been writing stories for WEIRD TALES Magazine since 1923." Well, we know that, and also we know that his character of Jules de Grandin is one of fiction's oldest detectives, and that in this issue of WEIRD TALES is one of Seabury's latest creations. About "Dark Rosaleen" he wrote that in this story he had treated the legend of Leanhaun Shee in a rather degagé manner, but that essentially the folk lore was on straight and he thought the tale ought to make interesting reading.

"Just a word of caution," he went on. "Where the art dealer says, 'It was a thing that he was marryin' Lady Frances Holahan O'Toole.' This is NOT a typographical error.—S.Q."

All right it isn't. Neither typesetter nor proofroom batted an eye.

Return Engagement

Editor, WEIRD TALES
9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y.

During the busy, hectic years of the war and those immediately following, I allowed my reading to be sadly neglected, and although my file of WEIRD TALES is rea-

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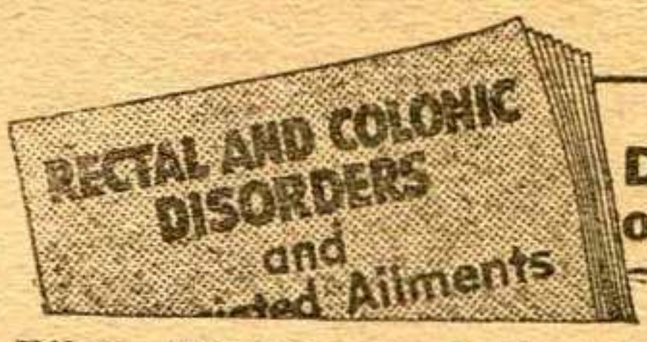
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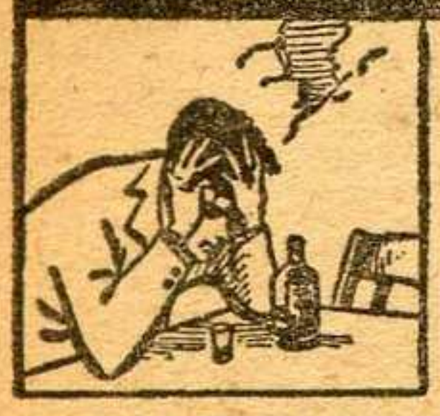
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sonably complete, I had not read an issue completely through from Pearl Harbor until a short time ago. Now crippled by a shop accident to a point where at least two avenues of expression are closed to me, I have more time for reading and am renewing a delightful acquaintance with an old friend—WEIRD TALES.

My reintroduction to your always excellent magazine took place during a wakeful night on a hospital bed. The issue being that of July, 1949, I read those two gems of weird fiction, Bloch's "Floral Tribute" and Quinn's "Dark O' the Moon," after which I dropped off to sleep with a deep sigh of contentment that writers who are capable of producing such excellent material are still beating their typewriters. I am looking forward with great anticipation to the many unread stories in my back issues, and to those which are to come.

There are two changes which I deeply regret. One is the fact that WEIRD TALES now appears only once every two months. I hope that in due time it will again appear as a monthly magazine. The other is the discontinuance of The Eyrie, where readers, writers and students of the occult formerly gathered. Would like to see that back again.

Best wishes for the future of the most interesting magazine on the stands!

Sincerely,
George N. Heflick,
Garretsville, Ohio.

Statistical Report

The Editor, WEIRD TALES,
9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y.

The November WEIRD TALES was a very good issue. My selections are:

(1) Harding, *The Underbody.* +2.13. Consistently fine throughout. Harding at her best. (2) Ferguson, *Terror Under Eridu.* +2.03. Best tale by this author I've read. A classic of its kind. (3) Murchie, *Stranger at Dusk.* +1.97. Really fine yarn; smooth throughout. (4) Burks, *These Debts Are Yours.* +1.92. Enjoyable novelette by a long-time favorite. (5) Theriault, *The Barren Field.* +1.76. Compelling and plausible. Interesting newcomer. (6) Whyte, *Murder Man.* +1.72. Well written short with hefty

punch ending. (7) Petaja, *Skydrift.* +1.69. (8) Wakefield, *Out of the Wrack I Rise.* +1.55. (9) Derleth, *Twilight Play.* +1.52. (10) Counselman, *The Green Window.* +1.49. (11) Quinn, *Conscience Maketh Cowards.* +1.18.

Ratings	*Rated on basis of:*
+3 = Excellent	1. Initial reaction
+2 = Very Good	2. Plot
+1 = Good	3. Theme
0 = Fairly Good	4. Characterization
−1 = Fair	5. Suspense
	6. Narration

Top story of the year was, I believe, Sturgeon's *One Foot and the Grave,* I'll send in my "ten best of the year" later on.

William N. Austin,
Wolf Den Book Shop,
Seattle 1, Washington

STATEMENT OF THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, CIRCULATION, etc., required by the Act of Congress of August 24, 1912, as amended by the Acts of March 3, 1933, and July 2, 1946, of WEIRD TALES, published bi-monthly at New York, N. Y., for October 1, 1949.

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, and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management, 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 Acts of March 3, 1933, and July 2, 1946 (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 managers are: Publisher, Short Stories, Inc., 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y.; Editor, D. McIlwraith, 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y.; Managing editor, None; Business manager, William J. Delaney, 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y.

2. That the owner is: Short Stories, Inc., 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y.; W. J. Delaney, 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y.

3. That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 percent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: (If there are none, so state.) 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.

[SEAL]

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 29th day of September, 1949.

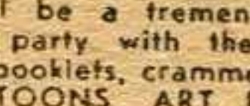
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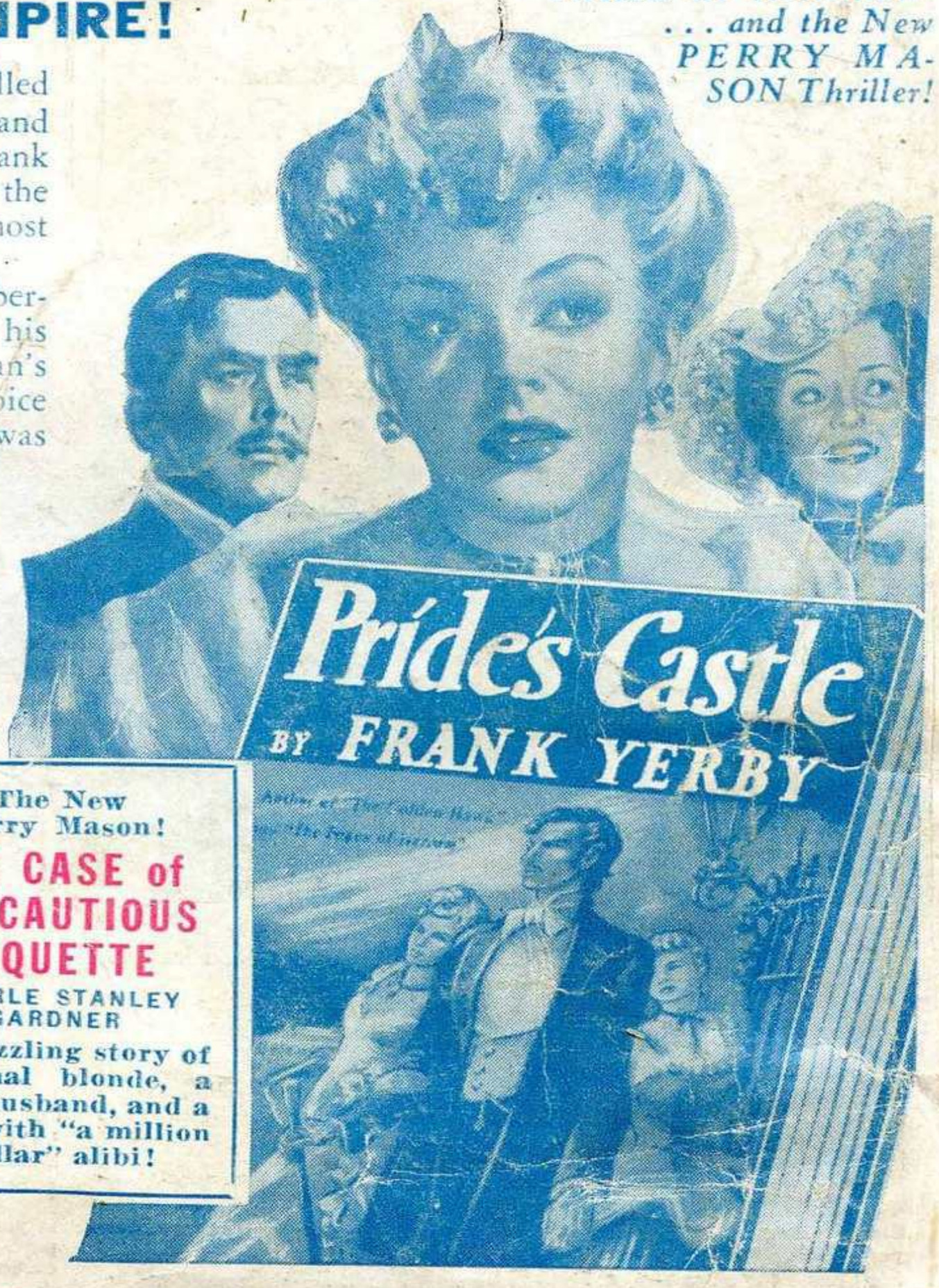
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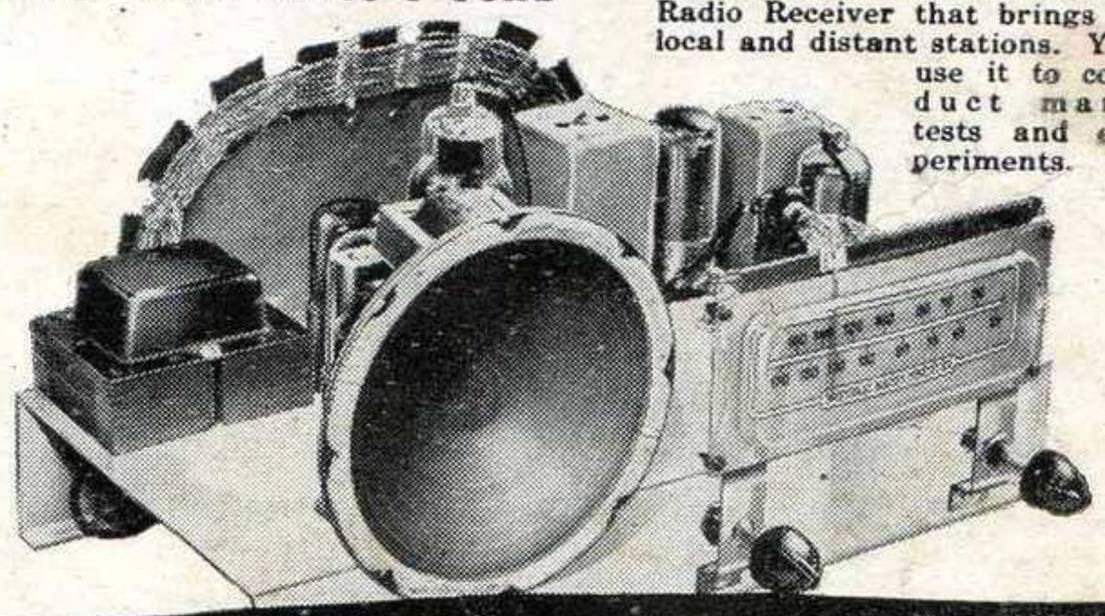
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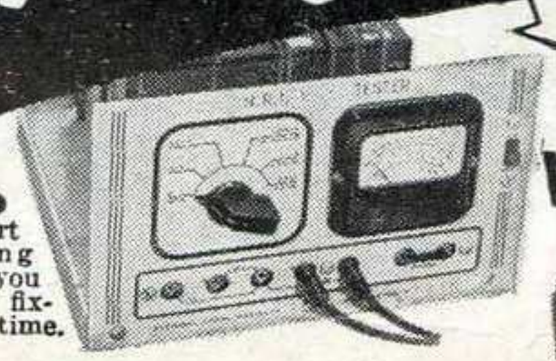
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