

ALL NEW STORIES OF THE STRANGE, THE MARVELOUS,
AND THE SUPERNATURAL

Weird Tales #3

Featuring "THE GUARDIAN
OF THE IDOL"

BY ROBERT E. HOWARD
AND GERALD W. PAGE

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And stories by Evangeline Walton, Brian Lumley, Manly
Wade Wellman, Carl Jacobi, and Many, Many Others

Edited by Lin Carter



FROM the very first issue of *Weird Tales* some fifty-eight years ago, the magazine established two traditions. In the first place, it assembled a stable of regular contributors whose work adorned its pages year after year. And secondly, the magazine offered a friendly and hospitable welcome to new writers of unusual talent, actively discovering and promoting writer after writer.

This, the two hundred and eighty-sixth issue of *Weird Tales*, happily exemplifies both of these traditions, as we welcome back to the pages of the magazine which discovered him one of our most distinguished literary alumni, Manly Wade Wellman . . . and introduce to you an extraordinarily gifted new writer, John Brizzolara, with his first published story.

Mr. Wellman is more closely identified with the editorial reign of Dorothy MacIlwraith, but he was actually a discovery of the great Farnsworth Wright, and he made his initial appearance in

continued on page 313



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Edited by Lin Carter

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Weird Tales



Fall, 1981

Vol. 48, No. 3

- THE CHINESE WOMAN Evangeline Walton 7
*There was something in the house
that hated her . . .*
- THE MESSENGER Steve Rasnic Tem 78
*It doesn't always pay to answer
a knock on the door*
- TO THE NIGHTSHADE Clark Ashton Smith 83
Verse
- THE OPPOSITE
HOUSE John and Diane Brizzolara 84
*Something was sucking the life
out of the very ground*
- THE GUARDIAN OF
THE IDOL . . Robert E. Howard and Gerald Page 124
It's never easy to kill a god
- THE BLACK GARDEN Carl Jacobi 139
*What plant is there that has
to be fed on blood?*
- THE HOUSE OF THE TEMPLE . . Brian Lumley 164

	<i>Was there something in the pool, or just his imagination?</i>	
THE RED BRAIN	Donald Wandrei	217
	<i>A Weird Tales' 'First'</i>	
THE SUMMONS/		
THE VIOLA	Robert A. W. Lowndes	230
	<i>Verse</i>	
NOBODY EVER		
GOES THERE	Manly Wade Wellman	232
	<i>Odd, how some places have an evil reputation . . .</i>	
THE SUMMONS OF		
NUGUTH-YUG	Gary Myers and Marc Laidlaw	249
	<i>Into a nightmare realm</i>	
THE WIND THAT TRAMPS		
THE WORLD	Frank Owen	257
	<i>A Weird Story Reprint</i>	
THE WINFIELD HERITANCE	Lin Carter	275
	<i>Every old family has a skeleton or two in the closet</i>	

LIN CARTER, EDITOR
Associates: Roy Torgeson, Robert Weinberg

There was something in the house that hated her . . .

The Chinese Woman *by Evangeline Walton*

(Author of "Witch House," "The Island of the Mighty," etc.)

Li Wan, the Chinese woman, had been sixteen years old when Captain Pegleg had brought her to Witch House. She had looked older; her delicate, unlined little face had been as exquisite and as expressionless as porcelain. It did not change, even in the gold of that early morning when Captain Pegleg called her on deck to see the dark bulk of the house on the island rising massive and black against the pale, shining sky.

She only looked and said submissively: "It is my lord's house, and the house of his fathers. So there

is no better sight that these eyes can see."

She wanted very much to reach out and lay her hand upon his arm; to touch him for the sake of touching him, as a little girl might have. Knowing that his warm, all-powerful strength was there, within sight and sound and touch, was a wonder and a delight to her; more wonderful than anything else on earth except those soul-thrilling moments when his eyes glowed and he looked at her and reached for her as if she, his slave, were wonder and delight to him also. Even as he was to her—even as he was to her! Sometimes in the night she had the courage to reach and touch him, unbidden, but she could never have had it here, in the light of day. Shall the littlest of the stars approach the sun uninvited, or a dog dare lick the hand of a king?

Only in song could she have told him what she felt for him, or anything that was his, and she was no singer. Often and often they had told her so, in that house on Peking's Willow Lane, that house in which she had been trained for the pleasing of men. They had said that her voice was weak, and often not true. And her fingers, that were so deft at embroidering gay, many-coloured figures upon fine silk were awkward and uninspired upon the lute. But that house had killed all the songs in her, in her heart or her hands or her throat.

They had not been pleased, her trainers. Many times they had said to her: "You will please only the baser sort of men, only those that take women cheaply, as they take bread or a bowl of soup. And they will pay you cheaply. Many times you will be

beaten with leather whips because they leave you no gifts of silver or gold."

But she had pleased Captain Pegleg. That night when he had come to the house on Willow Lane he had railed against their sweet singers and musicians. He had said: "Bring me a girl that doesn't screech like a cat in an alley! Bring me one that doesn't raise the devil's own row on a God-damned imitation of a guitar! Bring me one that can keep her mouth shut!"

It had taken them some time to understand that he wanted a silent woman, one who could neither sing nor play; they had not been able to understand half of what even his fumbling interpreter said he said. They never realized that to his barbarian ear, as to those of all 'coarse-haired foreign devils,' their ages'-old, subtle, sixteen note scale of music had sounded like unmusical and outlandish caterwauling. But at last they had said:

"Lord, we have here a maiden from a great house, one whose father once held high place under the Emperor, and whose father's widow sold her in the day of misfortune. She is fair, but she is very young and as yet knows nothing of the arts. She will be humbly and gratefully silent in the presence of my lord."

And they had brought her to him, white under her paint, and shrinking under her smile, a stiff, frightened girl who had never had a man before. And now she was beside him, a concubine if not a true wife, approaching the house of his fathers! That night that had seemed fated to be the beginning of her harlot's hell had been instead the

beginning of her woman's heaven. There was no man on earth like him, so strong or so generous or so kind.

She looked up at him, loving him with her eyes only, those dark eyes that sometimes had to change, as she would never let her little porcelain face change, because it was harder to keep her soul out of them. And he reached out and patted her, as he might have a dog.

He said, "It's home, Li Wan. And a damned queer home. I had a damned queer set of fathers. But it's ours!"

She did not understand his oaths; she was always puzzled by the strange way in which he damned both things he liked and things he did not like, so that one could never be sure whether "Damn!" meant a curse or a blessing. But she could not believe that he meant any disrespect to that noble house of his fathers. To her it looked very good, solid if dark there against the golden morning. A house—a real house, where the floors would be flat and would stand still beneath one's feet, never rolling, never lurching. There would be no seasickness there. No doubt there would be a real bathing-place, and cupboards, ways to make one's clothes and body clean and sweet so that one would, indeed, be worthy to draw peach-flower words of passion from one's lord. To please was a woman's life, and how could a seasick woman please, one whose hair was damp with salt water, and whose face was drawn and sick, no matter how she painted it? Whose mouth, however, daintily reddened, might burst open at any moment and spew

forth evil-smelling ugliness? Li Wan was very glad that the long hard voyage was over, very glad to see solid land again.

She was not afraid of the strange house. There was no mother-in-law there to be served and revered, no honourable brothers' wives even, only the wife of her lord's eldest son. It seemed to her that her troubles in the house should not be many or great.

The son's wife must be an untried girl, too young to be the mistress of a great house. Perhaps she would be gentle and glad of help. Li Wan would be glad of a friend. How good if they could live together as lovingly as sisters! As indeed, they should, being the only two ladies among serving-women. The young wife must be lonely. Li Wan marvelled that there should be a great house with only one well-born woman in it; in China that could not have happened. Once she had said wonderingly to Captain Pegleg: "Has my lord no brothers? Or had his father no brothers before him, that there should be only he and his sons to bring home wives?"

Captain Pegleg had chuckled with what sounded like grim relish: "I had one brother once. I had another leg, too."

There had been a hard, secret enjoyment in his voice, in the icy glint of his sea-grey eyes. One second it flashed there, and the next it was gone, leaving them inscrutable. And she had forgotten the riddle in marvelling that he could laugh at such a thing. At anything connected with so bitter

and humiliating a grief as his own maiming. What a man was this whom the gods had given her, what a lion's heart beat within his mighty chest! But then truly, he had so much manhood that he could have lost more parts of himself, and still have been the mightiest of men. He had no need of legs or kinsmen; what glory that he should have even a little need of her!

Evidently his brother was dead, and the great house was his and his only, to leave to his sons.

She was sorry when the ship went on past it, towards the mainland and the wharfs of the town. There were many houses there, stately houses that rose snow-white above lawns as green as jade. There were other ships there, and many people, and a great babble of voices. There was much life, but she had always been afraid of crowds, of too many people, pressing too closely around her. What she wanted was the warm quiet of that place that would be home.

Strange to be so eager to set foot inside the walls between which you must die! For some day, unless great misfortune came to her, she would surely die in that house on the island. As her lord's true wife had died, and his mother, and all the ladies who had gone before them. As more ladies, yet unborn, might die. . . . That, too, was part of the lot of woman; to be glad to see the place where you would die.

She thought, 'Nor would I wish to live to be very old, for my lord has thrice my years, and would mount the dragon too long before me. And that would be hard for me to bear, though neither

would I wish to die first and leave him in his old age to others who might care for him less lovingly than I. This only do I ask of Thee, O Kuan Yin, Lady of Pity—that I may live to see the son beneath my girdle grow to be a man.'

And thinking of that son, she dared to stand a little closer to his father. . . .

She walked proudly when they went ashore, and Captain Pegleg took her little cream-coloured hand and thrust it through the curve of his arm. She knew that somehow the unfamiliar gesture did her honour, and she felt worthy because of the precious burden within her womb. Though he should be the youngest, and not true-born like his elder brothers, still was he Captain Pegleg's son.

Many people came to greet her lord, and among them three tall men whose faces Li Wan knew, although never before had she seen them. They were dark and gaunt, with strongly marked features, and faces that were sterner than their father's, though somehow much less alive. Li Wan thought, 'They are like him, but they have not his strength.'

And her heart leaped with the hope that her son would have. . . .

Captain Pegleg shook hands with his sons and clapped them on the back. He laughed and spoke to them in that English of which she still knew but one word or two: "Howdy, Jim! Howdy, Sam! Abby still henpecking you, Johnny?"

James and Samuel Quincy made conventional answers; they asked their father whether he had made a good voyage, and how his health was. Yet

all the time Li Wan could feel their eyes stealing sidewise glances at her, piercing, probing her like knives.

Nor were theirs the only such glances. . . .

All round her she could feel eyes, stealthy eyes raking her, darting at her like the beaks of savage birds. Outraged and hostile eyes, eyes full of wonder and curiosity and a resentment that was as strong as hate. Automatically she felt herself with swift fingers, but her silken trousers, her embroidered jacket that covered snugly the inverted ivory cups of her breasts, all were as they should be. In no way could she be an unseemly spectacle, one to shame herself and her lord. Yet the concentrated force back of all those surreptitious, unfriendly glances seemed to make them stab her, like knives playfully prodding the victim whom presently they will transfix. Such cruelties as were still inflicted by evil-minded mandarins in the country of her birth.

Fear took her, and bewilderment. Why should they hate her, these people of her lord's town? Because she was foreign, and because some of them had daughters whom they had hoped to get into the great man's bed? Yet that could not explain the look in the eyes of her lord's own sons. What was it to these young men if their father had taken a concubine? Yet they too looked at her as if she were naked and misshapen.

Then suddenly John Quincy put out a long finger and pointed to her. "Father, who is this woman?"

Captain Pegleg grinned broadly, his whole face

crinkling up into hard, tormenting mirth: "Not quite your stepmother yet, Johnny. But she may be if Abby kicks up too much fuss. She's a lady, and in six months or so she's going to give you a little brother or sister, so it'd be only decent of you boys to be nice to her."

John said in a shocked, appalled whisper, "Father, what have you done?"

Captain Pegleg chuckled. "I should think that'd be pretty plain. You ought to know about these things by now, Johnny; you've got children of your own."

James and Samuel spoke together; their lowered, horrified voices almost hissed, like those of snakes. "But, Father, what will you do with her? You cannot take her home!"

"Can't I?" Captain Pegleg snorted. "There's nobody that can tell me who I can or can't take to my own home. She's going there because I want her there, and her child's going to be born there, the same as you were, boys. And those that take that too hard can stay away. But none of you will while I've got money to leave."

He turned, with the peculiar slewing stride that his pegleg gave him, and ploughed forward, Li Wan still upon his arm, to the carriage that waited near the pier. Every year for thirty years that carriage had waited there, whenever Captain Quincy's ship made port. For twenty-five years Esther Barret Quincy had sat waiting in it, prim and stiff and dainty, every inch a lady, and without one inch of uninhibited, natural woman. For the last five years Abigail, Mrs. John Quincy, had always sat there,

stiff and prim and not so dainty, with wariness and resolution in her eyes, and iron in the set of her jaw, as she waited to welcome her father-in-law.

He checked when he saw that she was not there; sharply disappointed, for the first time in all the years that he had known her, by her absence. He had not wanted her to miss the shocking and outrageous sight of him with a trousered woman on his arm, a young painted, foreign woman, with earrings in her ears. Few sights could have been more atrociously astounding on a New England pier in the 'sixties, and nobody he knew could have appreciated it as much as Abby.

"Where's your wife, John?" he growled. "I was counting on her being here."

"Abigail's sister is sick," John explained. "Mercy, the one who lives in Salem. Abigail is with her; she won't be back until next week. Sarai is looking after the house and the boys." He was silent, appalled at the thought of what his wife would think—and, more, what she would say—when she found that her young daughter had spent the week-end in the same house with a Chinese harlot.

"That's too bad," Captain Pegleg grunted. "She ought to be here to bid Li Wan welcome. A mother-in-law deserves some respect, even one that's on the wrong side of the blanket. Well, it'll be a mercy to Mercy when she comes home. I'd hate mightily to be sick and to have to have Abby tending to me too. Used to have bad dreams about that happening to me some day. That's one reason why I brought Li Wan home."

She was awkward and did not know how to let

him help her into the carriage. In China gentlemen never assisted ladies into carriages. So he laughed, picked her up, and lifted her bodily into the plush-lined interior. He set her down on the seat and swung himself in beside her. His sons clambered behind them, silently, and took the smaller seats. Li Wan sat bright-eyed and still as a bird, all her quiet grace returning to her now that her body was in a posture in which she knew what to do with it. She wondered intensely what had been said; why Captain Pegleg laughed, and his son's faces looked as dark as thunderclouds.

But her heart said: 'While he laughs all is well with you.' And from under her long, jet-black lashes she stole surreptitious glances, in her turn, at those dark-faced sons of her lord.

They said nothing more: they did not know what to say. They knew that no arguments they could bring to bear could move their father once his mind was made up, and it was true that they were afraid to offend him. His hand held a heavy purse, and so a heavy club.

He knew it, and grinned wryly yet tolerantly at them. "Piping down, eh, boys? That's better. All that worries you is what people will say. It ain't morals. No Quincy ever had a real moral, and no Quincy ever will. You don't care a damn about my morals or me, but you do care a lot about my money, that I may leave away from you if I get too mad. I'll make you be honest with yourselves yet: when you don't believe what other people believe (or pretend they believe) why care what they say?"

John said: "Too much talk can hurt business, Father."

Captain Pegleg snorted again. "Bosh! I don't know any man in Massachusetts that'll refuse to buy my cargoes. Not even if I brought home a harem from China, instead of one wench! Money talks to everybody, lad, just the same as it talks to you. All men are the devil's spawn, loaded down with original sin—you've got all the parsons' word for that—but a Quincy ought to be man enough not to be ashamed of it."

He added, in a gentler voice, "I'm real proud of you, Johnny. I wondered if you'd be able to get up the guts to ask me about Li Wan until you had Abby standing behind you, but you did."

John Quincy did not seem to appreciate the compliment. The carriage rolled on in silence, and in silence it came to the little private pier from which, in those days, the Quincys rowed across the thin grey finger of sea that lay between them and their island home. Too small for an arm, it had indeed, in spite of the bright sunlight, something of the look of a cold scaly finger. And the winding way that the boat had to take to reach the front of the house made the channel seem crooked, like a beckoning finger. It brought a grunt from Captain Pegleg.

"Never could travel in a straight line, old Joseph de Quincy. And he fixed it so none of his descendants ever could, either, the old devil. But I'll say this for him; he knew what he was talking about. I've heard tell that he said that every year the distance between his house and other men's homes would grow greater, and it seems to me this channel looks wider than it did when I last sailed. I

know it's a good three hands wider than when I used to play beside it as a lad."

John and James said nothing to that, but for a moment Samuel looked faintly apprehensive. "If the sea takes a little of the island each year, Father, we must be losing land."

Captain Pegleg shrugged. "Not enough to hurt us. Except maybe your banker's heart, Jim; I've heard a sight of tales about your foreclosing mortgages. But the main core of this island's solid rock. If the house is ever in danger, it'll be from fire, not flood. That was another of old Joseph's prophecies. And he didn't prophesy unless he had good horse sense to back him up."

James Quincy, too, relapsed into silence, and bit his lip. The shot about the foreclosure of mortgages had gone home. He was fairly sure that in at least one instance his father had advanced money to hard-pressed families on whom he had been about to foreclose. The old man had no sympathy with shrewd dealings that did not involve risk. He had always despised his sons for being unwilling to peril life and limb at sea "or anywhere else," as he scornfully put it.

So they rounded the island, and on the shore five young figures saw them and came running and whooping forward. As the boat came ashore they leaped overside and into Captain Pegleg's arms. And he laughed and held them, pushing his sons back roughly and with oaths, when they tried to intervene.

"Hallo, ye varmint! Your mother's not around this time to make you behave like lady and

gentlemen—which ye aren't and probably never will be! Ye know who brings ye presents, eh? And you're young enough to be honest about it."

The one girl, a dark-eyed twelve-year-old, put her arms about his neck and clung closer. "We do love you, Grandpa."

He laughed and gave her a light smack. "Well, maybe you do sometimes, at that."

She smiled into his eyes, her own twinkling, and said candidly, "The presents do help."

John Quincy snapped harshly, "Sarai!" and his father glared at him over her head and snapped back: "Belay there, Johnny! Nobody's talking to you."

"I only wanted the child to be respectful to you, Father. Abigail complains that she's growing into a pert little hussy."

His father made a face. "I'd grow into something worse if Abby had hold of me." Anything more that anybody might have said was lost in the boys' clamour, "Grandpa, what have you got for me?"

Li Wan did not like the boys. They made too much noise, and were openly greedy. She sensed a vein of cruelty, too, under their boisterousness; in the glee with which they fingered the fantastic collection of Chinese weapons he had brought them, and it repelled her as rough, laughing cruelty always did repel her. She had seen too much of it in China, in the days since her father's death. But she was drawn to the girl, Sarai; here was the promise of that companionship of her own sex for which she had longed. And here was another who loved the captain.

Yet in the great house, as she walked upstairs beside Sarai, she was hurt and chilled again by the look John Quincy gave her. He actually started forward as if to stop them, but one of his brothers caught his arm and checked him. She thought bewilderedly, 'Does my lord's eldest son think that I am like a wild beast, and fear that I may hurt his daughter?' For it was so that he had looked; as if the young maid walking at her side were going into actual danger.

And yet his father had sent them upstairs together. He had said, grinning: "Take Li Wan to the master bedroom, Sarai. She'll be staying there with me. And show her where the bathroom is."

She could see no harm in the casual, ordinary words, but she saw her lord's son step forward, his face reddening. And she saw her lord smile upon him, that hard, tormenting smile.

"Easy there, Johnny. The kid's human; not half as ignorant as you think. And it won't hurt her to know that her old Grand-dad's still a man."

She did not understand those words, any more than she understood John's tense, answering question; a whisper that was almost like a hissed curse: "Father, have you no shame? No respect for innocence?"

But she did know that somehow her lord had been witty. As they went upstairs the young girl Sarai was smiling, and the smile was evilly amused. Doubtless it was undutiful of her to show pleasure in her father's discomfiture, but was not he too undutiful, openly rebellious and disrespectful towards her lord? She thought Captain Pegleg a too indulgent father.

When she had been shown the two rooms in question she smiled at the young Sarai and spoke the two English words she knew best. "Thank you." And was startled by the quick, worshipping look she saw in the child's eyes. She did not know then how strange to Sarai Quincy were the sight and sound of a beautiful, soft-voiced woman. And the gentle friendliness of any woman.

She let the youngster stay and help her with the bathing and perfuming and jewelling that she considered necessary for the pleasing of her lord. She let her touch and examine what she pleased, and try on what she pleased. She did not smile steadily as a doll would, but she smiled whenever there was occasion and said, "Thank you," again, for any service. Young herself, she enjoyed another young girl's nearness, and the child's delight and wonder at her strange, bright possessions and in the strange intimacy were a delight to her also.

Only one casket, that was sealed with strange seals, she refused to let her open. She said quickly, when the child touched it, "Inside is not pretty," and shook her head in warning. Her English was not great enough to enable her to explain, and that Sarai quickly saw.

She said, "Will you tell me some day what is inside? When we can talk to each other better?" and Li Wan, only half understanding, smiled doubtfully.

She said, "What is inside must never come out. Not anywhere."

"Why?" asked Sarai. And Li Wan touched the casket and said, "Bad." She did not know the

English word for "kill," so she picked up a little jewelled knife that she sometimes wore in her hair and drew it across her throat, then touched the casket again. "Bad so. Like that."

Then the young Sarai's eyes shone so eagerly that for an instant Li Wan was reminded of the cruelty that she had thought she had seen gleaming in the eyes of the boys. There was something dark in that eager shining, a stark, primeval ugliness.

But Sarai's mood veered swiftly. She took the little dagger from Li Wan, made believe to slash her own finger with it, and said, "Cut." Two or three times she repeated the word, looking earnestly at the older girl. Then she drew the blade across her throat, as Li Wan had done, and said, "Kill."

So Li Wan learned two English words, and in later years both women were to remember that teaching and that learning, and to feel that there had been strange significance in the chance that made one of those two words deal with death. And with deliberately inflicted death.

But during the three days that followed Li Wan learned many more words, and all of them innocent. For the younger girl they were three days in wonderland. Once, when she was little, a sailor had shown her a stuffed bird; an exquisite, long-tailed bird, with feathers as bright and many-coloured as the Biblical Joseph's coat, so that always afterwards she had remembered and nodded to herself when she heard that passage read aloud from the Good Book. She had seen Joseph's own coat as made of feathers, as the sailor had said that some coats were in the far southern

islands from which he had brought the bird.

And now, unbelievably, she saw such strange bright beauty in a woman, in a lady who liked her and treated her as if she were another lady, not something strange or wicked and made to be forced to obey. Abigail Quincy, though strict with all her children, loved her sons; their loss was the one thing that might have broken her; but between her and her daughter there was only antagonism. Always Sarai had been considered a bad child; shut out of every warm and friendly daily circle. Her mother, and the nurses chosen by her mother, had all been hard-voiced and hard-handed; and when she had gone to school on the mainland the other girls had mocked and jeered at her. The child from the island had seemed different from the little friends with whom they had played outside their mothers' familiar doors upon the mainland; savage and strange, an alien. And Sarai had promptly proved her savagery by biting and kicking and scratching in retaliation. For such action she had, indeed, a gift, and one that she had cultivated as her hatred for her hostile world grew.

Long ago all other warmth had gone out of her; though she found Captain Pegleg both amusing and useful she had little real affection for him or any. But now the loveliness of Li Wan dawned upon her as quietly and yet in as rich colours as the sun that rises soundlessly in its splendours of red and rose and gold above the ransomed earth. So, too, for a little while, the Chinese lady drove back night from the child's darkened soul.

For three days they were happy together. Then

Abigail Quincy came back from her sister's house in Salem.

The first Li Wan heard of her was a loud voice ranting in the drawing-room below. Heavily and sturdily built though the old house was, that strong shrill voice rose through the beamed ceilings and the thick carpets to that master bedroom in which Li Wan sat. And she shrank, in sick distaste, because it reminded her of the loud angry voice of the woman who had overseen the novices in the house of shame. So curious a resemblance do the godly and ungodly bear each other when in the flames of anger.

Then she heard her lord's voice raised in answer, calm, amused, dryly mocking. Exultant, even in his power to shock and bait his enemy. And she sank back into the chair from which she had half-risen, aware that here was safety, and also no place and no need for her. Better to leave him to settle his quarrels in his own way, without the added irritant of her presence, that, inexplicably, all his kind but Sarai seemed to hate.

But the young Sarai sprang to her feet. Her face was white, and her eyes suddenly flashed as dark as Li Wan's own.

"Mother's back!" she said. There was no fear in the words, but there was loathing.

Li Wan hesitated. Should she try to keep the child with her or not? Surely a dutiful daughter should go at once to greet her mother, yet as surely no daughter should see her mother engaged in an unseemly quarrel with her father-in-law, the head of her house, to whom she owed obedience and

reverent respect. Already Li Wan was sure her lord's eldest son had married beneath him, a low-bred, unmannerly and impious woman, without respect for her elders and, therefore, for the gods.

But Sarai settled the question for her. She looked once around the quiet room with its strange new notes of colour, the vases and embroideries that Li Wan had brought with her and arranged—a brief yet deep and burning look, as if she would stamp that warm colourful quiet on her mind for ever—then she turned and flung her arms about Li Wan. For an instant she pressed her cheek against the older girl's, ardently as a lover might have done, then without a backward glance she fled through the door. Li Wan heard the light feet on the stairs, swift as those of a thing pursued.

In the parlour Abigail Quincy stood facing her father-in-law, her full figure drawn up to the full of its splendid height. She was a handsome woman, and might have been beautiful had it not been for her too-strong jaw and the hardness of her flashing eyes. Now those eyes blazed, and her full breast was heaving.

"To bring a heathen harlot into the house with my children! With my innocent boys—with a young girl upon the verge of womanhood! You wicked old man, is this sheer shameless infamy or have you gone mad at last?"

Captain Pegleg chuckled. "Sheer shameless infamy, I expect. Far as madness goes, I think the boot's on the other foot. Leastways, I'm not nearly as likely to burst a blood-vessel as you are, Abby."

She choked as if his suggestion might contain some truth.

"You dare! You mock at all decency, all shame! You dare to flaunt your pagan baggage here, among decent people, in a decent house! To bring the poison of her foul corruption under the same roof with innocent children—"

"She's as much a lady as you are, mother! More." The young voice came loud and clear. Sarai stood in the doorway, her face a white flame.

Her mother's hand promptly reddened one side of it. The slap rang loud in that room where that young, loving cry had made a sudden silence.

"Hussy! I'll deal with you later, miss! Lover of evil and foulness from your youth up! My milk was scarce dry in your mouth before you began to seek after wickedness. But you shall repent of this open consorting with lewdness! You will—"

"I'd think she'd repent of having been born!" Captain Pegleg's voice rose in the bellow that had quelled every din in the fo'c'sle. "You're enough to drive anybody to the devil, Abby. If you're going to get out, stop talking and do it! If I had to I'd bring a whole brothelful of stinking nigger women with rings through their noses into this house to get you out of it. The devil save me from the barkings and howlings of a pious bitch; God's too careless to."

"Blasphemer!" Abigail shrieked. She turned upon her husband, where he stood white and silent by the fire-place, too cautious with his father, too afraid of his wife, to speak. "John, have you had in the doctors to him? Surely such conduct as this should be proof to any that he is mad, unfit to handle his own affairs—"

Captain Pegleg smiled. "There's no doctor who'll

certify me of unsound mind while I hold the purse strings. And one thing you won't get Johnny to do, madam, is to make me mad by trying any tricks. You'll get out because I want you out, and Li Wan'll stay here because I want her here. This is my house, and while I live I'll choose the mistress of it. You leave it this hour or else go up and be real civil and make your best bow to my wench from Willow Lane. If you want to stay you'll have to knuckle under and be mealy mouthed and hand over the housekeeper's keys to her. You don't run things around here any longer."

Abigail drew her skirts up about her as if the poison of his wickedness lay like mud upon his floors.

"Less than one hour will I stay under this roof of sin! Sarai, go call your brothers! I leave you to your wickedness, abandoned old man. When you lie ill, facing the hell your life has earned, remember me."

"I will; I'll be might thankful you aren't by my bedside." Captain Pegleg chuckled again, his good humour apparently restored. He was too deep in relish of his own joke to look towards the young Sarai, who had stood silent as a carved figure ever since her brief defence of Li Wan, one cheek very white, the other as fierily red. Yet she glanced at him once before she turned to obey her mother, and once again, with utter evil in her look, at that mother. Then she turned and was gone.

His eyes were all for his antagonist, standing stiff and straight before him. His dry grin deepened as he looked at her.

"You'll have to hurry mightily to get out of here in less than an hour, Abby. With five kids to pack for. Better let us send some of your traps after you. And you needn't hold up your skirts like that; there aren't any mice around. Don't want to give me the idea you're trying to show your ankles, do you?"

She dropped her skirts abruptly. If her eyes could have blazed more, they would have. Her mouth opened, but no words came out. He gave a little laugh that was half a snort.

"Used up all your thunders and lightnings, eh? It's the first time I ever saw you run out, Abby. It's a sight to see, too. Be worth saddling myself with my little heathen upstairs for, even if I didn't like her. And I do."

She gave an inarticulate cry, low but utterly savage. She flung her hands as if she would have liked to strike him, then she turned and followed her daughter out of the room.

Before sunset she and her husband and children were gone from the house on the island. And Li Wan knew that for some inexplicable reason the wife of her lord's eldest son considered her presence in the house such a disgrace that she would not stay under the same roof with her. Knowledge that hurt and affronted and vaguely frightened her, sure though she was of the woman's low breeding and probable low birth.

In China no stigma attached to a concubine, or to the man who brought her to his house. A true wife might consider her social station higher than the concubine's, but then the first wife considered her station far above that of all other wives. No

moral blame rested on the unmarried woman concubine; she was not held as a harlot unless she betrayed her lord. Li Wan knew that she was unwelcome in her man's family, a great calamity to a Chinese woman, but why she had no more notion than the babe unborn.

Yet it puzzled and troubled her, though except for the loss of Sarai she was glad to be rid of the presence of her enemies. John's silent hostility had been a grief to her, and she shrank from the thought of ever having to speak with his impious and terrible wife. Even the boys had been, to some extent, her foes. She had often noticed them laughing and nodding and making rude gestures at her, as if they were making her the butt of some lewd joke she could not comprehend. Once she had seen Sarai catch the two younger boys at it and slap them soundly. But their mockery, too, had some source that she could not understand.

She was glad of their absence for another reason. Their obstreperousness had made her afraid that they might break the seals and find the death in the casket, and she had no wish to be the destruction of her lord's grandsons. She did not mean that casket to be unsealed now; there had been a time, in the house on Willow Lane, when she had thought that she might use it at the last, on herself or another. But now that she was safe and happy she would never loose that evil magic upon any; that terror of which even her father's grasping widow had stood in too much awe to break the seals. She had sold Li Wan's mother's jewels before she had sold Li Wan, but though the thing in the

casket had value she had let the girl carry it with her to the house on Willow Lane. She had been afraid to meddle with that grim legacy of the old *Hutukhtu*.

Yet she was not long in learning that in this house to which she had come there were strange things also; dark traditions and strange survivals of them.

Something did not want her to worship her beloved alabaster image of Kuan Yin, Goddess of Pity. She had set it up, near the little images of hideous Mongol devil-gods, also bequeathed her by her mother's kin, in a small room that Abigail Quincy had used for a sewing-room. And though nothing interfered with the offerings she made to the devil-gods, whatever she set before Kuan Yin was sure to be spilled or spoiled, and filth set in its place.

At first Li Wan suspected the servants; she saw clearly that they did not like her gods, who were strangers to them. And she became angry, for all her gentleness. She set up a screen in the room, as if it were part of the worship of her gods, and the third night after its placing she hid behind it, and watched to see who should come to disturb the shrine.

The night was very still. She had felt it undutiful to come down until after Captain Pegleg slept, so that the hour was already late when she placed herself behind the screen. She had feared that the vandal might have been before her, but the offerings were still untouched. The incense burned quietly and gently, its scent warming the chill

darkness that seemed somehow cold with more than the chill of night.

As she sat there she began to grow more and more aware, in some strange way, of space. Of the width and unfriendliness and loneliness of all the space around her, of the darkness and silence of every room upon the first floor of that great old house. Of her littleness in the midst of that vast gloomy quiet, which surrounded and encircled her. With a vividness almost like that of sight they rose before her, all the rooms beyond that room. Even the small chamber in which she sat seemed to grow large, the empty lengths of wall between its corners sinister, and those corners full of dancing shadows, that were darker than the darkness of the night.

No living thing shared that first floor with her. Captain Pegleg was asleep upstairs, knowing nothing of her absence or her errand. All the servants were asleep upstairs also, unless, indeed, one of them was even now creeping through the darkness to insult her goddess.

It occurred to her then, not for the first time, that such a one might be dangerous. Clearly these people of her lord's country hated strangers, and all that belonged to strangers, with a mad and unreasoning hatred. Did not his kin hate her, his servants hate the gentle goddess whom she served? There might be danger in surprising the marauder at his evil work.

Yet at the thought her delicate jaw only set a little more firmly, and her hand tightened on the small jewelled dagger that she had once shown Sarai. She feared no human thing. She would not

admit that she feared anything. But more and more, like an actual physical burden, the sheer largeness of the house oppressed her, the weight of all those dark and silent rooms, each pressing with a separate chill upon her heart.

Her spirit shivered with that sense of vast cold, and she thought, 'Even if a murderer walked through these rooms he would be alive, and so give off some warmth. There is no warmth anywhere. Whatever is here is cold; is utterly and terribly cold.'

For though she could not feel that anything human moved in those dark, silent rooms she could not but feel that every inch of their vast and terrifying space was *conscious*; packed with some kind of hostile and watching life.

Not life in the sense of anything that has flesh and blood and breath; life in the sense that feeling and intelligence are life. It is not with any visible parts of our bodies, not with anything we can see or touch, such as hands or eyes or ears, that we think and love and hate.

Li Wan was alone, and yet she was dreadfully, terribly, not alone.

Cold as she was, the sweat stood upon her forehead, and the hair on her brow seemed to stand up also.

She wanted to run screaming through the night, to fetch Captain Pegleg and the servants with her shrieks, bringing their human warmth and breaking that awful silence. But she sat still, motionless. Something greater than her fear of being seen in such folly, something greater, she hoped, than her

fear of that silent, sentient darkness through which she would have to flee, held her where she was.

She was the daughter of warriors, and she would not flee before any foe. She would sit there and wait for whatever came.

For she knew, now, that something would come. . . .

Was coming. For though she could hear no footsteps, she felt that diffused consciousness in the silent rooms gathering, advancing, as she might have felt icy water being poured over her hands.

Advancing towards the room in which she waited.

Still as the image of Kuan Yin she sat, and her eyes clung to its white face, that a ray of moonlight touched, and her lips moved in prayer. Soundlessly, for no breath to pray aloud would come.

And then suddenly, in the darkness, she heard a crunching sound.

Almost at the feet of the goddess it came, and as her horrified eyes fell from the shining face she saw the incense sticks.

They no longer burned in their secure places. They were in the air, at about the level of the goddess's waist, and no hand held them. Yet they were being squeezed and broken, horribly, as if in unseen, powerful hands.

Their little jets of pale, fragrant smoke went out. They were ground to bits in that savage, implacable grasp. And then flung upwards, straight into the goddess's pale, shining face.

Li Wan screamed with horror at the sight. She rushed forward to defend the image, even her utter

fear forgotten in her rage at that blasphemy. But her outflung hands, her charging body, met only empty air. There was nothing there, except the all-but-pulverized bits of incense sticks lying at the goddess's feet.

And with the discovery her fear came back and she fled, shuddering, from the room.

No human blasphemer could have done that sacrilege unless it were one armed with the *dip shing*, that strange, invisibility-giving talisman of which she had heard tales in her childhood, and, remembering that sensation of utter cold which had accompanied the dark visitation, Li Wan did not believe that any other human being had been in the room.

Yet once again she kept her vigil in that dark still room in the hours of darkness. She still said nothing to any, for her English was not sufficient, as indeed his Chinese was not, for her to confide in Captain Pegleg. She had not words with which to tell him so elaborate a tale.

And that second night all happened as before, and worse than before. Once again there was the feeling that the vacant rooms were filling with a bodiless watching enemy, then the silent horrible approach that no footsteps heralded. Once again the incense sticks were broken and flung in the face of the goddess in whose honour they had burned; and then, as Li Wan sprang up, she heard the sharp crack of a blow, and saw spring out, in its wake, upon the goddess's white face, the imprint of a great muddy hand.

The shining face had been struck and befouled.

Yet once again her horrified spring forward encountered only empty air.

She brought silken cloths and water and reverently washed that slapped, divine face clean again. But her heart was beating hard with fear. Her lord's house was plainly infested with evil spirits, and—surely only in this one space and for this one hour—they were stronger than the great, pure Kuan Yin.

She had only one comfort. Not yet had these dark powers been able to overthrow and break the image. That must be a task too great for them.

The next day Sarai Quincy came to her grandfather's house for the first time since she had left it.

She came in the bright gold of morning, and flung her arms about Li Wan, her young lips warm and eager. Almost too eager; they seemed to burn the cheek they touched.

"I can't stay long. Mother's at market with the Barrets, and she's going to stay and eat dinner with them. I'm supposed to be looking after the boys again. Oh, it's good to see you again, Li Wan!"

"And to see you, little plum blossom." Li Wan kissed her, too; kissing was a thing she had learned from Captain Pegleg, the art being little practised in China. "But how did you get here? Who brought you?"

"Oh, either the boys or I can always steal old Jeems Harris's skiff. He's not careful." Sarai laughed, with too much malice.

Li Wan said gravely, "You should not be spiteful, little plum blossom. You should not laugh so scornfully at the man's carelessness, when it

serves you so well. As if you wished to hurt him."

"He's good for nothing," said Sarai, coolly, "except to be hurt. And I'm not hurting him. Don't waste our time thinking about him, Li Wan." And again she put her arms about the older girl.

They talked, and Li Wan told her something of the strange happenings in the house, of the sacrilege against Kuan Yin. And Sarai's eyes grew round and glowed.

"I'd have loved to have seen that. Queer things always have happened here. Especially when people prayed. I remember once when mother was praying, and a vase she set a lot of store by—it'd been great-grandmother's—her grandmother's—fell off the table and broke in a thousand pieces. I saw it fall and nobody was touching it; the boys and I were all too far away. But mother said we must be lying, and whipped all of us for it. She never would believe, when things got broken, that it was anything but accident or some person's badness. Though grandfather says it's happened ever since he can remember, too."

"There has been an evil spirit in the house so long?" Li Wan had caught most of what was said; she looked troubled.

Sarai laughed. "There've been evil spirits in the house ever since it was built. Old Joseph Quincy, while he was alive, had his familiars. The familiars are still here, and maybe old Joseph is, too. I hope so. Only I'd think he'd do worse things—not just tease people—if he were."

"Why should your honourable ancestor wish to harm his own people?"

"Because we're not like him. We're religious and he was a witch."

So Li Wan heard for the first time of her lord's wizard ancestor, and could not understand the tale.

"But my mother's uncle was a great magician, and no man called that unlawful, or tried to put him in prison for it. He was head of a great religious house, and all honoured him. Why did they not honour my lord's honourable ancestor for his magic?"

Sarai laughed more loudly. "People here don't honour magicians. They don't believe in them any more, and when they did they hung them. But I believe in them. I'd like to be one. Tell me about your uncle, Li Wan."

Li Wan told her, as best she could. Of her childhood in Mongolia, where her father had been a taoti, representing the Chinese Emperor at Peking, and had taken to wife a Mongol lady, the niece of the great abbot who was revered as a *Hutukhtu*, the Incarnate God. That marriage had made the Mongols friendly with him and strengthened his power, and it was because her mother was a Mongol that Li Wan's feet had not been bound like those of other Chinese girls.

"My father did not care. Often Chinese fathers love their daughters and would not have them so hurt. But the mothers insist; they think the tiny crippled feet so beautiful, so good for husband-getting. But my Mongol mother saw no need to cripple me.

"Often, while she lived, her uncle the *Hutukhtu*

came to visit us. I remember the first time I saw him do magic, when I was not much higher than your knee. He took a slave and stood him in the courtyard, and plunged a knife into his breast. I saw the steel gleam as it went down into the man's chest and I saw the blood on it when it came out again. I would have screamed if my nurse had not covered my mouth with her hand. She wanted to watch, and she did not wish anyone to know that we were there.

"She covered my eyes, but not before I saw the man fall and the great *Hutukhtu* strike again, at his belly. And when I looked again he was standing above the man and holding the knife up, and strange things like red worms hung down from it. I did not know then that they were—were—"

"Bowels!" Sarai supplied the word, her eyes shining.

"I did not know that, but I knew they had come out of the man. And I screamed so loudly that we were found, and my mother struck the nurse. But my uncle smiled and said, 'See, little one, he is well. I have not hurt him.' And at his word the slave stood up and smiled. The great *Hutukhtu* made him open his clothes and show me his breast and belly, and there were no wounds there, only smooth flesh. He had made us see what had not happened."

Sarai said, a little disappointed, "So he didn't really kill the man after all? I don't see what use there was in it, then."

"He showed his power," said Li Wan gravely. "He was a magician, no stupid butcher. He killed

only evil men. And he could kill them from afar, without ever touching them with his hands. He would sit for days in a little room in his great stone house, the—the house where holy men like him lived”—Li Wan groped in vain for the word ‘monastery’—“and look at a knife that lay on a table before him. And he would think of the man who should die, and will the death of that man. And then he would send him that knife. And the man would die. It would draw his hand as a light draws the things that have wings”—again she groped for needed words. “It would have power over his mind, so that the man must die. His own hand would close round the knife and kill him.”

“How wonderfull!” Sarai breathed. “Where is the knife now, Li Wan? Did you get it? What became of it when he died?”

Li Wan looked rather sternly into the young eyes. “Such knives are dangerous, Sarai. I have heard tales of one—not my great-uncle’s knife, but that of a great magician of the Black Brotherhood—that killed its master and went wandering through the air like a bird. It would pounce down and kill whatever men or animals it passed. So full of death had it become, the death that the black magician had wanted for so many enemies. It was full of his thoughts. It killed him with his own stored wish to kill.

“My uncle laughed at that tale—he said the harm was all in the thoughts, and never in the knife—but after he was dead two young men who had meant to be holy men—young men who loved each other like brothers—found that knife among

my uncle's things and fought for it. One killed the other with it, and then himself. And he said, as he died, that neither of them had enemies or had ever stolen before. But when they saw the knife they wanted it suddenly as a man who has been days without water thirsts for water."

"So the knife was sealed up at last in a casket and sent to my mother, the niece of the great *Hutukhtu*. And before she died she made me promise never to break those seals, and never to let another do so. And I never will, Sarai!"

"So that's the casket you wouldn't let me touch! It's a shame to keep anything like that locked up and never use it—no matter how people treat you!" There was a rebellious longing in Sarai's eyes.

"I will always keep the seals unbroken," Li Wan said with quiet finality.

But that night the seals were nearly broken. Li Wan was at table when she thought she saw the young girl's figure run past the window, a long cape wrapped about her. She rose and went to the great hall to welcome her, though she wondered much that Sarai should have returned so soon, and at an hour when her mother must be at home. But before she entered the hall she heard quick light steps upon the stairs; did Sarai expect to find her in Captain Pegleg's room? The door was unlocked at that hour; yet it seemed strange that the child should have entered without knocking.

In the master bedroom she found Sarai with the forbidden casket in her hands. The girl's eyes were wild, and at sight of Li Wan she shrank back against the bedpost, with a little cry like that of an

animal about to be deprived of food.

"You've got to let me have it, Li Wan! You've got to! For just a little while! I'll put it back as soon as it's killed mother! I will! I will!"

Li Wan took the casket from her hands; gently but with inexorable determination. She never once let her eyes waver from the wild ones as she did it.

"Little plum blossom, you cannot kill your mother. That would be wicked, whatever she has done. You are her daughter." She did not say, 'You cannot want to kill your mother.' She knew better.

And though Sarai wept and stormed, and showed her great weals on her back she would not let her have the casket.

Sarai said, "Why should you care? She hates you. She'll hurt you when grandfather dies if she's still alive herself. I've heard her say so! And when she found out where I'd been today she 'most killed me. She thinks I'm locked in my room now and can't get out. But I did get out through the window. Oh, let me have the knife, Li Wan! Let me!"

"No, little plum blossom. No."

"You will if you know what's good for you. She'll fix you when grandfather dies! You'll see!"

Li Wan said, "Your grandfather is not dying, little plum blossom. And if he was I could not let her own daughter kill her."

"It'd be the knife, not me! Oh, Li Wan! Li Wan!"

It was six months before she saw Sarai again. During those months her son was born, and was named Joseph after the builder of the house. Li

Wan was glad and proud that Captain Pegleg saw fit to honour him with what must, in his family, be so great a name.

When she said so Captain Pegleg chuckled as dryly as of old. "It'll peeve the family, all right. It's the eldest son that's always supposed to be called Joseph. The heir. I was myself. And it always burned my brother up to think that I'd beat him to it—got born a year and a half earlier. That made me get the house, and he always wanted the house."

He added musingly, "I'd have called Johnny that, but when he was born Esther wanted to name him after her father. And I was still mightily in love with Esther then; always thinking I could wake her up—thaw her out. But there wasn't anything there to thaw out. She was born half-asleep, and she died half-asleep. A perfect lady, and a sweet lass in her way—not a hell-fire termagant like Abby. But your son shall be Joseph. He may get the house some day—he or his—even if he has got three elder brothers. You never can tell what will happen. The years bring queer things."

Little Joseph was three months old when his niece Sarai first saw him.

She came on an evening when Abigail Quincy was again with her own family, the Strongs of Salem. She was an inch taller, and her slender figure had begun to curve into womanhood; but at sight of Li Wan her dark eyes still lit up with the old childish eagerness; and she ran to fling her arms about her.

"You're just the same, Li Wan! You haven't

changed—"your waist is as slim as ever!"

She was not interested in the baby, as Li Wan had hoped. In her mind he seemed to stand for nothing except a successfully escaped menace to the beauty of the beloved. But she prowled around the house, longingly, touching and eyeing everything, commenting.

"You've changed this, Li Wan." Or, "You've changed that, Li Wan. You've made it prettier. Like you."

And Li Wan thought, conscience-stricken, "No doubt it is hard for her, being exiled. She was born in this house."

In the drawing-room Sarai said suddenly: "Are you still having trouble when you try to burn incense before Kuan Yin?"

Li Wan said, "In my heart I burn incense before the goddess. Perhaps she is best pleased with offerings made there."

"What's this?" Captain Pegleg stopped puffing his pipe, and his eyes were suddenly keen.

Li Wan had never told him of her troubles in the room of the shrine, but Sarai told him then. And his hard dark eyes gleamed and grew angry.

Yet at first he only muttered very quietly, under his breath, as if to himself: "No, he would not want a Goddess of Mercy worshipped here."

Then his head snapped back and he looked at Li Wan. "You'll burn your incense to whom you please and to what you please. The dead are dead and I'm alive, and while I live I'll be master here. He'd not like his house left empty. Well, it will be if I don't get my way in it."

He chuckled Sarai under the chin. "Thank you for telling me, girl. If your respected ancestor doesn't stop playing tricks I'll buy a house in town—one next door to your mother's if I can manage it—and Li Wan and I'll haunt the family and leave the ghosts to haunt empty air. Be a good joke on Abby. Last time I was in town she was throwing a fit because I was letting Li Wan turn this place into a heathen temple. Old Joe ought to be ashamed of himself, working with a pious hell-cat like your mother."

Sarai laughed, but Li Wan stared in horror. How dared he so offend his honoured ancestor, founder of his house?

She said quickly, her lips whitening: "Lord surely you would not leave your ancestral roof for the sake of this unworthy one! Such a sacrifice would forever shame me. And it might enrage the noble dead, bring disaster upon us or our son."

Captain Pegleg laughed. "I'll handle the noble dead. If you call that old wife-killer noble. And as for leaving this house, I'd do more than that for you, my girl. You and the sea, you're the only things I've ever found in my life that were better than I expected. Or as good."

He pulled her to him then and kissed her, heedless of Sarai's wide, watching eyes. She was embarrassed, yet her heart sang. Never, even in her wildest dreams, had she dared to hope that he might love her with so great a love. When was it ever heard of that any man would forsake, for a woman, the high, well-built house of his fathers?

Sarai said, "Do you really believe in ghosts,

grandfather?" and Captain Pegleg's face grew grave again.

He answered seriously: "I don't know. There's something in this house, lass; something that that old devil of a wizard left behind him. But to say it's him himself, that's farther than I'd go. Everybody that's sure he or she knows what can or can't be lives in a box. And you don't get much sun or air in a box; you know that there's earth under you, because there has to be something for a box to sit on. But you know precious little about even that earth, and the wonders that are in it. The man that says a thing can't be is just as bold as the man that says it is. Maybe the wise man can't say anything but, 'I don't know.' And maybe we all really live in boxes; but I've got the whole world for a box, and I've always found it a pretty entertaining one; I don't need magic."

He paused and drew a deep breath. "All the same, I know there is magic. It's a good enough name for the working of any law or art we don't understand. What makes a tree put out green leaves as much as what makes a witch able to trouble her enemies. Only a witch doesn't have to be a man; my brother was one. Neither of you girls has ever heard how I lost my leg; you couldn't have, because I never told."

Sarai's eyes were as round and shining as saucers of jet; they looked almost as big. "I thought you went whaling, grandfather; that you fell out of a boat, and the whale got you."

Captain Pegleg snorted. "I never was fool enough to fall out of a boat into a whale's mouth.

This is what happened: I ran away to sea when I was fourteen. Only wonder is that I didn't run away before. Never got along with my father—he was a pious old devil, though not so bad as your mother, Sarai. He knew damned well that things could be broken in this house without any help from careless children. But he thought it was more respectable to pretend otherwise and whale us whenever anything of that sort happened. Well, I got tired of it and left a string tied on the stairs that wasn't either ghost-stuff or accident. He fell over it and broke a few bones and I figured I'd better get away before he got well enough to attend to me. I shipped aboard a whaler; my brother helped me, and I wondered why at the time. Before that he'd always worked to get me into trouble, not to help me out of it. We weren't over friendly; he'd always been a queer, sickly little beggar, telling tales (especially on me) and dreaming dreams.

"But he helped me get away, and I was on that whaler for three years. Didn't have too easy a time there, but I did have the sea and a change of bosses. All went well enough until the last time that the ship put a little boat over—the last time on that voyage.

"I was on the boat with a harpoon—seventeen and feeling pretty good, but no greenhorn. And it was just when I was leaning forward to harpoon that whale that I saw my brother beside me.

"He was older and bigger than when I'd last seen him; maybe, in that instant, I wouldn't have known him if it hadn't been for his eyes; black eyes, shining and greedy, and full of the devil—just

the way they always had been when he'd known he was going to get me into trouble; only a hundred times more so, a hundred times more evil. The evil purpose in them, and his being there at all—both things knocked me silly. I didn't harpoon the whale; I didn't move; I just stood there, like a fool, with my jaw hanging down.

"And then his hands shot out as if to push me. I sidestepped and there wasn't room to sidestep; I saw his grinning face above me when I fell. I saw it till the whale's teeth closed on my leg, and after that I wasn't looking at anything any more. He wasn't on the boat, of course, when the men got what was left of me back on to it. And when a Portuguese said something about thinking he'd seen another fellow for a second, standing by me in the prow, I laughed at him. I wasn't going to have anybody saying I'd lost my head as well as my leg.

"But that was later. A lot of things came later. I had a long time to lie in my bunk and feel the wounds where my leg had been and to feel my leg when it wasn't there. And to wonder how my brother'd got there when he couldn't have been there. I tried to think he hadn't been. But I knew I'd never gone to sleep and dreamed in broad daylight before, and I didn't think I'd have begun it when I was standing on my feet and busy. No; I hadn't been dreaming; I was as sure of that as I was as sure that I'd never stand on both feet again. And I got to remembering things; times when it had seemed as if young Ezra could be in two places at once; things that had puzzled me when we were both boys together. And I remembered old books

that he used to pore over in the attic; books that had belonged to the old Quincys that were suspected of witchcraft, and that my father had hidden there, but never quite seemed to dare, somehow, to destroy. I remember how Ez. used to say that those books explained that a man had more than one body—one inside another, the way some of your Chinese dishes fit together, Li Wan; only the inside body wasn't smaller and just as solid, like another dish; it was made of finer stuff than flesh, and most people didn't know how to get it loose and send it out to do things for them. Ez. said that witches did; that they didn't need broomsticks; those were only children's stories. Ez. could be mighty lofty about children; he never really was like a child.

"I thought a lot, but I said nothing. Even when I got home I said nothing and waited. I wasn't suprised to see Ez. looking exactly like he'd looked that day in the boat; I looked at him real hard as I shook hands with him, and saw he hadn't changed a mite since I'd last seen him—I'd have known him anywhere. And I wasn't surprised, either, when he jerked back and darted a funny look at me. A suspicious, scared, sidewise look. He knew where I'd seen him last. And he knew I knew.

"But for months we neither one made a move. We were mighty brotherly; more so than we'd ever been in our lives. He was just as friendly and sympathetic as the rest of the family. And I grinned at him and purred like a cat.

"Until one night when I'd got my strength back and grown pretty nimble on my peg-leg. Then I

asked him to go walking on the cliffs with me above the sea. He looked scared for a minute, and then he grinned. He had the nerve to keep on trying for what he wanted, just as I'd known he'd try. So we went up together, and he urged me to walk on the inner side of the path—it'd be safer for me. But I wouldn't, and he thought that was fool's pride. I even took the nice brotherly arm he offered me for support, and he was surprised then! I think he had thought I'd balk at that.

"He talked all the way up the cliff, and I let him talk. I thought: 'He can't let his double loose'—I think that's what the Egyptians call it—'while he's exercising his jaws so hard.' That takes quiet, I'm sure; a minute of it, anyway; concentration. But he never got that quiet. The instant he stopped talking I heaved with the arm that I'd had tucked so trustingly through his and spun my whole body round and his with it. I pushed him just as he'd meant to push me. He tried to catch me as he went over the edge, but I kicked him with my wooden leg—with the gift he'd given me—and he fell. The rocks below made a better job than the whale had; you can't depend on a whale."

He was silent; and the two girls stared at him. Li Wan's face was white, but Sarai's was flushed, and her eyes blazed with triumph. "You showed him, grandpa! You showed him who deserved the house!"

Captain Pegleg said: "He was nervous. He shouldn't have talked so much. If he'd kept his mouth shut he might have got me; I wouldn't have known so well when to strike. But I knew he'd be

nervous; when he knew I was up and giving him a chance at me. The direct way was never Ez.'s way."

He added, chuckling: "Had good Biblical warrant for what I did, too. 'Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live.' "

Li Wan said nothing. To her it seemed a great pity that her lord should have had to slay his only brother. All her family-loving Chinese blood shrank from the horror of the deed; though never, even in the inmost recesses of her mind, would she have allowed any criticism of Captain Pegleg.

But Sarai thought proudly, 'He is a man. When someone injures him he takes revenge, and when someone is in his way he gets them out of it. Though he sent me away from here, and away from Li Wan, to get mother out of it, I will not hate him any more. Why should he spare anyone? I, too, will spare no one when the day of my own strength comes.'

And so her one-time hurt, and the malice to which it had given birth, died in a grimmer thing.

That same night Captain Pegleg insisted that Li Wan light more incense beneath the statue of Kuan Yin, and then and thereafter it burned undisturbed. Whatever powers lurked in the house evidently had heard and feared the threats of Captain Pegleg.

For four years there was quiet in the house. Captain Pegleg went sometimes to the mainland and dined with his respectable sons and families. Always he would tell them how their Chinese near-stepmother and their little brother were, "since you haven't had the grace to ask. Mind your manners,

boys." And always they would endure in white-lipped silence. Once Abigail's set mouth made him laugh. "Better watch those jaws, Abby. If you screw 'em together any tighter you'll smash your own teeth in." And when she rose and left the table, sailing out of the dining-room in offended hauteur, he leaned back in his chair and laughed so much that he had to hold his sides.

"Stately as a frigate under full sail! Only Abby'd be one of these d—d new steamboats! She's got steam enough to run a fleet."

John Quincy said coldly, "Will you have some more gravy, father?" And Captain Pegleg waved the gravy boat away. "No thankee, Johnny boy. Not unless it tastes a lot warmer than you sound."

He made no more voyages. The new steamships he hated were replacing the clipper ships that he loved, and with characteristic shrewdness he had shifted his fortunes from the East India trade to real estate near Boston. Love for the sea did not blind him, any more than anything else had ever blinded him.

But his sons had had no such foresight. Although they did not love the sea it was hard for them to realize that new-fangled inventions could depose and ruin the old and proud and established. Their investments began to crumble with the clipper trade, and their father's fortune to look more desirable than ever. With hard and suspicious eyes they looked towards the island on which they had been born. Who knew what kind of will that Chinese woman would get the old man to make? How much he would leave her bastard son?

Then on a winter morning, the day of Li Wan's son's fifth birthday, Captain Pegleg fell as he was coming down the high old stairs. He was breathing stertorously and his face was mottled when Li Wan and the servants picked him up. The doctor, hurriedly summoned from the mainland, diagnosed a stroke.

That night, for the first time in years, Li Wan stood face to face with her lord's three elder sons. They had come to take possession of the house and of their father, and only Captain Pegleg's bellows and the doctor's half-hearted support drove them off. Li Wan saw that the doctor had no real wish to support her, though he saw that she was essential to his patient's comfort. Fortunate indeed it was for her that Captain Pegleg had recovered his speech.

"If he hadn't they'd have turned you out in the street like a stray dog," Sarai told her when she came.

"But I am the mother of his son," Li Wan said gravely, staring. "How could his brothers, my lord's own flesh, do so foul a thing?"

Sarai laughed. "They'd keep the little boy. They'll say you're not fit to have him—a heathen and a harlot. You're not a Christian, Li Wan, and you're not married, so you've got no rights under the laws here. They've got it all mapped out; I've heard them planning. They're concerned about their little brother—since they know he's going to share in the money."

Dawn was almost upon them. It touched their faces with grey fingers, where they stood whisper-

ing near the head of the stairs. Sarai's mother thought her asleep hours ago; not until the prim stately house on the mainland was quiet had Sarai dared to steal out to the house on the island; and that night it had been long in quieting.

But now her coming had brought no consolation to Li Wan; only fresh terror. The future loomed over her like a black, cliff-high wave ready to fall; like descending and everlasting night.

The fall had broken the bones of Captain Pegleg's right hip. He would never be able to walk again, even if he fully recovered from the stroke. And how, in such a plight, could any wish long life for him, who had been so strong?

For a long time after Sarai had left her Li Wan sat very still. Before her were no longer the long, expected years of widowhood and twilight; loss and gloom still to be lightened by the growth and laughter of her child. All would end for her when her lord ended; not only love and happiness and the fullness of life, but motherhood and all its cares and sweetness; every reason for existence.

She would never go back to such a house as the one on Willow Lane, she who had known love. They could not starve or degrade her; she could always die.

Death would be easy, but it would not end the pain. For Abigail would have her child. And all Li Wan's being cried out against that, in one frantic, helpless scream of anguish.

It should not be! It should not, could not be! But it would be. . . .

She rose and went to the room of her shrine and

burned incense before Kuan Yin. Yet she burned it with the bitter knowledge that the goddess had been unable to defend her own image or her own shrine. Captain Pegleg's strength alone had held back the evil spirits of the house, Captain Pegleg's strength that now was going. . . .

She half-expected to see the incense sticks broken again before her, to hear again the savage slap upon the goddess's face.

But nothing happened. The dark silence about her was as cold and empty as an unfilled grave. Perhaps the Dark Powers knew that no manifestation of theirs could make her desolation greater.

With stiff lips she prayed to the goddess, stubborn and proper and determined prayers, but her heart cried, 'Kuan Yin, you are powerless. Nowhere on earth, or in the heavens above or the depths below, is there any help!'

And the goddess stood stiff and white and answered nothing and heard nothing; a piece of shining alabaster; no more.

No help in her. No help anywhere except in a dying man, and Li Wan fought with all her strength to hold the life in him.

The days and nights wore, and sometimes he was fully conscious, and sometimes his mind wandered. The stroke seemed to have left a cloud upon his brain, and of that Li Wan was glad; because his attention, that could not long remain fixed on any one object, was so spared full realization of his own helplessness.

Every day his sons came over from the mainland. Every day Li Wan greeted them coldly and led

them in to greet their father, and every day they ignored her with stiff discourtesy, and treated her as if she had been a leper. She kept her son out of their sight as much as she could, but they asked the servants about him, although they would not speak to her when they could avoid it.

They wanted to bring in nurses, and the doctor joined them in this, but Li Wan frantically opposed it. What if, in his present haziness and forgetfulness, her lord should seem comfortable enough with one of the nurses, should forget to ask for her?

She egged him on to stage an angry refusal of the proposition, but she knew that the doctor knew of that egging. It was one more count against her.

"Why should she keep out decent women, white women?" John Quincy demanded, pacing the floor. "Does she not want them to see what is going on here? Is she poisoning my father with her heathen drugs?"

"I am sure she is giving him only what I tell her to give him." The doctor spoke somewhat stiffly. He was on the side of respectability; he fully sympathized with the legitimate sons' desire to bring the scandalous state of affairs on the island to an end. But he could not imagine Li Wan being so blind to her own interests as to try to poison her lover.

"You aren't here every minute, doctor." Sam Quincy's eyes were shrewd. "You can't tell what she may be giving him when you're away. The old man used to keep opium in that black cabinet in his bedroom. My mother had to have it in her last

illness—that was before your time—and he brought her the best, from China. Li Wan could use that if it's still there."

"I have instructed the servants to keep watch when I am not here," the doctor said. "I did not know that there was opium on the premises. I will search the cabinet next time your father sleeps."

He did, but found nothing. There was a reason for that.

Li Wan was with her lord day and night, and she was growing very tired. Fear and exhaustion gnawed at her together, vampire-mouths that sucked out her strength. Even when she dared to steal a few hours from Captain Pegleg's side and to leave him with Meg, the most pleasant and trustworthy of the maids, she could not rest. Her uneasy, tired sleep was broken by evil dreams and sudden, frightened wakings.

Until the afternoon when she found the opium in the inmost, darkest corner of the cabinet. She knew what it was, though she had never used it; she had heard only that the coarse-haired foreign devils had brought it into her country, and that some feared, and many loved it. It was dangerous if used too freely, but a little was supposed to bring happy dreams, and peace.

She thought, 'I will never again know happiness, except in dreams. What if it would give me a little rest?'

One hour of escape would be wonderful. Too wonderful not to be sought.

So the next time she rested she took a little opium.

Yet though she dreamed she did not rest; no happiness came to her. Rather, there came again that sense of space which had haunted her the first night she had kept watch before the statue of Kuan Yin. The house again seemed immeasurably still, immeasurably vast. Neither Captain Pegleg nor her child seemed to be there. She searched for them, but could not find them. She had difficulty even in finding her way from one familiar room to another, for the passages seemed to change and lengthen. Every time she thought that she should come to a known door they grew suddenly yards longer before her advancing feet; or else twisted and led her down fresh lengths of winding passages never seen before.

Terror took her, and she tried to find one of the outer doors, to escape and stand in the clean sunlight under the sky. But she could not; she only lost herself more deeply in the maze of unknown, winding passages; among the known familiar rooms that they joined. She tried to reach the windows, but they seemed to have grown very far up and high away; as though the walls had thickened. Bars had sprouted before their inner sills, that were now feet deep, and when she tried to peer between the bars the window-panes were only a bright blur constantly receding, growing farther off and smaller, until she drew back in terror lest they vanish altogether, and leave her in the dark.

Yet so long as she did not try to approach them the windows remained the same size as of old, and as bright as ever.

For what seemed like many years she wandered

through the house, and she wondered that her hair did not grow grey, or her flesh wrinkled. Strange people were all about her, people with white faces, but with clothes very different from any she had ever seen in either China or her lord's land. They did not seem to see her, nor to hear her voice when she spoke to them, and yet they seemed at home. She could see the Quincy features in their faces, and even finally, in those of two young men, traces of her own face.

Somehow that frightened her more than all else, and she turned and ran away from them, down the maze of strange passages, until she came to a room that she had never seen before.

It seemed to be the drawing-room, yet it was larger and darker than the drawing-room, and full of shadows. When she looked about it she grew dizzy, and could not see its corners. Then she saw something else, and ceased to look towards any other thing on earth or (as might well be in that strange place) beyond earth.

Before the fire-place a man was standing. The red flames behind him outlined his tall dark figure sharply, and seemed to leap up towards him greedily, spitting in baffled, angry hunger.

He stood very still, and his dark face was very still, too, every feature in repose, yet neither the house nor the flames were so terrible as that face.

He said quietly, "Niece of the *Hutukhtu*, I have waited long. You have been long in coming to me, who alone can help you. To me, with whom alone you, the foreigner and sprung from the wizard's breed, ever can be allied. They hate you, these

Christian fools, as once they hated me; but you, who worship the weakling's goddess, Kuan Yin, are at their mercy. While here, on my own hearth, in this house I built, I still hold in bonds the fire with which they meant to burn me. You still hunger for me, eh, flames?"

He raised his hand, his lips smiling mockingly, and the fire leaped up as though on glowing wings. It rose as his arm rose; it hissed and crackled as if in rage, and darted out into the room so far that it narrowly missed his falling fingers. Then it shrank back again, sputtering, into its place upon the hearth.

Li Wan stood like stone. She said, dully, half-stupefied, "You are my lord's honourable ancestor?" She thought with horror, 'He is dead.' And then realized that her thoughts had been so loud as her words. Here one heard thoughts; there were no earthly voices.

He smiled. "Dead, but not gone. I will never be all gone while this house stands. I built well. Of this house inside the house I am still master, and shall be so long as its earth-self stands. Though soon even I must make a change. You are the last person who, while still in an earth-body, shall look upon my face."

Li Wan shivered. She had all she could do not to draw back, and then it came to her that this was foolish, this impulse to retreat. Her body still lay on a couch in the master bedroom, near Captain Pegleg's bed. What she was in could be only its Double, that vaporous, finer body of which her lord had spoken. But she hoped violently that this

dark man would not touch it.

He said, "You fear me. You may suffer for that, as others have suffered. As my wife did, though I made no effort to hold her snivelling soul here to bore me. You shall not escape me so easily; you are stronger, and you have in you the blood of wizards. Such blood as is needed here, in this temple that I built to the God who made me in His image."

Li Wan said, "You want something from me? What service I can honourably give to my lord's dead I will give. In China we are taught such service to the dead." Her mind was groping, like a frightened climber among dark abysses, for familiar ground.

He answered: "I am not to be served by fools' talk of honour. I am above and beyond honour. Leave such foolishness on the altars of your namby-pamby Kuan Yin. Be true to the strength that is in you. Strike at your enemies and mine."

Li Wan said wonderingly, "Does my lord call those of his own house enemies?"

"All those who oppose the purpose for which this house was built are my enemies. And my descendants grow weak and foolish, sprung as they were from a weakling mother. He who brought you here had strength, but he would not let me use it. And the others are worse than useless; even the girl Sarai, though she has savagery, has too little brain."

Joy leaped in Li Wan, even in that place and in that hour. "You would have my son carry on your line?"

"I will give his line that chance. My stock needs

new blood, and you have brought it. Wizard's blood from the land on the roof of the world, the land of ancient wisdom. But neither your son nor his sons' sons can be masters if so many of the unfit live. They must die, those who cannot serve my purpose. Your uncle the *Hutukhtu* would have known how to go about that work. I will show you how."

Li Wan's thoughts rose to a cry. "Lord, I am a woman! How could I kill many men? Even if they were not my lord Captain Pegleg's own flesh, and therefore sacred to me?"

"Then let your son be beaten and teased by Abigail Quincy's sons through all the years of his childhood. Let him grow up cowed and hopeless, ashamed of you and cursing the hour of his birth. Die yourself in the gutters of China, and let all your enemies triumph over you. Will you do that, niece of the *Hutukhtu*? Are you as weak as my wife, the fool?"

First his words were torture; they were like knives turning in her wounds. And then they seemed to awaken thirst within her, so that all her being was a parched throat crying out for water; the blessed, bliss-giving water of revenge.

Yet once again the thought came: 'They are your lord's sons, and his son's sons. The flesh of him you love.' And the white image of Kuan Yin rose before her memory, pale and shimmering, the symbol of all gentleness, all goodness; the image that even this master of darkness, though he had insulted and defiled it, had not been able to throw down. She cried out, "Oh, Kuan Yin, help me!

Come to me at the last!"

But nothing came, and he grew taller, swelling in his rage, so that his head touched the shadows where the ceiling should have been. And louder than the hiss of the flames came the hiss of his hate: "Fool! The statue stands so long as it stands in your own heart. No longer. When their hands twist your heart hard enough, so that all faith is dead, then shall I put forth my hand and pull it down."

She woke in the room with Captain Pegleg, and heard the death-rattle in his throat.

Towards evening the three tall Quincy sons brought the minister. They felt that their father should have whatever help might still be open to his lawless and endangered soul. At least they felt that they wished to tell their churchgoing mainland friends that they had done everything possible to save that soul.

Once, late in the afternoon, Captain Pegleg had roused a little; enough to be told that they were coming. He whispered; he could no longer speak: "Keep 'em out. I've steered my own course for a good many years now I can steer it to wherever I'm going. I'll not be preached at when I'm—too far gone—to answer back. Tell John and Jim and Sammy they're—getting my money—all they really want."

At the door of the master bedroom Li Wan met them, her hand upon the knob. Her slender figure barred their way inside.

"My lord wishes to die in peace, untroubled. Will you thwart his last wishes, you, his sons?"

John said, tight-lipped: "Out of the way, you heathen — —! Will you try to damn my father's soul in death as you have done your best to bring damnation upon it while he lived?"

Li Wan stared at him proudly, still not fully understanding, still innocent. "My lord, this humble slave has served your father as faithfully as any woman could. Against my chastity and loyalty you can bring no charge. But never had I heard of such ungrateful and impious sons as you, who presume in your disrespect to tell your father how to conduct himself in his own house, who flout his dying wishes as you flouted and defied him throughout his life."

John Quincy moved towards her, his face a dark flame, but she slammed the door in his face. When he banged upon the panels and shouted open she answered only, "I will obey your father." And Sam and the minister pulled him back. Jim said under his breath, "I know how you feel, Johnny. But father's dying in there; we've got to remember that. We'll deal with her later."

John said, "How do we know that she's not killing him? Keeping us out long enough to finish her work?"

In the great bed inside Captain Pegleg stirred and chuckled. "Good—girl, Li Wan! Wish I'd—married you. Seemed like—tomfool waste of time—and—knuckling under, but you might have been—safer."

Li Wan said: "I have been honoured with the service of my lord."

That night, in the grey dark that comes before

the dawn, he died.

Mid-morning saw Abigail Quincy mistress again in the house on the island, and Li Wan banished from the master bedroom for ever. She sat alone in the little shrine-room with her helpless gods, forbidden to go near her lord's body, or to speak to any of the children, even her own child.

"You'll stay here where nobody can see you," John Quincy had told her. "A servant can bring your meals to you here. We're not going to be further disgraced by having you show yourself to the people who come to pay their respects to father. A week from tomorrow the *Rebecca Norris* will sail for China, and her captain will put you ashore in whichever Chinese port you like. With enough money to start your own brothel, hussy."

Li Wan said nothing. She sat very still.

Her little son knew where she was, and once he came to the door and cried for her. She heard Abigail Quincy strike him and take him away. And still she sat with folded hands.

All day long she sat there, unmoving. Her world had ended, and she had gone down into a darkness as full of pain as that everlasting doom that the pious, orthodox Christians about her believed she merited. Indeed, they had sent her down to that hell that they had made; for though it takes a God to create a world, it takes the men who think they follow Him to create hell.

Night came, and with it Sarai. "I can't stay but a minute, Li Wan. Mother's watching me, and if she catches me I'll catch it! Oh, Li Wan, if you only had let me have the knife! Let me have it

now; if she were dead maybe we could find some way for you to stay— —"

Li Wan said: "Bring me some hair-combings from the heads of your brothers and, if you can get them, some parings of their nails."

She heard the words; she knew that they came from her own mouth, but not from her brain. She did not know what they could mean. Or care.

But it seemed that Sarai knew. She drew back, startled, and stared at Li Wan. In her white face her black eyes seemed suddenly darker than the blackness around them.

"All right, if that's what you want. They've always been nuisances anyway; but I'd rather get rid of mother."

Li Wan said, "They are what I want." Her voice was flat and strange, and not her own.

Sarai slipped away in silence. But in an hour she was back, and in her hands were untidy bits of human hair, and the gleaming edges of human nails. She said, "I told the boys that they'd have to cut their nails for grandfather's funeral. And they did. All but John; his nails were all right. I haven't got anything of his."

Li Wan said, "It is enough. Three will do, and you have here the hair and nails of three. Let your parents keep their eldest son." And then she added, with her own voice, words that came from her own brain: "Thank you, little plum blossom, for these things that you have brought me."

She kissed Sarai, who went away again into the night. She looked at the queer little gifts and thought, 'What shall I do with them now I have

them? Why did I want them?"

She thought that she should lie down and rest, but she was very tired. She thought that it did not matter now what she did, whether she tired herself or rested, lived or died. She dozed uneasily where she sat, and as she dozed she dreamed.

The white figure of Kuan Yin shimmered in the moonlight. And it said to her: "Can you not trust to the true good, that works slowly? Will you lend your strength to pull down the house of him that loved you? Remember that no night can be dark enough to drown the morning when it comes."

Li Wan said, "The night is very long. And I shall not live to see the morning."

And in her dream the statue of Kuan Yin answered her: "No; but others will. Would you lessen the number of those that live to see the light? There is not too much good in this child whom you would make your helper in the murder of her brothers. Will you take what little good there is—her love for you—and use it to turn her into a nightmare thing of the darkness? A distorted, twisted thing, given over to absolute evil?

"Could you not sleep sweetly under the yellow soil of China, where you were born? More soundly, more wholly, than ever you can here? Will you leave your shadow to be a puppet roaming these hills, coming perhaps at some invoker's call, helpless, of itself, to help or harm? Were they so sweet, those years of wandering here in your vision, that you wish them to come true? Is vengeance worth such bondage, woman who worshipped me?"

Li Wan said, "Why speak, when you cannot

help? I will do what I can to help my son; to avenge myself. She shall not keep all her sons; this woman who has taken my son from me."

Then she woke sharply, crying out. The whole room rang with the sound of a great crash. For the statue of Kuan Yin had fallen, and the moonlight gleamed upon its shattered, shining fragments.

Next day was the day of Captain Pegleg's funeral, and solemn, finely dressed people filled the house, and sat and listened to the minister, who talked warily, carefully of the dead. All was propriety, decorum. And hidden in her lonely little room the Chinese woman sat and embroidered; embroidered like one possessed, her slim fingers working swiftly, madly, as if they raced with time.

She worked on a great square of blue silk, and on it she outlined a boat, and above the boat pale clouds that turned the upper part of the blueness into sky. Clouds that were white when first she wove, and then turned grey. For over each white thread she put in a dark one, until the sky that had seemed sunny was full of storm.

While the grave-sods were being shovelled down upon Captain Pegleg's coffin she worked, and through the long hours of evening, while the Quincys ate and talked and sometimes even laughed, secure in their possessions and their triumph.

Next morning, Captain Pegleg's lawyer came to read the old man's will. He asked for Li Wan, but Abigail Quincy said, "She has locked herself in her room and won't see anyone. Completely beside herself—heathen savagery, you know. You could

do nothing with her; we will look after her interests."

So the will was read without Li Wan. It gave her custody of her boy, who shared equally in the estate with his half-brothers, and it disinherited any son who might, then or thereafter, contest any provision of the will. The Quincys had expected that. They knew the importance of getting the ignorant foreign woman away quickly and without fuss, before she could learn her rights.

The lawyer left, not so solicitous, perhaps, as he would have been for a client who was a white woman and respectable.

And in her room Li Wan wove on. Three embroidered figures sailed in the embroidered boat now, and the hair on their heads was human hair. Their tiny hands had tiny nails, held in place by threads.

So the day passed and night came. The Quincys went to bed, and the whole house was still. But still the Chinese lady sat at her embroidery.

Once the young Sarai crept down, in the dead of night, to that little room where the lamp burned, and the statue of Kuan Yin no longer stood. But she stopped at the door, and did not go in. She thought she heard a man's voice inside, speaking to Li Wan.

He said, "It is well. I would set my house in order before I go, I who must change. It may be that some day I shall come back in a new garment of flesh, and be visible master in this house as I was of old. Or I may find other work. But in any case I have brought here and shall leave here that which

will not go."

Something made Sarai turn and flee. Always afterwards she was sorry for that. For she thought she knew whom she had missed meeting. When she did manage to see Li Wan she said to her, "Has my great-great-great-grandfather Joseph appeared to you? The man who built the house?"

Li Wan shuddered and put her arms around her. She said: "I do not know. There is one who comes. Child, never try to deal with him. He is evil—all evil. I do not know whether he is your honourable ancestor or some evil thing in his likeness. Such might well wear his form, for he brought wickedness with him to this land and built wickedness into this house to live in its walls for ever. Remember what I say, little plum blossom; for you alone of all in this house have been good to me, and I would not bring more harm on you. If there are gods, may they forgive me for what I have already brought!"

But Sarai said, "I'm sorry I didn't have courage enough to stay and face him; I don't fit in among the people who live now. He's my kind, and I'll go to him when I die if I can't find him or someone like him before."

Li Wan was silent and looked at her embroidery. She thought, 'I have made certain that you can never fit in among the people who live now.' And when the child had gone she took more opium to dull that memory, as she had taken it through all the days and nights of her labour.

That was the fifth day after Captain Pegleg's death, and that night she found it very hard to

work. Sometimes the embroidery slipped from her leaden fingers, yet still she did the tiny faces over and over, to make them more like.

She thought wearily: 'Symbols; only symbols. So my uncle would have said, the great *Hutukhtu*. Symbols to help my will to focus. . . .'

The eighth night came, and the eighth day dawned fair and smiling, that day that was to see Li Wan set sail for China.

No morning had ever come up more brightly over the mainland roofs, never had the sea smiled more gladly upon any, with more sunlit, chuckling blueness. And in its early hours Sarai came:

"It's all fixed, Li Wan! They'll sneak away as soon as breakfast's over!" Her eyes were sparkling gleefully.

No answering light glowed in Li Wan's eyes. She said, a little sorrowfully, "Are you sure you are not at all sorry, Sarai?"

Sarai tossed her head and laughed. "If I was a little, at first, I'm over it! I don't care now. Not at all."

Li Wan said, "So be it." And bowed her head. . . .

She went swiftly back to her embroidery then. All through the morning hours she wove, and every thread she used was blue, as blue as the silk upon which the boat was woven. As blue as the waves of the sea.

And every thread went across the boat and the figures in the boat.

Li Wan smiled now as she worked, but her smile was grim, and above it her eyes shone strangely,

like a wolf's. Once she thought she heard a little noise somewhere in the room behind her, a faint rustling such as a mouse might make. And she nodded her head towards the casket into which her uncle's knife was sealed.

"Are you hungry? Wait a little longer, blade of the *Hutukhtu*. A little longer. Soon shall your seals be broken; soon you shall feed."

Thunder answered her, rumbling across the sea.

In the drawing-room John Quincy glanced uneasily towards the windows. A greyness that seemed to have the darkness of night behind it had come over sky and sea. All the blue-and-gold glow of the day was gone, like a candle-flame snuffed out by titanic, invisible hands. He said uncomfortably, "There is a storm coming. Strange, when the morning was so clear. Sarai, where are your brothers?"

"John is upstairs," his daughter answered. "I don't know about the others."

Abigail Quincy looked up from her sewing, her mouth pursed and tight. "Whether Captain Marlin sees fit to set sail in such weather or not, he must take that woman aboard his ship today. I will not have her in this house another night."

"He should be here in an hour," her husband answered, a little shortly. "Sarai, go ask John where your brothers are. He may know."

"Yes, father," said Sarai. As she glided from the room she was smiling, an ugly, gleeful smile.

Abigail looked up with a touch of fear. "If they should have slipped away again to go fishing, and get caught in this—! Go down to the pier, John;

see if all the boats are still there."

John Quincy followed his daughter from the room.

Upstairs his son said angrily, "I won't tell on you, Sarai—with this storm coming up it would get you into too much trouble—but I don't understand it. It was your idea, and the boys thought you were going with them. What made you change your mind?"

Sarai smiled again, and before the gloating evil in that smile he shrank back as if before fire that could burn him.

"I didn't change my mind; I never meant to go. Perhaps I knew that the storm was coming; that mother would be paid back for always loving you boys more than me."

He gaped and she laughed at him. "I'm too big now to run away and go fishing with boys, Johnny. A young lady doesn't do such things. I'll say that if you try to tell on me, I'll say you're inventing the whole story."

They were both in the drawing room when their father came back. He said heavily, "The boats are all in their places, but the boys aren't anywhere on the island; I've looked. And they could easily have swum across to the mainland and taken old Jeems Harris's boat. They've done it often enough before."

"They know better than to do that again," said Abigail grimly. "I taught them a lesson the last time. They are hiding somewhere, John. I will go and see if that woman has packed. She has had time enough. And I will not have Captain Marlin

kept waiting." She turned and stalked out of the room.

Sarai said, "Perhaps we'd better follow. Li Wan may be desperate; she might try to hurt mother."

Her father said, "That is a good idea. Your brother and I will go. But you stay here, Sarai; no young lady should go near a woman like that."

But his daughter as well as his son followed him. And John whispered savagely to his sister, "Much you'd care if she hurt mother!" And then was shocked into silence as again she turned upon him that evil grin. . . .

Abigail did not bother to knock upon the door. She flung it wide, calling sharply, "You inside there!" She would not soil her lips with Li Wan's name.

There was no answer. The little room was a pocket of darkness. It seemed to all the Quincys that it was darker than the rising storm outside could have made it, dark with a strange and special blackness.

Young John said nervously, "Can she have slipped out? Be hiding somewhere?"

Li Wan said, "I am here."

They did not see which of the shadows disgorged her. They did not see her face; only the outline of her body dark against the window, looking taller than it had ever looked before.

Abigail Quincy said, "Are you ready to leave, hussy?"

Li Wan said, "I am ready to go as far as I shall ever go."

She held out her hands, and all saw that there

was a small box in them. She fumbled with it, tearing the seals.

Abigail said harshly, "Is that all your baggage?" But her voice was a little loud; she did not like that faceless figure there by the window; it did not look human.

Li Wan opened the little casket. And as she did so the lightning flashed luridly behind her; it gleamed upon the bronze-handled knife that she took from the casket, and made it blaze like a silver death.

Both John Quincys drew back, crying out sharply. Even Abigail Quincy drew back a step, and caught her breath.

Li Wan said to her, "Do not fear. I have a sharper thing than this for your heart."

She was silent while the thunder rolled. Then she glanced over her shoulder towards the sea that was foaming with the rage of boiling water. Through the window she could see its pale savage anger. She said, "The spells works."

The elder John Quincy took a step forward, but her lifted knife stopped him.

"Be still, and listen! I will never sail away across the sea, but three of your sons have sailed away and shall never come back to you. They will die in those cold waters over which you meant to send me, but I shall not leave this house living, and it may be that I shall not leave it dead."

Abigail Quincy cried out, "Harlot! Do you think that we will keep you here? That you can scare us with a knife—?"

But she did not advance, and Li Wan said, "Not

all of me. But I think that a part of me will be here long after all of you are gone."

Then she drew herself up and cursed them, slowly and fiercely and in English, with such curses as they had never heard.

"May your days be black and your nights be haunted, woman who rejoices in breaking another woman's heart. May your husband and his brothers be as the rocks that stand beside the sea; sterile and without posterity, they and all the sons already born to them. So may they have the due wage of their impiety, those sons that would not leave their father in peace upon his death-bed, and set aside his last commands. May only daughters be born to you, wicked ones. May your seeds wither and your house perish, save through my son's sons!

"And the few that do come after you shall know no peace, but only fear and doom. For the devils in these walls awaken, and prepare to claim their own. All that will not yield to them they will destroy. I do not send them—I have only served them. May my blood make them stronger still!"

Then she raised the knife, and thrust it through her heart.

"The woman was mad," said Abigail Quincy. "An out-and-out lunatic. I believe she really thought that we were the wicked ones, not she. I wonder what this is."

She had picked up a square of blue silk. Grey clouds were embroidered on it, but below them was only a thick patch of blue threads, sewn straight across the blue silk like a great and overwhelming wave.

Abigail snorted. "She was mad, right enough. Looks as if she'd been embroidering, and then suddenly had gone crazy and sewn over the design—blotted out all her work!"

Sarai said, "There was a boat there, and three human figures in it."

"And how did you know that, miss! Go and look for your brothers. They must be hiding somewhere around."

Sarai went, but she did not find her brothers. Their bodies were washed up three days later. And next winter an epidemic raged in Harperstown, and killed the only sons of James and Samuel Quincy. Their aunt, worn with grief for her own sons, died with them.

It doesn't always pay to answer a knock on the door

The Messenger

by Steve Rasnic Tem

Morgan staggered to the door half-asleep. Then he opened his eyes. Then he opened the door. The Western Union man was there.

Still dark outside; it was three o'clock in the morning.

"I'm . . . I'm really very sorry," the messenger said, fumbling with the piece of paper in his hands. "I don't know what brings me here. I . . ." He cleared his throat. "But I've really terrible news."

Morgan frowned at the little man. "This must really be difficult for you. But we all have our tasks to perform. You have your duty."

The little man's eyes darted about nervously. "But you don't understand. We don't deliver these by hand anymore. I don't understand why I'm

here. I've been behind a desk for years; I'm not even a *messenger*!"

"You know, in the ancient world they put to death the bearers of bad tidings." Morgan smiled grimly, then chuckled.

He let the messenger in. The man's clothes were disheveled, his cap awry. Apparently in his rush to get dressed, the messenger had forgotten his tie.

Morgan clucked to himself softly. "Such a mess . . ."

The messenger was beginning to weep, wringing his hands, crumpling the paper, wiping his bald pate beneath the front edge of the uniform cap with trembling fingers.

"I'm really very sorry," the messenger said.

"Oh, that's quite all right. Have some tea? Perhaps some cake?"

"But I'm afraid I have quite bad news."

"Well then, by all means, tell me. You have your duty, remember?"

The messenger cleared his throat. He looked small and vulnerable in his too-small cap and baggy, wrinkled uniform. He stared at the paper in his hands, as if for the first time, then back at Morgan. He lowered his eyes and began to read.

"Your wife and children have been killed in a fiery car crash," he paused. "Wait . . . there must be some *mistake*. The rest of this . . . no responsible official . . ."

"Read me the message." Morgan's voice was firm.

"But sir . . ."

"Read me the *entire* message. You have a job to do."

The Western Union man read rapidly. "The bodies were burned almost beyond recognition. Their faces were fixed in expressions of . . . agony. Your little girl still clutched the charred remains of her doll." He looked up. "I'm so sorry."

Morgan sighed and looked past the messenger, at the endless row of streetlights leading down into the city. "Oh . . . oh, I appreciate your going to this trouble for me, delivering such a personal message and all." He stared at the messenger's sweaty face. "You're really *too* kind."

At four in the morning the messenger had returned. He was pale, his eyes bright red from lack of sleep. "Oh . . . ohhhh. I'm so sorry. You see, they keep calling me, telling me to come down here. With these horrible messages. I can't understand it."

"And who, exactly, are *they*?"

The Western Union man just stood there, watching him.

"*Who?*"

"I . . . I don't know . . ."

Morgan looked down at the messenger's hands. "You're holding the message in your hands." He smiled at the little man. "I'd suggest you read it."

"I haven't slept for days," the man whispered, shaking his head.

"You're a very dedicated man. Won't you come in?"

The messenger appeared suddenly frightened. "No . . . oh, no. I'll just deliver the message and be off. I don't . . . don't want to bother you longer than necessary."

"And the message?"

The messenger read slowly. "Your parents have murdered each other. They . . . they were found with their fingers wrapped around each other's throat. You're all alone now." He opened his mouth, gulping for air. "It says here . . . the message is dated *fifteen years ago!*"

"You do well at your assigned task. Your employers must be quite pleased with you."

The Western Union man shuffled his feet, staring at the welcome mat beneath them. "I suppose I should be leaving you . . . to your grief."

At six in the morning the messenger returned. He was agitated, running his thin hands up and down the front of his uniform blazer. He squinted his eyes.

"Why?" The messenger gazed at him helplessly. "Why does this continue to happen? I haven't slept. I don't even remember how I received these messages. I lie down to sleep and the next thing I know I'm ringing your doorbell, and you're answering the door."

Morgan looked at him impatiently. "You have your task to perform."

The messenger clutched at Morgan's sleeve. "Please. Please, this has to stop."

"You have your *sacred* task. Read me the message."

"I really need this job, you know? I have an old mother to support. And the prices these days, you know what I mean? It takes money."

"Just read me the message. I don't need to know all that; I don't want to know all that. It's not your

job to relay your life history to your customers."

"There's so little caring in the world. We're strangers to other people."

"That's simply human nature, my man. Just read me the message."

The messenger moaned and stared at the paper. After a few seconds Morgan reached over and pulled the paper out of his hands, almost tearing it, the messenger's grip was so tight.

Morgan began to read. "You will commit murder."

The Western Union man whimpered. Morgan put his hand on the little man's shoulder. "You're a fine messenger, a credit to the company."

"I'm really tired. This must stop."

"Get some rest. Drink some coffee. Soon you must make your rounds again."

Morgan closed the door on the slumped figure of the messenger and walked back into his study.

He sat at his desk. He gazed up into the memorial alcove he had prepared above the desk, at the black-framed pictures of his parents, his dead wife and children. "You do a good job, little man."

He ran his narrow fingers over the top message scribbled hastily on his message pad. Morgan read the message silently to himself.

You will be cruel. You will have no compassion. The world has treated you badly.

At seven the doorbell rang once again. He was chuckling as he walked down the hallway from his office. By the time he reached the door there were tears in his eyes from the paroxysms of laughter

wracking his body. He was barely able to nudge open the door, so great was his hilarity.

The Western Union man was down on his knees in front of the door, one hand out beseeching, his eyes white coins, speechless. The little man was weeping.

Morgan howled with a raw laughter as he removed the gun from his coat, aimed, and pulled the trigger.

To the Nightshade

Sullen and sinister, darkly dull of leaf,
Thou rearest amid the brighter flowers,
Like a presage of evil in dreams of joyance—
Evil of beauty thy blossoms,
And purple like the agony of Death,
And their fruit as its livid consummation.
Such a flower art thou
As might spring from the rotting of ancient sin,
Its unavoidable latter confession,
Or from the corroded altar-stone,
Now merged with the blood of its victims—
A hideous and fruitful wedlock—
In some place of sacrifice to monstrous gods.

—Clark Ashton Smith

Something was sucking the life out of the very ground . . .

The Opposite House

by John and Diane Brizzolara

"There's been a Death, in The Opposite House,
As lately as Today—
I know it, by the numb look
Such Houses have—always—"

—Emily Dickinson

The smile slid from Emma Van Borg's face as the last child rounded the corner and was lost to sight. She put two fingers over her eyes and massaged gently. Her plump body sagged against the door frame of the Clarence Corners Elementary Schoolhouse.

She felt more tired than she usually did at the end of the term. There was always a sense of

fatigue, an ending feeling, but this year was the worst ever. She used to make a joke of it, for thirty years she called it her 'Post Parting Depression.' It didn't feel much like birth this year but a disgorge-ment. Not that she had any experience with actual birth, she was a spinster and proud of the name with which she was born.

Emma sighed and looked around in the brisk manner of school marms and motel guests. Everything seemed in order. The chairs were upside down on the desks, all the crayon drawings had been removed from the walls, the textbooks stacked according to grade and left for Mr. Goody, the janitor to lock up in the supply room. She started to make a slow descent down the steps as the janitor arrived on his bike.

"Afternoon, M'm." He called.

"I think you'll find everything in order, Mr. Goody. Have a good summer."

"And you, Miz Van Borg."

She waved him wearily away and started the three block trek to Billy's Paint and Glass where she was to meet her brother, Benjamin, who had the pickup today. They had planned to do some shopping and then drive the seven miles home together. Emma felt preoccupied and out of sorts, her bursitis had been kicking up for a month now, but Benjamin was worrying her too. All that lolling around in front of the television, that wasn't like him.

"Miz Van Borg, wait." Mr. Goody called in his nasal twang. "You forgot this black book here."

"Oh, my." She felt slightly flustered at her over-

sight. "Where was it?"

"Right on the desk, m'am."

"How odd. Well, thank you, it was kind of you."

"No trouble."

Mr. Goody had been the janitor at Elementary for twenty five years and he had never known Emma Van Borg to overlook a detail or forget anything. Her meticulousness was legend. He scratched his head and walked back into the building.

Clutching the book, Emma set off past the schoolyard that still seemed to ring with ghostly echoes of recesses past. She paused at the fence, wrapped her fingers around the wire mesh and stared as if drinking in for the last time, the sight, in her mind's eye, of children playing volleyball, hopscotch and jump rope; shouting, laughing, drawing epitaphs and hearts with chalk (Tommy loves Denise, Justin and Maurine, Goody bites wazoo) until inexplicably she felt the odd, unfamiliar sensation of tears welling in her eyes.

She moved on. She must get home. She would feel better once she was ensconced in her own chair on the front porch with dinner on, the radio tuned to the classical station in Buffalo, Ben puttering around the cider press making ready for fall and perhaps the new Reader's Digest in her lap. Mentally orchestrating her evening, she walked past Wayne's Diner and Rhona's Beauty Salon. There was no accounting for this feeling of melancholy and enervation unless . . . *No, old age does not simply come upon you overnight, does it?* She didn't know.

At the hardware store, there was no sign of Ben. She asked Billy Pless behind the counter if he had seen her brother. He said that he hadn't. He inquired about her health and opened up an aluminum folding chair for her to sit on while she waited for Ben. She sat in the shade of the store's awning between a bicycle rack and a lawnmower display. She watched the sparse traffic on Center St. looking for the red Dodge pickup. After a few minutes of that she removed her bifocals and again massaged her eyes. She decided to rest them for a moment.

She was awakened nearly forty five minutes later by a gentle shaking of her shoulders. She looked up and blinked into the sun now a little lower over the streets. At first she could not make out the two figures bent over her, their faces in shadow. She shielded the sun from her eyes with her palm and squinted up at the hulking silhouettes, one of whom, she wildly imagined for a moment to have a huge pumpkin on his shoulders where his head should have been. She let out a gasp.

"Miss Van Borg, you alright?"

"Oh, yes. I'm sorry, you startled me. I must have fallen asleep." She saw now that the moon-faced young man with the large head was Karl Cotton. The figure behind him, thin, angular, and serious looking was his brother Chris. *My, how they've grown.* She thought irrelevantly.

"Can we give you a lift anywhere, Miss Van Borg?" Chris spoke from behind his brother looking into the store. "Billy's about to close up here."

"Well, Ben was supposed to meet me." She

glanced at her watch. "My word, it's five o'clock. I hope nothing's happened."

"C'mon, it's on our way." Karl offered her his arm. "I'm sure Ben just got hung up somewhere or forgot."

Taking his arm, Emma rose and said, "Well, I don't know about that. Ben's like me, a memory like an elephant." She picked up the black book from the chair. "He remembers what he had for breakfast on VJ day and what color ties Harry Truman wore." Karl laughed and slapped his brother heartily. Chris smiled at the joke and then resumed his frown of concern as he studied his former teacher. *Damn. She looks old!* He counted off the years mentally. The number could explain, only in part, her haggard, almost transparent appearance. Certainly the answer lay elsewhere: illness or depression or both.

Karl drove the station wagon and kept up a running banter about his schooldays. Emma, sitting next to him, smiled and nodded as they headed down Center St. towards Hainesville Rd. Occasionally she would say, "Yes indeed, I remember that well. You were one of my favorites." Actually she had very few recollections of Karl Cotton, his face blended and merged with those of nearly a thousand other reasonably well-behaved but rather thick-witted children she had taught over the years. It was Chris that she remembered with his precocious eyes and dark countenance. She was sure that Chris would have gone off to college and moved to a big city somewhere writing poetry or sensitive novels. That he was still in Clarence,

working his father's farm, did not disappoint her.

After they had made the turn on Hainesville Rd. and had, for several minutes, sat in silence while the shorn fields of the Cotton's winter wheat moved past them in dun resignation, Karl slammed on the brakes within one hundred feet of the Van Borg's driveway so suddenly that Emma and Chris were thrown forward and then back with an uncere-
monious whipping action.

"What the hell!" Chris exclaimed.

"The cat." Emma said.

"Whew! Almost ran it right over." Karl pointed to the streak of rust colored fur running full tilt through the fields. "Come out of your place Emma, uh, Miss Van Borg. Runnin' right for us."

"Ain't that your red tom?" Chris leaned forward.

"Ben's." Emma nodded. "That's Balthazar."

"Well look where he's headed." Chris pointed with alarm. From where they had stopped on the side of the road they commanded a view of Hainesville, the depression ghost town, long since deleted from the maps of New York State for some forty years. Situated perpendicularly to the Cotton farm and the Van Borg place, they could make out, just beyond the fenceposts, the rows of sagging rooftops, the rusted hulks of old jalopies and the bleak, vacant windows of the weathered, wooden structures peering out like plaintive, empty eye sockets at the living world of Clarence. The cat disappeared in the poison sumac that grew through the cracked asphalt and over the crumbling, dry wells of the town that had 'gone bad' so mysteriously and so long ago. The residents of Clarence and

even Brompton, superstitiously had as little to say as possible about its passing.

"Hainesville." Emma said tiredly.

Starting up the engine again, Karl said, "I'm sure he'll be back."

"Nothing ever comes back from there." Emma pointed out fatalistically. "At least not the same."

Karl gave one last look out over the wheat fields at the ruin that was Hainesville. "You sound like him." He snorted derisively and jerked his thumb toward his brother in the back seat.

Emma invited the Cotton brothers for some lemonade on the front porch. They told her they'd love some and didn't mention they'd love a beer more. Karl pulled the station wagon into the driveway and parked behind the red pickup. Chris got out and gave Emma his arm. She pulled herself out of the passenger seat with the laboring gracelessness of a woman twenty years older. She gestured the boys to the porch and shuffled towards Ben's workshop in the rear from which she could hear the sounds of machinery. "Ben?" She called out. "Ben, you hear me?"

Chris and Karl sat on old cane chairs on the porch, swatted at the first mosquitoes of the season and listened to the late afternoon stillness. Just to say something, Chris commented, "This house could sure use a coat of paint."

"That's for damn sure." Karl agreed looking around. "Lawn needs cuttin' too pretty bad." He shifted his weight in the chair and listened to the floorboards beneath him creak. He looked down and saw they were warped and separating in

places. "Shee-it!" He shook his head from side to side as if to say it was a shame.

"Yeah." His brother sighed kicking at a tuft of devil weed growing through the floor.

"Maybe after we build Boogie's barn we should get some folks over here for some paintin' and fix-in'."

"Maybe." Chris did not look at his brother.

* * *

Emma did not find Ben in the workshop. She opened the door to the shed and blinking into the artificial light, saw only Ben's jigsaw, the blade mindlessly vibrating, cutting away at nothing. Tools lay along the bench and on the floor. Her scalp bristled and she fought down a wave of alarm. Something must have happened to Ben, he would no more leave tools lying about and machinery unattended than he would run off to the south seas with a Las Vegas showgirl. As she hurried across the yard and into the house she knew that it was beginning. Whatever the source of her vague malaise and the nameless trepidation that had been growing in recent weeks, it was now upon her.

So convinced she was that she would find her brother sprawled lifelessly on the bathroom floor, his hands clutching a bottle of nitro pills, or curled into a hideous stroke posture near the telephone table in the hall that she nearly ran past him as he sat in his usual chair in the living room, drawing on a long-extinguished pipe and smiling feebly at

The Carol Burnett Show.

"Ben!" She nearly shrieked.

"Oh, Emma." Ben turned in his chair, a curious expression on his unshaven face. "What's wrong? You're home early."

"Ben, it's 5:30. You've frightened the wits out of me." She ran a bony, chalk eraser hand through her grey-streaked hair. Ben glanced at the TV Guide in his lap as if for confirmation.

"Oh oh." He said. "Goddamn, I'm in the doghouse now. I didn't realize. I was working in the shop making a new chute for the cider press and the power went out. I got kind of tired . . . Oh, hell I'm sorry Em. I don't know what I was thinking about."

While Ben ambled shamefacedly out to the workshop to pick up his tools and turn off the saw, Emma moved distractedly around the kitchen making lemonade. The lemons had become soft and moldy along with several other items in the refrigerator. She settled on a bottle of Realemon and a quart pitcher of water. There was no ice.

She arrived with a tray and glasses on the front porch still trying to control her nerves and quiet her heart. She tried not to think of the eerie, slack look her brother wore bathed in the blue-white glow of the television. Chris and Karl engaged in what was obviously an old and tired argument.

"Well why don't Daddy just buy up that land then?" Karl was gesturing towards Hainesville. It was not out of any real desire to bait his brother with a closed subject, but a lingering curiosity that had never been satisfied to his way of thinking.

"Hell, Karl. You know why." Chris batted the subject away peevishly along with a mosquito.

"Cuz it's a spook town?" Karl made a face and mock-ghoulish gestures with his hands.

"Oh shut up." Chris said. "It's just no good is all. Bad land. Just bad land. Leave it at that."

"Well what makes it so damned bad is what I want to know. Oh, hello, Miss Van Borg." Karl rose to his feet followed by Chris. "You find Ben? Everything alright?"

"Oh yes, you were right, Karl." Emma smiled and set down the tray on a rusted lawn table. "The old fool just forgot about me. He was watching his television." Emma seated herself on the rocker, poured the lukewarm lemonade into three glasses and arranged the pleats of her skirt. "What were we talking about?" she asked brightly.

"Real estate." Chris said quickly before his brother could say anything. He took a sip of his drink and grimaced. Emma had forgotten the sugar. He drank it anyway and indicated with his eyes that his brother should do the same and like it.

"Yes, m'am. Real estate." Karl repeated red faced as if he had been caught talking about something dirty, in bad taste.

Just then Ben joined them and they talked of property taxes, the upcoming 4th of July barn building party at Boogie's, the strawberry festival, the relative merits of Macintosh, Red Delicious, Northern Spy, Jonathan and Old Time Baldwin apples in the making of cider, the weather and finally the sunset. Ben began to yawn. Emma

drained her tepid drink oblivious to its bitterness and presently said goodbye to the Cottons.

She guided Ben up the staircase. "Why don't you lay down for awhile, Ben. Look at you. All that television is giving you CBS eyes." Ben chuckled sleepily and shrugged.

"I'm sorry, Em . . . I mean about . . ." He didn't finish. There was a pulpy, ripping sound and his foot went through the mildewed carpet and a rotted stair. He sank to his hip on the steps with a cry of pain. Emma screamed and clutched her brother around the armpits as she leaned against the banister. The railing groaned, an echoing, tenor sound that filled the house like inhuman laughter. She heard a series of snaps and edged away from the rail fearing that it too would give way. It didn't, though several stanchions fell to the first floor hall with resounding, wooden thumps.

With Emma's help, Ben eased himself up and away from the gaping hole in the stairs. "Nothing broken." He said pulling up his pantsleg. "Just scraped. This old house . . ."

"It's not that old, Ben." She said with a whispered edge to her voice.

"I'll have to call Billy Pless tomorrow about some lumber. I had meant to anyway. A lot of work to be done around here. I guess you could say I'm falling down on the job." Emma smiled and guided him to his room muttering assurances. "Don't fret about the stairs, Em. I'll see to it tomorrow, you'll see. I've just gotta turn in early . . . big day tomorrow . . . all those little odd jobs. . . ."

After she had removed his shoes and covered

him, she turned out the light and made her way down the stairs again, slowly, her back to the wall. She peered into the twilight gloom of the stairway and hall, squinting into shadows as if searching for a clue to the house's next betrayal.

* * *

With a gnashing of gears, an oily smokecloud and a rumbling, post-ignition cough, Ben's pickup ground to a halt in the cinder parking lot of the VFW hall. His hands clasped over the wheel were claws in mottled parchment. He rested his head on the wheel for a moment. He sighed, a long expulsion of air and stared through the dusty windshield at the pink and green banner that read: Strawberry Festival Tonight.

Emma prodded him weakly. "Ben?"

He sat up and shook his head as if the action would clear his peculiar miasma. "So doggone tired, Em."

Emma wanted to sit with him there in the car and comfort him, never let him go, but she was resolved to action. She forced her hand to the doorhandle, her legs to propel her out of the truck. "Come on, Ben. It will do us a world of good to be among people again." He made no response, but his eyes fluttered and shut. She hurried over to his side of the vehicle and with an exasperated cry of, "Ben, you promised!" half dragged, half bullied him out.

They trudged up the drive and through the double doors. Every face inside turned to them,

their expressions a mixture of surprise, pleasure and concern. Doc Payne rushed up to them, a crease forming between his brows.

"Emma. Ben. I think it's time to pay your doctor a visit."

She smiled at the diminutive man with the Clark Gable moustache. "Yes, of course." She said thinly.

Ben hitched up his pants in a gesture that was meant to be jaunty and manly. "We really weren't up to comin' out today. Got this damned bug." He made a pass over his nose with a handkerchief. "But Em would've been so disappointed."

Rhona Kleegman put her arm around Emma saying, "You look all done in, Em. You too, Ben. Come, let's sit down. Take a load off the floor." She laughed heartily.

They gathered around one end of the a table, pulling up folding chairs and stools. The ladies served the food, the men took care that their cups remained filled with the 4 Roses spiked strawberry punch. "I didn't bring anything this year." Emma apologized.

"You know there's always too much of everything as it is." Rhona pointed out.

"Ben," It was Boogie Warren speaking. "Sure looking forward to your cider this year. Nothing like a cold glass after mowing quack grass and pigweed all afternoon. How's the orchard coming?"

"Comin' along." Ben answered wearily as if he had to drag the words out of himself.

As night fell, the men talked of spring oats, the new Case tractors in the Brompton showroom, of drags, disks and culpackers. The women discussed

garage sales, quilting and preserving. Lulled by the familiar discussions of familiar topics, Emma felt an odd, slipping away sensation; the lights seemed to dim and the voices to speed up until they resembled the angry buzzing of flies. She deliberately took her lower lip between her teeth and bit down hard until she tasted the coppery sweetness of her own blood. The real world began to assert itself once again in her mind. With an effort she focused on the people before her and recognized the bean-pole form of Chris Cotton. Only then did she recall why she had been so insistent on coming here tonight, she had to speak with him.

"Chris!" She called, waving a tatted hanky at him.

The older Cotton brother drained his punch and sauntered over smiling. Emmas rose and steered him to a vacant corner. She felt Ben's eyes on her. He would want to leave soon, return to that eager maw of a house, but first she must have answers. She turned to Chris who looked decidedly uncomfortable and cornered. "Christopher," she paused. Her legs turned to spindle rods, her hands felt palsied and uncontrollable. She ignored her failing body and willed herself to stand erect, brazen the question out. "I have to know about . . . Hainesville." A light headed feeling of recklessness overcame her, she plunged ahead. "You know something about it don't you?"

Chris pretended to study the unlighted cigarette in his hands, his head cast downward. At length, he looked at Emma and opened his mouth to speak

and smiled. In that moment Emma saw not the lanky farm boy and former student, but Death himself. The deep set, shadowed eyes, the high cheekbones and the smile that she could only see, in that brief second before he spoke, as a rictus grin, made her want to break and run. She knew his words would, at last put weight, form and a name to her doom. She chided herself for a fool. Perhaps he knew nothing. She stilled her flight impulse and smiled back at him now, composing her features into a school marm's look of encouragement.

"Doppelganger." He said.

Emma felt a constriction in her throat. The strange, foreign sounding word meant nothing to her yet it seemed to loose a Pandora's box of phantoms that flitted and cavorted at the edge of her consciousness as if somewhere, in some ancient and inaccessible self, she knew what it was.

Chris was speaking. "Grandma Holler always had stories." He shrugged. His eyes searched the ceiling for quaint recollections. "The Vikings, the little people, Golems, The Old Race. Sometimes they scared me, sometimes made me laugh. I always thought they were just stories . . ." He lit his cigarette.

"Please continue, Chris." She urged in a dry, toneless voice.

"I don't know anything about Hainesville, Miss Van Borg. Oh, I know what everyone else knows. Tommy Tucker fallin' down that dry well there and breakin' his neck. Mary Zeeland, still in a coma in Buffalo after wanderin' in there. No one

knows what happened to her and I don't figure anyone ever will. I know about all the cattle that drifted in through busted fences and were found dead or not at all. But I don't know anything really. Grandma Holler though, I figure she knew something alright.

"Granny and I were drivin' home from Doc Payne's years back. I had just got my farm license and Old Doc wasn't even old yet. I was showin' off, doin' about fifty on that flat stretch of Hainesville road just south of your place when she puts her hand on my arm and says, 'That's close enough, Chris.' I said I was only doin' fifty and she says, 'To Hainesville is what I mean.' In those days I was like Karl. I said, 'What's the big deal about that place, Granny?' and she looks at me, eyes clear as a bell and starts tellin' me. 'When I was a child in The Black Forest there was a village just like Hainesville. One day it was filled with laughter and life and the next day it was gone, all the people and their works were sucked into the ground, into the Doppelganger world to become Doppelgangers themselves.' Everytime she said the word she would cross herself three times and shiver like she was freezin' though this was in the summer. 'That place is the same.' She says, pointing at Hainesville. 'Pray God that whatever took that place is satisfied and has moved away from here. Don't study it too close.' She says. 'But always keep one eye on it and don't turn your back.' Then she shuts down like an old Farmall A on the subject and starts talkin' about bedding flats. Couldn't get another word out of her about it." Chris drew on his cigarette and

looked sheepish as if this had all made him feel a little silly.

Emma, who had listened with a gathering disquiet without really understanding what it might have to do with her, said, "What is a Doppelganger, Chris? Do you know?"

He nodded. "Looked it up. Means twin or double."

She thanked him for indulging an old lady's curiosity and said she had see to Ben. She hurried away from Chris, the word echoing in her mind until it became a gibbering drone.

Boogie Warren was still talking to Ben trying to elicit a promise from him that he would come to the barn raising at his place on the 4th of July. Ben mumbled something about having things to do. Boogie, taking the rejection in stride, turned the subject once again to something he knew would brighten Ben. His apples.

Ben set down his punch with a quick gesture and stood, rounding on the slightly younger man. "I told you the damned apples were coming along didn't I?"

Boogie looked at him concealing puzzlement, alarm and hurt. There was something eating Ben and his sister, something gnawing and undermining their lives. He had the disturbing certainty that it was something the Doc wouldn't have a pill or even good advice for. He looked into Ben's eyes and it was like looking into twin wells full of brackish water: dark, still and foul.

"So you did, Ben." He smiled nervously. "So you did."

Emma arrived at his side and they said good-night. Their neighbors stared after them as they made their way slowly out of the hall.

* * *

She stood in her kitchen one week later and stared, without seeing, at the electric can opener. With one hand she clutched her housecoat closed at her neck. The shabby garment no longer fit her properly, she had lost an inordinate amount of weight in the weeks since school, a fact that normally might have pleased her but now served only to point out more concretely, her quickening deterioration. In her other hand she held a can of Dinty Moore Beef Stew. Unable to make the elementary connection between what she held in her hand and what she was staring at, she tried to remember her purpose there in the kitchen.

As if in mocking reply, the appliance sprang to life of its own accord making a grinding, humming noise. The lights in the house grew suddenly brighter and from her bedroom upstairs, she heard her clock-radio come on. The strains of The Warsaw Concerto drifted through the house.

Then, abruptly, the lights went out, the music stopped and the can opener ceased its sinister noise. Emma dropped the can of stew and threw her hands up over her face. She successfully held back a scream but failed to stop the tears which came in an unbidden torrent.

Ben entered through the swinging door and held a burning match in front of him. The darkness

seemed to absorb the small light eagerly and the match illuminated nothing but Ben's face. Emma looked at him through her tears and caught her breath sharply. He looked hideous like some horrid Hollywood monster with the match eerily lighting his lined features from below.

"Had a power surge and then a failure. The TV's out too . . . Emma, you're crying!" He moved forward to comfort her then cursed and dropped the match, his fingers burned. He felt his way around the kitchen and found a flashlight in the utility drawer. He turned it on and the beam played over the room revealing the pile of unwashed dishes that had accumulated and the bags of garbage that overflowed with TV dinner packages and empty cans of beer. He moved slowly to Emma as if the blackness were a palpable, syrupy medium and put his arm around her. "There there, Em. Now what's the matter. This has happened before, the power company's seeing to it."

"I know. I know." Emma wiped at her tears with the back of her hand. "It's just . . . I feel so awful. Ben, something terrible is wrong."

"Now now. I feel . . ." He sighed into the dark. "I feel like Hell myself. Rheumatism's worse than ever and this damned cold we've got. Maybe we should have Doc Payne over, give us a shot or something."

"Yes, I suppose." Emma drew herself up. "Should I call him?"

"Well, right now you just sit down for a while and pull yourself together. I'm going down to the

cellar and have a look at the fusebox. When you feel more yourself, you can call the Doc." As he spoke, he guided Emma out of the kitchen and into the hall. They passed the large, bronze framed mirror next to the umbrella stand and Emma saw their oddly lit reflections: two hollow-eyed, wraith-like figures huddled together and shambling through a great void. She sat at the telephone table in the hall with her head in her hands while Ben descended the cellar stairs. She was trying to think of something, something important but it kept dancing away from her. Something about Hainesville.

The lights came back on and The Warsaw Concerto again filled the house. She could not hear the can opener. She called out feebly for Ben but there was no answer. In a moment, when she gathered her strength, she would go to the stairs and call out again. He had been down there for some time now. She breathed deeply and picked up the phone. Each number she dialed was like a victory against the gathering enervation she felt. She listened to the line become alive with a subliminally perceived electronic crackling. It rang twice and a woman answered. "Hello."

"Hello, is this Doctor Payne's residence?"

"No, I'm sorry, you have the wrong number."

"I'm terribly sorry."

"That's quite alright, dear."

Emma put the phone down slowly. Her hands shook and the blood in her veins turned to freon. The voice, that familiar voice. She knew it. Against all reason, all sanity, she knew that the voice on

the other end of that line was her own.

And then she remembered what it was she was trying to think of; it was the word Chris had used: Doppelganger.

Ben was still in the cellar.

* * *

From the diary of Emma Van Borg, July 3rd.

. . . I don't know what's wrong with me. (How many times have I written that phrase here in the past weeks?) I don't know what's wrong with Ben either. He worries me more. I have seen him now several times in his shop, just sitting there looking at the backs of his hands or the floor while he runs the lathe or the jigsaw to reassure me he is working. The machines buzz and hum mocking his idleness and lethargy. And mine.

Though Ben refuses to discuss it, I know he feels what I do: the lassitude, the inertia, the sensation of having your heart, mind and soul sucked through the very earth—as if every cell in your body was being weighted down with some menacing, invisible burden. That and the certainty that there is nothing to be done, that it is inexorable.

We are dying, but not in a clean, natural way. There is a presence, a malevolence that is very close to us here. At times I feel I could reach out and touch it, but I am afraid.

Ben was sleepwalking again last night and again I found him in the cellar. He was sitting there like a child drawing patterns in the dust of the floor. I

asked him what he was doing there and he answered that he felt better in the basement. He asked me to sit with him there too, to see if he wasn't right. He was pleading. I cried as I sat there with him like a madwoman in the dust because he *was* right. I knew it even as I descended the stairs. It is better somehow down here.

Oh God, we are insane and we are dying!
We must leave this house.

* * *

The stars and stripes hung limply in the hazy, oppressive air. Mosquitoes swarmed in great lazy clouds that would ripple into an eating frenzy when disturbed. There were a lot of mosquitoes this year. The women sat in a semi-circle of lounge chairs. They sprayed themselves with cans of "Off" that Clara Warren, Boogie's wife, had supplied. It was the fourth of July.

The women had a cooler of beer and soft drinks sitting on the snack table, but they preferred iced tea. It was too hot for anything else. However, as the men put the finishing touches on Boogie's barn, they lit into the beer like there was no tomorrow.

Clara Warren appeared at the top of the hill patting down her apron and breathing hard. "Come quick, it's the Van Borgs! Something's wrong."

Everyone rushed to the edge of the slope overlooking Hainesville Rd. Ben's old pickup was bucking and weaving like a drunken mule. It

swerved left suddenly and off the shoulder. Slowly, it approached a telephone pole and hit it square on with a hollow, metallic crash. The men started running to the accident. Boogie called over his shoulder, "Clara, call an ambulance!" Clara had already started for the house. Rhona Kleegman and Martha Deutsch were at her heels and headed for the first aid kit in the bathroom as she dialed.

The car was in the drainage pit nestled between the splintered telephone pole and the road embankment. Steam escaped from the busted radiator and that, beside the scrambling feet of the rescuers, was the only sound on Hainesville Rd. since the impact.

Boogie broke into a sprint followed closely by Chris and Karl Cotton. "Ben! Emma! You alright?" He called as he reached the wrecked car. Panic threatened as he pried open the door and saw that Ben was just coming to. He looked over at Emma. Her face had slammed against the windshield and the whiplash had thrown it back against the headrest. Chris had forced her door open and was feeling for a pulse when they both heard the siren wail of the approaching ambulance. It was followed by a black and white with two uniformed officers and what looked to be Doc Payne's LaSalle.

Boogie was cradling Ben's head in his arm.

"Emma?" whispered the hurt man with effort.

"She's fine, Ben. This is Chris. Chris and Boogie. She'll be fine. The first aid's almost here."

The attendants, Tim Bowen and Red Anders, had the Van Borgs out of the car and were treating

Ben. Doc Payne concentrated on Emma trying to determine the extent of her injuries. "Mostly superficial." He pronounced with relief. "She's suffering from shock, mild concussion and, well. . . ."

"Should we take her over to county, do some X-rays?" asked Tim. The doctor nodded assent.

"Bring Ben in for observation too." Doc Payne ran a hand through his thinning hair. "I've been trying to get them to come in for an examination anyway. Neither of them are well."

"We're going no place but home, Doc. Right now too." Doc looked over his bifocals into Ben's stubborn face. He shooked his head in exasperation.

Emma sat up suddenly as if waking from an unexpected doze. "We in Buffalo yet, Ben?" She inquired sleepily.

* * *

From the diary of Emma Van Borg, July 4.

Our attempt to leave the house has failed. There is nothing more we can do. Our neighbors, in their Christian concern, have unwittingly doomed us by returning us here as Ben insisted. I wanted to tell them but I could not.

After I completed the last entry, I told Ben that we must leave. He would have none of it. He still refuses to see what is happening to us here. I explained to him as best as I understand it myself, that there is some corrupt and horrible force drawing upon us and our house and that it is emanating

from beneath the cellar, its unholy power originating perhaps in the bowels of hell itself. I do not know, but I cannot deny, as Ben, that it is happening. Perhaps it is some world parallel to ours, its substance and nature the very antithesis of ours. Though its form may be identical on the surface, its features may be reversed as if in some great mirror. This is a fanciful, fevered idea to be sure, the ramblings no doubt of a demented and dying old woman. Be that as it may, I cannot discount the intuition, the certainty, that somewhere, in this unwholesome, subterranean reflection of our house and our lives, is a healthy alternate of myself and Ben and our place. I see it in my anguished dreams: random and fractured images of some mocking double going about the business of my life and Ben's, in a sound house filled with the smells of summer. The dream always ends with my own face laughing joylessly at the troubled dreamer, myself.

We are, of course, in the cellar. The doctor left some hours ago and we both found ourselves unable to sleep or find comfort anywhere but here, near the source of the thing that drains us like a narcotic. It has been several hours since Ben has moved. His face is a death's head covered with a dry, yellow/white membrane that is his sickly skin. I have not looked into a mirror for days, partly out of fear that I will see myself as hideous and wasted as my brother and partly, no mostly, because I fear I will see myself healthy and full-faced, flushed and gloating in the glass with some perverse life.

I told Ben that if he would not leave the house

with me then I would go alone to our cousin in Buffalo. He grew angry and that, at least, was something. His anger served to focus his mind, rouse him from the malaise long enough to see clearly the signs of entropy around us. At length he agreed. We packed a few things, wandering about the house in a nightmare fog. It took us most of the night to pack the few, useless things we did. In the morning when I looked at the two bags full of bowling trophies and gardening books, neckties, odd pieces of china and Tupperware, the old magazines and empty liqueur bottles, it struck me that these were the random accruments of the insane. I think I knew then that it was too late.

Somehow we started the car and escaped the sickening inertia of the house. I made the mistake of looking back and saw what had become of our place in just a few short weeks. Like Hainesville . . .

The thing that claimed that town is spreading. It lay dormant for years and now it has claimed us. The Van Borg place has 'Gone Bad' and the Van Borgs with it. I don't think that, satisfied, it will stop here.

Ben's hand slipped from the wheel a mile down Hainesville Rd. at the very moment when I felt an overpowering ache, a crushing emotional pain. In the brief time before I passed out, I saw the pole coming to meet the car and thought, "Now we will be killed." I thanked God we had at least escaped the thing behind us.

Now we are back and we are waiting. It won't be long now. My pen moves over the page so slowly it

is as if I were immersed in some invisible, viscous gel.

Ben has been digging painfully with his hands at the hard, packed earth of the cellar. He has dug a hole about one foot wide and again as deep. Perhaps he is trying to retrieve his mortality from the earth like a dog some misplaced bone. Or perhaps he is simply trying to quicken the process, to greet his strange destiny.

I can no longer write. I will join Ben now.

* * *

Emma set the pen down slowly. She put the black, leather bound book on the workbench alongside paint cans and dusty mason jars. She eased herself off the hard, wooden chair and moved to join her brother. She crouched to touch his shoulder and he let out a dry scream that sounded like fingernails along a taught bedsheet. With a burst of palsied energy he dug handfuls of caked mud away from the thing that constricted his heart with terror. Emma clutched him and whispered. "Ben, what . . .?" He moved fractionally to one side and she could see his face, drained of all human color. His eyes were pried open impossibly as if looking upon something no man should ever have to see. She followed his agonized gaze down to the floor, to the shallow hole. Her heart sounded a death knell in her ears and bile rose like acid in her throat. There in the floor was herself and her brother looking up at her, or rather down at her from a hole in the floor, of *their* cellar.

The other Ben was fat and healthy. He drew on his best bent stem briar with relish and the laugh lines around his eyes accented a summer tan. In his lap purred Balthazar. Emma looked down/up at herself and in the moment before her heart gave out, in that eternal second that was its last, tortured spasm she saw that her double was wearing a new dress, one that she had hoped to buy last spring. There was one more thing, she never would have believed that her own smile could contain such ghastly, leering smugness. It was like looking into some evilly contrived mirror where what is reflected is some Godless mockery of what is presented to it. Her final sensation was a nostalgic pang. She would never again smell fresh paint, new mown grass, her favorite perfume and baked, green apples; the smells which emanated up to her from the ersatz, doppelganger world.

* * *

Doctor Payne nosed his Lasalle onto Hainesville Rd. and towards the Van Borg place. He felt vaguely disquieted about yesterday. He shouldn't have given in to Ben so easily, but with the clean bill of health after the accident there was little else he could have done. So, he contented himself with an eight AM housecall.

Around him a morning haze promised another scorcher. At this hour though, the dew still lay on the land moist and cooling. A faint engine knock drew his attention. Valves? It couldn't be the damn valves. He'd had that job done in February. At

least that was what it said on the receipt in his glove compartment. Three days ago he had checked over the engine himself. Seemed to be running like a top. It was the same day he simonized the car and yet now, as his eyes played over the deep patina of the maroon hood, he saw it was pitted with rust spots the size of raisins. It simply wasn't possible. He cursed.

He turned into the crushed stone of the Van Borg's drive and the sight that greeted him drove all thoughts of a piddling valve and finish job out of his mind. Emma's vegetable patch was a weed choked mess. The tomatoes hadn't set and lay rotting on the ground, the leaves twisted and dwarfed. Strangled pole beans vied unsuccessfully with pidgeon grass for ascendancy. He couldn't even recognize any other vegetable among the riotous weeds.

Getting out of the car he let out a low whistle of disbelief as he focused on the house. It looked as if it had been neglected for a decade. The roof sagged, most of the chimney was now a random scattering of bricks on the ground. The south side was a blistered mass of peeling paint and broken window sashes.

His feeling of disquiet turned to inexplicable panic and he raced for the front porch. In the dozen or so strides from his car to the house he peripherally noted a rusted culpacker, a broken disc, a twisted subsoiler and other artifacts in various stages of resigned decay.

He paused at the base of the derelict stairs and called out. No reply. He calmed himself before

entering the house. He decided that the brother and sister would accompany him to a proper facility. They were, without a doubt, incapable of taking care of themselves any longer.

It was then that he became aware of the unnatural quiet around him; the absence of the subliminal sounds of a hot summer's morning. He thought of an unsanctified graveyard and shuddered as if the sun had passed behind an invisible cloud momentarily chilling him. The insidious image of Hainesville crossed his mind like a startled cat. He wanted to run but friendship, the Hippocratic oath, and a dark curiosity bound him to whatever lay inside. He was testing his way up the steps when he heard the sound of wheels on cinder and turned to a tractor pulling into the drive.

It was the Cotton brothers and Doc Payne could have cried in gut-wrenching relief at the welcome, mundane sight of them. Instead he quipped, "You boys up early after last night."

"I been meaning to talk to you about that Doc," Chris drawled casually. "What do you prescribe for a boy who stays stone, cold sober after a fast pint and a half of vodka?"

"Increase the dosage." He laughed but it didn't sound right.

Karl said, "Shee-it!" as he surveyed the ruin around him.

All of them stood in silence as they took in the extent of the damage and waste of a once going farm. No one wanted to be the first to remark on how much worse it seemed to be just since late yesterday afternoon when they had taken the Van

Borgs home. Perhaps if it were left unsaid the reality might somehow be denied.

"Do you feel . . .?" Chris cast around for words. "Do you feel it?"

"Yes." Doc said quietly. "Ben and Emma don't answer."

"Okay Doc, let's go. Karl, you check out back will ya?"

"Okay big brother." Karl felt guiltily relieved that he did not have to go into that dark mess of a house. He knew he would not find the Van Borgs anywhere out back. Chris and Doc knew it too. The outbuildings looked as if they'd fall down at a light tap. He had to force open the warped barn door and for his efforts was assailed with the odor of mold, rotting feed and small, putrefying animals. He had to hold his breath. Rats scurried over beams and into shadows. He called out for Emma and Ben. No answer.

The attached fix-it shop was deserted and in disarray but it didn't smell.

He jogged behind the barn darting nervous looks at the dying structure. Bags of seed and lime lay piled at the field border. They had broken open with exposure. The lime had hardened and the seed which spilled out through the burst bags had sprouted, turned black and mildewed. It now lay a congealed mass in the sun. An abandoned roto-tiller stood guard over a kingdom of devil weed and sumac. About an acre of winter wheat struggled against an overwhelming tide of weeds but had gone to seed already and that's where the roto-tiller had stopped. All Ben had done this year was a

measly acre. By the looks of things he'd abandoned the field about the middle of May and this was well into July.

The orchard at the edge of the field was a broken rank of gnarled sentinels; silent witnesses to some apocalyptic blight.

Karl jumped as he heard his brother calling him from the house. He fought down the urge to run past the disaster area and not look back.

Instead he bounded up the stairs calling out, "Chris, Doc, you alright?" When he crossed the threshold his knees sagged and he gave out a low, involuntary moan. A wave of nausea engulfed him and a sudden, senseless despair. He clutched a stair rail for support and peered into the gloom blinking back tears and an urge to curl into a ball on the musty carpet, vomit, sob and perhaps go to sleep. "Oh my God!" He sighed shaking.

"Yes, we felt it too." He heard Chris' voice and in a moment could make out the form of his brother at the door to the basement steps, his face drawn, his eyes enlarged with fear.

"What the hell is it? What's going on?" Karl managed to whisper.

"I don't know. I don't know. Try not to think about it . . . the feeling." He could hear Chris breathing heavily as he joined him at the head of the stairs.

"What's happened to this house Chris?" His eyes traversed the dusty hallway, the peeling paint and flaking plaster, the exposed beams which sagged and groaned like tortured, dying things. His nostrils curled at the stench that was more than

just neglect and rot, but something evil in itself. He did vomit.

"Overnight," Chris said and stifled a giggle." I don't know what happened, but whatever it was, it got the Van Borgs. They're dead. Doc's down there now." He jerked his chin down the stairs. "I can't go down there." He showed the beam of his flashlight into the deeper blackness of the cellar. It caught the Doc standing at the base of the stairs with an imbecilic look on his face. He stared ahead at nothing.

"What is it Doc?" Karl whispered down. "Are Emma and Ben down there?"

"Yes." The Doc answered as if in a dream.

Karl grabbed Chris' shoulder and together they edged down the stairs leaning against the wall for support. With each descending step their feet became heavier and the air grew thicker. At the bottom of the steps was silence save for their labored breathing and their deafening heartbeats. "Where?" Karl broke the stillness that was almost painful to their ears. The Doc turned and Chris pointed his flashlight at the Van Borgs.

Neither Chris nor Karl could recognize the things as human. Certainly they were not Emma and Benjamin Van Borg. The process of rigor mortis, decomposition, and calcification of the skeletons had been impossibly accelerated. They saw two mounds of fused bone, tufts of white hair and articles of faded, sagging clothing. The flesh around the skulls was mummified and the death masks were twin, silent screams. The eye sockets were riveted upon something beneath them. It was

a hole some three feet wide. Some of it had apparently been dug away judging by the mounds of dirt clutched in the bony fingers of what was Ben Van Borg and by the shallow furrows etched into the sides of the crater. Some of it seemed to have been collapsed or eroded into itself. As Chris played the flashlight across it to gauge its depth he let out a choked, girlish cry. The beam of light bent abruptly like a spent stream from a garden hose. At the point where the light disappeared into the floor, they thought they could see a kind of sleek, obsidian mirror. But the mirror reflected nothing. It seemed to take what was presented to it and devour it, negate it. Chris blinked, looked away, looked back. He thought he could see rainbow patterns play across the surface of the thing, but he closed his eyes, looked again and could not be certain of what he saw. Karl looked at it out of the corner of his eye and saw a great drain drawing in light, particles of dust, and the very air itself. At the same time he was sure it was an illusion. The Doc saw a kind of metaphysical well churning with sub-atomic particles or anti-matter; a pit where all the elements, the very fabric of reality came together to create a kind of negative world stew. He knew that to stare into the thing any longer would be to go hopelessly and forever insane. He turned away wondering what it was the Van Borgs saw there. He looked again at their corpses. "Impossible." He breathed. "I saw them last night. Alive." He repeated it silently to himself again and again like an incantation, a talisman against the horrific evidence of his own eyes. Finally he said,

"Let's go."

Chris' fingers had closed around an object on the workbench as he stared from the Van Borgs to the thing that had sucked the life from them. In his hand was a book. Unable to pry his fingers open again, he took it with him as Karl grabbed him harshly at the elbow and they followed the doctor painfully up the stairs. They made their way through the corrupt air of the house in silence.

Blinking in the morning sunlight and taking in greedy lungfuls of air, it was Karl who spoke first. "I guess we should call somebody," he said.

"Who should we call Karl?" The Doc said evenly, in a distracted voice. "And what do you want to tell them?" He looked at Karl and then Chris. "Who do you want to send back down there? Tom Lyons? Sheriff Wood? I'm the goddamned coroner here!" His voice rose to a near hysterical pitch. He began to laugh crazily. "What kind of autopsy am I supposed to do on . . . that?" He pointed to the house and threw back his head laughing. Chris took him by the shoulders and shook him hard. The doctor regained his composure with effort and they were plunged back into silence. They listened to insects buzzing and grass growing across the road.

After a time, Doc Payne turned his back on the imponderable horror of the house. He looked away from the house, away from Karl and Chris. He wore no expression. He spoke flatly through clenched teeth. "There was an accident early this morning at the Van Borgs," he said. "There was a bad fire and they couldn't get out. They weren't

well. The fire spread to the barn and the orchard. It was a very bad fire." He then looked over at Chris who blinked then nodded slowly.

"Hey!" Karl protested.

"Shut up Karl." Chris said quietly. "He's right." He sighed a tremolo sigh and then, "There should be gasoline in the shop or the barn . . . c'mon." Karl fell in with his brother and the doctor as they walked up the driveway. They would do it together.

* * *

Doc Payne arrived home well after sundown and stinking drunk. He fumbled with his keys in the moonlight and again ran through the story he had given Sheriff Wood, Fire Chief Gieselman and later, some of the boys at the tavern. He would have to go over it again for his wife. The door swung open and the grey-blue light of the television set spilled out across the porch. His wife stood before him in a housecoat, her hair in the same rollers he had left her in that morning. "Oh Arthur, where have you been? You look terrible. You look like a chimney sweep. Your clothes smell like smoke. Has there been a fire? I wish you wouldn't go off and leave me like this when I'm feeling so poorly. You could have called me. There's been a fire hasn't there?" He brushed past her and walked through the living room stumbling over childrens' toys that had been left out all day. He made his way into the kitchen for a glass of water and saw that the breakfast dishes hadn't been done. He

fought down an irritable comment and then registered a sense of reassurance that little things like that could get to him after today. He laughed and swayed at the kitchen sink.

"Arthur, you're drunk." His wife complained with an uncharacteristic peevishness.

"Yes." He agreed soberly. He looked around the kitchen and living room at the mess. He hadn't seen the place like this since the day they had moved in. From the open window over the sink, a disagreeable odor wafted in from the back yard. "The septic tank's backed up again isn't it?" he said wrinkling his nostrils. "Why can't they fix that?" he asked as if he were vaguely amused.

"Oh Arthur, everything's going wrong today. The kids all have colds and I'm coming down with it too I suppose. I haven't been myself." She sat down heavily into one of the kitchen chairs. "I'm sorry though, tell me what's happened. How's Emma and Ben?" The doctor sat down across from her. He held his head in his hands and surrendered to his burden of liquor, exhaustion and the truth he must conceal.

"There was an accident honey. They're dead." He told her about the fire and as he lied, he wondered how much time was left for all of them.

* * *

Boogie lay on the sweat-damp sheet. It was too hot to sleep and it being two in the morning, it was too late to do anything else. He looked out his bedroom window at the new barn limned with

moonlight. He thought it looked crooked but knew it could just be the light. He raised himself on one elbow and stared intently into the night trying to eye gauge the level of the roof beam.

With a grunt he rolled out of bed and went downstairs for his floodlamp. He felt silly and overtired but he had to find out for sure about the barn. Clad only in boxer shorts he picked his way through the silent house and took himself outside.

Suspicion became certainty as he played the flood over the barn. The rafters were improperly aligned though he'd overseen the work himself and could have sworn to its accuracy. Something else odd here, he groaned. There were uneven gaps between the siding planks as if the cross beams were pulling away from them by brute force. His barn was being torn apart from within.

Boogie slumped to a sitting position and remained there motionlessly on the hard packed earth trying to figure it out. The cockeyed barn made him feel useless and old. He would just sit for a while.

His wife found him still sitting there the next morning. She turned off the floodlamp, began to speak but thought better of it and just sat down on the dirt next to him.

* * *

Chris heard his father turn off the television downstairs and then his plodding footfalls on the steps. In a moment there was a light tapping on his bedroom door. And then, "Son, you'd better turn

out the light and get some sleep. We've got a lot of work tomorrow. Have to throw a lot of weed killer around and see what we can salvage from those acres by the fence. And that's all before noon so go to sleep hey?"

"Yeah, Dad, goodnight." Chris turned off the light and closed the diary of Emma Van Borg. He set the book under his pillow with care. He lay on his back, listened to the sounds of his brother's snores from across the room and looked out over the moonwashed fields to the southern boundaries of their farm. It was the area they would be working tomorrow morning, the acres that had gone bad, the ones next to Hainesville.

He thought of the words in the diary. He could hear Emma's rasping, pixy voice as she wrote in May: ". . . Now that school's going to close soon, I can see to those little jobs Ben's been putting off all spring. He needs me now and then to nigger at him. Besides it'll take his mind off his rheumatism . . ." And the entry only two weeks later, ". . . All those little things: the washer in the bathroom faucet, that two by four under the house, that lime we picked up and never spread. Maybe Ben's right. We're not getting any younger. Maybe we should hire on a man. Lord knows I'm not up to things anymore and I haven't the heart to ask Ben what with his gout and his shortness of breath. Getting old ain't all it's cracked up to be. Nonsense, neither of us are sixty yet. I do carry on."

Chris lay back and watched through slitted eyes the ceiling illuminated by the gibbous moon.

" . . . All those little things." He made a mental note to fix that crack in the plaster by the light. He was going to fight.

Presently he fell asleep. He dreamt the earth opened up and swallowed him.

It's never easy to kill a god . . .

The Guardian of the Idol

*by Robert E. Howard and
Gerald W. Page*

Once I was Gorm of the Bison People. I can not explain to you how I remember this, any more than I can explain the phenomenon that causes me, and you, to recall the events of yesterday and yesteryear. I am James Allison, dying of a malady that baffles all modern science, and I was Gorm of the Bison People, who lived in a far clime and a far age. More I can not say. *I was*; *I am*. I cannot dispute the evidence of ten thousand years that teach me *I shall be again*. Enough; I am James Allison; I was Gorm. And in the voices of Gorm and James Allison I shall tell my tale, the tale of Gorm, who lived when the world was young and mankind was weak and few. And I will begin at

the point where I, Gorm of the Bison People, lay bound hand and foot beside the altar-stone of the River People, with the howling of maddened worshippers in my ears and the hideous mask of their priest bending over me, its plumes rippling in the breeze that drove down the smoke of the fires in billowing whorls that dimmed the ring of savage faces.

Closer and closer bent that bestial visage, through the eye slits of which gleamed the beady black eyes of the priest who wore it. And closer and closer to my naked breast sank the hand gripping a stick in the cleft of which was a white-hot flint—I did not close my eyes as that hell-hot shard touched my bosom and ploughed the flesh. A wisp of smoke curled up from my skin but I made no sound, nor showed my keen agony by so much as the flicker of an eyelash. From the River People rose a maddened howl; the priest straightened, waving the branding stone and screaming. On my breast, burned indelibly, showed the symbol of sacrifice.

Soon a knife of flint would plunge into my heart as I lay on the blackly-stained stone, to flood that smoking symbol with red blood, that the gods of the river people might be appeased and send rice, fat in the marshes, and barley, thick in the fields.

One victim already lay on the altar—a youth of my own people, though of a different tribe, captured about the same time as myself and taken to the secret hiding place of the River People's idol, as was I, so that we were consecrated to the sacrifice together; for the idol of their god was in a

concealed place known only to the priests of the River People and to the warriors who accompanied us there. It was the belief of the River People that the idol held their souls in thrall and so must be kept at a secret place and guarded from enemies. Now, the people began circling the altar-stone and the ring of fires, chanting and leaping in their grotesque dance—would that I might reconstruct that primeval scene!

The River People's village stood on the extremity of a neck of land which ran into the Great River. This neck broadened at the end and was roughly circular and their mud and wattle huts occupied almost the entire space. Their palisade, made of upright, pointed logs sunk into the earth, stood at the very rim of the low bluffs which surrounded the end of the peninsula. The altar-stone, merely a flat rock topping a heap of stone, stood in the center of the village where a space was left clear. Fires, built to form a triangle, enclosed the stone and the priest who stood beside the stone and the victims who lay upon it and beside it.

Around this triangle, the River People danced and droned their chants of sacrifice—short but thickly muscled folk with shocks of bushy hair and black glittering eyes; people clad in garments of skin and crudely woven flax. I, 'Gorm, was typical of my people, being tall and broadshouldered, with gray eyes and tawny hair.

The priest chanted; he lifted the flint knife and when it fell it was quenched in the heart's blood of the Bison man who lay on the altar. At the spurt of crimson, the people howled like wolves and some

tore their garments and leaped into the fires, scattering sparks. One brand, struck by a heedless foot, flew through the air and fell close to me, searing my flesh, but falling so the flame-touched the thongs that bound my legs. I lay still, setting my teeth against the bite of flame; and when the binding was almost burnt through, I shifted so that the thongs on my arms could be burned. And at the moment the priest tore out the heart of the other Bison man and cast it into the flame, I exerted my agony-steeled throws and snapped the thongs.

In an instant, I was up and racing toward the palisade. Men and women howled and scattered from my path as I smote right and left with a flaming brand snatched from a fire. Arrows whistled close as I climbed the palisade.

But none struck me. I leaped the barricade and landed on my feet on the soft, grassy ground beyond. The low bluffs were before me, but I hesitated, knowing that I would be an easy target for the spears and arrows of the River People if I tried to escape that way. The river was but a short distance to my left and therein lay my safety, for I did not believe any of the River People could swim.

The howls of my pursuers grew louder as I sped for the river. I reached the bank and dove cleanly into the water.

Its cold sting brought fresh pain to the open burn upon my chest, but it also cleared the last of the fear and confusion from my brain. I rose for air, then dove again, swimming underwater with powerful strokes that would carry me swiftly

beyond spear or arrow range before I had to surface.

But eventually I had to surface. I was well beyond their reach now, and knew I could reach the far shore before the River People could follow in their canoes. But then I heard a sound—a thrashing in the water.

Sharp pain lanced through my left thigh as needle pointed teeth tore through the flesh and agony tore at the calf of the same leg. At once I understood both the thrashing in the water and the reason the River People did not swim in this river. It was inhabited by flesh-eating fish!

My surprise was not sufficient to paralyze me. The injuries to my leg were painful, and blood colored the water around me, but I pushed on with renewed vigor.

Swimming as I never swam before, I was grateful that the full school of the fierce denizens of the river had not discovered me. But the blood would attract them soon enough, I knew, and they were numerous enough to cause me concern that I might never leave the river. However, torn and bleeding though I was, I reached the shore and pulled myself up on the bank.

I lay there a moment, lungs burning with the effort to breathe, the myriad wounds and the burns on my body aching painfully. I glanced back across the river and saw the light of torches along the other bank and guessed that the River People were preparing to cross the river in their canoes. No matter how severe my injuries, I had to move on. To wait for them to cross was to render my escape

from their altar and my swim across that cursed water meaningless. I staggered to my feet and plunged into the jungle.

I ran, heedless of the noise I made, heedless of the pain wracking my body. It was night and that would cover my trail for now. With the dawn, the River People would have light enough to trail me by the drops of blood I scattered as I ran. Nor, with the dawn, would they fear the terrors of the jungle any more than I did. I ran until I was certain I was too far from the river to be heard by my pursuers and there I paused in a small clearing.

Weakness from loss of blood, and the numbness creeping over me did nothing to interfere with the functioning of my mind, and the knowledge that was my heritage as a son of the Bison People. Come dawn and I knew the River People would plunge into the jungle after me—and find a clearly marked trail. But I was determined they would trail me no farther than this clearing.

I had chosen a clearing where certain plants grew and now I stripped leaves from the bushes to bind my wounds. The leaves were long and their sticky juices not only pasted them to my flesh, but would speed the healing of my injuries. The beginning of a fever was overtaking me as I applied the final leaf and checked to make certain no wound still bled. But I ignored fever and as the first pale fingers of day stretched into the sky, I left the clearing, travelling with less speed than before, hiding my trail as I went, in the certainty that the River People were not as good hunters as the Bison People, and that they would not be able to find me.

I went into the jungle as far as I could before my exertion began to tell on me. At long last, weakened and feverish, I knew I could go no farther. With an almost superhuman effort, I made myself climb a tree and there, in the safety of its upper boughs, I fell into an exhausted sleep.

The heat of fever came over me and I shook with it and delirium. How long I lay sick I cannot say, but in time the illness passed sufficiently that I had the strength to gather berries and other fruit from nearby trees and bushes, and water from a close stream. I was still weak and my wounds unhealed, but I knew now I would live. And with a fury that only the primitive man is capable of, I swore that no more of my people would die upon the altar of the River People.

In the days that followed, as my wounds healed and I regained my strength, I plotted my revenge. The River People were interlopers in the land of the Bison People. They had come from the south with their domesticated dogs, which they ate the first winter. No open warfare had flared between our two tribes, yet no Bison man or woman caught by the River People could expect to live. I had seen one die and I knew that others, vanished and thought lost, had likely died on that altar. The Bison People, though primitive and savage, did not sacrifice humans to their gods; the idea revolted me.

The god of the River People was a crude, wooden idol, hidden away even from all but the most privileged of the River People. I knew where it was, for all the sacrifice victims were taken

before the idol. It rested high above the ground in a sacred oak tree in a canyon where the River People themselves were safe only if they travelled in large numbers. For in addition to being hidden from their enemies, the idol was protected by the creature which lived in that canyon. But I did not give thought to the dangers spoken of in legends—even the legends mentioned in the threats of the priest as I stood before that idol. It was believed by the River People that their souls were held in that idol, and that if the idol were destroyed so would their souls be. I swore that the destruction of their idol would be my revenge.

Yet there was the guardian to deal with. I had only vague legends to go by, even to tell me what the guardian was, for I had never seen it. It was spoken of in Bison People lore, for it had inhabited that canyon before the River People had come here, but we had never hunted near that canyon, and our legends were all but useless. What the priest had told me was more detailed. The creature stayed hidden when the River People came to bring their victims before the idol. They came only in great numbers and they left gifts of fruit and freshly killed game for the guardian. But a man alone would surely be attacked by the guardian. The legends of my people said that the creature was the last of the Old Ones.

Of the Old Ones, I knew something. Many was the time as a child, as a youth, even as a warrior grown to full manhood, that I sat and listened as the elders of my tribe told of the Old Ones and the wars in which my people drove the Old Ones from

the land. For the Old Ones were not the masters of war and hunt that the Bison People were, and their numbrs were smaller because they knew not the ways of survival by which the Bison People prospered. Yet the fight was hard, for while the Old Ones lacked the craft and cunning of the Bison People, they had the powers of gods. Evil gods, yes, but still was their power great. They could confuse the minds of their enemies and cast visions before the eyes of their foes—visions of what was not really there.

I, James Allison, offer no explanation for the powers of the Old Ones. But as Gorm, I knew the legends of the Bison People, and I believed them. But who is to explain the efforts by which Nature sought to find a creature which could deal with life in a hostile environment, I, James Allison, will not even try; the wonders of evolution are beyond my powers of fathom, I, Gorm, gave no thought to that at all; the wonders of evolution were beyond my powers to even comprehend.

Thus, as my wounds healed and strength returned to me, I fashioned a knife and a spear to replace those the River People took from me, and made my plans. Sufficiently recovered, I made my way back to the river, crossed it with a floating log, then proceeded to the Canyon of the Old One.

Comparitively high cliffs surrounded the canyon on all sides but one; cliffs too steep to climb, even for me. But I knew from the fact that their idol was cached safely in a tree, well above ground, that the Old One could not climb either.

I went to the top of the cliff, near the end of the

canyon that was open, and there I stood, staring down into the thick-grown forests that grew almost to the base of the cliffs. I did not wait long. Before I even saw the Old One in the forest below, a spear struck the wall of the cliff but inches from my foot. I dropped back and lay flat on the ground, peering over the edge of the cliff as the spear clattered back to the ground below. Then I saw the Old One.

It stood at the edge of the jungle, shaking a great gnarled fist angrily above its grizzled head. The roar that escaped that twisted, snarling mouth reached my ears as a deep and terrifying sound. The Old One stood erect on two legs as a man stands, and wore the skins of a slain animal as clothing. But there was no mistaking that misshapen form for human; not that sloping, sinister brow above those glaring, beady, eyes, nor those over-long muscle-corded arms. Again the Old One growled with such force the sound reverberated from the canyon walls.

I rose from where I lay and stood fully exposed to the Old One. I yelled the war cry of my people and the creature growled a defiant reply. Even at that distance I could not mistake the hatred that burned in those small red eyes. But I was drunk with the desire for revenge, and confident of my plan. Again, I gave the war cry of the Bison People, and again the Old One returned angry reply.

He ran for the base of the cliff and for a moment I thought he was going to recover his spear to hurl at me again. But for the moment that was

forgotten. He beat on the wall and tried clumsily to climb, but with no success. I laughed at him and he saw the spear and reached for it. But before he could throw it, I stepped out of the range of his vision. I ran several yards up the edge of the cliff and stood where he might see me. But before he could move close enough to throw the spear, I was off again.

Thus did I toy with and anger the Old One and lead him a chase that lured him to the far end of the canyon. There, I stood and again taunted him with laughter and my people's war cry, and threw rocks at him. When I was confident he would remain there as long as he thought I was there, I fell back out of his sight and built a fire so he could see the smoke.

I showed myself once more and hurled down more taunts. The creature stared up at me and my certainty grew that he would remain until I was either gone or dead.

I moved away from the edge. Leaving the fire and its trail of smoke to fool the Old One into thinking I was still there, I ran to the other end of the canyon and entered it.

I recalled in vivid detail the way to the tree where the idol of the River People was kept. As I retraced the way, I forgot about the Old One. All that filled my brain was the desire for revenge against the River People.

There was a peculiar quiet in the woods near the sacred tree. No birds sang or called out. No monkeys chattered. I moved with stealth—and that alone saved my life.

I stood but a few feet from the tree in which the idol rested safe from the guardian who could not climb high enough to reach it. Behind me, in the stillness, I heard the snap of a twig.

My hand flashed toward the crude stone knife at my waist. I started to turn—but then I saw the Old One in front of me, poised savagely but not moving. I forgot my knife and hurled my spear.

The spear struck the Old One and went through him. But he did not fall.

I remembered the twig that I heard break and realized then that I saw not the Old One but his image, cast by a magic I could not understand. I reached again for my knife as the image faded. But before I could pull my knife from the scabbard of animal hide in which it was carried, strong powerful arms encircled me from behind.

Somehow as it tightened its hold on me, I managed to twist so that I faced it. Those huge muscular arms squeezed harder, cutting off my breath and threatening to break ribs. Involuntarily, I cried out with pain as I had not done when the River People branded me. Black mists shot with scarlet, welled up before my eyes to blot out my vision; something beat throbbingly in my head. The odor of the Old One's pelt and body was overpowering, but worse was the smell of its fetid breath. I could hear the creature's low, bestial growl. Consciousness was slowly ebbing from me as those powerful hair-matted arms tightened around me.

I felt my fingers touch the handle of my knife and with a supreme effort I drew the weapon and

forced my arm free of the Old One's grasp. I drove the blade into the hairy chest of the Old One and it gave a cry. I felt the trunk-like arms tighten convulsively around my body until I thought I'd be broken in two. I gave the blade a savage twist, seeking the Old One's heart, grating across bone, widening the wound so that blood spewed out in great gouts to soak us both. In spite of this, the Old One continued to tighten his grip.

I yanked the knife free and plunged it in again, just as deeply, but higher in the chest. Again the Old One gave forth a roar of pain and again the arms tightened. I felt sure my spine would break leaving me limp and helpless in his grasp.

But as quickly and convulsively as it had tightened, the Old One's grip loosened. The great arms went slack and fell away from me. I let go the knife and fell back free of that crushing hold. I was too weak to fight any longer should the Old One renew its attack. It stood there, a look of mixed pain and anger stamped on an ape-like face, and then collapsed in a dead heap to the ground at the foot of the tree of the idol.

Wonderingly, I stared at the dead Old One for many minutes as the pain left me. Then I got to my feet and moved cautiously to the dead creature to retrieve my knife from its chest. After that, I turned to the matter of the idol.

When only wisps of smoke curled up from the ashes of their idol, I turned my back on the canyon and, carrying a gift for the River People, started for their village.

It was dark by the time I reached it, but beyond

the palisade I saw the lights of the village fires. I heard the savage howling of the River People and knew another sacrifice was in progress. Likely they had brought their victim to the idol of their gods at the same time I was taunting the Old One at the far end of the canyon. As I listened, I heard the crowd silence to a hush, then roar with bloodthirsty satisfaction and I knew I was too late to prevent this sacrifice.

I ran to the palisade where a single guard stood watch. The shouts from the village masked the noise of my running, and the guard himself was staring not beyond the palisade but at the crowd. I thrust my spear between the logs into the sentry's side before he was so much as aware of me. I gave the war cry of the Bison People, but the blood-thirsting celebration of the River People drowned out even this. I leaped, grasping the top of the wall and pulling myself over. I ran toward the crowd.

The mangled corpse of a youth of the Bison People lay upon the altar. Over him stood the hideously masked priest of the River People, and he waved a knife in his hand. Knife, hand, arm to the elbow were drenched in blood.

My spear flew from my hand. It drove into the breast of the priest and the knife fell from lifeless fingers. New blood flowed across the priest's body, but this time it was his own.

The crowd fell silent. As one, they turned to face me as I walked toward them.

My coming and the death of their priest left the River People momentarily paralyzed. I walked toward them and held high that which I had

brought from the Canyon of the Old One, so that all of the River People might see it—the head of their destroyed idol.

A wail rose from the crowd as they saw what it was. Those closest to me backed away, as if it were plague I had brought into their midst. No one reached for any weapon then; superstitious fear gripped all of them—a fear such as their victims must have felt upon their altar stone.

The River People turned and fled as if driven by a single will. But it was a mindless will and it sent them not to the palisade and the land beyond, but to the river.

It was a thing I, Gorm, would puzzle over the remainder of my years; and which I, James Allison, have puzzled over as avidly in this life. In their fear did they forget the danger of the river? Or did the sight of what remained of their destroyed idol drive them to suicide? I cannot say. But the River People ran straight into the river and within moments the water was colored red with their blood and white with the threshing of both the people and the schools of savage, flesh-eating fish.

I, Gorm, stood on the bank and held the idol's head and stared at the sight. I had not sought to drive them thus to their deaths, but to drive them, rather, from the country of the Bison People. But when, at last, I turned and saw the pale and lifeless victim upon the altar stone, I felt no regrets.

What plant is there that has to be fed on human blood? It grows in—

The Black Garden

by Carl Jacobi

The January, 1932 issue of *Weird Tales* contained a short story called "Mive." That was the first appearance of Carl Jacobi in these pages, but very far from being the last. To-day, almost fifty years later, here is the latest from his hand.

THE woman in black got off the Mankato bus in Cologne in southwestern Carver county on Tuesday, the twelfth, at 2 p.m. Judge Warren Harker, sitting on his veranda, watched over his cigar as the bus driver deposited her suitcase in the dusty street and drove off, leaving her there, hesitant and alone.

Harker got to his feet and strode down the steps and through the gate.

"I'm sorry to bother," the woman said with a

pronounced accent, seeing him approach. "Could you direct me to the hotel?"

A smile touched Harker's lips. The thought of a hotel in a village the size of Cologne was amusing. Almost as amusing as the woman's dress which dated back a good forty years and was an unrelieved black.

"No hotel, I'm sorry. The widow Benjamin sometimes has rooms to rent. Third house beyond the depot. Can I help you?"

She shook her head, picked up her suitcase and without further word set off down the street.

Not until evening did Harker have occasion to think of the stranger again. After supper he began his customary stroll through the village and as he came abreast of the store-front building where Jeff Taylor had his land office his steps were halted by a tapping on the glass. Inside Taylor beckoned him to enter.

"Might as well witness some papers," he said as the judge pushed through the doors. "Fraulein Tessler is buying the Hogarth place."

The woman in black sat before Taylor's desk. She had removed her hat which had hidden much of her face that afternoon, and Harker caught his breath now as he looked at her. She was young and beautiful, her eyes dark and lustrous, her complexion that of a tinted cameo.

"Hogarth," repeated Harker. "You don't mean that old ruin back beyond Number 5?"

"Fraulein Tessler understands that it needs repairs."

"Repairs!" said the judge scornfully. "Why

there's practically nothing there but walls and a foundation."

The woman raised her hands. "I'm interested only in the acres near the house. I believe they've been cleared . . .?"

Harker shrugged. "Y—es. Old Man Hogarth nearly broke his back, trundling rocks out of there." A puzzled look entered his eyes. "May I ask what you're going to do with the property?"

Fraulein Tessler reached for the papers requiring her signature. "I'm going to plant a garden," she said.

That was the last the judge or anyone in Cologne saw of the stranger until August. The summer was a hot and sultry one and few persons in Carver county had the inclination to wander off into the furnace-like back-roads. In fact it wasn't until Mark Davis who worked in the arboretum told of the remodeling of the Hogarth house that Fraulein Tessler was remembered at all.

"I only saw it from the road," he said, "but the house has been fixed up in a queer way with a bell tower in the center. There's a strange garden too with colors so bright it looks like a picture post card."

And Charlie Yarboro, returning late from Watertown, took the Hogarth road because it led through higher ground and he was having trouble with his allergy. "What's a woman doin' prowlin' in her garden at 3 a.m.? The place gives me the creeps."

Other reports reached the judge. Crows were gathering in great flocks on the property. The bell

in the tower could be heard at intervals booming out over the countryside. An opalescent light like fox fire was seen to hover at times over the house. And a few passersby told of hearing strange chanting within those stone walls.

Harker would have dismissed these tales as idle talk that didn't concern him had it not been for a chance action by Mrs. Dayton, his housekeeper of many years. With an eagle eye for dirt or debris of any kind, she spotted a stack of old magazines which the judge had brought down from the attic and stashed behind his desk for future reference.

"Some of these are thirty years old!" she exclaimed. "They're going *out*!"

"No," Harker protested. "Let me look through them first."

The following evening he was leafing through a 1946 news magazine when an illustrated article caught his eye. He read it and then he read it again. He read it a third time while a slow tingle began to creep up his spine. The article told of the heir of a wealthy Austrian perfume manufacturer who had mysteriously vanished following the seizure of her father's plant by a member of a renegade branch of the family.

But it was not the name of the perfume magnate—Tessler—that held him there transfixed. It was the incredible fact that the accompanying 1946 photograph was a picture of the woman in black exactly as she looked today.

The judge wrinkled his brow in puzzlement. Time had played an important part in his own life. He had seen birthdays come and go and he had

watched his hair whiten and crow's feet appear about his eyes. Age had finally forced his retirement. How could a woman—assuming she was one and the same—escape the ravages of more than a quarter century without revealing them?

More to the point, what was a person of her financial status doing on a farm here in Carver county?

The judge had had little to occupy him during the six months since his retirement, and after a life of activity he was bored. It needed little self argument therefore to convince him that it would not be amiss to drive out to the Hogarth place and satisfy his curiosity about the woman in black.

That evening when he drove into her driveway she came to meet him almost before he was out of the car.

"Judge Harker, isn't it? I'm glad you've come. I don't get many visitors and it's lonely here."

"You must have known what to expect when you chose this site? Why did you?"

"It seemed ideal for my garden. Come, let me show it to you."

She led the way down a newly-laid flagstone walk into the evening dusk. Abruptly Harker found himself surrounded by a multitude of blossoms, the luxuriance of which astounded him. As Mark Davis had said, the riot of color was breathtaking. The judge was no botanist but he saw at least twenty different varieties and twenty more that were unknown to him. Azaleas, heliotrope, jasmine, roses, lilies of the valley, scarlet gentians, moonflowers. The outer reaches of the garden were

lost in the gathering darkness, but there were open spaces where stone benches and statuary gave a classic look to the area. In the center stood a large stone fountain fashioned of a single block of granite but apparently with no water connection as yet. Over the expanse drifted a cloying aroma, a strange spicy scent that entered Harker's nostrils and constricted his throat. As they went on, the smell grew stronger, became almost overpowering.

"It's the heliotrope *falcus*," Fraulein Tessler said. "The false heliotrope. It plays an important part in my work."

"My work," she continued. "The making of perfume."

Harker raised his eyes.

"My father and his father before him devoted their lives to the distilling of exotic scents. I left my father's plant near Salsburg when it was taken over by my uncle."

"But that was thirty years ago," the judge said, remembering the magazine article. "You couldn't have been born then."

She remained silent.

"Your uncle? His name was Tessler?"

She shook her head. "His name was Balsamo. But I know you're not interested in my family affairs. Here, let me pick you a boutonniere." She drew scissors from her dress pocket and, reaching down, clipped a pale blue flower.

Harker lingered an hour longer. He marveled at the care that had been given the garden. Not a weed, not a spare tuft of grass was visible in the orderly rows, and though there had been little rain

in recent weeks there was no indication here of insufficient moisture. The small statuary was mostly Grecian in subject and style but there were several pieces that puzzled him.

It was not until he was halfway back to Cologne that he recalled some of the words of Fraulein Tessler. She had said the name of her uncle was Balsamo. The name was familiar to Harker but for the moment he could not place it.

A week passed. On the 12th of August a dual event occurred in Carver county that thrust all further thought of the woman completely out of the judge's mind. Like all county residents, Harker was appalled by what facts indicated was a crime and tragedy of the first water.

During the first few hours the disappearance of teen-agers Sharon Bentley and Lillian Brooks was not taken seriously. It was not until a blood stained fragment of one of the girl's dress was found that the significance was fully realized. Sheriff Tom Blunt called in the state police and despite an arthritic foot Judge Harker joined in an intensive search. A second blood stained article of clothing—this time a knee length stocking—was found, but that was all. Later Blunt accosted Harker on Cologne's main street.

"You've tried a lot of cases in your time," he said. "Ever had one that involved kidnapping?"

"Kidnapping! What made you think of that?"

The sheriff was a big florid faced man, addicted to large hats. He had small watery eyes and those eyes were now dark with concern.

"I don't know. Except that both of the girls'

families are well fixed. There's been no ransom note of course, but I've got this funny feeling. How about that character out beyond Number 5. The one that took over the Hogarth place?"

"Fraulein Tessler?" Harker raised his eyebrows. "What made you think of her?"

"She's the only stranger in the county. And Postmaster Freddie Ganz says she's been gettin' mail from Chicago. It may be a thin lead but Chicago is where things like that are hatched."

"Did Freddie notice the return address on those letters?"

"They came from a cosmetic company. But that doesn't mean . . ."

Harker smiled. "There goes your suspect. Fraulein Tessler raises flowers to make perfume. Naturally she would have dealings with a cosmetic wholesaler."

Blunt shrugged. "Well, we should get a break before long." He lit a cigar with a kitchen match, said good night and headed back down the street.

Noon of the following day a foreign car seldom seen in the U.S., a Melchior Sant, came into Cologne from the south and drew up before the post office. With its oversized headlights, open tonneau, and queer-shaped hood, it attracted considerable attention. From it stepped Fraulein Tessler, carrying a large carton.

Inside she met Judge Harker who was picking up his mail. "How are you?" he said cordially. "Sending out a shipment of your perfume?"

Fraulein Tessler nodded. "Yes. My work has been going nicely. Will you wait while I have this

package weighed?"

Moments later she joined him again. "Can I give you a lift somewhere? My car is a bit different from your American machines, different even from the continental ones."

Harker was going to Chaska to pay his taxes and his own car was parked just outside.

"I think you'd enjoy it," Fraulein Tessler said as the judge hesitated.

Harker nodded and followed her out to the street. They drove out of town slowly. Once the village was behind them, the woman sent the Melchior Sant leaping forward like a frightened gazelle. She laughed gayly as the wind whipped her tawny hair back over her shoulders. Almost, Harker thought, as if she were under the effects of a narcotic.

He spoke over the whine of the motor and the rush of wind. "Fraulein, have there been any strangers near your place?"

"Strangers? You mean like tramps or burglars?"

"I mean like young girls. Teenagers. One blonde. One brunette."

"The only strangers—intruders rather—have been those infernal crows. Nothing seems to frighten them away, not even the bell. The two girls—they are missing?"

Harker nodded. "And we know they met with foul play."

"We?"

"Well, Sheriff Blunt. But the whole town's united."

She tooled the car expertly around a curve and

lapsed into silence. The miles flowed by.

It happened as they were approaching the outskirts of Chaska, and it was such a complete removal of the veneer of nicety with which Fraulein Tessler cloaked herself that Harker was sickened to the point of disgust. A small Collie dog bounded out of the bushes that flanked the road and began to bark furiously. The woman at the wheel gave no sign that she had seen or heard. She made no move to turn or slacken speed but continued straight on.

There was a sickening thump, a short bark cut off in mid career. Harker's gorge rose. He turned, eyes blazing. "Why?" he demanded. "You could have avoided . . ."

She laughed. "Come, Judge, you're not going to get sentimental over a dog. It should have got out of the way."

For the next mile until they reached the business district of Chaska Harker sat in silence. When they drew up before the courthouse he said "You needn't wait. I'll catch a bus back."

He spent only a short time in the county treasurer's office. With his tax receipt in his pocket he sauntered down the hot August street and on a sudden impulse entered the library. It was pleasantly cool inside. A few moments later he was turning the pages of a volume whose condition showed that it had been read infrequently. Then he found what he was looking for:

BALSAMO (Giusseppi) Joseph . . . Count Cagliostro. Hypnotist and charlatan at the court of Louis XVI. Also assumed the names of

Pelligrini and the Count de Fenix. He practiced the art of precognition and is said to have predicted the manner of Marie Antoinette's death. But he is best known for his *Elixir of Life*, a secret of eternal youth. He died in prison, charged with various crimes . . .

Harker left the library and was fortunate to catch a bus back to Cologne. In Cologne he went into the Arboretum and found Mark Davis transplanting some black spruce seedlings.

"Mark," he said without preamble, "do you know a flower called Heliotrope Falcus?"

"Sure," Davis replied. "Another name for it is Heliotrope Simulacrum. But it doesn't grow here."

"Oh? Where does it grow?"

"South America. It's a tropical plant."

"Anything unusual about it?"

Davis shrugged. "Well, the natives along the Amazon claim it halts the aging process, if taken in the right dosage. But the right dosage is the problem because it's a poison akin to the Nightshade plant. I've never seen it myself. Going in for gardening, Judge?"

Back home, Harker went into his study, picked up an unfinished novel and tried to read. But the print faded before his eyes and he found his thoughts returning to Fraulein Tessler. He told himself that he was no longer interested in the woman, yet an image of her kept returning to his mind's eye. The incident of the dog had soured any regard he had for her; but more than that a vague aura, a disturbing sense of malevolence, hung

around her which he felt when he was in her presence.

Harker sat there for some time before he became aware that there was no familiar rattle of dishes and pans in the kitchen. Silence filled the house. And then he saw the note propped up on his desk. He opened it.

The note was annoying. Mrs. Dayton had been called out of town to attend a sick sister. Meanwhile his meals would be taken care of by her daughter, who, the note assured him, was a capable cook. He found the truth in that statement when he came down stairs in the morning. Anne Dayton, a somewhat corpulent fifteen-year-old, was busily cooking his bacon and eggs. Never had the coffee smelled or tasted better.

"Will you be alone in your house while your mother's away?" he asked her.

Anne nodded. "I don't mind. I'm in school most of the day. And Mr. Blunt has said he would have one of his deputies drive by every hour or so."

Breakfast over, Harker went into his study. He had discarded the novel for *The Dark Elements Of Survival*, a curious work concerned with the postponement of death by occult means. But although it coincided to a certain extent with his train of thought, again his attention wandered until finally he flung the book aside and went out to the veranda and his hammock.

He spent the morning and the long afternoon there. With dusk came a restlessness and a desire for action. He backed his car out of the garage and headed south down Number 5. He was just driving

aimlessly, he told himself. But he knew that wasn't so. He was heading for the house of Fraulein Tessler and he realized that in some unexplained way she was drawing him like a magnet.

An army of crows rose up screaming as he turned into the driveway. There was no answer to his rattle of the brass door knocker, so he descended the steps and walked uncertainly down the flagstone walk into the garden. He moved slowly through the rows of flowers, marveling as before at their fecundity and brilliant coloring. The pungent musk of Heliotrope Falcus enveloped him like invisible smoke. He came to the area of small statues and stone benches and finally stood before the granite fountain. It struck him that the big stone block did not look much like a fountain. There were figures on its sides and some of those figures were almost obscene in appearance, animal heads on human bodies.

With a sudden loud flapping of wings a crow swooped to the ground a few yards away. It preened its black plumage and began to move toward him in a brazen strut. There was something glittery in its beak and as Harker made a movement the bird gave a raucous cry of alarm and took off, letting the glittery object drop.

The judge bent to retrieve it. Even as he straightened a voice behind him spoke.

"Judge Harker! How nice of you to come again."

Fraulein Tessler's corn colored hair was beautifully coiffured in a coronet. Did she never wear anything but black, he wondered.

"May I ask to what do I owe the pleasure of this

visit. In Chaska you didn't seem . . ."

Harker shrugged. "I'm helping Sheriff Blunt," he said, not untruthfully. "We're still looking for Sharon Bentley and Lillian Brooks."

"Ah, yes. The two teenagers. Well I doubt if they wandered this far from town. At any rate I haven't seen them. But I probably wouldn't have anyway. My garden and my house occupy all my time. You've seen my garden, Judge. Now wouldn't you like to see my house?"

Without waiting for an answer she turned and moved down the walk, heading not for the front of the house, but veering off to the side where a narrow door, reached by a short flight of steps, opened on the south wall. She opened this door and led the way down a short corridor into a large room, all white with walls of gleaming tile. There were bins along one side filled with freshly cut blossoms. There was a long central table littered with vials and retorts and a large copper extractor which was rotating slowly and from which issued a strong odor.

"This is where I make my perfume," she said. "Steam distillation in a petroleum-ether solution. Or in some cases enfléurage or maceration. It depends upon the flower.

"Perfume, you know Judge, goes far back in history and even mythology. Circe was said to have held Odysseus in her power by means of it and Helen of Troy was made more attractive by a gift of scent from Aphrodite."

"The Heliotrope Falcus. Isn't that usually considered a tropical flower?"

A shadow crossed her face. "Yes," she said. "But I have been successful in cross breeding a strain that is indigenous to this climate."

"I understand some persons attribute age-stopping powers to it," Harker said.

She glanced at him sharply. "I've heard that, yes."

"You mentioned a relative of yours named Balsamo. There was a Balsamo in eighteenth century France who claimed he could prolong youth with what he called his *Elixir of Life*."

There was a ghost of a smile on her lips. "The fight against senility is as old as time," she said. She moved across to a wall cabinet, opened one of its drawers and began rummaging inside. Then she turned.

It was then that Harker became suddenly confused. He was aware that Fraulein Tessler continued talking to him and that he was answering her. But his replies seemed automatic while his thoughts ran ahead or lagged behind those replies. Then there followed a space of time during which he lost his orientation and the walls of the room appeared to stagger in his vision. When next reality had returned to him he had somehow left the house and was back in his car, driving. Or rather the road, like an endless treadmill, unrolled before him. He was vaguely aware of passing landmarks and intersections. And then he was home, climbing the stairs to his room, undressing and finally falling into a deep sleep.

At ten o'clock next morning he entered the office of Dr. Rufus Fenley, the physician Cologne

shared with the two neighboring towns of Norwood and Young America.

"You look terrible," the doctor said unprofessionally but with the frankness of an old friend. "What's wrong?"

"Doc," Harker said, "is it possible for a person to have temporary amnesia?"

"What do you mean, 'temporary'?"

"I mean I have utterly no recollection of last night. I remember I called on Fraulein Tessler—out on Number 5—and I was in her house. Then this blackness struck me. I don't remember driving home."

"I wouldn't worry about the driving," soothed Dr. Fenley. "It might be a case of the mind being occupied and the surroundings so familiar that your reactions became mechanical."

Harker shook his head. "It was more than that," he insisted. "It was a complete mental blackout."

"I don't suppose you know where you got this puncture on the back of the neck."

The judge shook his head.

"You say you were visiting a woman. You don't recall talking to her or any details of her house?"

"No. I was in her garden and I smelled the flowers there and from then on it's all a blank."

"Well the rest will come back to you presently," Fenley said. He was no psychologist but he was a shrewd G.P. "Meanwhile don't fret over it and take two of these at bedtime." He handed Harker a prescription. "Come and see me tomorrow."

Harker returned home, lit a cigar and stretched out on the sofa. He was still very much disturbed,

but as the tobacco smoke drifted ceilingward and he relaxed, little by little the events of the previous evening began to come back to him. As if he were going backward in time, he recalled driving down the highway from Fraulein Tessler's house. Then he saw himself walking through the garden and the solitary crow that had swooped down before him. And then the white tile room in the Tessler house came back to him. But what he had said in that house or what the woman in black had said to him were part of a gulf he could not cross.

When evening came, Anne Dayton not having appeared, Harker went into the kitchen and prepared a frugal supper. An hour later a knock sounded on the door. It was Sheriff Blunt. He looked concerned.

"Any news of the girls?" the judge asked, ushering him into the study.

"No," Blunt said. "And that's what I came to talk to you about. 'Wasn't Mrs. Dayton's Anne supposed to fix your meals while her mother is out of town?'"

Harker nodded. "She didn't show up."

Worry lanced into the sheriff's eyes. "She wasn't in school either. And her house is open . . ."

Harker frowned. "You don't think . . .?"

"Yes, I do." Blunt nervously ground his cigar in an ash tray. "I've had my deputy drive by her place regularly. Maybe I should have taken more precautions. If anything has happened to her I'll never forgive myself."

"And you have no clues of the Bentley or Brooks girl except for that piece of dress Lew Gadsen found?"

"No. Nothing. Nothing except this, and we don't even know for sure if it belonged to either of the girls." He showed Harker a large copper button.

Harker glanced at the button absently. And then suddenly something clicked in his memory. He thrust his hand in his pocket and drew forth the thing the crow had dropped in Fraulein Tessler's garden. It had remained forgotten in his pocket. Revealed now, it was a duplicate of the button in the sheriff's hand.

"Where did you get that?" demanded Blunt.

In a few words Harker told him.

The sheriff swung around. "So I was right after all." He headed for the door. "I knew that woman was no good."

"Hold on!" Harker said. "We don't know how far that crow may have flown before I saw it in the garden."

But Blunt was already hurrying out to his car. Harker hesitated, then followed.

The sheriff kept the Plymouth wide open until they reached the side road that led to the Tessler property. Moonlight turned that side road into a lane of silver, but heavy clouds were rolling in and when they reached her driveway, the place was smothered in darkness.

"Try the garden first," Harker advised. "That seems to be where she spends most of her time."

Though it was possible to see only a few yards before them, they traversed the garden from one end to another but saw no sign of Fraulein Tessler. They turned and headed back for the house. Blunt

banged the brass knocker but there was no response. Without compunction he reached in his pocket, produced a set of keys, tried several until one clicked in the lock, then shoved the door open.

"No warrant," he said under his breath. "I'll think of an excuse later."

Inside he found a light switch, and the two men stood a moment looking with an appreciative eye at the interior. There was one large room, two stories in height with a staircase leading up to a gallery. There was a door leading off the main floor. The furniture, draperies and oil paintings were those of a French chateau rather than a house in rural farming area. The north wall from ceiling to floor was composed entirely of book shelves. Harker strode across to these shelves, while Blunt went on through the connecting door in search of Fraulein Tessler. When he returned unsuccessfully he found the judge had moved to the central table and was examining several books there.

"Look at this," the judge said. He held a leather-bound book whose crumbling covers were protected by a plastic shield. The pages were brittle and yellow with age. "Richard Verstegan's *Restitution of Decayed Intelligence*. Do you know what this is?"

"Looks pretty old."

"Not only old but a curiosity. Why, it's a legend. It was banned and all copies supposedly destroyed in the 1700's".

"Witchcraft?" Blunt said.

"Witchcraft, sorcery, the occult. It supposedly contains secrets straight out of the Dark Ages,

things it was judged no man should read."

Blunt stirred impatiently.

"And look at these symbols and this writing!"

The book was printed in Latin. One of the two open pages was covered with symbols, of which circles, stars, lesangres, and pentacles predominated. On the opposite page a passage was underlined and an English translation written in red ink on the margin:

Know ye all of sorted interests, all elixirs brewed to surcease the forwarding of age, all drafts for the restoration of youth must come to naught without the presence of the Lesangre symbols, the Borthorian chant and that vital integrant, the blood of young virgins.

"Nobody believes that balderdash," Blunt said. He thrust his hands into his pockets and strode meditatively across the room. Before one of the ceiling high windows he stopped and stood staring out into the dark night. "Where do you suppose that Tessler woman is," he said half to himself. "Her car is here. I saw it beside the house when we came in." He chewed his lip reflectively. "Blood of young virgins. What rot!"

Suddenly he stiffened and took a step nearer the window. He peered out. Turning he called sharply, "Judge!" He headed for the door, motioning Harker to follow.

Outside, after the lights of the interior, the blackness was intense, the moon still covered by opaque clouds. But ahead of them, some distance

beyond a short rise, a flickering light was visible in the garden. As they went on, the light resolved into the multiple flare of flaming torches. There were four of them Harker saw, near the center of the garden, set close together, and he saw a moment later that they were mounted on the granite fountain. Silhouetted against the uncertain radiance was the unmistakable figure of the woman in black. Either she had been in the garden all the while and they had passed her unseeing in the darkness or she had come out the door in the south wall leading from the distillation room. The judge was about to call out to her but Blunt clamped his hand over Harker's mouth, shaking his head.

They moved closer. Now they were only a few yards away. Suddenly Harker rocked backward as he saw the reason for Blunt's demand for silence. The scene before them was like a motion picture film stopped at one frame. Lying supine on the surface of the granite slab was another familiar figure, arms and legs spreadeagled and bound. Anne Dayton! She lay there motionless, eyes closed. And bent over her, Fraulein Tessler held one hand above her; the torchlight gleamed on the naked steel of a wide bladed knife. As she poised there she began to sing a low almost inaudible chant.

For what seemed an eternity to Harker the tableaux continued. The sing song voice rose and fell down the octaves. Abruptly the chanting ceased and the woman raised the knife higher above her. Simultaneously the spell was broken and Blunt hurtled forward. With a single motion he reached up and deflected the knife even as it began

its downward descent so that the blade ground harmlessly into the stone on which the girl lay. Then he seized the woman, spun her around, whipped her arms behind her, and clamped handcuffs about her wrists.

"I reckon that's the end of that," he said.

Harker moved to the sacrifice block—he recognized it for what it was now and unfastened the bonds that held Anne Dayton there. He felt for a pulse.

"She's alive," he said. "Drugged probably, but seems unhurt."

He lifted her in his arms and began to move down the flagstone walk toward the sheriff's car. Blunt followed, prodding the cuffed Fraulein Tessler before him. The woman walked as in a stupor; her lips trembled with passion and her eyes gleamed malevolently. They reached the car, got in, and the sheriff headed it down the driveway.

"She's coming around," Harker said of the girl next to him in the rear seat. He had wrapped her in the car robe.

All the way back to Cologne the woman in black sat in frozen silence which Lunt made no effort to break. By the light of the dash Harker could see the sheriff's knuckles white where his hands gripped the wheel.

In Cologne Blunt drove straight to the house of Dr. Fenley. Anne Dayton was fully conscious now but sobbing deep in her throat and obviously suffering from shock. Harker carried her up the stairs and into the physician's spare bedroom where Fenley's wife took charge. Then briefly the judge

told Fenley what had happened.

"We'll be back and see how she is," Harker said.

Blunt next drove to the Cologne jail which was a small narrow building that doubled as an office for the local electric company. Not until the cell door had closed on the still silent Fraulein Tessler did the judge utter a sigh of relief.

"Thank heaven, that's over!" he said fervently.

Blunt shook his head. "I'm afraid the worst is yet to come," he said. "We're going back to the garden."

"The Brooks and Bentley girls?"

"Yes."

Once again they headed down the highway. Harker knew the reason now behind his temporary amnesia of the night before, knew why all had been a blank after he entered the Tessler distillation room. Like Anne Dayton he had been drugged. At the Tessler driveway Blunt stopped the car, went around to the trunk and took out a flashlight and a small short handled spade.

"This may not be very 'pleasant,'" he said. "Maybe you'd better wait here."

He turned and headed into the garden. Unmindful of his words Harker followed.

Twenty yards beyond the granite sacrifice block the sheriff's flash revealed two oblong mounds of freshly turned earth. Blunt took off his coat and began to wield the spade.

A quarter of an hour later Harker wished he had taken Blunt's advice and stayed in the car.

The epilogue to the horror came three weeks later.

During that time crowds of aroused Carver county citizens gathered outside the Chaska jail to which Fraulein Tessler had been transferred shortly after her arrest. As the crowd increased and its mood grew darker there was talk of moving the woman to Minneapolis for security reasons as well as a possible change of venue. It was strangely ironic that fate stepped in before this could be done.

A public defender was appointed for Fraulein Tessler when she refused to engage an attorney. The defender let it be known that his defense would be total and complete insanity.

"What else," he was quoted as saying, "could induce a woman to commit such hideous crimes, double murder, simply to comply with an eighteenth century superstition that the necessary ingredient to make a drug operative was the blood of young virgins?"

The woman continued to maintain silence save to ask that a bottle of "medicine" be brought to her from the distillation room of her house. The request was refused. Whereupon she broke into a rage, tearing her hair and screaming curses and maledictions at her jailors.

On September 20th Judge Warren Harker was awakened by a telephone call from Sheriff Tom Blunt. It was one a.m.

Blunt said quietly, "Fraulein Tessler is dead!"

It took a moment for the significance of those words to filter into Harker's sleep fogged brain.

"Well," he said at length, "perhaps it's just as well. It may not be the justice the people wanted,

but it saves the county the expense of a trial. What took her off?"

Blunt did not reply for a long moment.

"You're not going to believe this," he said slowly. "I have the coroner's report here before me. He gives as the cause of death 'advanced senility.' In other words, old age."

Was there something in the pool, or just his imagination?

The House of the Temple

by Brian Lumley

A thrilling new novelette of the Cthulhu Mythos

I

The Summons

I SUPPOSE UNDER the circumstances it is only natural that the police should require this belated written statement from me; and I further suppose it to be in recognition of my present highly nervous condition and my totally unwarranted confinement in this *place* that they are allowing me to draw the thing up without supervision. But while every kindness has been shown me, still I most strongly protest my continued detainment here. Knowing what I now know, I would voice the same protest in

respect of detention in *any* prison or institute anywhere in Scotland . . . anywhere in the entire British Isles.

Before I begin, however, let me clearly make the point that, since no charges have been levelled against me, I make this statement of my own free will, fully knowing that in so doing I may well extend my stay in this detestable place. I can only hope that upon its reading, it will be seen that I had no alternative but to follow the action I describe.

You the reader must therefore judge. My actual sanity—if indeed I am still sane—my very *being*, may well depend upon your findings. . . .

I was in New York when the letter from my uncle's solicitors reached me. Sent from an address in the Royal Mile, that great road which reaches steep and cobbled to the esplanade of Edinburgh Castle itself, the large, sealed manila envelope had all the hallmarks of officialdom, so that even before I opened it I feared the worst.

Not that I had been close to my uncle in recent years (my mother had brought me out of Scotland as a small child, on the death of my father, and I had never been back) but certainly I remembered Uncle Gavin. If anything I remembered him better than I did my father; for where Andrew McGilchrist had always been dry and introverted, Uncle Gavin had been just the opposite. Warm, outgoing and generous to a fault, he had spoilt me mercilessly.

Now, according to the letter, he was dead and I

was named his sole heir and beneficiary; and the envelope contained a voucher which guaranteed me a flight to Edinburgh from anywhere in the world. And then of course there was the letter itself, the contents of which further guaranteed my use of that voucher; for only a fool could possibly refuse my uncle's bequest, or fail to be interested in its attendant though at present unspecified conditions.

Quite simply, by presenting myself at the offices of Macdonald, Asquith and Lee in Edinburgh, I would already have fulfilled the first condition toward inheriting my uncle's considerable fortune, his estate of over three hundred acres and his great house where it stood in wild and splendid solitude at the foot of the Pentlands in Lothian. All of which seemed a very far cry from New York . . .

As to what I was doing in New York in the first place:

Three months earlier, in mid-March of 1976—when I was living alone in Philadelphia in the home where my mother had raised me—my fiancée of two years had given me back my ring, run off and married a banker from Baltimore. The novel I was writing had immediately metamorphosed from a light-hearted love story into a doom-laden tragedy, became meaningless somewhere in the transformation, and ended up in my wastepaper basket. That was that. I sold up and moved to New York, where an artist friend had been willing to share his apartment until I could find a decent place of my own.

I had left no forwarding address, however, which

explained the delayed delivery of the letter from my uncle's solicitors; the letter itself was post-marked March 26th, and from the various marks, labels and redirections on the envelope, the U.S. Mail had obviously gone to considerable trouble to find me. And they found me at a time when the lives of both myself and my artist friend, Carl Earlman, were at a very low ebb. I was not writing and Carl was not drawing, and despite the arrival of summer our spirits were on a rapid decline.

Which is probably why I jumped at the opportunity the letter presented, though, as I have said, certainly I would have been a fool to ignore or refuse the thing . . . Or so I thought at the time.

I invited Carl along if he so desired, and he too grasped at the chance with both hands. His funds were low and getting lower; he would soon be obliged to quit his apartment for something less ostentatious; and since he, too, had decided that he needed a change of locale—to put some life back into his artwork—the matter was soon decided and we packed our bags and headed for Edinburgh.

It was not until our journey was over, however—when we were settled in our hotel rooms in Princes Street—that I remembered my mother's warning, delivered to me deliriously but persistently from her deathbed, that I should never return to Scotland, certainly not to the old house. And as I vainly attempted to adjust to jet-lag and the fact that it was late evening while all my instincts told me it should now be day, so my mind

went back over what little I knew of my family roots, of the McGilchrist line itself, of that old and rambling house in the Pentlands where I had been born, and especially of the peculiar reticence of Messrs. Macdonald, Asquith and Lee, the Scottish solicitors.

Reticence, yes, because I could almost feel the hesitancy in their letter. It seemed to me that they would have preferred *not* to find me; and yet, if I were asked what it was that gave me this impression, then I would be at a loss for an answer. Something in the way it was phrased, perhaps—in the dry, professional idiom of solicitors—which too often seems to me to put aside all matters of emotion or sensibility; so that I felt like a small boy offered a candy . . . and warned simultaneously that it would ruin my teeth. Yes, it seemed to me that Messrs. Macdonald, Asquith and Lee might actually be *apprehensive* about my acceptance of their conditions—or rather, of my uncle's conditions—as if they were offering a cigar to an addict suffering from cancer of the lungs.

I fastened on that line of reasoning, seeing the conditions of the will as the root of the vague uneasiness which niggled at the back of my mind. The worst of it was that these conditions were not specified; other than to say that if I could not or would not meet them, still I would receive fifteen thousand pounds and my return ticket home, and that the residue of my uncle's fortune would then be used to carry out his will in respect of "the property known as Temple House."

Temple House, that rambling old seat of the

McGilchrists where it stood locked in a steep re-
entry; and the Pentland Hills a grey and green
backdrop to its frowning, steep-gabled aspect; with
something of the Gothic in its structure, something
more of Renaissance Scotland, and an aura of
antiquity all its own which, as a child, I could still
remember loving dearly. But that had been almost
twenty years ago and the place had been my home.
A happy home, I had thought; at least until the
death of my father, of which I could remember
nothing at all.

But I did remember the pool—the deep, grey
pool where it lapped at the raised, reinforced, east-
facing garden wall—the pool and its ring of broken
quartz pillars, the remains of the temple for which
the house was named. Thinking back over the
years to my infancy, I wondered if perhaps the
pool had been the reason my mother had always
hated the place. None of the McGilchrists had ever
been swimmers, and yet water had always seemed
to fascinate them. I would not have been the first
of the line to be found floating face-down in that
strange, pillar-encircled pool of deep and weedy
water; and I had used to spend hours just sitting on
the wall and staring across the breeze-rippled sur-
face . . .

So my thoughts went as, tossing in my hotel bed
late into the night, I turned matters over in my
mind . . . And having retired late, so we rose late,
Carl and I; and it was not until 2 p.m. that I
presented myself at the office of Macdonald, As-
quith and Lee on the Royal Mile.

II

The Will

Since Carl had climbed up to the esplanade to take in the view, I was alone when I reached my destination and entered MA and L's offices through a door of yellow-tinted bull's-eye panes, passing into the cool welcome of a dim and very *Olde Worlde* anteroom; and for all that this was the source of my enigmatic summons, still I found a reassuring air of charm and quiet sincerity about the place. A clerk led me into an inner chamber as much removed from my idea of a solicitor's office as is Edinburgh from New York, and having been introduced to the firm's Mr. Asquith I was offered a seat.

Asquith was tall, slender, high-browed and balding, with a mass of freckles which seemed oddly in contrast with his late middle years, and his handshake was firm and dry. While he busied himself getting various documents, I was given a minute or two to look about this large and bewilderingly cluttered room of shelves, filing cabinets, cupboards and three small desks. But for all that the place seemed grossly disordered, still Mr. Asquith quickly found what he was looking for and seated himself opposite me behind his desk. He was the only partner present and I the only client.

"Now, Mr. McGilchrist," he began. "And so we managed to find you, did we? And doubtless you're wondering what it's all about, and you probably

think there's something of a mystery here? Well, so there is, and for me and my partners no less than for yourself."

"I don't quite follow," I answered, searching his face for a clue.

"No, no, of course you don't. Well now, perhaps this will explain it better. It's a copy of your uncle's will. As you'll see, he was rather short on words; hence the mystery. A more succinct document—which nevertheless hints at so much more—I've yet to see!"

"I Gavin McGilchrist," (the will began) "of Temple House in Lothian, hereby revoke all Wills, Codicils or Testamentary Dispositions heretofore made by me, and I appoint my Nephew, John Hamish McGilchrist of Philadelphia in the United States of America, to be the Executor of this my Last Will and direct that all my Debts, Testamentary and Funeral Expenses shall be paid as soon as conveniently may be after my death."

"I give and bequeath unto the aforementioned John Hamish McGilchrist everything I possess, my Land and the Property standing thereon, with the following Condition: namely that he alone shall open and read the Deposition which shall accompany this Will into the hands of the Solicitors; and that furthermore he, being the Owner, shall destroy Temple House to its last stone within a Threemonth of accepting this Condition. In the event that he shall refuse this undertaking, then shall my Solicitors, Macdonald, Asquith and Lee of Edinburgh, become sole Executors of my Estate,

who shall follow to the letter the Instructions simultaneously deposited with them."

The will was dated and signed in my uncle's scratchy scrawl.

I read it through a second time and looked up to find Mr. Asquith's gaze fixed intently upon me. "Well," he said, "and didn't I say it was a mystery? Almost as strange as his death . . ." He saw the immediate change in my expression, the frown and the question my lips were beginning to frame, and held up his hands in apology. "I'm sorry," he said, "so very sorry—for of course you know nothing of the circumstances of his death, do you? I had better explain:

"A year ago," Asquith continued, "your uncle was one of the most hale and hearty men you could wish to meet. He was a man of independent means, as you know, and for a good many years he had been collecting data for a book. Ah! I see you're surprised. Well, you shouldn't be. Your great-grandfather wrote *Notes of Nessie: the Secrets of Loch Ness*; and your grandmother, under a pseudonym, was a fairly successful romanticist around the turn of the century. You, too, I believe, have published several romances? Indeed," and he smiled and nodded, "it appears to be in the blood, you see?

"Like your great-grandfather, however, your Uncle Gavin McGilchrist had no romantic aspirations. He was a researcher, you see, and couldn't abide a mystery to remain unsolved. And there he was at Temple House, a bachelor and time on his hands, and a marvellous family tree to explore and

a great mystery to unravel."

"Family tree?" I said. "He was researching the biography of a family? But which fam—" And I paused.

Asquith smiled. "You've guessed it, of course," he said. "Yes, he was planning a book on the McGilchrists, with special reference to the curse . . ." And his smile quickly vanished.

It was as if a cold draft, coming from nowhere, fanned my cheek. "The curse? My family had . . . a curse?"

He nodded. "Oh, yes. Not the classical sort of curse, by any means, but a curse nevertheless—or at least your uncle thought so. Perhaps he wasn't really serious about it at first, but towards the end—"

"I think I know what you mean," I said. "I remember now: the deaths by stroke, by drowning, by thrombosis. My mother mentioned them on her own deathbed. A curse on the McGilchrists, she said, on the old house."

Again Asquith nodded, and finally he continued. "Well, your uncle had been collecting material for many years, I suspect since the death of your father; from local archives, historical annals, various chronicles, church records, military museums, and so on. He had even enlisted our aid, on occasion, in finding this or that old document. Our firm was founded one hundred and sixty years ago, you see, and we've had many McGilchrists as clients.

"As I've said, up to a time roughly a year ago, he was as hale and hearty a man as you could wish to

meet. Then he travelled abroad; Hungary, Romania, all the old countries of antique myth and legend. He brought back many books with him, and on his return he was a changed man. He had become, in a matter of weeks, the merest shadow of his former self. Finally, nine weeks ago on March 22nd, he left his will in our hands, an additional set of instructions for us to follow in the event you couldn't be found, and the sealed envelope which he mentions in his will. I shall give that to you in a moment. Two days later, when his gillie returned to Temple House from a short holiday—"

"He found my uncle dead," I finished it for him. "I see . . . And the strange circumstances?"

"For a man of his years to die of a heart attack . . ." Asquith shook his head. "He wasn't old. What?—an outdoors man, like him? And what of the shotgun, with both barrels discharged, and the spent cartridges lying at his feet just outside the porch? What had he fired at, eh, in the dead of night? And the look on his face—monstrous!"

"You saw him?"

"Oh, yes. That was part of our instructions; I was to see him. And not just myself but Mr. Lee also. And the doctor, of course, who declared it could only have been a heart attack. But then there was the post-mortem. That was also part of your uncle's instructions . . ."

"And its findings?" I quietly asked.

"Why, that was the reason he wanted the autopsy, do you see? So that we should know he was in good health."

"No heart attack?"

"No," he shook his head, "not him. But dead, certainly. And that look on his face, Mr. McGilchrist—that terrible, pleading look in his wide, wide eyes . . ."

III

The House

Half an hour later I left Mr. Asquith in his office and saw myself out through the anteroom and into the hot, cobbled road that climbed to the great grey castle. In the interim I had opened the envelope left for me by my uncle and had given its contents a cursory scrutiny, but I intended to study them minutely at my earliest convenience.

I had also offered to let Asquith see the contents, only to have him wave my offer aside. It was a private thing, he said, for my eyes only. Then he had asked me what I intended to do now, and I had answered that I would go to Temple House and take up temporary residence there. He then produced the keys, assured me of the firm's interest in my business—its complete confidentiality and its readiness to provide assistance should I need it—and bade me good day.

I found Carl Earlman leaning on the esplanade wall and gazing out over the city. Directly below his position the castle rock fell away for hundreds of feet to a busy road that wound round and down and into the maze of streets and junctions forming the city center. He started when I took hold of his arm.

"What—? Oh, it's you, John! I was lost in thought. This fantastic view; I've already stored away a dozen sketches in my head. Great!" Then he saw my face and frowned. "Is anything wrong? You don't quite look yourself."

As we made our way down from that high place I told him of my meeting with Asquith and all that had passed between us, so that by the time we found a cab (a "taxi") and had ourselves driven to an automobile rental depot, I had managed to bring him fully up to date. Then it was simply a matter of hiring a car and driving out to Temple House . . .

We headed south-west out of Edinburgh with Carl driving our Range Rover at a leisurely pace, and within three-quarters of an hour turned right off the main road onto a narrow strip whose half-metalled surface climbed straight as an arrow toward the looming Pentlands. Bald and majestic, those grey domes rose from a scree of gorse-grown shale to cast their sooty, mid-afternoon shadows over lesser mounds, fields and streamlets alike. Over our vehicle, too, as it grew tiny in the frowning presence of the hills.

I was following a small-scale map of the area purchased from a filling station, (a "garage") for of course the district was completely strange to me. A lad of five on leaving Scotland—and protected by my mother's exaggerated fears at that, which hardly ever let me out of her sight—I had never been allowed to stray very far from Temple House.

Temple House . . . and again the name con-

jured strange phantoms, stirred vague memories I had thought long dead.

Now the road narrowed more yet, swinging sharply to the right before passing round a rocky spur. The ground rose up beyond the spur and formed a shallow ridge, and my map told me that the gully or reentry which guarded Temple House lay on the far side of this final rise. I knew that when we reached the crest the house would come into view, and I found myself holding my breath as the Range Rover's wheels bit into the cinder surface of the track.

"There she is!" cried Carl as first the eaves of the place became visible, then its oak-beamed gables and greystone walls, and finally the entire frontage where it projected from behind the sheer rise of the gully's wall. And now, as we accelerated down the slight decline and turned right to follow a course running parallel to the stream, the whole house came into view where it stood half in shadow. That strange old house in the silent gully, where no birds ever flew and not even a rabbit had been seen to sport in the long wild grass.

"Hey!" Carl cried, his voice full of enthusiasm. "And your uncle wanted this place pulled down? What in hell for? It's beautiful—and it must be worth a fortune!"

"I shouldn't think so," I answered. "It might look all right from here, but wait till you get inside. Its foundations were waterlogged twenty years ago. There were always six inches of water in the cellar, and the panels of the lower rooms were mouldy even then. God only knows what it must be

like now!"

"Does it look the way you remember it?" he asked.

"Not quite," I frowned. "Seen through the eyes of an adult, there are differences."

For one thing, the pool was different. The level of the water was lower, so that the wide, grass-grown wall of the dam seemed somehow taller. In fact, I had completely forgotten about the dam, without which the pool could not exist, or at best would be the merest pebble-bottomed pool and not the small lake which it now was. For the first time it dawned on me that the pool was artificial, not natural as I had always thought of it, and that Temple House had been built on top of the dam's curving mound where it extended to the steep shale cliff of the defile itself.

With a skidding of loose chippings, Carl took the Range Rover up the ramp that formed the drive to the house, and a moment later we drew to a halt before the high-arched porch. We dismounted and entered, and now Carl went clattering away—almost irreverently, I thought—into cool rooms, dark stairwells and huge cupboards, his voice echoing back to me where I stood with mixed emotions, savouring the atmosphere of the old place, just inside the doorway to the house proper.

"But this is *it!*" he cried from somewhere. "This is for me! My studio, and no question. Come and look, John—look at the windows letting in all this good light. You're right about the damp, I can feel it—but that aside it's perfect."

I found him in what had once been the main

living-room, standing in golden clouds of dust he had stirred up, motes illumined by the sun's rays where they struck into the room through huge, leaded windows, "You'll need to give the place a good dusting and sweeping out," I told him.

"Oh, sure," he answered, "but there's a lot wants doing before that. Do you know where the master switch is?"

"Umm? Switch?"

"For the electric light," he frowned impatiently at me. "And surely there's an icebox in the kitchen?"

"A refrigerator?" I answered. "Oh, yes, I'm sure there is . . . Look, you run around and explore the place and do whatever makes you happy. Me, I'm just going to potter about and try to waken a few old dreams."

During the next hour or two—while I quite literally "potted about" and familiarized myself once again with this old house so full of memories—Carl fixed himself up with a bed in his "studio," found the main switch and got the electricity flowing, examined the refrigerator and satisfied himself that it was in working order, then searched me out where I sat in the mahogany-panelled study upstairs to tell me that he was driving into Penicuik to stock up with food.

From my window I watched him go, until the cloud of dust thrown up by his wheels disappeared over the rise to the south, then stirred myself into positive action. There were things to be done—things I must do for myself, others for my uncle—and the sooner I started the better. Not

that there was any lack of time; I had three whole months to carry out Gavin McGilchrist's instructions, or to fail to carry them out. And yet somehow . . . yes, there was this feeling of *urgency* in me.

And so I switched on the light against gathering shadows, took out the envelope left for me by my uncle—that envelope whose contents, a letter and a notebook, were for my eyes only—sat down at the great desk used by so many generations of McGilchrists, and began to read. . . .

IV

The Curse

"My dear, dear Nephew," the letter in my uncle's uneven script began, "—so much I would like to say to you, and so little time in which to say it. And all these years grown in between since last I saw you.

"When first you left Scotland with your mother I would have written to you through her, but she forbade it. In early 1970 I learned of her death, so that even my condolences would have been six months too late; well, you have them now. She was a wonderful woman, and of course she was quite right to take you away out of it all. If I'm right in what I now suspect, her woman's intuition will yet prove to have been nearer the mark than anyone ever could have guessed, and—

"But there I go, miles off the point and

rambling as usual; and such a lot to say. Except—I'm damned if I know where to begin! I suppose the plain fact of the matter is quite simply stated—namely, that for you to be reading this is for me to be gone forever from the world of men. But gone . . . *where?* And how to explain?

The fact is, I cannot tell it all, not and make it believable. Not the way I have come to believe it. Instead you will have to be satisfied with the barest essentials. The rest you can discover for yourself. There are books in the old library that tell it all—if a man has the patience to look. And if he's capable of putting aside all matters of common knowledge, all laws of science and logic; capable of unlearning all that life has ever taught him of truth and beauty.

"Four hundred years ago we weren't such a race of damned sceptics. They were burning witches in these parts then, and if they had suspected of anyone what I have come to suspect of Temple House and its grounds. . . .

"Your mother may not have mentioned the curse—the curse of the McGilchrists. Oh, she believed in it, certainly, but it's possible she thought that to tell of it might be to invoke the thing. That is to say, by telling you she might bring the curse down on your head. Perhaps she was right, for unless my death is seen to be *entirely natural*, then certainly I shall have brought it down upon myself.

"And what of you, Nephew?

"You have three months. Longer than that I do not deem safe, and nothing is guaranteed. Even

three months might be dangerously overlong, but I pray not. Of course you are at liberty, if you so desire, simply to get the thing over and done with. In my study, in the bottom right-hand drawer of my desk, you will find sufficient fuses and explosive materials to bring down the wall of the defile onto the house, and the house itself down into the pool, which should satisfactorily put an end to the thing.

"But . . . you had an inquiring mind as a child. If you look where I have looked and read what I have read, then you shall learn what I've learned and know that it is neither advanced senility nor madness but my own intelligence which leads me to the one, inescapable conclusion—that this House of the Temple, this Temple House of the McGilchrists, is accursed. Most terribly . . .

"I could flee the place, of course, but I doubt if that would save me. And if it did save me, still it would leave the final questions unanswered and the riddle unsolved. Also, I loved my brother, your father, and I saw his face when he was dead. If for nothing else, that look on your father's dead face has been sufficient reason for me to pursue the thing thus far. I thought to seek it out, to know it, destroy it—but now. . . .

"I have never been much of a religious man, Nephew, and so it comes doubly hard for me to say what I now say: that while your father is dead these twenty years and more, I now find myself wondering if he is truly at rest! And what will be the look on *my* face when the thing is over, one way or the other? Ask about that, Nephew, ask how *I* looked when they found me.

"Finally, as to your course of action from this point onward: do what you will, but in the last event be sure you bring about the utter dissolution of the seat of ancient evil known as Temple House. There are things hidden in the great deserts and mountains of the world, and others sunken under the deepest oceans, which never were meant to exist in any sane or ordered universe. Yes, and certain revenants of immemorial horror have even come among men. One such has anchored itself here in the Pentlands, and in a little while I may meet it face to face. If all goes well . . . But then you should not be reading this.

"And so the rest is up to you, John Hamish; and if indeed man has an immortal soul, I now place mine in your hands. Do what must be done and if you are a believer, then say a prayer for me . . .

Yr. Loving Uncle—
Gavin McGilchrist."

I read the letter through a second time, then a third, and the shadows lengthened beyond the reach of the study's electric lights. Finally, I turned to the notebook—a slim, ruled, board-covered book whose like might be purchased at any stationery store—and opened it to page upon page of scrawled and at first glance seemingly unconnected jottings, references, abbreviated notes and memoranda concerning . . . Concerning what? Black magic? Witchcraft? The "supernatural?" But what else would you call a curse if not supernatural?

Well, my uncle had mentioned a puzzle, a mystery, the McGilchrist curse, the thing he had tracked down almost to the finish. And here were all the pointers, the clues, the keys to his years of research. I stared at the great bookcases lining the walls, the leather spines of their contents dully agleam in the glow of the lights. Asquith had told me that my uncle brought many old books back with him from his wanderings abroad.

I stood up and felt momentarily dizzy, and was obliged to lean on the desk until the feeling passed. The mustiness of the deserted house, I supposed, the closeness of the room and the odour of old books. Books . . . yes, and I moved shakily across to the nearest bookcase and ran my fingers over titles rubbed and faded with age and wear. There were works here which seemed to stir faint memories—perhaps I had been allowed to play with these books as a child?—but others were almost tangibly strange to the place, whose titles alone would make aliens of them without ever a page being turned. These must be those volumes my uncle had discovered abroad. I frowned as I tried to make something of their less than commonplace names.

Here were such works as the German *Unter-Zee Kulden* and Feery's *Notes on the Necronomicon* in a French edition; and here Gaston le Fe's *Dwellers in the Depths* and a black-bound, iron-hasped copy of the *Cthäat Aquadingen*, its harsh title suggestive of both German and Latin roots. Here was Gantley's *Hydrophinnæ*, and here the *Liber Miraculorem* of the Monk and Chaplain Herbert of

Clairvaux. Gothic letters proclaimed of one volume that it was Prinn's *De Vermis Mysteriis*, while another purported to be the suppressed and hideously disquieting *Unaussprechlichen Kulten* of Von Junzt—titles which seemed to leap at me as my eyes moved from shelf to shelf in a sort of disbelieving stupefaction.

What possible connection could there be between these ancient, foreign volumes of elder madness and delirium and the solid, down-to-earth McGilchrist line of gentlemen, officers and scholars? There seemed only one way to find out. Choosing a book at random. I found it to be the *Cthäat Aquadingen* and returned with it to the desk. The light outside was failing now and the shadows of the hills were long and sooty. In less than an hour it would be dusk, and half an hour after that dark.

Then there would only be Carl and I and the night. And the old house. As if in answer to unspoken thoughts, settling timbers groaned somewhere overhead. Through the window, down below in the sharp shadows of the house, the dull green glint of water caught my eye.

Carl and I, the night and the old house—
And the deep, dark pool.

V

The Music

It was almost completely dark by the time Carl

returned, but in between I had at least been able to discover my uncle's system of reference. It was quite elementary, really. In his notebook, references such as "CA 121/7" simply indicated an item of interest in the *Cthäat Aquadingen*, page 121, the seventh paragraph. And in the work itself he had carefully underscored all such paragraphs or items of interest. At least a dozen such references concerning the *Cthäat Aquadingen* occurred in his notebook, and as night had drawn on I had examined each in turn.

Most of them were meaningless to me and several were in a tongue or glyph completely beyond my comprehension, but others were in a form of old English which I could transcribe with comparative ease. One such, which seemed a chant of sorts, had a brief annotation scrawled in the margin in my uncle's hand. The passage I refer to, as nearly as I can remember, went like this:

*"Rise, O Nameless Ones;
It is Thy Season
When Thine Own of Thy Choosing,
Through Thy Spells & Thy Magic,
Through Dreams & Enchantry,
May know Thou art come.
They rush to Thy Pleasure,
For the Love of Thy Masters—
—the Spawn of Cthulhu."*

And the accompanying annotation queried: "Would they have used such as this to call the Thing forth, I wonder, or was it simply a blood lure? What causes it to come forth now? When will

it next come?"

It was while I was comparing references and text in this fashion that I began to get a glimmer as to just what the book was, and on further considering its title I saw that I had probably guessed correctly. "Cthäat" frankly baffled me, unless it had some connection with the language or being of the pre-Nacaal Kthatans; but "Aquadingen" was far less alien in its sound and formation. It meant (I believed) "water-things," or "things of the waters;" and the *Cthäat Aquadingen* was quite simply a compendium of myths and legends concerning water sprites, nymphs, demons, naiads and other supernatural creatures of lakes and oceans, and the spells or conjurations by which they might be evoked or called out of their watery haunts.

I had just arrived at this conclusion when Carl returned, the lights of his vehicle cutting a bright swath over the dark surface of the pool as he parked in front of the porch. Laden down, he entered the house and I went down to the spacious if somewhat old fashioned kitchen to find him filling shelves and cupboards and stocking the refrigerator with perishables. This done, bright and breezy in his enthusiasm, he inquired about the radio.

"Radio?" I answered. "I thought your prime concern was for peace and quiet? Why, you've made enough noise for ten since we got here!"

"No, no," he said. "It's not *my* noise I'm concerned about but yours. Or rather, the radio's. I mean, you've obviously found one for I heard the music."

Carl was big, blond and blue-eyed; a Viking if ever I saw one, and quite capable of displaying a Viking's temper. He had been laughing when he asked me where the radio was, but now he was frowning. "Are you playing games with me, John?"

"No, of course I'm not," I answered him. "Now what's all this about? What music have you been hearing?"

His face suddenly brightened and he snapped his fingers. "There's a radio in the Range Rover," he said. "There has to be. It must have gotten switched on, very low, and I've been getting Bucharest or something." He made as if to go back outside.

"Bucharest?" I repeated him.

"Hmm?" he paused in the kitchen doorway. "Oh, yes—gypsyish stuff. Tambourines and chanting—and fiddles. Dancing round campfires. Look, I'd better switch it off or the battery will run down."

"I didn't see a radio," I told him, following him out through the porch and onto the drive.

He leaned inside the front of the vehicle, switched on the interior light and searched methodically. Finally he put the light out with an emphatic click. He turned to me and his jaw had a stubborn set to it. I looked back at him and raised my eyebrows. "No radio?"

He shook his head. "But I heard the music."

"Lovers," I said.

"Eh?"

"Lovers, out walking. A transistor radio. Perhaps they were sitting in the grass. After all, it is a

beautiful summer night."

Again he shook his head. "No, it was right there in the air. Sweet and clear. I heard it as I approached the house. It came from the house, I thought. And you heard nothing?"

"Nothing," I answered, shaking my head.

"Well then—damn it to hell!" he suddenly grinned. "I've started hearing things, that's all! Skip it . . . Come on, let's have supper . . ."

Carl stuck to his "studio" bedroom but I slept upstairs in a room adjacent to the study. Even with the windows thrown wide open, the night was very warm and the atmosphere sticky, so that sleep did not come easily. Carl must have found a similar problem for on two or three occasions I awakened from a restless half-sleep to sounds of his moving about downstairs. In the morning over breakfast both of us were a little bleary-eyed, but then he led me through into his room to display the reason for his nocturnal activity.

There on the makeshift easel, on one of a dozen old canvasses he had brought with him, Carl had started work on a picture . . . of sorts.

For the present he had done little more than lightly brush in the background, which was clearly the valley of the house, but the house itself was missing from the picture and I could see that the artist did not intend to include it. The pool was there, however, with its encircling ring of quartz columns complete and finished with lintels of a like material. The columns and lintels glowed luminously.

In between and around the columns vague figures writhed, at present insubstantial as smoke, and in the foreground the flames of a small fire were driven on a wind that blew from across the pool. Taken as a whole and for all its sketchiness, the scene gave a vivid impression of savagery and pagan excitement—strange indeed considering that as yet there seemed to be so little in it to excite any sort of emotion whatever.

"Well," said Carl, his voice a trifle edgy, "what do you think?"

"I'm no artist, Carl," I answered, which I suppose in the circumstances was saying too much.

"You don't like it?" he sounded disappointed.

"I didn't say that," I countered. "Will it be a night scene?"

He nodded.

"And the dancers there, those wraiths . . . I suppose they *are* dancers?"

"Yes," he answered, "and musicians. Tambourines, fiddles . . ."

"Ah!" I nodded. "Last night's music."

He looked at me curiously. "Probably . . . Anyway, I'm happy with it. At least I've started to work. What about you?"

"You do your thing," I told him, "and I'll do mine."

"But what are you going to do?"

I shrugged. "Before I do anything I'm going to soak up a lot of atmosphere. But I don't intend staying here very long. A month or so, and then—"

"And then you'll burn this beautiful old place to the ground." He had difficulty keeping the sour

note out of his voice.

"It's what my uncle wanted," I said. "I'm not here to write a story. A story may come if it eventually, even a book, but that can wait. Anyway, I won't burn the house." I made a mushroom cloud with my hands. "She goes—up!"

Carl snorted. "You McGilchrists," he said. "You're all nuts!" But there was no malice in his statement.

There was a little in mine, however, when I answered: "Maybe—but I don't hear music where there isn't any!"

But that was before I knew everything . . .

VI

The Familiar

During the course of the next week Scotland began to feel the first effects of what is now being termed "a scourge on the British Isles," the beginning of an intense, ferocious and prolonged period of drought. Sheltered by the Pentlands, a veritable suntrap for a full eight to ten hours a day, Temple House was no exception. Carl and I took to lounging around in shorts and T-shirts, and with his blond hair and fair skin he was particularly vulnerable. If we had been swimmers, then certainly we should have used the pool; as it was we had to content ourselves by sitting at its edge with our feet in the cool mountain water.

By the end of that first week, however, the

drought's effect upon the small stream which fed the pool could clearly be seen. Where before the water had rushed down from the heights of the defile, now it seeped, and the natural overflow from the sides of the dam was so reduced that the old course of the stream was now completely dry. As for our own needs: the large water tanks in the attic of the house were full and their source of supply seemed independent, possibly some reservoir higher in the hills.

In the cool of the late afternoon, when the house stood in its own and the Pentlands' shade, then we worked; Carl at his drawing or painting, I with my uncle's notebook and veritable library of esoteric books. We also did a little walking in the hills, but in the heat of this incredible summer that was far too exhausting and only served to accentuate a peculiar mood of depression which had taken both of us in its grip. We blamed the weather, of course, when at any other time we would have considered so much sunshine and fresh air a positive blessing.

By the middle of the second week I was beginning to make real sense of my uncle's fragmentary record of his research. That is to say, his trail was becoming easier to follow as I grew used to his system and started to detect a pattern.

There were in fact two trails, both historic, one dealing with the McGilchrist line itself, the other more concerned with the family seat, with the House of the Temple. Because I seemed close to a definite discovery, I worked harder and became more absorbed with the work. And as if my own

industry was contagious, Carl too began to put in longer hours at his easel or drawing board.

It was a Wednesday evening, I remember, the shadows lengthening and the atmosphere heavy when I began to see just how my uncle's mind had been working. He had apparently decided that if there really was a curse on the McGilchrists, then that it had come about during the construction of Temple House. To discover why this was so, he had delved back into the years prior to its construction in this cleft in the hills, and his findings had been strange indeed.

It had seemed to start in England in 1594 with the advent of foreign refugees. These had been the members of a monkish order originating in the mountains of Romania, whose ranks had nevertheless been filled with many diverse creeds, colours and races. There were Chinamen amongst them, Hungarians, Arabs and Africans, but their leader had been a Romanian priest named Chorazos. As to why they had been hounded out of their own countries, that remained a mystery.

Chorazos and certain of his followers became regular visitors at the court of Queen Elizabeth I—who had ever held an interest in astrology, alchemy and all similar magics and mysteries—and with her help they founded a temple "somewhere near Finchley." Soon, however, couriers from foreign parts began to bring in accounts of the previous doings of this darkling sect, and so the Queen took advice.

Of all persons, she consulted with Dr. John Dee,

that more than dubious character whose own dabbling with the occult had brought him so close to disaster in 1555 during the reign of Queen Mary. Dee, at first enamoured of Chorazos and his followers, now turned against them. They were pagans, he said; their women were whores and their ceremonies orgiastic. They had brought with them a "familiar," which would have "needs" of its own, and eventually the public would rise up against them and the "outrage" they must soon bring about in the country. The Queen should therefore sever all connections with the sect—and immediately!

Acting under Dee's guidance, she at once issued orders for the arrest, detention and investigation of Chorazos and his members . . . but too late, for they had already flown. Their "temple" in Finchley—a "columned pavilion about a central lake"—was destroyed and the pool filled in. That was in late 1595.

In 1596 they turned up in Scotland, this time under the guise of travelling faith-healers and herbalists working out of Edinburgh. As a reward for their work among the poorer folk in the district, they were given a land grant and took up an austere residence in the Pentlands. There, following a pattern established abroad and carried on in England, Chorazos and his followers built their temple; except that this time they had to dam a stream in order to create a pool. The work took them several years; their ground was private property; they kept for the main well out of the limelight, and all was well . . . for a while.

Then came rumours of orgiastic rites in the hills, of children wandering away from home under the influence of strange, hypnotic music, of a monstrous being conjured up from hell to preside over ceremonial murder and receive its grisly tribute, and at last the truth was out. However covertly Chorazos had organized his perversions, there now existed the gravest suspicions as to what he and the others of his sect were about. And this in the Scotland of James IV, who five years earlier had charged an Edinburgh jury with "an Assize of Error" when they dismissed an action for witchcraft against one of the "notorious" North Berwick Witches.

In this present matter, however, any decision of the authorities was preempted by persons unknown—possibly the inhabitants of nearby Penicuik, from which town several children had disappeared—and Chorazos' order had been wiped out *en masse* one night and the temple reduced to ruins and shattered quartz stumps.

Quite obviously, the site of the temple had been here, and the place had been remembered by locals down the centuries, so that when the McGilchrist house was built in the mid-18th Century it automatically acquired the name of Temple House. The name had been retained . . . but what else had lingered over from those earlier times, and what *exactly* was the nature of the McGilchrist Curse?

I yawned and stretched. It was after eight and the sinking sun had turned the crests of the hills to bronze. A movement, seen in the corner of my eye

through the window, attracted my attention. Carl was making his way to the rim of the pool. He paused with his hands on his hips to stand between two of the broken columns, staring out over the silent water. Then he laid back his head and breathed deeply. There was a tired but self-satisfied air about him that set me wondering.

I threw the window wide and leaned out, calling down through air which was still warm and cloying: "Hey, Carl—you look like the cat who got the cream!"

He turned and waved. "Maybe I am. It's that painting of mine. I think I've got it beat. Not finished yet . . . but coming along."

"Is it good?" I asked.

He shrugged, but it was a shrug of affirmation, not indifference. "Are you busy? Come down and see for yourself. I only came out to clear my head, so that I can view it in fresh perspective. Yours will be a second opinion."

I went downstairs to find him back in his studio. Since the light was poor now, he switched on all of the electric lights and led the way to his easel. I had last looked at the painting some three or four days previously, at a time when it had still been very insubstantial. Now—

Nothing insubstantial about it now. The grass was green, long and wild, rising to nighted hills of grey and purple, silvered a little by a gibbous moon. The temple was almost luminous, its columns shining with an eerie light. Gone the wraithlike dancers; they capered in cassocks now, solid, wild and weird with leering faces. I started as

I stared at those faces—yellow, black and white faces, a half-dozen different races—but I started worse at the sight of the *thing* rising over the pool within the circle of glowing columns. Still vague, that horror—that leprous grey, tentacled, mushroom-domed monstrosity—and as yet mainly amorphous; but formed enough to show that it was nothing of this good, sane Earth.

"What the hell is it?" I half-gasped, half-whispered.

"Hmm?" Carl turned to me and smiled with pleased surprise at the look of shock on my blanched face. "I'm damned if I know—but I think it's pretty good! It will be when it's finished. I'm going to call it *The Familiar* . . ."

VII

The Face

For a long while I simply stood there taking in the contents of that hideous canvas and feeling the heat of the near-tropical night beating in through the open windows. It was all there: the foreign monks making their weird music, the temple glowing in the darkness, the dam, the pool and the hills as I had always known them, the *Thing* rising up in bloated loathsomeness from dark water, and a sense of realness I had never before and probably never again will see in any artist's work.

My first impulse when the shock wore off a little was to turn on Carl in anger. This was too

monstrous a joke. But no, his face bore only a look of astonishment now—astonishment at my reaction, which must be quite obvious to him. "Christ!" he said, "is it that good?"

"That—*thing*—has nothing to do with Christ!" I finally managed to force the words out of a dry throat. And again I felt myself on the verge of demanding an explanation. Had he been reading my uncle's notes? Had he been secretly following my own line of research? But how could he, secretly or otherwise? The idea was preposterous.

"You really do *feel* it, don't you?" he said, excitedly taking my arm. "I can see it in your face."

"I . . . I feel it, yes," I answered. "It's a very . . . powerful piece of work." Then, to fill the gap, I added: "Where did you dream it up?"

"Right first time," he answered. "A dream—I think. Something left over from a nightmare. I haven't been sleeping too well. The heat, I guess."

"You're right," I agreed. "It's too damned hot. Will you be doing any more tonight?"

He shook his head, his eyes still on the painting. "Not in this light. I don't want to foul it up. No, I'm for bed. Besides, I have a headache."

"What?" I said, glad now that I had made no wild accusation. "You?—a strapping great Viking like you, with a headache?"

"Viking?" he frowned. "You've called me that before. My looks must be deceptive. No, my ancestors came out of Hungary—a place called Stregocavar. And I can tell you they burned more witches there than you ever did in Scotland!"

* * *

There was little sleep for me that night, though toward morning I did finally drop off, slumped across the great desk, drowsing fitfully in the soft glow of my desk light. Prior to that, however, in the silence of the night—driven on by a feeling of impending . . . something—I had delved deeper into the old books and documents amassed by my uncle, slowly but surely fitting together that great jigsaw whose pieces he had spent so many years collecting.

The work was more difficult now, his notes less coherent, his writing barely legible; but at least the material was or should be more familiar to me. Namely, I was studying the long line of McGilchrists gone before me, whose seat had been Temple House since its construction two hundred and forty years ago. And as I worked so my eyes would return again and again, almost involuntarily, to the dark pool with its ring of broken columns. Those stumps were white in the silver moonlight—as white as the columns in Carl's picture—and so my thoughts returned to Carl.

By now he must be well asleep, but this new mystery filled my mind through the small hours. Carl Earلمان . . . It certainly sounded Hungarian, German at any rate, and I wondered what the old family name had been. Ehrlichman, perhaps? Arlmann? And not Carl but Karl.

And his family hailed from Stregoicavar. That was a name I remembered from a glance into Von Junzt's *Unspeakable Cults*, I was sure. Stregoicavar: it had stayed in my mind because of its meaning, which is "witch-town." Certain of Chorazos' order

of pagan priests had been Hungarian. Was it possible that some dim ancestral memory lingered over in Carl's mind, and that the pool with its quartz stumps had awakened that in his blood which harkened back to older times? And what of the gypsy music he had sworn to hear on our first night in this old house? Young and strong he was, certainly, but beneath an often brash exterior he had all the sensitivity of the artist born.

According to my uncle's research my own great-grandfather, Robert Allan McGilchrist, had been just such a man. Sensitive, a dreamer, prone to hearing things in the dead of night which no one else could hear. Indeed, his wife had left him for his peculiar ways. She had taken her two sons with her; and so for many years the old man had lived here alone, writing and studying. He had been well known for his paper on the Lambton Worm legend of Northumberland: of a great worm or dragon that lived in a well and emerged at night to devour "bairns and beasties and foolhardy wanderers in the dark." He had also published a pamphlet on the naiads of the lochs of Inverness; and his limited edition book, *Notes on Nessie—the Secrets of Loch Ness* had caused a minor sensation when first it saw print.

It was Robert Allan McGilchrist, too, who restored the old floodgate in the dam, so that the water level in the pool could be controlled; but that had been his last work. A shepherd had found him one morning slumped across the gate, one hand still grasping the wheel which controlled its elevation, his upper body floating face-down in the

water. He must have slipped and fallen, and his heart had given out. But the look on his face had been a fearful thing; and since the embalmers had been unable to do anything with him, they had buried him immediately.

And as I studied this or that old record or consulted this or that musty book, so my eyes would return to the dam, the pool with its fanged columns, the old floodgate—rusted now and fixed firmly in place—and the growing sensation of an onrushing doom gnawed inside me until it became a knot of fear in my chest. If only the heat would let up, just for one day, and if only I could finish my research and solve the riddle once and for all.

It was then, as the first flush of dawn showed above the eastern hills, that I determined what I must do. The fact of the matter was that Temple House frightened me, as I suspected it had frightened many people before me. Well, I had neither the stamina nor the dedication of my uncle. He had resolved to track the thing down to the end, and something—sheer hard work, the “curse,” failing health, *something*—had killed him.

But his legacy to me had been a choice: continue his work or put an end to the puzzle for all time and blow Temple House to hell. So be it, that was what I would do. A day or two more—only a day or two, to let Carl finish his damnable painting—and then I would do what Gavin McGilchrist had ordered done. And with that resolution uppermost in my mind, relieved that at last I had made the decision, so I fell asleep where I sprawled at the desk.

The sound of splashing aroused me; that and my name called from below. The sun was just up and I felt dreadful, as if suffering from a hangover. For a long time I simply lay sprawled out. Then I stood up and eased my cramped limbs, and finally I turned to the open window. There was Carl, dressed only in his shorts, stretched out flat on a wide, thick plank, paddling out toward the middle of the pool!

"Carl!" I called down, my voice harsh with my own instinctive fear of the water. "Man, that's dangerous—you can't swim!"

He turned his head, craned his neck and grinned up at me. "Safe as houses," he called, "so long as I hang on to the plank. And it's cool, John, so wonderfully cool. This feels like the first time I've been cool in weeks!"

By now he had reached roughly the pool's center and there he stopped paddling and simply let his hands trail in green depths. The level of the water had gone down appreciably during the night and the streamlet which fed the pool was now quite dry. The plentiful weed of the pool, becoming concentrated as the water evaporated, seemed thicker than ever I remembered it. So void of life, that water, with never a fish or a frog to cause a ripple on the morass-green of its surface.

And suddenly that tight knot of fear was back in my chest, making my voice a croak as I tried to call out: "Carl, get out of there!"

"What?" he faintly called back, but he didn't turn his head. He was staring down into the water,

staring intently at something he saw there. His hand brushed aside weed—

"Carl!" I found my voice. "For God's sake get out of it!"

He started then, his head and limbs jerking as if scalded, setting the plank to rocking so that he half slid off it. Then—a scrambling back to safety and a frantic splashing and paddling; and galvanized into activity I sprang from the window and raced breakneck downstairs. And Carl laughing shakily as I stumbled knee-deep in hated water to drag him physically from the plank, both of us trembling despite the burning rays of the new-risen sun and the furnace heat of the air.

"What happened?" I finally asked.

"I thought I saw something," he answered. "In the pool. A reflection, that's all, but it startled me."

"What did you see?" I demanded, my back damp with cold sweat.

"Why, what would I see?" he answered, but his voice trembled for all that he tried to grin. "A face, of course—my own face framed by the weeds. But it didn't look like me, that's all . . ."

VIII

The Dweller

Looking back now in the light of what I already knew—certainly of what I should have guessed at that time—it must seem that I was guilty of an

almost suicidal negligence in spending the rest of that day upstairs on my bed, tossing in nightmares brought on by the nervous exhaustion which beset me immediately after the incident at the pool. On the other hand, I had had no sleep the night before and Carl's adventure had given me a terrific jolt; and so my failure to recognize the danger—how close it had drawn—may perhaps be forgiven.

In any event, I forced myself to wakefulness in the early evening, went downstairs and had coffee and a frugal meal of biscuits, and briefly visited Carl in his studio. He was busy—frantically busy, dripping with sweat and brushing away at his canvas—working on his loathsome painting, which he did not want me to see. That suited me perfectly for I had already seen more than enough of the thing. I did take time enough to tell him, though, that he should finish his work in the next two days; for on Friday or at the very latest Saturday morning I intended to blow the place sky high.

Then I went back upstairs, washed and shaved, and as the light began to fail so I returned to my uncle's notebook. There were only three or four pages left unread, the first dated only days before his demise, but they were such a hodge-podge of scrambled and near-illegible miscellanea that I had the greatest difficulty making anything of them. Only that feeling of a burgeoning terror drove me on, though by now I had almost completely lost faith in making anything whatever of the puzzle.

As for my uncle's notes: a basically orderly nature had kept me from leafing at random through his book, or perhaps I should have

understood earlier. As it is, the notebook is lost forever, but as best I can I shall copy down what I remember of those last few pages. After that—and after I relate the remaining facts of the occurrences of that fateful hideous night—the reader must rely upon his own judgement. The notes then, or what little I remember of them:

“Levi’s or Mirandola’s invocation: ‘*Dasmass Jeschet Boene Doess Efar Duvema Enit Marous.*’ If I could get the pronounciation right, perhaps . . . But what will the Thing be? And will it succumb to a double-barreled blast? That remains to be seen. But if what I suspect is firmly founded . . . Is It a tickthing, such as Von Junzt states inhabits the globular mantle of Yogg-Sothoth? (*Unaussprechlichen Kulten*, 78/16)—fearful hints—monstrous pantheon . . . And this merely a parasite to one of *Them*!

“The Cult of Cthulhu . . . immemorial horror spanning all the ages. The *Johansen Narrative* and the *Pnakotic Manuscript*. And the Innsmouth Raid of 1928; much was made of that, and yet nothing known for sure. Deep Ones, but . . . different again from this Thing.

“Entire myth-cycle . . . So many sources. Pure myth and legend? I think not. Too deep, interconnected, even plausible. According to Carter in SR, (AH '59) p. 250-51, *They* were driven into this part of the universe (or into this time-dimension) by ‘Elder Gods’ as punishment for a rebellion. Hastur the Unspeakable prisoned in Lake of Hali (again the lake or pool motif) in

Carcosa; Great Cthulhu in R'lyeh, where he slumbers still in his death-sleep; Ithaqua sealed away behind icy Artic harriers, and so on. But Yogg-Sothoth was sent *outside*, into a parallel place, conterminous with all space and time. Since YS is everywhere and when, if a man knew the gate he could call Him out . . .

"Did Chorazos and his acolytes, for some dark reason of their own, attempt thus to call Him out? And did they get this dweller in Him instead? And I believe I understand the reason for the pool. Grandfather knew. His interest in Nessie, the Lambton Worm, the Kraken of olden legend, naiads, Cthulhu . . . Wendy-Smith's burrowers feared water; and the sheer *weight* of the mighty Pacific helps keep C. prisoned in his place in R'lyeh—thank God! Water subdues these things . . .

"But if water confines It, why does It *return* to the water? And how may It leave the pool if not deliberately called out? No McGilchrist ever called It out, I'm sure, not willingly; though some may have suspected that something was there. No swimmers in the family—not a one—and I think I know why. It is an instinctive, an ancestral fear of the pool! No, of the unknown *Thing* which lurks beneath the pool's surface . . ."

The thing which lurks beneath the pool's surface . . .

Clammy with the heat, and with a debilitating terror springing from these words on the written

page—these scribbled thought-fragments which, I was now sure, were anything but demented ravings—I sat at the old desk and read on. And as the house grew dark and quiet, as on the previous night, again I found my eyes drawn to gaze down through the open window to the surface of the still pool.

Except that the surface was no longer still!

Ripples were spreading in concentric rings from the pool's dark centre, tiny mobile wavelets caused by—by what? Some disturbance beneath the surface? The water level was well down now and tendrils of mist drifted from the pool to lie soft, luminous and undulating in the moonlight, curling like the tentacles of some great plastic beast over the dam, across the drive to the foot of the house.

A sort of paralysis settled over me then, a dreadful lassitude, a mental and physical malaise brought on by excessive morbid study, culminating in this latest phenomenon of the old house and the aura of evil which now seemed to saturate its very stones. I should have done something—something to break the spell, anything rather than sit there and merely wait for what was happening to happen—and yet I was incapable of positive action.

Slowly I returned my eyes to the written page; and there I sat shivering and sweating, my skin crawling as I read on by the light of my desk lamp. But so deep my trancelike state that it was as much as I could do to force my eyes from one word to the next. I had no volition, no will of my own with which to fight that fatalistic spell; and the physical heat of the night was that of a furnace as sweat

dripped from my forehead onto the pages of the notebook.

"... I have checked my findings and can't believe my previous blindness! It should have been obvious. It happens when the water level falls below a certain point. It *has* happened every time there has been extremely hot weather—when the pool has started to *dry up*! Thing needn't be called out at all! As to why it returns to the pool after taking a victim: it *must* return before daylight. It is a fly-the-light. A haunter of the dark. A wampyre! . . . but not blood. Nowhere can I find mention of blood sacrifices. And no punctures or mutilations. What, then are Its 'needs'? Did Dee know? Kelly knew, I'm sure, but his writings are lost . . .

"Eager now to try the invocation, but I wish that first I might know the true nature of the Thing. It takes the life of Its victim—but what else?"

"I have it!—God, I know—and I wish I did not know! But that *look* on my poor brother's face . . . Andrew, Andrew . . . I know now why you looked that way. But if I can free you, you shall be freed. If I wondered at the nature of the Thing, then I wonder no longer. The answers were all there, in the *Cthaat A.* and *Hydrophinae*, if only I had known exactly where to look. Yibb-Tstll is one such; Bugg-Shash, too. Yes, and the pool-thing is another . . .

"There have been a number down the cen-

turies—the horror that dwelled in the mirror of Nitocris; the sucking, hunting thing that Count Magnus kept; the red, hairy slime used by Julian Scortz—familiar of the Great Old Ones, parasites that lived on *Them* as lice live on men. Or rather, on their life-force! This one has survived the ages, at least until now. It does not take the blood but the very essence of Its victim. *It is a soul-eater!*

"I can wait no longer. Tonight, when the sun goes down and the hills are in darkness . . . But if I succeed, and if the Thing comes for me . . . We'll see how It faces up to my shotgun!"

My eyes were half-closed by the time I had finally scanned all that was written, of which the above is only a small part; and even having read it I had not fully taken it in. Rather, I had absorbed it automatically, without reading any immediate meaning into it. But as I re-read those last few lines, so I heard something which roused me up from my lassitude and snapped me alertly awake in an instant.

It was music: the faint but unmistakable strains of a whirling pagan tune that seemed to reach out to me from a time beyond time, from a hell beyond all known hells. . . .

IX

The Horror

Shocked back to mental alertness, still my limbs were stiff as a result of several hours crouched over the desk. Thus, as I sprang or attempted to spring to my feet, a cramp attacked both of my calves and threw me down by the window. I grabbed at the sill . . . and whatever I had been about to do was at once forgotten.

I gazed out the open window on a scene straight out of madness or nightmare. The broken columns where they now stood up from bases draped with weed seemed to glow with an inner light; and to my straining eyes it appeared that this haze of light extended uniformly upwards, so that I saw a remnant of the temple as it had once been. Through the light-haze I could also see the centre of the pool, from which the ripples spread outward with a rapidly increasing agitation.

There was a shape there now, a dark oblong illuminated both by the clean moonlight and by that supernatural glow; and even as I gazed, so the water slopping above the oblong seemed pushed aside and the slab showed its stained marble surface to the air. The music grew louder then, soaring wildly, and it seemed to me in my shocked and frightened condition that dim figures reeled and writhed around the perimeter of the pool.

Then—horror of horrors!—in one mad moment the slab tilted to reveal a black hole going down under the pool, like the entrance to some sunken

tomb. There came an outpouring of miasmal gasses, visible in the eerie glow, and then—

Even before the thing emerged I knew what it would be, how it would look. It was that horror on Carl's canvas, the soft-tentacled, mushroom-domed terror he had painted under the ancient, evil influence of this damned, doomed place. It was the dweller, the familiar, the tick-thing, the star-born wampyre . . . it was the curse of the McGilchrists. Except I understood now that this was not merely a curse on the McGilchrists but on the entire world. Of course it had seemed to plague the McGilchrists as a personal curse—but only because they had chosen to build Temple House here on the edge of its pool. They had been victims by virtue of their *availability*, for I was sure that the pool-thing was not naturally discriminative.

Then, with an additional thrill of horror, I saw that the thing was on the move, drifting across the surface of the pool, its flaccid tentacles reaching avidly in the direction of the house. The lights downstairs were out, which meant that Carl must be asleep . . .

Carl!

The thing was across the drive now, entering the porch, the house itself. I forced cramped limbs to agonized activity, lurched across the room, out onto the dark landing and stumbled blindly down the stairs. I slipped, fell, found my feet again—and my voice, too.

"Carl!" I cried, arriving at the door of his studio.
"Carl, *for God's sake!*"

The thing straddled him where he lay upon his

bed. It glowed with an unearthly, a rotten luminescence which outlined his pale body in a sort of foxfire. Its tentacles writhed over his naked form and his limbs were filled with fitful motion. Then the dweller's mushroom head settled over his face, which disappeared in folds of the thing's gilled mantle.

"Carl!" I screamed yet again, and as I lurched forward in numb horror so my hand found the light switch on the wall. In another moment the room was bathed in sane and wholesome electric light. The thing bulged upward from Carl—rising like some monstrous amoeba, some sentient, poisonous jellyfish from an alien ocean—and turned toward me.

I saw a face, a face I knew across twenty years of time fled, *my uncle's face!* Carved in horror, those well remembered features besought, pleaded with me, that an end be put to this horror and peace restored to this lonely valley; that the souls of countless victims be freed to pass on from this world to their rightful destinations.

The thing left Carl's suddenly still form and moved forward, flowed toward me; and as it came so the face it wore melted and changed. Other faces were there, hidden in the thing, many with McGilchrist features and many without, dozens of them that came and went ceaselessly. There were children there, too, mere babies; but the last face of all, the one I shall remember above all others—*that was the face of Carl Earلمان himself!* And it, too, wore that pleading, that imploring look—the look of a soul in hell, which prays only

for release.

Then the light won its unseen, unsung battle. Almost upon me, suddenly the dweller seemed to wilt. It shrank from the light, turned and flowed out of the room, through the porch, back toward the pool. Weak with reaction I watched it go, saw it move out across the now still water, saw the slab tilt down upon its descending shape and heard the music fade into silence. Then I turned to Carl . . .

I do not think I need mention the look on Carl's lifeless face, or indeed say anything more about him. Except perhaps that it is my fervent prayer that he now rests in peace with the rest of the dweller's many victims, taken down the centuries. That is my prayer, but . . .

As for the rest of it:

I dragged Carl from the house to the Range Rover, drove him to the crest of the rise, left him there and returned to the house. I took my uncle's prepared charges from his study and set them in the base of the shale cliff where the house backed onto it. Then I lit the fuses, scrambled back into the Range Rover and drove to where Carl's body lay in the cool of night. I tried not to look at his face.

In a little while the charges detonated, going off almost simultaneously, and the night was shot with fire and smoke and a rising cloud of dust. When the air cleared the whole scene was changed forever. The cliff had come down on the house, sending it crashing into the pool. The pool itself had disappeared, swallowed up in shale and debris;

and it was as if the House of the Temple, the temple itself and the demon-cursed pool had never existed.

All was silence and desolation, where only the moonlight played on jagged stumps of centuried columns, projecting still from the scree-and rubble-filled depression which had been the pool. And now the moon silvered the bed of the old stream, running with water from the ruined pool—

And at last I was able to drive on.

X

The Unending Nightmare

That should have been the end of it, but such has not been the case. Perhaps I alone am to blame. The police in Penicuik listened to my story, locked me in a cell overnight and finally conveyed me to this place, where I have been now for more than a week. In a way I suppose that the actions of the police were understandable; for my wild appearance that night—not to mention the ghastly, naked corpse in the Range Rover and the incredible story I incoherently told—could hardly be expected to solicit their faith or understanding. But I do *not* understand the position of the alienists here at Oakdeene.

Surely they, too, can hear the damnable music?—that music which grows louder hour by hour, more definite and decisive every night—the music which in olden days summoned the pool-

thing to its ritual sacrifice. Or is it simply that they disagree with my theory? I have mentioned it to them time and time again and repeat it now: that there are *other* pools in the Pentlands, watery havens to which the thing might have fled from the destruction of its weedy retreat beside the now fallen seat of the McGilchrists. Oh, yes, and I firmly believe that it did so flee. And the days are long and hot and a great drought is on the land . . .

And perhaps, too, over the years, a very real curse has loomed up large and monstrous over the McGilchrists. Do souls have a flavour, I wonder, a distinctive texture of their own? Is it possible that the pool-thing has developed an appetite, a *taste* for the souls of McGilchrists? If so, then it will surely seek me out; and yet here I am detained in this institute for the insane.

Or could it be that I am now in all truth mad? Perhaps the things I have experienced and know to be true have driven me mad, and the music I hear exists only in my mind. That is what the nurses tell me and dear God, I pray that it is so! But if not—if not . . .

For there is that other thing, which I have not mentioned until now. When I carried Carl from his studio after the pool-thing left him, I saw his finished painting. Not the whole painting but merely a part of it, for when it met my eyes they saw only one thing: the finished face which Carl had painted on the dweller.

This is the nightmare which haunts me worse than any other, the question I ask myself over and over in the dead of night, when the moonlight falls

upon my high, barred window and the music
floods into my padded cell:

If they should bring me my breakfast one morn-
ing and find me dead—*will my face really look like
that?*



A Weird Tales 'First'

The Red Brain

by Donald Wandrei

THIS story first introduced the talents of Donald Wandrei to the early readers of *Weird Tales*. It appeared in our issue for October, 1927, the first of fifteen stories which this talented disciple and correspondent of H. P. Lovecraft published in this magazine. With August Derleth, Mr. Wandrei later established Arkham House, Publishers, to preserve in the dignity of hardcover the work of their common mentor and his colleagues in this magazine. Here is his first story, far too long unprinted . . .

One by one the pale stars in the sky overhead had twinkled fainter and gone out. One by one those lights flaming whitely with their clear, cold flame had dimmed and darkened. One by one they had vanished forever, and in their places had come patches of ink that blotted out immense areas of a

sky once luminous with hordes of brightly shining stars.

Years had passed; centuries had fled backward; the accumulating thousands had turned into millions, and they, too, had faded into the oblivion of eternity. The earth had disappeared. The sun had cooled and hardened, and had dissolved into the dust of its grave. The solar system and innumerable other systems had broken up and vanished, and their fragments had swelled the clouds of dust which were engulfing the entire universe. In the billions of years which had passed, sweeping everything on toward the gathering doom, the huge bodies, once countless, that had dotted the sky and hurtled through unmeasurable immensities of space had lessened in number and disintegrated until the black pall of the sky was broken only at rare intervals by dim spots of light—light ever growing paler and darker.

No one knew when the dust had begun to gather, but far back in the forgotten dawn of time the dead worlds, in their ceaseless wanderings, had become smaller and had slowly broken up. What happened to them, no one knew or cared, for there was then none to know or care. The worlds had vanished, unremembered and unmourned.

Those were the nuclei of the dust. Those were the progenitors of the universal dissolution which now approached its completion. Those were the stars which had first burned out, died, and wasted away in myriads of atoms. Those were the mushroom growths which had first passed into nothingness in a puff of dust.

Slowly the faint wisps had gathered into clouds, the clouds into seas, and the seas into monstrous oceans of gently heaving dust, dust that drifted from dead and dying worlds, from interstellar collisions of plunging stars, from rushing meteors and streaming comets which madly flamed from the void and hurtled into the abyss.

The dust had spread and spread. The dim luminosity of the heavens had become fainter as great blots of black appeared far in the outer depths of space. In all the millions and billions and trillions of years that had fled into the past, the cosmic dust had been gathering, and the starry horde had been dwindling. There was a time when the universe consisted of hundreds of millions of stars, planets, and suns; but they were ephemeral as life or dreams, and like life or dreams they faded and vanished, one by one.

The smaller worlds were obliterated first, then the larger, and so in ever-ascending steps to the unchecked giants which roared their fury and blazed their whiteness through the conquering dust and the realms of night. Never did the Cosmic Dust cease its hellish and relentless war on the universe; it choked the little aerolites; it swallowed the helpless satellites; it swirled around the leaping comets that rocketed from one black end of the universe to the other, flaming their trailing splendor, tearing paths of wild adventure through horizonless infinitudes the dust already ruled; it clawed at the planets and sucked their very being; it washed, hateful and brooding about the monarchs and plucked at their lands and deserts.

Thicker, thicker, always thicker grew the Cosmic Dust, until the giants no longer could watch each other's gyres far across the void. Instead, they thundered through the waste, lonely, despairing, and lost. In solitary grandeur they burned their brilliant beauty. In solitary majesty they waited for their doom. In solitary defeat, kings to the last, they succumbed to the dust. And in solitary death they disappeared.

Of all the stars in all the countless host that once had spotted the heavens, there remained only Antares. Antares, immensest of the stars, alone was left, the last body in the universe, inhabited by the last race ever to have consciousness, ever to live. That race, in hopeless compassion, had watched the darkening skies and had counted with miserly care the stars which resisted. Every one that twinkled out wrenched their hearts; every one that ceased to struggle and was swallowed by the tides of dust added a new strain to the national anthem, that indescribable melody, that infinitely somber paeon of doom which tolled a solemn harmony in every heart of the dying race. The dwellers had built a great crystal dome around their world in order to keep out the dust and to keep in the atmosphere, and under this dome the watchers kept their silent sentinel. The shadows had swept in faster and faster from the farther realms of darkness, engulfing more rapidly the last of the stars. The astronomers' task had become easier, but the saddest on Antares: that of watching the universe die, of watching Death and Oblivion spread a pall of blackness over all that was, all that

would be.

The last star, Mira, second only to Antares, had shone frostily pale, twinkled more darkly—and vanished. There was nothing in all Space except an illimitable expanse of dust that stretched on and on in every direction; only this, and Antares. No longer did the astronomers watch the heavens to glimpse again that dying star before it succumbed. No longer did they scan the upper reaches—everywhere swirled the dust, enshrouding Space with a choking blackness. Once there had been sown through the abyss a multitude of morbidly beautiful stars, whitely shining, wan—now there was none. Once there had been light in the sky—now there was none. Once there had been a dim phosphorescence in the vault—now it was a heavy-hanging pall of ebony, a rayless realm of gloom, a smothering thing of blackness eternal and infinite.

“We meet again in this Hall of the Mist, not in the hope that a remedy has been found, but that we find how best it is fitting that we die. We meet, not in the vain hope that we may control the dust, but in the hope that we may triumph even as we are obliterated. We can not win the struggle, save in meeting our death heroically.”

The speaker paused. All around him towered a hall of Space rampant. Far above spread a vague roof whose flowing sides melted into the lost and dreamy distances, a roof supported by unseen walls and by the mighty pillars which rolled upward at long intervals from the smoothly marbled floor. A faint haze seemed always to be hanging in the air

because of the measureless lengths of that architectural colossus. Like a boundless plain the expanse of the floor swept forever onward with a dull-gleaming whiteness. Dim in the distance, the speaker reclined on a metal dais raised above the sea of beings in front of him. But he was not, in reality, a speaker, nor was he a being such as those which had inhabited the world called Earth.

Evolution, because of the unusual conditions on Antares, had proceeded along lines utterly different from those followed on the various bodies which had dotted the heavens when the deep was sprinkled with stars in the years now gone. Antares was the hugest sun that had leaped from the primeval chaos. When it cooled, it cooled far more slowly than the others, and when life once again began it was assured of an existence not of thousands, not of millions, but of billions of years.

That life, when it began, had passed from the simple forms to the age of land juggernauts, and so by steps on and on up the scale. The civilizations of other worlds had reached their apex and the worlds themselves become cold and lifeless at the time when the mighty civilization of Antares was beginning.

The star, because of discords arising from its enormous population, had then passed through a period of warfare until such terrific and fearful scourges of destruction were produced that in the Two Days War seven billion of the eight and one-half billion inhabitants were slaughtered. Those two days of carnage, followed by pestilential diseases which carried off three-fourths of the re-

maining inhabitants, ended war for eons.

From then on, the golden age began. The minds of the people of Antares became bigger and bigger, their bodies proportionately smaller, until the cycle eventually was completed. Every being in front of the speaker was a monstrous heap of black viscosity, each mass an enormous brain, a sexless thing that lived for Thought. Long ago it had been discovered that life could be created artificially in tissue formed in the laboratories of the chemists. Sex was thus destroyed, and the inhabitants no longer spent their time in taking care of families. Nearly all the countless hours that were saved were put into scientific advance, with the result that the star leaped forward in an age of progress never paralleled.

The beings, rapidly becoming Brains, found that by the extermination of the parasites and bacteria on Antares, by changing their own organic structure, and by *willing* to live, they approached immortality. They discovered the secrets of Time and Space; they knew the extent of the universe, and how Space in its farther reaches became self-annihilating. They knew that life was self-created and controlled its own period of duration. They knew that when a life, tired of existence, killed itself, it was dead forever; it could not live again, for death was the final chemical change of life.

These were the shapes that spread in the vast sea before the speaker. They were shapes because they could assume any form they wished. Their all-powerful minds had complete control of that which was themselves. When the Brains were desirous of

traveling, they relaxed from their usual semi-rigidity and flowed from place to place like a stream of ink rushing down a hill; when they were tired, they flattened into disks; when expounding their thoughts, they became towering pillars of rigid ooze; and when lost in abstraction, or in a pleasurable contemplation of the unbounded worlds created in their minds, within which they often wandered, they resembled huge, dormant balls.

From the speaker himself had come no sound although he had imparted his thoughts to his sentient assembly. The thoughts of the Brains, when their minds permitted, emanated to those about them instantly, like electric waves. Antares was a world of eternal, unbroken silence.

The Great Brain's thoughts continued to flow out. "Long ago, the approaching doom became known to us all. We could do nothing then; probably we can do nothing now. It does not matter greatly, of course, for existence is a useless thing which benefits no one. But nevertheless, at that meeting in an unremembered year; we asked those who were willing to try to think of some possible way of saving our own star, at least, if not the others. There was no reward offered, for there was no reward adequate. All that the Brain would receive would be glory as one of the greatest which has ever been produced. The rest of us, too, would receive only the effects of that glory in the knowledge that we had conquered Fate, hitherto, and still, considered inexorable; we would derive pleasure only from the fact that we, self-creating

and all but supreme, had made ourselves supreme by conquering the worst and most powerful menace which has ever attacked life, time, and the universe: the Cosmic Dust.

"Our most intelligent Brains have been thinking on this one subject for untold millions of years. They have excluded from their thoughts everything except the question: How can the dust be checked? They have produced innumerable plans which have been tested thoroughly. All have failed. We have hurled into the void uncontrollable bolts of lightning, interplanetary sheets of flame, in the hope that we might fuse masses of the dust into new, incandescent worlds. We have anchored huge magnets throughout Space, hoping to attract the dust, which is faintly magnetic, and thus to solidify it or clear much of it from the waste. We have caused fearful disturbances by exploding our most powerful compounds in the realms about us, hoping to set the dust so violently in motion that the chaos would become tempestuous with the storms of creation. With our rays of annihilation, we have blasted billion-mile paths through the ceaselessly surging dust. We have destroyed the life on Betelgeuse and rooted there titanic developers of vacua, sprawling, whirring machines to suck the dust from Space and heap it up on that star. We have liberated enormous quantities of gas, lit them, and sent the hot and furious fires madly flashing through the affrighted dust. In our desperation, we have even asked for the aid of the Ether-Eaters. Yes, we have in finality exercised our Will-Power to sweep back the rolling billows! In

vain! What has been accomplished? The dust has retreated for a moment, has paused—and has welled onward. It has returned silently triumphant, and it has again hung its pall of blackness over a fear-haunted and a nightmare-ridden Space."

Swelling in soundless sorrow through the Hall of the Mist rose the racing thoughts of the Great Brain. "Our chemists with a bitter doggedness never before displayed have devoted their time to the production of Super-Brains, in the hope of making one which could defeat the Cosmic Dust. They have changed the chemicals used in our genesis; they have experimented with molds and forms; they have tried every resource. With what result? There have come forth raging monstrosities, mad abominations, satanic horrors and ravenous foul things howling wildly the nameless and indescribable phantoms that thronged their minds. We have killed them in order to save ourselves. And the Dust has pushed onward! We have appealed to every living Brain to help us. We appealed, in the forgotten, dream-veiled centuries, for aid in any form. From time to time we have been offered plans, plans which for a while have made terrific and sweeping inroads on the Dust, but plans which have always failed.

"The triumph of the Cosmic Dust has almost come. There is so little time left us that our efforts now must inevitably be futile. But today, in the hope that some Brain, either of the old ones or of the gigantic new ones, has discovered a possibility not yet tried, we have called this conference, the first in more than twelve thousand years."

The tense, alert silence of the hall relaxed and became soft when the thoughts of the Great Brain had stopped flowing. The electric waves which had filled the vast Hall of the Mist sank, and for a long time a strange tranquillity brooded there. But the mass was never still; the sea in front of the dais rippled and billowed from time to time as waves of thought passed through it. Yet no Brain offered to speak, and the seething expanse, as the minutes crept by, again became quiet.

In a thin column on the dais, rising high into the air, swayed the Great Brain; again and again it swept its glance around the hall, peering among the rolling, heaving shapes in the hope of finding somewhere in those thousands one which could offer a suggestion. But the minutes passed, and time lengthened, with no response; and the sadness of the fixed and changeless end crept across the last race. And the Brains, wrapped in their meditation, saw the Dust pushing at the glass shell of Antares with triumphant mockery.

The Great Brain had expected no reply, since for centuries it had been considered futile to combat the Dust; and so, when its expectation, though not its wish, was fulfilled, it relaxed and dropped, the signal that the meeting was over.

But the motion had scarcely been completed, when from deep within the center of the sea there came a violent heave; in a moment, a section collected itself and rushed together; like a waterspout it swished upward and went streaming toward the roof until it swayed thin and tenuous as a column of smoke, the top of the Brain peering down from

the dimness of the upper hall.

"I have found an infallible plan! The Red Brain has conquered the Cosmic Dust!"

A terrific tenseness leaped upon the Brains, numbed by the cry that wavered in silence down the Hall of the Mist into the empty and dreamless tomb of the farther marble. The Great Brain, hardly relaxed, rose again. And with a curious whirling motion the assembled horde suddenly revolved. Immediately, the Red Brain hung upward from the middle of a sea which had become an amphitheater in arrangement, all Brains looking toward the center. A suppressed expectancy and hope electrified the air.

The Red Brain was one of the later creations of the chemists, and had come forth during the experiments to produce more perfect Brains. Previously, they had all been black; but, perhaps because of impurities in the chemicals, this one had evolved in an extremely dark, dull-red color. It was regarded with wonder by its companions, and more so when they found that many of its thoughts could not be grasped by them. What it allowed the others to know of what passed within it was to a large extent incomprehensible. No one knew how to judge the Red Brain, but much had been expected from it.

Thus, when the Red Brain sent forth its announcement, the others formed a huge circle around, their minds passive and open for the explanation. Thus they lay, silent, while awaiting the discovery. And thus they reclined, completely unprepared for what followed.

For, as the Red Brain hung in the air, it began a slow but restless swaying; and as it swayed, its thoughts poured out in a rhythmic chant. High above them it towered, a smooth, slender column, whose lofty end was moving ever faster and faster while nervous shudders rippled up and down its length. And the alien chant became stronger, stronger, until it changed into a wild and dithyrambic paean to the beauty of the past, to the glory of the present, to the splendor of the future. And the lay became a moaning praise, an exaltation; a strain of furious joy ran through it, a repetition of, "The Red Brain has conquered the Dust. Others have failed, but he has not. Play the national anthem in honor of the Red Brain, for he has triumphed. Place him at your head, for he has conquered the Dust. Exalt him who has proved himself the greatest of all. Worship him who is greater than Antares, greater than the Cosmic Dust, greater than the Universe."

Abruptly it stopped. The puzzled Brains looked up. The Red Brain had ceased its nodding motion for a moment, and had closed its thoughts to them. But along its entire length it began a gyratory spinning, until it whirled at an incredible speed. Something antagonistic suddenly emanated from it. And before the Brains could grasp the situation, before they could protect themselves by closing their minds, the will-impulses of the Red Brain, laden with hatred and death, were throbbing about them and entering their open minds. Like a whirlwind spun the Red Brain, hurling forth its hate. Like half-inflated balloons, the other

Brains had lain around it; like cooling glass bubbles, they tautened for a moment; and like pricked balloons as their thoughts and thus their lives were annihilated, since Thought was Life, they flattened, instantaneously dissolving into pools of evanescent slime. By tens and by hundreds they sank, destroyed by the sweeping unchecked thoughts of the Red Brain which filled the hall; by groups, by sections, by paths around the entire circle fell the doomed Brains in that single moment of carelessness, while pools of thick ink collected, flowed together, crept onward, and became rivers of pitch rushing down the marble floor with a soft, silken swish.

The hope of the universe had lain with the Red Brain.

And the Red Brain was mad.

* * * *

Annals of Arkya . . .

5. The Summons

A dream in metal was the argosy
They built to span the brooding face of night
Between the far-flung planets, and the light
Of bright desire shone on their victory.
All labor ceased within the realm: the cry
Of festive holiday arose, for ere a week
Had passed the valiant voyagers would seek
The verities beyond the azure sky.

None heard the deadly summons from the stars

To those that dwelt unseen within the lands,
Or guessed the fruit of hellish sorcery,
Until the earth erupted burrowers
And bloody chaos sprouted from their hands—
The mindless legion of the Enemy.

6. *The Viola*

It was an instrument no mortal hand
Dare touch, they said, and crossed themselves:
 a spell
Of evil lay upon it. One would tell
How Yarish found it in an attic, and
Relate in whispers of the prodigies
Befalling his last concert: shadows left
Their proper place to dance, and folks, bereft,
Engaged in lewd and hellish revelries.

I took the shunned viola from its place,
To play a long-forgotten melody
And found myself lost in a revelrie
That swept my fingers into bows and chords
Undreamed. But this recalled their warning words:
The counterpoint that issued out of space!

—Robert A. W. Lowndes

Odd, how some places have an evil reputation . . .

Nobody Ever Goes There *by Manly Wade Wellman*

With this new story of John the ballad-singer, we are pleased to welcome back to our pages one of *Weird Tales*' most legendary discoveries. Fifty-four years ago, this magazine published Mr. Wellman's first tale, "Back to the Beast," and since then, under his own name or that of his pseudonym, 'Gans T. Field,' his chilling tales have adorned no fewer than fifty-three issues. For all his years, Mr. Wellman is hale and hearty and still, happily, writing tales as chilling as ever.

That was what Mark Banion's grandparents told him when he was a five-year-old with tousled black hair, looking from the porch and out across Catch River to a big dark building and some small dark

ones clumped against the soaring face of Music Mountain, rank with its gloomy huddles of trees.

His grandparents towered high to tell him, the way grownups do when you're little, and they said, "Nobody ever goes there," without explaining, the way grownups do when you're little. Mark was a good, obedient boy. He didn't press the matter. And he sure enough didn't go over.

The town had been named Trimble for somebody who, a hundred and forty-odd years ago, had a stock stand there, entertainment for man and beast. In those old days, stagecoaches and trading wagons rolled along the road chopped through the mountains, and sometimes came great herds of cattle and horses and hogs. Later there had been the railroad that carried hardly anything anymore. Trucks rumbled along Main Street and on, northwest to Tennessee or southeast to Asheville. Trimble was no great size for a town. Maybe that was why it stayed interesting to look at. It had stores on Main Street, and Mark's grandfather's chair factory, the town hall and the *Weekly Record*. On side streets stood the bank, the high school where students came by bus from all corners of the rocky county, and three churches. All those things were on this side of Catch River.

But over yonder where nobody went, loomed the empty-windowed old textile mill, like the picture of a ruined castle in an outlawed romantic novel. Once it had spun its acres of cloth. People working there had lived in the little house you could barely see from this side. Those houses had a dusky, secret look, bunched against Music Mountain. When

Mark asked why it was called Music Mountain, his grandparents said, "We never heard tell why." So once, in his bed at night, Mark thought he heard soft music from across Catch River to his window. When he mentioned that next day, they laughed and said he was making it up.

He stopped talking about that other side of the river, but he kept his curiosity as he grew older. He found out a few things from listening to talk when he played in town. He found out that a police car did cruise over there two or three times a week on the rattly old bridge that nobody else used, and that the cruise was made only by daylight. When he was in high school, tall and tanned and a hot-rock tight end on the football team, he and two classmates started to amble across one Saturday. They were nearly halfway to the other side when a policeman came puffing after them and scolded them back. That night, Mark's grandparents told him never to let them hear of doing such a fool thing again. He asked why it was foolish, and his grandmother said, "Nobody ever goes there. Ever." And shut up her mouth with a snap.

One who did tell Mark something about it was Mr. Glover Shelton, the oldest man in Trimble, who whittled birds and bear cubs and rabbits in his little shop behind the Worley Cafe. Once a month he sold a crate of such whittlings to a man who carried them to a tourist bazaar off in another county. Mr. Glover was lamed so that he had an elbow in one knee, like a cricket. He wore checked shirts and bib overalls and a pointed beard as white as dandelion fluff. And he had memories.

"Something other happened there round about seventy-five years back," he said. "I was another sight younger than you then. There was the textile mill, and thirty-forty folks a-living in them company houses and a-working two shifts. Then one day, they was all of a sudden all gone."

"Gone where?" Mark asked him.

"Don't rightly know how to answer that. Just gone. Derwood Neidger the manager, and Sam Brood the foreman, and the whole crew on shift—gone." Mr. Glover whittled at the bluejay he was making. "One night just round sundown, the whistle it blowed and blowed, and folks over here got curiosed up and next day some of 'em headed over across the bridge. And nair soul at the mill, nor neither yet in the houses. The wives and children done gone, too. Everbody."

"Are you putting me on, Mr. Glover?"

"You done asked me, boy, and I done told you the thing I recollect about it."

"They just packed up and left?"

"They left, but they sure God nair packed up. The looms was still a-running. Derwood Neidger's fifty-dollar hat was on the hook, his cigar burnt out in a tray on his desk. Even supper a-standing on the stoves, two-three places. But nair a soul to be seen anywheres."

Mark looked to see if a grin was caught in the white beard, but Mr. Glover was as solemn as a preacher. "Where did they go?" Mark asked.

"I just wish you'd tell me. There was a search made, inquiries here and yonder, but none of them folks air showed theirself again."

"And now," said Mark, "nobody ever goes there."

"Well now, a couple-three has gone, one time another . . . from here, and a hunter or so a-cooning over Music Mountain from the far side. But none air come back no more. Only them policemen that drives over quick and comes back quick—always by daylight, always three in the car, with pistols and sawed-off shotguns. Boy," said Mr. Glover, "folks just stays off from that there place, like a-staying off from a rocky patch full of snakes, a wet bottom full of chills and fever."

"And now it's a habit," said Mark. "Staying out."

"Likewise a habit not to go a-talking about it none. Don't you go a-naming it to nobody I told you this much."

Mark played good enough football to get a grant in aid at a lowland college, about enough help to make the difference between going and not going. Summers, he mostly worked hard to keep in condition, in construction and at road mending. By the time he graduated, his grandparents had sold the chair factory and had retired to Florida. Mark came back to Trimble, where they hired him to coach football and baseball and teach physical education at his old high school.

And still nobody ever went across Catch River. He felt the old interest, but he quickly became more interested in Ruth Covell, the history teacher.

She was small and slim, and her hair was blonde with a spice of red to it. She wore it more or less the length Mark wore his own black mane. She

came up to about his coat lapel. Her face was round and sweet. She gave him a date, but wanted to sit and talk on the porch of the teacherage instead of driving to an outdoor movie. It was a balmy October night. She fetched them out two glasses of iced tea, flavored with lemon juice and ginger. They sat on bark-bottomed chairs, and Ruth said it was good to be in Trimble.

"I've liked it here from the first," she said, "I've thought I might write a history of this town."

"A history of Trimble?" Mark repeated, smiling. "Who'd read that?"

"You might, when I finish it. This place has stories worth putting on record. I've been to the town hall and the churches. I've found out lots of interesting things, but one thing avoids me."

"What's that, Ruth?" Mark asked, sipping.

"Why nobody ever goes across the river, and why everybody changes the subject when I bring it up."

From where they sat they could see a spattery shimmer of moonlight on the water, but Music Mountain beyond was as black as soot.

"Ruth," Mark said, "you're up against a story that just never is told in Trimble."

"But why not?" Her face hung silvery in the moonglow.

"I don't know. I never found out, and I was born here. Old Mr. Glover Shelton told me a few things, but he's dead now." He related the old man's story. "I'm unable to tell you why things are that way about the business," he wound up. "It's just not discussed, sort of the way sex didn't used to be discussed in polite society. I suspect that most peo-

ple have more or less forgotten about it, pushed it to the back of their minds."

"But the police go over," she reminded him. "The chief said it was just a routine check, a tour in a deserted area. Then he changed the subject, too."

"If I were you, I'd not push anyone too hard about all this," said Mark. "It's a sort of rule of life here, staying on this side of the river. As an athletic coach, I abide by rules."

"As a historian, I look for the truth," she said back, "and I don't like to have the truth denied me."

He changed the subject. They talked cheerfully of other things. When he left that night, she let him kiss her and said he could come back and see her again.

Next Saturday evening, Ruth finished grading a sheaf of papers and just before sundown she walked out in the town with Mark. She wore snug jeans and a short, dark jacket. They had a soda at Doc Roberts's drug store and strolled on along Main Street. Mark told her about his boyhood in Trimble, pointed out the massive old town hall (twice burned down, once by accident, and rebuilt both times inside its solid brick walls), and led her behind Worley's Cafe to show her where Glover Shelton once had worked. The door of the little old shop was open. A light gleamed through it, and a voice from inside said, "Hidy."

A man sat at the ancient work bench, dressed in a blue hickory shirt and khaki pants and plow shoes, carefully shaping a slip of wood with a

bright, sharp knife. He was lean, and as tall as Mark, say six feet. His long, thoughtful face was neither young nor old. In his dark hair showed silver dabs at the temples and in a brushed-back lock on top.

"Glover Shelton and I were choice friends, years back," he said. "I knew the special kinds of wood he hunted out and used here, and his nephew loaned me a key so I could come work me out a new bridge for my old guitar."

It was an old guitar indeed, seasoned as dark brown as a nut. The man set the new bridge in place, with a dab of some adhesive compound. "That'll dry right while we're a-studying it," he said. Then he laid the strings across, threaded them through the pegs, and tightened them with judicious fingers. He struck a chord, adjusted the pegs, struck and struck again. "Sounds passable," he decided.

"Those strings shine like silver," offered Ruth.

"It just so happens that silver's what they are," was the reply, with a quiet smile. "Silver's what the oldest old-timers used. Might could be I'm the last that uses it."

He achieved a chord to suit him. Tunefully, richly, he sang:

"She came down the stair,
Combing back her yellow hair,
And her cheek was as red as the rose . . ."

Mark had made up his mind to something.

"Sir," he said, "I knew Mr. Glover Shelton when I was a boy. This young lady wishes he had lived

for her to talk to. Because he was the only man I ever heard speak of the far side of Catch River yonder, the Music Mountain side."

"I know a tad of something about that," said the guitar-picker, while the strings whispered under his long, skilled fingers. "An old Indian medicine man, name of Reuben Manco—he mentioned about it to me one time."

"Nobody here in Trimble talks about it," said Mark. "They just stay away from over there. Nobody ever goes there."

"I reckon not, son. The way Reuben Manco had it, the old Indians more or less left the place alone, too. What was there didn't relish to be pestered."

"Some other kind of men than Indians?" suggested Ruth.

"Better just only call them things. The way the old story comes down, they didn't truly look like aught a man could tell of at first. And they more or less learnt from a-studying men—Indians—how to get a little bitty bit like men, too."

"They sound weird," said Mark, interested.

"I reckon that's a good word for them. The Indians were scared of how they made themselves to look. So sometimes the Indians got up on the top of the mountain yonder and sang to the things, to make sure they wouldn't try to come out and make trouble." The long, thoughtful face brooded above the guitar's soft melody. "I reckon that's how it come to be named Music Mountain. The Indians would sing those things back off and into their place, time after time. I reckon all the way up to when the white men came in."

"Came in and took the Indian's land," said Mark. "That happened here."

"Shoo, it happened all over America—the taking of the land. All right, I've given you what Reuben Manco gave me. Music Mountain for the music the Indians used against those things."

"Why won't anybody in town tell about this?" Ruth asked.

"I don't reckon folks in town much heard of it. Especially when they might not want to hear tell of it."

"I'm glad to hear it," declared Ruth. "I'm someone who wants to know things."

"There's always a right much to get to know, ma'am," was the polite rejoinder.

Mark sat down on the work bench. "Music," he repeated. "Could the Indians control something like that—something frightening, you said—with music?"

"Well, son, with Indians the right song can make the rain to fall. An Indian hunter sings to bring him luck before he goes after game. Medicine sing to cure a sick man or a hurt man: One time another, music's been known to do the like of such things."

Mark asked for the story of the mill that had been built under Music Mountain. It seemed that Derwood Neideger had interested some Northern financiers and had built his mill, with Trimble's townspeople shaking their heads about it. But there was good pay, and families came from other places to live in the houses built for them and to spin the cloth. Until the night they all vanished.

"What if there had been music at the mill?" Mark wondered. "In the houses?"

"Doesn't seem like as if there was much of that, so we can't rightly tell. And it's too late to figure on it now."

The sun sank over the western mountains. Dusk slid swiftly down into the town. Mark listened as his companion struck the silver strings and sang again:

"She came down the stair,
Combing back her yellow hair . . ."

He muted the melody with his palm. "Sounds like that beauty-looking young girl that came here with you. Where's she gone off to?"

Mark jumped up from where he sat. Ruth was nowhere in sight. He hurried out of the shop, around the cafe and out into the street.

"Ruth, wait—"

Far along the sidewalk, in the light of a shop window, he saw her as she turned off and out of view, where the old alley led to where the bridge was.

"Wait!" he yelled after her, and started to run.

It was a long sprint to the alley. One or two loungers gazed at Mark as he raced past. He found the alley, headed into it, stumbled in its darkness and went to one knee. He felt his trousers rip where they struck the jagged old cobbles. Up again, he hurried to the bridge.

It was already too dim to see clearly, but Ruth must be there. She must be moving along, almost as fast as he. "You damned fool," he wheezed into

the darkening air as he ran. "You damned little fool, why did you do this?" And in his heart her voice seemed to answer him, *I'm someone who wants to know things.*

The old, old boards of the bridge rattled under his feet. He heard the soft, purling rush of Catch River. There she was now, at the far end, a darker point in the night that came down on them. "Ruth," he tried to call her once more, but his breath wasn't enough to carry it. He ran on after her.

Now he had come out on the other bank, where nobody ever went. He turned to his left. A road of sorts had been there once, it seemed. Its blotchy stones were rank between with grass. His shoe skidded on what must have been slippery moss and he nearly went down again. To his right climbed the steep face of Music Mountain, huddled with watching trees as black as ink. On ahead of him, small, dark houses clung together at the roadside. Farther beyond them rose the sooty pile of the old mill. He stood for a moment and wheezed to get his breath. Something came toward him. He quivered as he faced it.

"I knew you'd come too, Mark," said Ruth's merry voice.

At that moment, the moon had scrambled clear of the mountain and flung pale light around them. He saw that Ruth smiled.

"Why ever did you—" he began to say.

"I told you, Mark, I want to find things out. Nobody else here wants to. Dares to."

"You come right back to town with me," he commanded.

She laughed musically.

On into the sky swam the round, pallid moon, among a bright sprinkling of stars. Its light picked out the mill more clearly. It struck a twinkle from the glass of a window; or could there be a stealthy light inside? Ruth laughed again.

"But you came across, at least," she said, as though happy about it.

The glow of the moon beat upon her, making her hair pale. And something else moved on the road to the mill.

He hurried toward Ruth as the something drifted from between those dubious houses, a murky series of puffs, like foul smoke. He thought, for a moment hoped, that it might be fog; but it gathered into shapes as it emerged, shadowy, knobby shapes. Headlike lumps seemed to rise, narrow at the top, with, Mark thought, great loose mouths. Wisps stirred like groping arms.

"Let's get out of here," he said to Ruth, and tried to catch her by the hand.

But then she, too, saw those half-shaped things that now stole into groups and advanced. She screamed once, like an animal caught in a trap, and she lost her head and ran from them. She ran toward the mill in the moonlight that flooded the old paving stones.

Mark rushed after her because he must, because she had to be caught and hustled back toward the bridge. As the two of them fled, the creatures from among the houses slunk, stole after them, made a line across the road, cut off escape in that direction.

Ruth ran fast in her unreasoning terror, toward where a great squat doorway gaped in the old mill. But then she stopped, so suddenly that Mark nearly blundered against her as he hurried from behind.

"More—" she whimpered. "More of them—"

And more of them crept out through that door. Many more of them, crowding together into a grotesque phalanx.

Ruth pressed close against Mark. She trembled, sagged, her pert daring was gone from her. He gathered his football muscles for a fight, whatever fight he could put up. They came closing in around him and Ruth, those shapes that were only half-shapes. They churned wispily as they formed themselves into a ring.

He made out squat bodies, knobs of craniums, the green gleam of eyes, not all of the eyes set two and two. The Indians, those old Indians, had been right to fear presences like these. Everything drew near. Above the encircling, approaching horde, Mark saw things that fluttered in the air. Bats? But bats are never that big. He heard a soft mutter of sound, as of panting breath.

Even if Ruth hadn't been there to hold on her feet, Mark could never have run now. The way was cut off. It would have to be a battle. What kind of battle?

Just then, abrupt music rang out in the shining night.

And that was a brave music, a flooding burst of melody, like harps in the hands of minstrels. A powerful, tuneful voice sang words to it:

"The cross in my right hand,
That I may travel open land,
That I may be charmed and blessed,
And safe from any man or beast . . ."

The pressing throng ceased to press around Mark and Ruth. It ebbed away, like dark water flowing back from an island.

The song changed, the guitar and the voice changed:

"Lights in the valley outshine the sun,
Lights in the valley outshine the sun,
Lights in the valley outshine the sun—
Look away beyond the blue."

Those creatures, if they could be called creatures, fell back. They fell back, as though blown by the wind. The singing voice put in words of its own, put in a message, a guidance:

"Head for the bridge and I'll follow you,
Head for the bridge and I'll follow you,
Head for the bridge and I'll follow you—
Look away beyond the blue."

Ruth would have run again. Mark held her tightly by the arm, kept her to a walk. Running just now might start something else running. They stumbled back along the rough stones with the grass between the edges. The moonlight blazed upon them. Behind them, like a prayer, another verse of the song:

"Do, Lord, oh do, Lord, oh do remember me,

Do, Lord, oh do, Lord, oh do remember me,
Do, Lord, oh do, Lord, oh do remember me—
Look away beyond the blue."

But this time, a confident happiness in that appeal. Mark felt like joining in and singing the song himself, but he kept silent and urged Ruth along by her arm. He thought, though he could not be sure, that soft radiances blinked on and off in the shantylike old houses strung along the road. He did not stop to look more closely. He peered ahead for the bridge, and then the bridge was there and thankfully they were upon it, their feet drumming the planks.

Still he panted for breath, as they reached the other side. He held Ruth to him, glad that he could hold her, glad for her that he was there to hold her. He looked across. There on the bridge came something dark. It was the guitar-picker, moving at a slower pace than Mark and Ruth had moved. He sang, softly now, softly. Mark could not make out the song. He came and joined them at last. He stood tall and lean with his hair rumpled, holding his guitar across himself like a rifle at the port.

"You all can be easy now," he said gently. "Looky younder, they can't come over this far."

Over there, all the way over there at the far bridge head, a dark cluster of forms showed under the moon, standing close together and not coming.

"The fact about it is," said the guitar-picker, "they don't seem to be up to making their way across a run of water."

Mark was able to speak. "Like *Dracula*," he said numbly. "Like the witches in *Tam O'Shanter*."

"Sure enough, like them. Now, folks," and the voice was gentler than ever, "you all see they'd best be left alone on their side yonder, the way folks have mostly left them alone, all the way back to when the whole crew of the mill went off to nowhere. Old ways can be best."

"Mark, I was such a fool," Ruth mumbled against Mark's shirt.

"I told you that, dear," he said to her.

"Did you call me dear?"

"Yes."

"It makes me feel right good to hear talk like that with nice young folks like you two," said the guitar-picker.

Mark looked up above Ruth's trembling golden head. "You were able to defeat them," he said. "You knew music would hold them back."

"No, I nair rightly knew that." The big hand swept a melody from the silver string. "I hoped it, was all, and the hope wasn't vain."

Mark held out a shaking hand. "We'll never be able to thank you, Mr.—I don't even know your name."

My name's John."

"John what?" Mark asked.

"Just call me John."

*You venture into a nightmare realm, when you
answer*

The Summons of Nuguth-Yug

*by Gary Myers and
Marc Laidlaw*

I, Snith, student of the elder mysteries, practitioner of magic white and grey, pen this account in my minutest script upon the flyleaves of the Fourth Cryptical Book of Hsan. In my own blood I pen it, having no readier ink to hand, by the doubtful light of twenty captive glowworms, sitting cross-legged on the threshold of the silent house of my colleague, Nuguth-Yug.

I recall that the summons of Nuguth-Yug found me in my study, pondering one of the darker passages in the Second Cryptical Book of Hsan, the

book wherein, it will be remembered, Hsan professes to explain the ulterior motives of the stars. My reverie was broken by a peremptory knock at the outer door. Arising from the depths of my arm-chair and my soul, I traded my book for a silver candlestick: shielding my candle against the draught, I hurried down the reverberating corridor to the solid oaken portal booming at the far end. The booming grew steadily louder until the instant my fingertips touched the verdigris-mottled brass doorknob—then ceased! I threw open the door. The cypress hedge cast long, black, pointed shadows down the moonlit garden path. Of the knocker there was no sign.

But then I heard a dismal flapping sound proceeding from above, and then I saw a star-eclipsing shadow wheeling slowly overhead. My imagination interpreted as best it could the progression of fragmentary silhouettes that passed before my eyes, as belonging to a manlike figure lean and bat-winged. But my eyes were tired from long hours of study, and doubtless my imagination was morbidly excited from the same cause.

"Cease these pranks!" I shouted. "In the name of the Elder Ones I conjure you!" And I hurled my candlestick at the offending shadow.

And which was the more effective, my missile or my shout, I do not know; but the winged shadow shot away, as from a sling, over my steep thatched roof, where it quickly became lost among the black spaces between the stars.

Meanwhile something cylindrical fell to earth at my feet. Stooping to retrieve it, I found not my

candlestick, but a black lacquer tube sheathing a roll of parchment. The single sheet was closely written on both sides in luminous ink that glimmered blue in the dark, such ink as I believed was used exclusively by the peoples of the Great Abyss, that hidden country where the sun is unheard of and the moon and stars are regarded as mythical. But the language was that spoken in my native city of Narath. And the spidery script looked oddly familiar—for a reason which soon became obvious from the reading of it.

"Friend Snith," it said, "in this direst hour of the world's need I call upon you to join your powers with mine in combating the peril that has arisen from the inmost dark. You will understand me when I say that something has taught the Gugs how to violate the Sign of Koth. Come at once, I beseech you, and bring with you the Fourth Cryptical Book of Hsan. My courier, a night-gaunt of the Great Abyss, will bear you to my house; the Elder Ones speed you upon your journey." And here it was signed, "Nuguth-Yug, priest of Nodens."

The name of Nuguth-Yug was not unknown to me, for its owner and I had read magic together in the secret college of Hezethub, the master sorcerer of Narath, in the draughty catacombs beneath that city. But Nuguth-Yug had been sent into the lower catacombs on a secret errand, and from that errand he had never returned! And Nodens is, as all men know, the Lord of the Great Abyss. But Nuguth-Yug's more cryptic reference was to the crawling chaos Nyarlathotep, and signified that the

doom of the world was at hand. Here were mysteries indeed, and I read eagerly onward in quest of their solutions.

But all that remained was a lengthy postscript, a set of minutely detailed directions for finding the Temple of Nodens, or it might be the house of Nuguth-Yug, in the eternal darkness of the Great Abyss. This against the contingency, foreseen by the writer, that I should become separated from my intended mount—by the inhospitable device of a thrown candlestick.

Of the etiquette that sorcerers observe I say nothing. I captured twenty glowworms and imprisoned them in a dark lantern: for a light would of course be necessary, and though even the dimmest light might betray me to the bad things with eyes, at least no odor of hot metal should draw to me the worse things without eyes. And the Fourth Cryptical Book of Hsan, that peerless compendium of spells for the summoning and dismissing of every kind of daemon, I wrapped in an oilskin. A measure of dried apricots tied up in a napkin, an iron bottle of clear spring water fortified with brandy, and Nuguth-Yug's letter to be my guide: these completed my accoutrement.

Then I turned the key in the lock of the outer door—from within. Returning to my study, I removed the furniture to one side of the room and rolled back the carpet from the floor of broad flagstones. One of these stones was conspicuously marked with the Sign of Kish, even as Nuguth-Yug had predicted. Tilting up this stone, I uncovered a square opening whose impenetrable darkness, if

Nuguth-Yug had written truly, was one with the darkness of the Great Abyss, and into which depended a silken cord. I lowered myself into this darkness as into a bath of ink, and commended my soul to the Elder Ones, and slid down the silken cord.

When I lighted upon the cindery slope above the vale of Pnoth, the bright opening above me showed no bigger than a star, and I reflected that there are more ways into the Great Abyss than there are out of it. Then I struck downward through the blind dark, taking my direction from Nuguth-Yug's luminous postscript. But I did not open my lantern: there are things not meant to be seen by men, and most of them inhabit the vale of Pnoth.

The cindery slope was smooth and easy, and I descended without serious mishap. But once I trod on something round and hard that turned beneath my foot and brought me to my knees. My groping fingers encountered the empty orbits of a human skull; the ghostly beams of my lantern revealed a fully articulated human skeleton lying prone at my feet. My rude step had turned the skull face-up. How came he here, the owner of these bones? One skeletal arm embraced a little idol of leprous stone, an anthropomorphic idol with a beard of tentacles. I lost no time in idle speculation; I left them lying and continued on my way.

Then the cindery slope ran down to meet a cindery plain, and the first stage of my journey was behind me. But I had still to cross the unspeakable vale of Pnoth itself, a prospect that weighed as heavily upon my soul as the darkness weighed upon

my aching eyeballs. For in the vale of Pnoth anything can happen; and to know this is to foreknow nothing; and against the totally unexpected there is no defence but flight.

Marching until I was weary and sleeping until I was rested: thus I divided the endless night into days. And always before I lay down I repeated a certain formula from the Fourth Cryptical Book of Hsan, to guard me whilst I slept. But whether it was by virtue of this formula that nothing unpleasant ever came to disturb my rest, or whether it was chance, I do not know. I breakfasted as I dined, on two apricots and a sip of water.

The morning of the first day spread a carpet of bones beneath my feet, of layered bones that rattled to my tread. My lantern revealed that these were mostly human bones, but that some were the bones of rats and elephants. The way grew steeper as the piled bones mounted beneath me; I crept up the last of the difficult slope painfully on my hands and knees. But when I reached the crest of the mountain of bones, I found that the opposing declivity was steeper still. So I began a slow circuit of what was shown thereby to be the rim of a funnel some miles across, a funnel uncomfortably like the pit of an ant-lion.

Coming to the far side of the rim of the funnel of bones, I inadvertently kicked a skull backward into the pit, where I heard its dismal clatter swallowed up in the awesome stillness of the inconceivable depths. And then I heard what could only be its echo rolling back to the rim. But too loud was that sound, and too irregular the intervals

of its repetition, ever to be an echo. And then I perceived the terrible truth, that drove me to mount the fearsome avalanche and ride it all in a moment adown the terrific slope, alighting bruised and shaken on the edge of the cindery plain: the skull had disturbed the ant-lion, and the ant-lion was crawling up!

It was in the black noon of the second day that the whispers began. First something whispered a few words in front of me, and then something else whispered a few more words behind, and then a horrible whispered laughter arose on every side. Quickly I threw open my lantern, reasoning that the children of darkness must be confounded by the sudden appearance of a light in their midst. And I must have reasoned correctly, for as quickly the whispers fell silent.

Nor was there any sign of the whisperers, for whom the horrible laughter had in some measure prepared me. But what could have prepared me for the sight that greeted my astonished eyes when, thinking myself still on the cindery plain, I found myself in a narrow way between endless walls that rose higher than my light could reach? These walls were curiously knobbed with human anatomical features, with knees and elbows and heads, for they were composed entirely of broken statuary. And they had no proper doors and windows, but only, high up, round openings the width of the human trunk.

The whispers resumed beyond the nimbus of my lantern, retreating before me as I advanced along the narrow way, but pressing close behind and

leaving no marks on the cindery path. And this was the fashion of my going for the rest of that day, for I dared not lie down to sleep until the city and the whisperers were behind me.

The evening of the third day brought me to the very doorstep of my destination, the silent house of Nuguth-Yug. Light streamed out of the open doorway, throwing my shadow far across the cindery plain over which I had come, and climbing as a mist up the windowless black facade of Cyclopean masonry to the lofty roof where seven gargoyles sat arow. Black as the wall that supported them, nearly as black as the darkness that bowed them down, these gargoyles were not easy to discern; they may have been manlike figures lean and bat-winged. But so lifelike were their attitudes of crouching expectancy, that I almost heard the thrumming of their membranous wings.

Double doors of green bronze stood open against the wall, and portrayed in high relief the primal allegory of Nodens, the Lord of the Great Abyss: an anthropomorphic god with a beard of tentacles, now hunting winged octopi with a trident, now enthroned in a scallop shell.

Looking past the doors into the lighted interior, I saw the lowly bed of the anchorite, a pallet of filthy straw, and the leprous stone altar of his god with its crowning pedestal, a pedestal in the shape of a scallop shell. Both were empty.

Then the light went out. And in another moment I had the great unhappiness to see, by the light of my open lantern, the doorway closing upon me like a mouth.

The Wind That Tramps The World

by Frank Owen

THE LITTLE CITY OF THE BIG WINDS LIES ON the very roof of the world, among the bleak, barren storm-blown peaks of the Himalayas, as though flung there by some monstrous frenzied hand, or snapped from the tip of a whip in the hand of a giant. A grayer or more desolate spot would be hard to imagine, or a spot where the tumult of discord is more frightful.

At first John Steppling had been unable to sleep upon his arrival in the City. It was like being in another world, living in a cloud-land of drifting shadows, where every breath was an effort and prolonged exertion an almost physical impossibility. He felt like an empty box, strained to the breaking point by external things, in danger of collapsing at any moment. At night as he gazed toward the stars, he almost imagined that he could extend his

hand and pick them out of the sky much as one might pick blue-white flowers in a fragrant garden. The sky was so intensely clear, it was breathtaking. It almost made him gasp. Though possibly the rarefied air may have made him gasp in any case. He had arrived at the City quite by chance during an exploring expedition in Northern India. He had intended remaining in the weird little town only for a single day, and yet somehow he could not bring himself to leave it. There was a wild attraction about the bleak town which he could not define.

For the most part the inhabitants of the City were as poor as church-mice, poorer in truth, for they had only the roughest type of mud-thatched huts wherein to live. By occupation they were shepherds. They watched over thin and sickly flocks of sheep and goats that scraped out a meagre existence from the barren, half-frozen soil. They were filthy-looking individuals, illiterate, stolid, totally lacking in humor. They never bathed. In lieu thereof they smeared their entire bodies with grease. Water was scarce. They did not waste it, besides the grease had a tendency to keep them warm. It kept them odoriferous as well but to the people unused to the sweet perfumes of which the inhabitants of the lands lying to the south were so fond, it did not matter. Among all the shepherds, Steppling could not find a single person who understood his language, nor did any of them seem to care. As long as they did not bother him, he did not bother them. Their visions were so limited they were unable to grasp anything beyond

their usual scope. When they married, the bride married all the brothers of the family. Naturally in their connubial arrangements most of the brothers were diplomatic enough to be away much of the time.

Steppling was charmed by the spirit of mystery that hovered over everything. He longed to get beneath the mask which each person seemed to wear. They seemed totally lacking in personality, yet personality of some sort they must have. When they went into their huts did they just pass into blackness like candles blown out? Did they have any home life at all? He doubted it. Were their affections, hopes, desires, loves, all blunted? Did they ever read? It was like being in a dead city. No one approached him. No one talked to him. He seldom heard a human voice for the voices of the people were usually drowned by the frightful screeching of the wind through the mountain passes. Fortunately he had sufficient food with him to last him another month. When that was gone he intended to endeavor to buy food from the natives. When he bought food in what currency could he pay for it? English currency would be of little use among these savage hillsmen. He was outside British domains. The people did not value money. What they gloated over was food. Money was a rather questionable commodity. Although illiterate and dull they were able to appreciate how fundamentally useless gold is after all.

Each day he roamed for hours about the wind swept mountain passes. He climbed to lofty pinacles almost as sharp as needles. Sometimes he

rambled over a table of rock so vast that the greatest giants of legend might have sat down comfortably around it without bumping elbows. Not infrequently he even ventured to walk about the native haunts of the City, where sod-thatched huts were mute testimony of the poverty of the people. But the inhabitants looked at him hostilely as he passed. They were not pleased with his manner. They did not like to be the pivots of his scrutiny. He did not mind their attitude. He had traveled much. He was used to eccentricities. And yet he felt ill at ease. Such walks were not enjoyable.

Nevertheless one day he walked farther than usual. The City was small. At last the houses grew less frequent until finally he arrived at the country beyond. Even then he did not stop until he reached a long low house, Chinese in style. In the center was what seemed to be a tall pagoda whose colorful facade was at strange variance with the drab little city through which he had just passed. Before the doorway of the house sat an old Chinaman. He was so old, shrivelled and shrunken, and his face was so criss-crossed with lines he appeared almost like a mummy. Age seemed to have turned him to stone. He sat without blinking. His parchment-like skin was as brown as tanned leather. On his chin was a wisp of a beard which eddied fantastically about in the sun. His lips were compressed into a thin line. His eyes looked dully out from half-closed lids. His slant brows would have made his face distinctive even if it had been distinctive in any case. He was completely wrapped in a great cloak of a tantalizing color. It was blue like the midnight sky yet

sometimes as the light struck it it seemed to flame green. On his head was a square hat, small and black, although oblong would perhaps be more descriptive of it. It was like a great black ebony domino.

The old man sat and gazed before him. He seemed to be peering into the future, an old prognosticator crouching before his house. John Stepling stood and stared at the ancient figure. He was so small he resembled a child, a very old child with a wisp of a beard.

Stepling was curious. Who was this ancient stranger, this man so different to all the other inhabitants of the desolate city? Nothing that he had beheld since crossing the mountain barriers had so completely captivated his interest. "Perhaps," he thought, "this man may understand English." Despite his extreme age there was an undeniable air of culture about him.

"I wonder," said Stepling, "why they call this town the City of the Big Winds."

The old man did not stir. He seemed carved of stone.

Stepling repeated the sentence. There was no response. Then he repeated it again in a louder voice.

Finally the old man turned. He shook his shoulders in a peculiar manner as though trying to escape from his reveries, from the visions which imagination had conjured up for him.

"What do you wish?" he asked finally in quaintly accented though perfectly pronounced English.

Stepling was nonplussed. He did not know what

to answer. He was surprised that the old Chinaman understood English. So long had it been since he had conversed with anyone, the question was rather a shock to him. But at last he succeeded in getting his cosmos readjusted.

"If I am not presuming," he said, "I should like to know what you are gazing at so intently."

The old man's eyes were like slits. They gleamed in his rough brown face as though they were lighted lamps.

"Looking?" he repeated slowly. "Looking? I was not looking. I was listening to the ceaseless voices of the wind. Most men of earth who believe their sense of hearing is very acute are in reality stone-deaf. To listen truly, is a fine art. Anyone can hear a mountain fall but only a genius can hear the music of a flower unfolding in the sun, a flower fringed with nectar-cooled dew."

He paused for a moment and gazed off toward the jagged, knife-edged cliffs. But presently he spoke again.

"I am Hi Ling," he said. "To my house you are welcome. No human soul dwells with me. And yet there are other voices besides my own constantly echoing through my house for every night I open my windows so that all the great winds can blow through. They are whispering, forever they are whispering. Can you not stay with me awhile?"

"Nothing would give me greater pleasure," replied Steppling quickly and he felt as though he could howl with glee. But he was careful to hide the intensity of his jubilant spirits.

It was with a feeling of keen elation therefore

that he followed the old Chinaman who now arose and entered the house, if house it could be called, for it was a huge ambling affair of mystery and shadows. Together they groped their way through multitudinous rooms, silent, weird, vast, through which scarcely even the faintest suggestion of daylight penetrated.

"I keep my house forever dark and shadowy," explained Hi Ling, "in order that it may always be in harmony with life."

"You think then," said Stepling, "that life is clothed in shadows."

"I do indeed," was the quick response. "The shadows of earth quite outweigh the pleasures. Over almost everyone there is a shadow constantly hanging."

As he spoke they emerged into a great room which somehow suggested a shrine to Stepling. The air was fragrant with the pungent perfumes of the East, preeminent among which was the incense of aloes-wood and musk. In the center of a slightly raised black platform there stood a jade green vase. In the vase was a single branch, withered and old, a branch whose shrivelled appearance somehow suggested the gaunt face of Hi Ling. The flower if flower there had been had long since fallen from it. Above the vase hung a soft-toned yellow lantern, as round and coolly brilliant as an autumn moon, first rising above a range of blue-mist-crested hills.

Hi Ling prostrated himself flat on his face before the altar. He chanted some jumbled garish Chinese verses in a sad monotone. For perhaps ten minutes

or it might have been longer, he remained thus. Then he rose to his feet. Without a word he walked across the room. He threw open a great heavily draped window. Then he did the same to a window on the other side of the room.

Instantly pandemonium broke loose. It was as though all the winds of earth had congregated outside that window and now came crashing through. They shrieked and laughed in a thousand fantastic tongues. It was frightful because it was so intense, so unrestrained. Sometimes Stepling imagined he detected a low moan in the wind, almost a sob, but at once it was drowned by the awful fiendish laughter.

The wind came crashing madly through as though it would wreck the very building. It caught up the fragrant perfume from the musk-scented air and bore it off into measureless distances. The yellow moon-lantern swayed back and forth as ceaselessly as a pendulum. Only the jade vase remained stationary. The entire building shuddered but still the vase did not move.

Stepling gripped Hi Ling's arm. "What does it mean?" he cried. He pitched his voice to the highest key possible and even then it seemed as weak as a whisper. "Is it a tornado, a cyclone?"

Hi Ling shook his head. His ghastly brown face looked more like that of a mummy than ever.

"Listen intently," he said, "can you not hear voices in the wind?"

How long the havoc continued Stepling did not know. At that moment time had lost its importance. Something supernatural seemed to have

clutched them up in its grip. Steppling felt numb, powerless, almost without the power to move. At last Hi Ling walked across the room and closed the windows. He had to fight until he was practically exhausted to get the mad wind out again. But at last the windows were tightly barred. And peace seemed to sweep down over the room like a caress. The yellow lantern ceased its swaying. The pungent perfume bloomed forth again.

That night John Steppling sat down to the simplest meal he had ever partaken of in his life. It was simply rice cakes and tea. The rice cakes were as crisp as mountain air and the tea was pungent as it was delicious. They ate in a room lit only by a single lamp which spluttered feebly as though protesting against the limitless darkness which enveloped the house like a shroud.

After the meal was finished, the old man produced several pipes. They were very black and ominously small. Into the bowl of each, Hi Ling rolled a black gummy pellet which he shaped in the palms of his hand.

He held out one to John Steppling. "Smoke?" he said curtly.

But Steppling refused the proffered pipe.

"I would prefer to hear you talk," he said.

"Why do you not listen to the myriads of voices in the wind?" asked Hi Ling drowsily.

"Because my ear is not tuned to catch the sound."

"You do not try. If you really listened, you could hear."

"I would rather hear your voice."

"That is foolish," declared Hi Ling. "No human voice is as softly alluring as the voices one sometimes discovers in the wind."

"Nevertheless," repeated Stepling stubbornly, "I would rather hear you talk."

Hi Ling shrugged his shoulders. He could not understand how anyone should prefer the natural voice to magic.

"What do you wish me to say?" he asked finally.

"Tell me the story of your life," replied John Stepling bluntly, "the story of the jade vase and the moon lantern."

Hi Ling hesitated. "I have never told that to a living soul," he said slowly.

"Nevertheless, you must tell it to me."

"You would only smile," said Hi Ling. "You would hold my story up to ridicule, and if you did I would kill you. I should hate to do that. Never in my life has the blood of any animal been upon my hand."

"Scarcely a compliment," drawled Stepling, "to call me an animal." He was not angry. He merely made the comment to draw on conversation.

"I meant no offense," Hi Ling hastened to assure him. "Although I spoke the truth for surely if you are neither a fish nor a fowl you must be an animal."

"You are right," agreed Stepling. "I agree with you on every point. Therefore I think it but fitting for you to tell me your story."

Again Hi Ling hesitated. But finally he acquiesced.

"Years ago," he began, "I lived in Southern

China. I was very wealthy. My ancestors had all contributed their share to the measure of my holdings. By profession I was a horticulturist. Even though forty years have passed the glory of my garden is still recounted throughout Southern China in innumerable little quaint tales of fantasy which have almost become legends. I raised all sorts of flowers but I specialized in jasmine, eglantine and wistaria blossoms. Particularly the last. I had a passion for the flowers as great as that of any renowned Sultan for the veiled ladies of his harem. So intent was I on the contemplation of my flowers I seldom left the garden. Sometimes I did not even return to my house to sleep. Instead I reclined in a charming grove at the back of my buildings where I could hear the tinkle of a tiny rivulet and where hundreds of gorgeous flowers breathed onto the air a perfume that made me drowsy, that caressed me to sleep, all care and worry forgotten. To me that garden was filled with countless soft-sweet voices. Flowers talk or rather perhaps it would be more descriptive to say, they sing, but it is given to few people of earth to hear their wondrous melodies. Of this few I was one. Day by day I studied the language of flowers. I became a hermit. As time went on I never left my garden. All else was forgotten in the contemplation of gorgeous orchids, sweet-scented jasmine and seductive eglantine. I forsook human life for floral, and in my renouncing I gained much. In my garden there grew a single fragile flower, orchid-like in glory, but of a species quite different to any I had ever chanced upon before. It was of the soft warm color of a tea

rose with a tint of carmine, faintly suggested in the petals which were as velvet soft as the cheek of any maiden. By the hour I used to sit and listen to the sweet singing of that perfect flower. It was unlike any sound ever heard by man. The tinkle of a fairy bell would almost seem harsh by comparison. Is it any wonder then that I fell in love with that flower? The wonder is that the flower seemed equally enamored of me. It glowed more beautifully as I approached it. It swayed toward me. As I put down my head to breathe of the exotic fragrance it gently caressed my lips and the caress was softer than the kiss of the loveliest woman. In time I grew to call the flower, 'Dawn-Girl.' I idolized it. No lover of romance was more enraptured by his dear one than I. That garden became for me a sacred place. Great peace stole into my heart. The miracle of love had been performed anew. Like night and day it goes on endlessly. When love dies out on earth then will the sun grow cold.

"I was supremely happy, but my happiness was not to last. Into my life there came a shadow as come it does into the life of every man. 'The Wind that Tramps the World' chanced to blow through the garden. He beheld the exquisite beauty of 'Dawn-Girl' and paused. For the first time in years he was subdued and silent. He had tramped through every country and clime of the world, over every mountain and every sea. He had beheld the grandeur of Greece and Rome and all the other fabulous cities. But never had he chanced upon any sight comparable to that of 'Dawn-Girl' for

loveliness. From that day forth he wooed her arduously. Each night he came to the garden, singing love lyrics of fervid intensity. He brought her all the rarest perfumes and tapestries of dazzling sunlight which he tossed on the ground before her. He even impregnated the cool night dew with all the famed perfumes of earth so that as it fell upon her it would be more enticing than even the sun-glare. But it availed him not. She cared not at all for his gifts, continuing to bend toward me as of yore. This greatly incensed 'The Wind that Tramped the World.' He who had wrecked cities, had levelled trees and stately palaces, now was impotent before this lovely girl-flower. His anger was frightful. He roared about the city so ferociously that the people fled to their homes in fear, dreading the force of the tropical storm which they imagined was about to engulf them. The great Wind planned vengeance. One night while I slept, he whisked 'Dawn-Girl' from her branch and with a shriek of joy, he sped off on his endless tramp which never ends.

"In the morning I awakened with an unaccountable fear clutching my heart. As usual I had slept in the grove. I jumped to my feet and rushed toward the bush where 'Dawn-Girl' dwelt but it was empty. And my heart, my life was empty also. The shadow of doom had descended upon me. For three days I wept in the garden. And all my flower friends closed their glorious petals in sympathy. The entire garden wept. It was a place of mourning. Some of the flowers even died of grief.

"On the morning of the fourth day I went with

heavy step to the house of an old Hindu philosopher who had lived for a hundred and forty years. He was known to be the oldest living man in the world and also the wisest. He listened to my story. When I had finished he told me to come to this city in the Himalayas where all the great winds congregate. Here comes every wind of importance at some time or other. To this place he declared must some day come 'The Wind that Tramps the World.' When it does, he suggested that I steal 'Dawn-Girl' from the Wind even as the Wind had stolen 'Dawn-Girl' from me. So I sold my garden although it tore my soul to do so, and came up here to 'The City of the Big Winds.' I had this huge house built. It cost a vast sum of money. All the wood and material it contains had to be laboriously carried over the winding mountain passes that divide this country from India. I had two great windows built in the room of 'The Jade Vase.' When these windows are flung open all the winds come crashing through. I have been here for thirty years, thirty years have I failed, and even so I have not lost courage. There is always tomorrow and tomorrow rolling on endlessly. Some day 'The Wind that Tramps the World' will come and when he does I shall be ready for him."

Thus the old Chinaman ended his story and Steppling did not comment upon it. There seemed nothing to say. Words at best are rather futile. He was surprised at the story but then he had traveled much in the world and much had he heard that surprised him. It set many unanswerable queries to floating in his mind. Was Hi Ling sane? For that

matter was he sane himself?

All through that night he sat at the door of the house of Hi Ling. He could not sleep. His brain was a cauldron of seething fantastic thoughts. He was on the roof of the world. Much could he see that was invisible to the millions of people down in the Valleys of Earth. The sky was as brilliant as a diamond-studded crown. It bore down upon him, crushing him beneath the weight of its splendor. He was breathing hard. The air was so rarefied that even in the night he could see for miles about him. From the jagged mountain peaks came the constant din and babble of the winds. On up they came from the Valleys on a constant trail that is nobody knows how old.

During the days that followed John Steppling felt as though he were living in a dream. The house, the moon-lantern, Hi Ling all seemed but wraiths in a rather pleasant sleep. Hi Ling had not insisted on his staying, though he took his continued presence as a matter of course. Every night before they supped, Hi Ling opened the massive windows of the room of 'The Jade Vase' and the Winds came tumbling through. Night after night the self-same happenings were repeated and yet they never seemed to grow monotonous. Hi Ling endeavored to teach him the art of listening, but his efforts were in vain.

One night as Hi Ling opened the windows the blast that drove in was so intense that it shook the house as though it had been on rockers. It belled and roared like a lion with a thorn in its foot. It seemed wild. By comparison the other

winds which had drifted through seemed to possess much culture. The moon-lantern swayed perilously.

Hi Ling seized Steppling's arm. His face was more cadaverous and drawn than ever. His fingers bit into the flesh like talons.

"It is the Wind!" he muttered hoarsely.

How can one describe the events that followed? Hi Ling seemed to have gone stark raving mad. He pranced about the room as agilely as an ape in a jungle swamp. His mouth was drawn back until his decayed yellow teeth showed like fangs. All the while he chanted a wild weird refrain which occasionally rose above the howling of 'The Wind that Tramps the World.' Involuntarily John Steppling stepped back into the shadows of the farthest corner of the room. He shivered. He was gripped by a crushing, an unexplainable fear, which he could not shake from him. He knew that events of great portent in the life of Hi Ling were about to happen. For thirty years or was it longer, Hi Ling had waited for this moment.

Fascinated Steppling watched the actions of the old Chinaman. At times he gyrated about like a whirling dervish of India. Sometimes he sprang into the air as though clutching for the moon-lantern. And all the time he drooled at the mouth. Froth foamed horribly in the corners of his lips.

As the actions Hi Ling grew more fanatical, the intensity of the wind increased. It struck against the ears like something solid so great was the shock. And all the time Steppling listened, listened more intensely than he had ever listened before. And

eventually he thought he heard the sound of singing, in a voice sweet-low and sadder than the autumn breeze through the tree-tops. He strained every effort. His heart even slowed down to catch the melody so superb was its beauty. At first he imagined that his ears were at fault, that the beautiful notes existed only in his subconscious mind, but even as the thought occurred to him, he banished it. A sound so beautiful could not be buried in his subconsciousness, for never in his life had he heard music of such haunting beauty. The subconscious mind contains only impressions which have passed at some time or other through one's consciousness. At that moment he became almost as mad as Hi Ling. He knew that he had heard the voice of 'Dawn-Girl' and he did not wonder that Hi Ling had renounced all else in the world for love of her. For a while longer the singing continued, then it ceased. It ended on a final beautiful note that seemed almost a moan. With a start, Stepling came back to reality. The room was now in total darkness. The moon-lantern had been ruthlessly torn from its hanging and as it fell it had spluttered out. Now the fury of the Wind increased, if increase it could. Occasionally Hi Ling uttered a cry of excitement, of anger or delight. And the Wind roared back in a tremendous voice which Stepling construed as a threat. How long the fight continued, John Stepling could not tell. He crouched in his corner as nervous as a new-born kitten that is snatched from its mother.

Sunrise came at last. As it did so the Wind passed out of the window to return no more. As the

first shafts of the sun cut over the jagged mountain peaks and crept into the room, John Steppling gazed cautiously about him. Hi Ling lay prone on the floor before the altar. At once Steppling rushed to his side. He turned the limp body over, but it was useless. He could do nothing. The chest had been completely stove in. Hi Ling had collapsed even as an old frail house might collapse in a cyclone. For a moment Steppling gazed down upon the face but it was no longer old and lined with age. It was the face of a youth. There was a bit of warm red color in the cheeks and the lips were smiling. Steppling gazed slowly toward the jade vase. The withered branch was withered no longer. Life had come to it again for on the branch was a flower of the soft warm color of a tea rose but unlike any flower he had ever known before. The fragrant cool petals were as velvet soft as the cheek of any maiden. Again John Steppling turned to Hi Ling and he was not surprised that even in death he looked young. For youth had come to him in the return of 'Dawn-Girl.' Old age at best is mainly a matter of attitude.

An hour later John Steppling left the long ambling old house. But before he went he again lighted the moon-lantern and placed the lovely flower on the breast of Hi Ling. Even as he left he heard the sound of singing and the notes were joyous and wonderfully sweet.

Every old family has a skeleton or two in the closet

The Winfield Heritage *by Lin Carter*

Statement of Winfield Phillips

IN the event of my death or disappearance, I herewith request of the person into whose hands this statement shall come that he mail it without delay to Dr. Seneca Lapham, care of the Anthropology Department of Miskatonic University in the city of Arkham, Massachusetts. And, for his own safety, if not indeed his sanity of mind, I beg him to send it *unread*.

My name is Winfield Phillips, and I reside at number 86 College Street in Arkham. I am a graduate of Miskatonic University, where I majored in American literature and took for my minor the study of anthropology. Since my freshman year I have been in the employ of Dr. Lapham in the

capacity of a private secretary, and have continued thereafter in that position in order to support myself while researching for a book on the Decadent movement in recent art and literature. I am twenty-nine years old, and consider myself to be sound of mind and body.

As for my soul, I am not so certain.

I

ON the morning of June 7th, 1936, having obtained a brief leave of absence from my employer, I boarded the train for California at the B & O Station on Water Street. My purpose in undertaking a journey of such length as to traverse the entirety of the continent was partially business and partially pleasure. And, in part, from a sense of family duty.

Due to the recent death of my Uncle, Hiram Stokely of Durnham Beach, California, I felt obligated to attend his funeral and to take my place at the obsequies in order that the Eastern branch of the family might be represented on this solemn occasion. Uncle Hiram had been, after all, my Mother's favorite brother; and, even though I had never met him, had, in fact, never even seen him to my knowledge, I knew that she would have wished me to attend his burial. My late Mother was a Winfield of New Hampshire, but my Father was a Phillips, sprung from ancient-Massachusetts stock which can be traced back to 1670, if not further. I am a descendant of the celebrated, and ever so

slightly notorious, Reverend Ward Phillips, former pastor of the Second Congregationalist Church in Arkham, author of an obscure but psychologically fascinating bit of New England eccentricity called *Thaumaturgical Prodigies in the New-English Canaan*, first published at Boston in 1794 and later reprinted in rather expurgated form in 1801. It is an old family joke that the reverend doctor, in this his only known venture into the fine art of letters, literally did his "damndest" to out-do in hellfire and brimstone mad old Cotton Mather's hellish *Magnalia* and the even more nightmarish *Wonders of the Invisible World*. If so, he succeeded admirably.

Many years before I was born, there had been some sort of trouble between my Uncle Hiram and the rest of my Mother's family. I have never quite known what occasioned this breach, but the breaking-off of relations was lasting and permanent. If my Mother ever knew the reason, she never confided it to me, but I can remember my aged Grandfather muttering about "forbidden practices" and "books no one should ever read," whenever Uncle Hiram's name came up, which was not very often. Whatever the nature of the family scandal, Uncle Hiram moved away from Arkham, went to California, and never returned. These ancient, inbred New England families, as you may be aware, are rife with skeletons in the closet, old feuds, centuries old scandals. It seems quaint, even perverse nowadays, to bear a grudge for a lifetime, but we are a proud, stubborn, stiff-necked race. Just how stiff-necked we are can be demonstrated by the

fact that my Uncle, as if not content with severing all relations with the family (even with my Mother, who was his favorite sister), actually repudiated the family name, Winfield, adopting instead his mother's maiden name, Stokely.

At any rate, all of this happened long before I was born—before my Mother married into the Phillips family, in fact—and because of this, and of the fact that no single communication had ever passed between my Uncle and myself, I had no slightest thought of even being mentioned in my Uncle's will, and had as well utterly no interest in his Estate, although it was commonly known that he had become immensely wealthy since moving to distant California.

As for the element of pleasure involved in my journey, this lay in the opportunity to resume a cherished friendship with my cousin, Brian Winfield, the only son of my other Uncle, Richard. We had first met, Brian and I, quite by chance, in the Widener Library at Harvard in 1927. I had been sent there by my employer to copy out some passages from a certain very rare version of a curious old volume of myths and liturgies called the *Book of Eibon*, since Harvard was lucky enough to possess the only known text of the medieval Latin translation made from the Greek by Philippus Faber. The young man seated next to me, a cheerful, freckle-faced, snub-nosed fellow with tousled sandy hair and friendly eyes, deep in a medical book full of the most repulsive illustrations imaginable, responded to the librarian's call of "Winfield" and ambled forward to claim another

book just fetched up from the stacks for his perusal. Thinking he must certainly be a relative, I took the liberty of introducing myself; later, chatting over coffee, we laid the foundations of a lasting friendship.

Brian was about five years younger than myself and had come east to study at the medical school, hoping to become a doctor. We both took to each other from the start, both equally delighted to discover we were cousins. Although my stay was a brief one, we managed to continue our friendship on weekends and during vacations. On these occasions I had to come to the dorm to visit him, since his father had made him swear never to venture a foot closer to Arkham than the Boston city limits.

This afforded me no particular discomfort in traveling, of course, since Boston and Arkham are only some fifteen miles apart. But after some two years my visits to Boston had to end, for Brian flunked out of medical school because of some ridiculously boyish prank, and he went home to live again with his parent. He later studied veterinary medicine at Tate College in Buford, the county seat of Santiago County in which Durnham Beach is located, and became a licensed veterinarian. I suppose this was quite a come-down for one who had hoped to cure cancer and win the Nobel Prize; or perhaps his father, discovering our surreptitious correspondence, demanded that it cease. At any rate, our exchange of letters dwindled and died. An infrequent card at Christmases or birthdays, and that was about it.

Until this June, when suddenly and to my delight

I found in my mailbox a brief, scribbled letter in his familiar, childish hand, informing me of our Uncle's death and inviting—virtually *begging*—that I come west for the funeral. I did not need much urging, and, as Dr. Lapham was willing to dispense with my services for a week or so, I went out that very afternoon and purchased my railway tickets, informing Brian by telegraph of the time of my arrival.

Besides the pleasure of resuming my acquaintance with Brian, and the family duty of attending my Uncle's funeral, I had also a bit of unfinished business to clean up on the behalf of Dr. Lapham. A few miles north of Durnham Beach, on the coast of Southern California, lay the town of Santiago in which the famous Sanbourne Institute of Pacific Antiquities was situated. About seven years earlier we had been visited at Miskatonic by a gentleman named Arthur Wilcox Hodgkins, the assistant curator of the manuscripts collection at the Sanbourne Institute. This earnest and scholarly young man had implored the assistance of Dr. Lapham and certain of his colleagues in unravelling an ancient mystery which I shall not go into here, save that it involved the necessary destruction of a rare primitive idol of unknown craftsmanship, found off Ponape some decades earlier. Possession of this peculiar statuette—which gained considerable notoriety in the popular press under the rather melodramatic name of the "Ponape Figurine"—was already reputed to have driven two famous scientists mad, and from Hodgkins' agitated state, threatened to unhinge his own reason as well.

Rather to my surprise, Dr. Lapham took these ravings quite seriously indeed, as did Dr. Henry Armitage, the librarian at Miskatonic. It is a measure of their concern over the potential danger to mankind in the continued existence of this so-called Ponape Figurine that the two of them placed at young Hodgkins' use the fabulously rare copy of a grim, blasphemous old book called the *Necronomicon*, of which Miskatonic owns and jealously guards in a locked vault the only copy of the "complete edition" of the book known to exist in the Western Hemisphere.

This book, and several other volumes of similar rarity and esoteric lore, form the central source of information the world possesses on an obscure, very ancient, and bafflingly wide-spread prehistoric mythology called by some the "Alhazredic demonology," from the name of the *Necronomicon's* Arabic author, and by others the "Cthulhu Mythos," from the appellation of its most celebrated devil. Traces of the Cthulhu cult, and of other cognate cults and secret societies devoted to the worship of Cthulhu's three sons, Ghataothoa, Ythogtha, and Zoth-Ommog, as well as his half-brother, Hastur the Unspeakable, and other gods or demons with names like Tsathoggua, Azathoth, Nyarlathotep, Daoloth, Rhan Tegoth, Lloigor, Zhar, Ithaqua, Shub-Niggurath, and so on, have persisted for ages in the far corners of the world, and are not yet entirely extinct. Linked together into a vast secret network, a sort of "occult underworld," the Cthulhu cult and its minions form, in the opinions of some authorities, little less

than an enormous, and age-old, criminal conspiracy against the safety, the sanity, and the very existence of mankind.

Dr. Lapham and Dr. Armitage asked me, while visiting Santiago, where Brian was currently employed, to look into the mysterious end of Arthur Wilcox Hodgkins. He had cruelly bludgeoned an old watchman to death, set fire to the South Gallery of the museum wing of the Institute, hidden or destroyed the noxious Figurine, and had been hauled off raving mad to the local sanatorium.

It would seem that there was considerably more to his wild story than one might reasonably have assumed. While assisting Dr. Lapham in his investigations of the activities of the Cthulhu cultists I have undergone a few unnerving and scientifically inexplicable experiences myself. I knew, although I tried not to believe, that there was in fact a hard, grim kernel of truth behind the nightmarish legends of this fantastic mythology. I saw enough in Billington's Wood that dark day in 1924 when Dr. Lapham and I shot and killed Ambrose Dewart and his Indian bodyservant, Quamis—or whomever it *really* was had taken over their minds, bodies and souls—to treat these matters with caution and trepidation.

Something had driven poor Hodgkins mad. The Ponape Figurine? Or what he saw in the instant in which he touched to the cold slick jadeite of the Figurine the grey star-stone talisman from lost, immemorial Mnar which Dr. Armitage had entrusted to him? I did not know. But Lapham and Armi-

tage wanted desperately to find out; they wanted to close their file on the weird and unearthly statuette they believed had come down from the black yawning gulfs between the stars when the Earth was young.

And so did I.

II

BRIAN was there to greet me at the Santiago railway station when the train pulled in. Hatless, his sandy hair tousling in the breeze, he waved and grinned and thrust his broad shoulders through the crowd to crush my hand in his clumsy, powerful grip. He had changed very little in the years since we had last seen each other: he was still loud and boyish and irrepressible, with that joyous zest in life and boundless store of physical energy I admired and envied so much.

Collecting my bags, he tossed them into the backseat of his car, a sporty red roadster, and bade me pile in. I had been just as willing to have employed the dilapidated old taxi which was pulled up before the station, but this was even more comfortable an arrangement. While we drove to Brian's little apartment on Hidalgo Street, just off the park, we talked, renewing our acquaintance.

"Tomorrow, I'd like to motor down to Durnham Beach, so we can explore Uncle Hiram's house," said Brian as he helped me unpack. "The lawyers gave me the key to the front door, and directions on getting there."

"Haven't you ever seen it?" I asked. "Living so close to our Uncle, all these years . . ."

He grimaced. "Uncle Hiram didn't get along with my Dad any better than he got along with the rest of the family, I guess! Anyway, I never got invited down. Queer old bird he must have been, but not a bad sort, after all. By the way—I didn't get around to mentioning it before—did you know that you and I are his beneficiaries?"

I blinked, fairly thunderstruck. "Do you mean it?"

He grinned, nodding. "Everything but the money, I'm afraid! That goes to some sort of foundation. But we can split the house, the library and furnishings. Reckon you'll be most interested in the books . . . I understand our Uncle had quite a library. Well; come on, let's wash up and get something to eat."

III.

THE events of the following morning I will pass over without comment. There were only a few people at the services, a couple of our Uncle's old servants and a curiosity-seeker or two. The burial was done rather hastily, and I noticed it was a closed-casket service, for some reason.

After lunch, we motored down the Coast. It was a brisk, bright day, and Brian drove with the top down. I could tell Brian had some news for me—he was fairly bursting with it. Finally, I asked him what was up. He gave me a mischievous

sidewise glance.

"Remember, when you wrote you were coming, you asked me to find out anything I could about that 'Ponape Figurine' affair?" he asked. I nodded. "Well, I got together some newspaper clippings for you—give them to you later. But I discovered something positively weird while looking into the matter. . . ."

And he mentioned the name of the late Professor Harold Hadley Copeland. Time was, what with all the newspaper sensationalism connected with that name, it would instantly have been familiar to the reader of Sunday supplements. But how swiftly yesterday's news becomes ancient history! I suppose few people would even recognize the name nowadays, although his death in a San Francisco mental institution was only some seven years ago.

It had been Professor Copeland who had discovered the notorious Ponape Figurine, which formed the nexus about which so many strange and baffling mysteries had centered. The Figurine had been part of the collection of rare Pacific antiquities and books which Copeland had left to the Sanbourne Institute in 1928. It seems that the Figurine was in some way connected to an ancient, little-known cult which worshipped "Great Old Ones from the stars," whose myths and legends were presumably recorded in a number of old, seldom-found books. Several of these books Copeland had left to the Sanbourne Institute, as they bore upon the matter of his research. What I now learned from the lips of my cousin thoroughly

astounded me:

"The old Prof had a copy of the *Unausprechlichen Kulten*, did you know?" asked Brian, teasingly, playing with my curiosity.

I nodded. The book, by a German scholar named von Junzt, was a principal text in the study of the cult.

"And some pages from the *Yuggya Chants*," he added, "and a copy of something called the *R'lyeh Text*—"

"Yes, I know all about that," I said impatiently. "Get on with it, won't you?"

"Well, Win, where do you suppose Professor Copeland got these rare books from in the first place?"

I shrugged, irritably. "How the devil should I know?"

Still smiling, Brian dropped his bombshell.)

"He bought them from Uncle Hiram."

I'm sure my jaw must have dropped, making me look ludicrous, for after another sidewise glance, Brian began chuckling.

"Great Scott," I murmured, "what a coincidence? D'you mean to say our Uncle was interested in occultism—in this Alhazredic demonology?"

He frowned, not recognizing the term. "'Alhazredic'—?"

"After the Arabic demonologist, Abdul Alhazred, author of the celebrated *Necronomicon*, one of the rarest books in the world. We have a copy back at Miskatonic, kept under lock and key. The only one in the Western hemisphere."

He confessed that he had no idea about our Uncle's interests, scholarly or otherwise. "But Uncle Hiram made a fortune, you know . . . and he went in for book-collecting in a big way . . . anything old and rare and obscure and hard-to-find was just his meat. He had purchasing agents all over the world working for him . . . say, bet that sounds good to you, since you've inherited your pick of his books!"

I didn't say anything, feeling a bit uncomfortable. While my Uncle Hiram's death had meant nothing at all to me personally, there is something a trifle ghoulish about profiting from another man's demise. I changed the subject.

The long drive down to Durnham Beach took us by a scenic route which disclosed frequent glimpses of the rugged, rocky coast, with the smiling blue Pacific lazing beyond under clear sunlight. But, as we approached the town, the highway turned inland, and the scenery became by gradual stages oddly drab and even depressing. We passed acres of scrub pine and mud-flats full of stagnant, scummed water. Then followed, for dreary miles, abandoned farms and fields where the raw, unhealthy earth, eroded by the salt breeze from the ocean, exposed beneath pitifully-thin layers of topsoil nothing but dead and sterile sand. Sea birds honked and cried mournfully, as if to fit the mood of uneasy depression that had fallen over us both. Even the clear sunlight seemed vitiated and dull, although the skies were as clear as ever.

I said something about this to my cousin, and he nodded soberly.

"It's not a very healthy place," he remarked. "Town's been going downhill as far back as I can remember—especially when they started to close down the canneries and people were out of jobs. I can remember when all these farms were going strong, lots of orange groves, truck gardening . . . some communities thrive and grow, and others just sort of crumble and go rotten at the heart . . ."

We passed a roadsign and the name on it seemed vaguely familiar to me, like something I half-remembered reading years ago in the newspapers. I asked Brian about it. He looked grim.

"Hubble's Field? Sure, you must have read about it—ten or fifteen years ago, something like that. They found all those bodies buried there—hundreds, I think it was."

His remark sent a shiver of cold apprehension through me. Of course, I remembered the Hubble's Field atrocity—who could forget it? The county was putting in a pipeline for some reason, and when they came to excavate a certain stretch of condemned property, they began to dig up the remains of human bodies, literally hundreds, as Brian said, although from the way the bodies were dismembered and jumbled together, it was never possible to ascertain an accurate count. Somebody on the radio at the time remarked that if you took all of the mass-murders in history and put them together, you wouldn't have half as many corpses as those found buried in Hubble's Field . . . oddly gruesome thing to remember! Or to think about.

"Yes, I remember something about it now," I

murmured. "They never did find out who did it, or why, did they?"

Brian uttered a harsh little bark of laughter. "No, they didn't," he said shortly. "What they did find out, was that it had been going on for one hell of a long time . . . the further down they dug, they began to find scraps of homespun and tanned leather and old bottles from the early settlers . . . deeper down, bits and pieces of old Spanish armor were found mixed in with the skeletons . . . and beneath *that*—"

He broke off, saying nothing. I nudged him.

"Beneath that—*what*?"

"Indians," he said heavily. "Lot's of 'em. Infants, old people, braves, women. Way back before the Spaniards came. This was all Indian country once, of course. The Hippaway nation owned all these parts before the explorers came. Still some Hippaways around, on reservations in the mountains. But not anywhere around *here*, you can bet!"

"What do you mean?"

"Back in school I took a course in anthropology, Indian stuff. Hippaways had a name for Hubble's Field in their own language . . . something like E-choc-tah, I think it was."

"What does it mean?" I inquired curiously.

His face looked stony.

"*'The Place of Worms.'*"

Suddenly the sunlight dulled, the sky seemed to darken, and the air around us became dank and unwholesomely chill. But when I glanced up, the sky was still clear and the sun shone brightly . . . but seemed weirdly unable to warm

the air.

I changed the subject.

IV.

WE arrived at our Uncle's house by late afternoon, after driving through what was left of the old town. Rows of dingy housing inhabited by whiskered, surly men and slatternly women and squalling brats . . . storefronts shut and mouldering into decay . . . dirt streets cut with ruts, with scrub grass growing in many of them. And beyond the rotting wharfs of the harbor, where only a small boat or two gave evidence of fishermen, loomed the abandoned warehouses and the crumbling canneries. It was hard to believe that this disintegrating ghost town had been a vigorous community in Brian's boyhood, only a dozen or fifteen years ago. It looked contaminated—poisoned, in some uncanny way—and slumping almost visibly into ruin.

"I'm certainly not surprised you've stayed away all of these years," I murmured. "The wonder is, Uncle Hiram kept on, with all his money: I'd of moved to San Francisco or somewhere—*anywhere* but Durnham Beach!"

Brian grunted assent. "Still, the house *is* grand," he mused, looking it over. And I had to admit that it was. A two-story, rambling stucco structure in the Spanish Hacienda style, with red tile roofs and chimneys, ringed about with desolate gardens gone to seed and fishponds long dry, scummed with filth

and rotting leaves.

"Doesn't look like he kept the place up in recent years," I remarked.

"No, it doesn't," he said. Then he pointed to a stretch of empty field bordering the property, beyond a row of dilapidated and dying palms. "Maybe he *couldn't*," he added thoughtfully.

"What does *that* mean?"

He nodded to the empty fields: raw red clay, cut into ditches and hollows and gullies, stretched beyond the row of palms.

"Neighborhood sort of went to pot," he said sourly. "*That* is Hubble's Field . . . !"

After a couple of tries, we opened the big front door with the keys from Uncle Hiram's lawyer, and entered a dim, cool front hall. Suits of rusty armor stood beneath tattered banners and faded tapestries; a grand spiral staircase wound through the dimness into the upper reaches of the house. Dust lay thick and scummy on heavy, carved, antique furniture, and gusts of rain from some broken window upstairs had turned the old carpet green with mildew.

The place had a cold, un-lived-in feeling, despite its attempt at feudal grandeur. It looked like the reception hall in some high-class funeral parlour with pretensions towards Baroque.

"Well, we're here," Brian grunted. "Let's look around—explore." There were tall stained glass windows in the grand dining hall, whose heavy oak table must have seated twenty guests, if guests had ever been welcome here, and I had a queasy feeling they had not. Bronze statuary stood about on

old sideboards and stone mantles, and there was quite a clutter of end-tables and bric-a-brac, some fine pieces of old Indian pottery, Victorian art glass, ashtrays and brass pots. The air was musty and unwholesome, although the house had not really been closed that long: Hiram Stokely had only recently died, after all—did he have something about open windows and fresh air?

Or did the breeze that blew across Hubble's Field, where hundreds and hundreds of corpses had rotted into the earth over centuries, bear with it the taint of some miasma, some pestilence so unholy, that even in the hot summer months, Hiram Stokely had preferred to stifle behind shut windows, rather than breathe it in?

It was a question to which I really desired no answer.

We found the library on the second floor, a huge room, lined from floor to ceiling with bookshelves. I didn't really feel in the mood for evaluating my inheritance that grey and gruesome afternoon: but ran my eye cursorily over the shelves. Tooled leather bindings held standards sets of Dickens, Thackeray, Scott, the Lake Poets. Doubtless, a good second-hand book dealer in San Francisco could turn a tidy profit for me, if the damp and mildew hadn't gotten to the books first.

"My God! What's that?" ejaculated Brian in startled tones. He was staring at an oil painting which hung on the panelled wall beside the door. Dim with dust and neglect, its thickly scrolled gilt frame held a shocking scene I could not quite make out in the dim light.

Peering closer, I read the little brass plate attached to the bottom of the frame. "Richard Upton Pickman," I murmured. "I've heard of him, Boston artist—"

Then I lifted my eyes to study the painting. With a distinct sense of shock I saw a dim, shadowy graveyard vault, stone walls slick with trickling moisture, pallid and bloated fungi sprouting underfoot; scores of obscenely naked, unwholesomely plump men and women, naked and filthy, with heavy clawed hands and a suggestion of dog-like muzzles about their sloping brows and distorted lower faces, were clustered about one who held a guidebook. What was so spine-chillingly ghastly about the grotesque painting was the uncanny, the virtually *photographic* realism of the artist's technique . . . that, and the hellish expressions of hideous, gloating relish stamped on the fat features of the degenerate, the almost bestial, hound-muzzled faces . . .

With a shudder of aversion, I dropped my gaze hastily from the oil, to scan the title of the picture.

" 'Holmes, Lowell, and Longfellow Lie Buried in Mount Auburn,' " I read half-aloud.

Brian looked sick. "God, I'll sell that abomination first off!" he swore feelingly. And I didn't blame him: frankly, I'd have burned the grisly thing.

We decided to stay the night, since it would have taken us hours to drive back to Santiago. We'd driven past a dingy little diner near the docks on our trip through town, but, somehow, neither of us felt like retracing our path through those rutted

streets lined with tottering, decaying tenements. In a mood of festive generosity, Brian's landlady had packed us a large picnic lunch, which we had only nibbled at along the way, so we built a fire in a cavernous stone fireplace and wolfed down cold tea, ham and chicken sandwiches and potato salad by the flickering orange light of the blaze. A thin, drizzly rain had started up; the skies were leaden and overcast; a mournful wind prowled and whimpered about the eaves. It was going to be a filthy night, and neither of us felt like crawling into bed after one look at damp, stale-smelling sheets and empty, drafty bedrooms. We fed the fire and curled up on a couple of sofas, wrapped in quilts found in an upstairs closet.

Brian was soon snoring comfortably, but I found myself unable to get relaxed enough to feel drowsy. Giving it up after a while, I stirred up the fire and lit an old hurricane lamp we'd found on the back porch, which still held plenty of oil. Then I went hunting through the shelves for something to read. Twain, Dumas, Balzac—all of the standard classics were too heavy for my gloomy mood, but surely, somewhere in among all of these thousands of embalmed masterpieces, Uncle Hiram must have tucked away a good thriller or a juicy detective story . . .

On one of the lower shelves I noticed something odd: a row of books and pamphlets which stood *behind* the front row, which made me wonder if all of the bookshelves were built double . . . or was this, perhaps, where Uncle Hiram had squeamishly concealed from casual public discovery a small,

choice collection of "risque" Victoriana? Grinning, I pried one of the volumes out and held it up to the light so that I could read the title.

It was *Night-Gaunts*, a novel by Edgar Henquist Gordon, published in London by Charnel House, Publishers . . . great heaven! I was holding in my hands an extremely rare and very valuable book. It was the first book Gordon had published and, probably because of what critics of the period had damned as its "excessive morbidity," had been a total failure, which was why the volume I held in my grasp was so sought-after by collectors of the bizarre and the fantastic.

Setting it down gently on the table, I removed the front row of books and began to take out and to examine one by one the hidden volumes they had concealed. The next one was also by Gordon, his privately published novel, *The Soul of Chaos*. This was followed by a rare copy of the obscure magazine *Outré*, the very issue which contained Gordon's famous first short-story, "Gargoyle" . . . for my projected book on Decadance in literature I had studied a photographic copy of "Gargoyle," obtained not easily and with considerable expenditure of time, and I remembered well its phantasmagoric lore of black cities on the outermost rim of space, where weird beings whisper unmentionable blasphemies from formless thrones that stand beyond the domain of matter . . .

The next volume was a slim volume of verse by Edward Pickman Derby entitled *Azathoth and Other Horrors*, into which I had also peered and which was a valuable first edition in a very

desirable state. Paired with this was a second volume of verse, *The People of the Monolith*, by Justin Geoffrey; then came several crumbling and yellowed copies of *Outré* and another magazine called *Whispers* which contained the famous tales of that extraordinary, overlooked young genius, Michael Hayward. But the next book was such an astonishing find that I virtually reeled backwards in slack-jawed amazement: it was the original, unpublished manuscript of Amadaeus Carson's notorious and legendary novel, *Black God of Madness*, which most authorities believed no longer to be in existence.

I had stumbled upon an amazing trove of literary treasures so fabulously rare as almost to be considered legendary.

Which made me wonder—it was only an idle, passing thought!—what other hidden treasures the house of Hiram Stokely might conceal.

V.

WHEN Brian woke to a grey and drizzly morning, and I shared with him the wonder and delight of my discoveries, he was considerably less enthralled than he might have been. I suppose it takes a Liberal Arts education with a deep interest in decadent literature to fully appreciate the profundity of my discoveries, but, still, he could have showed a *little* more interest—!

"Pretty rare stuff, and really valuable, eh?" he mused, leafing through the bound manuscript of

Black God of Madness.

"Some of these items are almost priceless," I said. "The one you're examining is not the only unpublished manuscript, either: here's what seems to be the authentic original manuscript of Simon Maglore's celebrated, prize-winning poem "The Witch is Hung," famous for its riot of wild imagery and eldritch color . . . and here's a gem: a true first edition of Halpin Chalmer's arcane and recondite work, *The Secret Watcher*, another first edition from Charnel House in London . . ."

"Yes, and here's another one," he muttered, looking through a slender pamphlet. "*Visions from Yaddith*, verses by Ariel Prescott, Charnel House, Publishers: London, 1927 . . . I've heard of her; didn't she die raving in a madhouse, like your Harold Hadley Copeland?"

"Yes; in Oakdeane," I said briefly. "And here's the notorious January, 1922 issue of *Whispers*, which contains that famous—or infamous!—tale by Randolph Carter, "The Attic Window." This copy could be worth hundreds to the right collector; when the story appeared, it aroused such an outcry of revulsion that every known copy of that issue was withdrawn from the newsstands . . ."

Brian was glancing through some magazines, flaking and yellowed with age. "Who was Phillip Howard?" he murmured curiously.

"The author of several short-stories that would have delighted the soul of Poe and Bierce," I declared. " 'The House of the Worm' is probably the most notorious; at least one young reader, a student at Midwestern University, I believe, went

insane because of it. Another of his tales is in one of the issues you're looking at: 'The Defilers,' it's called; I remember an article in the *Partridgeville Gazette* as claiming the magazine received no fewer than three hundred and ten letters of outraged indignation when they published that tale . . ."

"Didn't know Uncle had such morbid tastes in literature," he said wonderingly. Then, looking up: "What's that you've got?"

"More original manuscripts," I whispered almost reverently. "I don't suppose you've ever heard of that appalling young genius, Robert Blake? I thought not; well, he only died last year, after all . . . but word is getting around about these stories." I stared at the neatly-written manuscript pages of "Shaggai," "The Feaster from the Stars," "The Stairs in the Crypt," "The Burrower Beneath," and "In the Vale of Pnath."

"Someday, they must be published, for all to read," I murmured, hungrily scanning the papers.

But Brian was examining the pile in bafflement. "If they're so rare and valuable, why hide them away behind another row of books?" he asked, almost challengingly. "I always thought collectors liked to show off their treasures—*why?*"

I gave him look for look.

"I don't know," I said honestly.

WE drove to the diner for breakfast and bought some supplies for lunch, as the utilities were still turned on and it might be more pleasant to cook something than go out through the rain again. We spent the rest of the morning cataloguing the fur-

niture and pictures; I don't know much about antiques, but everything looked pretty valuable to me. With a little luck, we could each come away from this with a sizable sum of money. The real estate value of Uncle Hiram's house was another matter; the way the town was slouching into decay—and the nearness of the house to Hubble's Field—might bring the resale value way down.

I was mulling over these things while going through my Uncle's curio collection, when I was roused by a startled whoop from Brian.

"What's up?" I demanded, joining him in the library. "You just about gave me a heart attack . . ."

Then my words trailed away. Brian was grinning at me excitedly, beside a door-size opening in the bookshelves. "A secret room!" he exclaimed, eyes a-gleam with boyish enthusiasm. "I was searching behind the shelves to see if there were any more concealed books, and must have triggered the mechanism. Like to scared me out of a year's growth! Take a look . . ."

I peered past his burly shoulders into a narrow, small, cramped, airless room, revealed to view when one of the bookcases had swung ajar like a door. It was so dark within the hidden chamber that, at first, all I could see was a huge piece of ancient oakwood furniture. It took me a few moments to identify it.

"My God! That's an adumbry; looks authentic, too," I gasped.

"What's—"

"Sort of a Medieval bookcase. Monks in the old

monasteries used them to lay flat books too huge to stand on edge," I said absently.

"Looks like they left a few behind, then," he remarked. For there were a number of immense volumes on the low, flat shelving—books bound in vellum, wrinkled and yellowed with age, or in flaking black leather. I pulled one down, screwing up my face at the reek of ancient mildew and decay which arose from it like a palpable touch.

The next instant a pang of fearful surmise stabbed through me. I held in my hands an Elizabethan folio of fabulous age, a bound manuscript written in a crabbed hand on thick sheets of excellent parchment. And the title page bore this inscription: *Al Aziph, ye Booke of ye Arab, Call'd ye Necronomicon of Abdoul Al-hazred, Newly Englisshed by Me, Master Jno. Dee, of Mortlake, Doctor of ye Arts.*

Even Brian could not help but be impressed by the discovery, doubtless remembering that I had called the *Necronomicon* "one of the rarest books in the world," which indeed it was. It was worth, I suppose, thousands . . . even more, if it truly was what it seemed to be. That is, I am no expert in Elizabethan or Jacobean handwriting, but the huge folio pages looked old enough to have been in Dr. Dee's own hand. *Could* this be the original manuscript?

"Here's another one," Brian muttered thoughtfully. "*Livre d'Eibon* . . ."

". . . *The Book of Eibon*," I said dazedly. I examined it; the ancient bound manuscript was tattered and in a disreputable condition, the pages

water-stained and foxed with mildew. Still and all, the antiquated Norman-French seemed legible enough . . . and also, the calligraphy of the handwriting looked old enough to be in Gaspard du Nord's veritable hand . . .

With repetition, I found, the shocks of discovery diminish. The mind numbs, can bear no more. There were other books on the shelves, but we did not look at them. The light from the open door revealed cabalistic designs traced in chalk on the floor; curious and oddly obscene instruments of brass, copper, or steel glittered on the topmost shelf; the air was rank with mouldering decay, stale and vitiated. Quite suddenly, I felt sick to my stomach: now I knew, or thought I knew, why Uncle Hiram had broken off relations with his family.

It was not his doing, it was *theirs*. The Winfields were of ancient stock; rumors and whispers of disgusting witch-cult survivals in our accursed corner of New England had come to them, with whispers of certain disturbing and unsettling doings in Arkham, Innsmouth and Dunwich.

The Winfields had cast Uncle Hiram out because he was dabbling in rituals and lore too loathsome, too blasphemous, to be tolerated.

And I am a Winfield . . .

No words passed between us, but we left the secret room together, as if in obedience to the same impulse. And we left the hidden door ajar.

VI.

WE did little more the rest of that cold, drizzly day; nor did we discuss what we had found. Brian was too healthy-minded, too whole-boyishly wholesome and normal to have read the queer old texts and the tainted literature into which I have delved deeper than I wish I had. But he sensed the evil that lurked all about us, in the pages of those abominable old books, and that gloated down from the smirking canine faces in that grisly painting, and that breathed about the dark old house from that charnel-pit of buried horrors men call Hubble's Field . . .

Later, feeling a bit hungry, and oddly desirous of some human companionship, we drove through the dank drizzle back to the diner by the waterfront. Before, it had been empty, save for a slatternly girl behind the counter and a fat cook chewing on the stub of a dead cigar, bent over the steam-table. Now, though, it was half-full, and I thought the locals looked at us oddly as we went in and took a table by the blurred and greasy window. They were a disreputable lot, men with stubbled cheeks and furtive eyes, clad in filthy overalls and flannel shirts. We paid them no attention, but it seemed to me that we were a larger object of curiosity, or resentment, than we should have been, even taking into consideration the attention a "city stranger" draws in secluded, decaying backwaters like Durnham Beach.

The gum-chewing waitress leaned over the counter and said something to one of the locals. I

couldn't make out her whining tones, something about "ol' Stokely place" and "Hubble's Field," but he grumbled something in reply that sounded like "Damned lotta nerve, comin' in here."

". . . Git back where they came from," muttered another. A third gave a surly nod of agreement.

"Now it's gonna start all over again, *I bet!*" he growled.

More disapproving, even menacing looks were directed at us. Brian noticed it, too. "We seem to be distinctly unpopular, Win," he observed. I nodded quickly.

"We do, indeed. Let's finish up and get out of here before there's trouble."

"Good idea," he agreed. We left and drove back through the wet, saying little, each busy with his own thoughts.

THAT evening Brian was browsing through one of the old books while I tried to concentrate on cataloguing the contents of the house. My mind seemed unable to focus on business, being obscurely troubled.

"Here's something odd, Win," Brian spoke up. Something in his tones made me look up sharply.

"What's that you're reading?"

"The *Necronomicon* . . . listen to this! Hm, let's see—here it is: . . . 'and the Mi-Go that are the minions of His Half-Brother, Lord Hastur, come down but rarely to the,' no, a little further on: 'and likewise is it with the fearsome Yuggs that are the servitors of Zoth-Ommog and His Brother, Ythogtha, and that are led in That Service by

Ubb, Father of Worms, they slither but seldom from the moist and fetid burrows beneath the fields where they make their loathsome lair' . . . wasn't that Ponape Figurine you people were so concerned about supposed to be an image of Zoth-Ommog?"

I felt a queer foreboding. "It was. Is there any more?"

"Plenty. Listen to this. 'But all such as these, aye, and the Night-Gaunts, too, that be in the service of Nyarlathotep under their leader, Yegg-ha the Faceless Thing, and the Dholes of Yaddith, and the Nug-Soth, that serve the Mighty Mother'—I'll skip down the page—'they fret and fumble ever at the fetters of the Elder Sign, the which doth bind their Masters, and they strive ever to do That which should set Them free, even unto the Red Offering. And in this dreadful Cause they have full many times ere this seduced and bought the hearts and souls of mortal men, selecting such as be frail and vain, venal or avaricious, and thereby easily corrupted by the thirst for knowledge, or the lust for gold, or the madness for power that is man's deepest and most direful sin. . . .'"

We stared at each other for a moment. Then I got up and crossed to where my cousin was sitting, and examined the page over his shoulder.

I read: "Such men as these, I say, they whisper to of night, and lure into their toils with Promises most often unfulfilled. For men they need, and that hungrily: for 'tis the hand of mortal men alone can dislodge the Elder Sign and undo the mighty

ensorcellments stamped upon the prisons of the Old Ones by the Elder Gods . . ."

"Look at the next passage," he said in low, troubled tones.

I read on: "In particular it be those of the minions that inhabit the noisome depths beneath the Earth's crust that lure men to their dreadful service through promise of wealth; for all the ore and riches of the world be theirs to dispense, aye, mines of gold and great heaps of inestimable gems. Of these, the Yuggs, whose name the Scribe rendereth as the Worms of the Earth, are by far the most to be feared, for it is said that there be many a rich and wealthy man bestriding the proud ways of the world today, the secret of whose wealth lies in accursed treasure brought to his feet by the immense and loathsome, the white and slimy Yuggs, whereby to purchase his service to their Cause, *to the utter and most damnable betrayal of humankind, and the imperilment of the very Earth.*"

Brian's face was drawn, his eyes haunted by a fearful surmise. "Remember we wondered where Uncle Hiram's fortune came from," he whispered.

I flinched away from his stare. "What are you suggesting?" I cried, protestingly. "That's absolutely crazy—madness!"

"Is it? . . . remember that queer term, the 'Red Offering' . . . and all those bodies out in Hubble's Field . . .?"

"What are you . . . trying to say?" I scoffed, but my voice was shaky and I knew that Brian could read the doubt in my eyes.

"Hubble's Field," he murmured somberly, "Ubb, Father of Worms . . . the Worms of the Earth . . . 'those that inhabit the noisome depths beneath the Earth's crust that lure men to their service through promise of wealth' . . . Hubble's Field . . . E-choc-tah, 'The Place of Worms' . . ."

". . . *Ubb's Field*," I gasped. He nodded grimly.

"Come on," said Brian briefly, springing up and heading for the secret chamber. I paused only long enough to snatch up my electric torch. Then I followed him into the Unknown . . .

VII.

THE beam of my torch flashed about the plaster walls of the cramped, airless little room sending enormous shadows leaping crazily. Brian was running his hands over the walls as if searching for something. I asked him in a rather breathless voice what it was he was looking for. He shook his head numbly.

"Damned if I know," he confessed. "Another secret panel, I guess, leading maybe to another hidden room beyond this one."

At my suggestion we dragged the huge Medieval adumbry away from the wall. As the only piece of furniture in the hidden chamber, it might conceal another door, if door there was.

And there was . . .

Brian's searching fingers found and pressed a button set flush into the plaster. Some mechanism concealed behind the wall squealed rustily, pro-

testing. A black opening appeared. I shone my light within the opening, and we saw crudely-hewn stone steps going down into darkness.

"That's it!" Brian breathed triumphantly.

"You're crazy," I said. "Probably just lead to the basement."

"This is Southern California," he reminded me. "Houses don't have cellars or basements like they do back East. Just hot water heaters out in back . . . come on! And hold that light steady."

Propping the sliding panel open with one of the brass implements from the top shelf of the adumbry, we started down the steps, Brian leading the way.

The stone stair wound down into the depths in a spiral; air blew up from below us, sickening with the stench of mould and rot and mildew, sweetish with the smells of raw wet soil. And over all the other stench, strangely, the salt smell of the sea.

"My God! There! *Look—*"

Strewn on the lichen-cruste steps beneath us gems glimmered and flashed in the light of the torch. Some were cut into facets and set in antique gold or silver settings, others were raw and neither cut nor polished. Interspersed among the jewels were lumps of gold ore, and silver, and worked pieces of precious metals. There were many coins scattered down the steps: I bent, picked one up, examined it, peering with dread surmise at noble Spanish profiles of ancient kings.

"No wonder he was so rich, damn him!" breathed Brian, his eyes gleaming wildly in the electric glare of the torch. "No wonder they bought

his 'service' so easily . . . my God! The 'Red Offerings!'"

"You still don't have any real proof," I protested. But my words rang hollowly, even to my hearing.

"*There's all the proof I need,*" raged Brian, kicking with his shoe at the surface of the mould-crusted step. Gems and coins scattered, clattering. And it seemed to me that something stirred in the darkness beneath where we stood.

"Come on, let's follow this thing to the end of it." Without waiting for me to follow, he plunged recklessly down the coiling stair, rubies and sapphires crunching and squealing under his tread. While I lingered, hesitating just a little, he vanished from my sight.

Then I heard him cry out in a wrathful roar.

"There's someone down here, Win! You, there, stop—"

A moment of dead silence. The stench became overpowering, sickening. Something huge and wet and glistening white surged in the gloom beneath where I stood hesitating.

Then Brian *screamed* . . . a raw shriek of ultimate horror such as I have never heard before from human lips, and hope and pray never to hear again. A scream such as that could rip and tear the lining of a man's throat—

Calling his name out, I plunged and stumbled and half-fell down the steps, slipping in the slimy muck that coated the stones.

I reached the bottom of the stair, but Brian was not there. There was nothing at all to be seen, no side-passages, no doorways: nothing.

The coiling stone stair did not end, but it vanished into a black pool of slimy liquid mud which completely filled the bottom of the stairwell. Something died within me as I shone my light across that black pool. *The agitated ripples that crawled from edge to edge of the pool, as if something heavy had just fallen in . . .*

Fallen, or been dragged.

I DID not stay very much longer in the huge old house so near, so fearfully near to Hubble's Field. Once the police had taken my wild and incoherent statement—which doubtless they dismissed as the ravings of a lunatic—I returned to Brian's apartment in Santiago.

I brought with me the old books. It was—it *is*—my firm intention to give them to some suitable, scholarly collection; I shall most likely donate them to the Sanbourne Institute of Pacific Antiquities, which already has Copeland's *Unaussprechlichen Kulden* and the *Zanthu Tablets*. For some reason, I linger on here; and I do not think I shall go back to my place of employment at Miskatonic. After all, with the wealth of my heritage from Uncle Hiram's estate, I need no longer work for a living and may indulge my whims.

Every night, as I hover on the brink of sleep, the Voices come—whispering, whispering. Wealth and power and forbidden knowledge they promise me, over and over . . . now that I have already performed the Red Offering, I may enjoy the fruits of my—sacrifice.

In vain I protest that *it was not I* that flung or felled or drove Brian down into that horrible pool of black, liquescent mud at the bottom of the secret stair. The stair of which I said nothing to the police.

But the Voices say it does not matter: the Red Offering has been made. And it must be made again, and again, and again.

Is that what the loutish workman in the diner meant when he predicted, "now it's gonna start all over again?" Perhaps. From the hundreds of corpses the authorities found buried in Hubble's Field, it has been going on for a very long time already.

Oh, they know too well how easy it is to seduce weak and fallible men, curse them!

The Voices whisper to me how easy it is to make the Sign of Koth which will take me beyond the Dream-Gates where the Night-Gaunts and the Ghouls, and the Ghasts of Zin, wait to welcome me; from thence the great winged Byakhee that serve Hastur in the dark spaces between the stars linger upon my coming, to fly me to the dark star amidst the Hyades, to Carcosa beside the cloudy shores of Lake Hali, to the very foot of the Elder Throne where the King in Yellow—even He, Yhtill the Timeless One—will receive my Vow, and where I will receive the penultimate guerdon of my service, and will at length glimpse That which is hidden behind the Pallid Mask . . . soon . . . soon . . .

I have been reading the *Necronomicon* a lot, these empty days, waiting for the nights to come

and the Voices to begin.

I think I will move back to Uncle Hiram's house in Durnham Beach soon. After all, it belongs to me, now.

It, too, is part of the Winfield heritage.



continued from page 1

these pages in our issue for November, 1927. Over the years, his work has appeared in something like fifty-three issues of *Weird Tales*, and we are pleased to have him back with us again, with a new tale of John the ballad-singer.

As for John Brizzolara (here sharing his first byline with his wife, Diane), we feel confident that his name will soon become very familiar to our readers. In fact, we have already to hand two new stories from his pen, and you will be reading his new contributions soon. Another newcomer to these pages returns in this issue and we refer to Steve Rasnic Tem, whose first tale, "Boy Blue," appeared in the last issue. His new story, "The Messenger," is one which you will find every bit as superlative.

IT is always a pleasure to welcome to *Weird Tales* the newer writers who have appeared on the scene during the hiatus in our publishing schedule. In previous issues, we have published stories by Ramsey Campbell, Tanith Lee, and others: in this issue we have an exciting new Cthulhu Mythos novelette by Brian Lumley, and a new short story written in collaboration by Gary Myers and Marc Laidlaw. Both Brian Lumley and Gary Myers, of course, were discovered by August Derleth and were first published by Arkham House. Now, both appear in the same issue of *Weird Tales*, where they belong.

And we are proud to feature in this issue a superb new novella by one of the most distinguished of living fantasy writers—"The Chinese Woman," a major work of the macabre by Miss Evangeline Walton.

Miss Walton is perhaps best known to our field as the author of a remarkable book, *Witch House*,

which has the unique distinction of being the very first original novel to have been published by August Derleth's Arkham House. Miss Walton's new novellette is, in fact, nothing less than a "pre-quel" (or, What-came-before) to that famous novel. We hasten to reassure those of you who may have missed *Witch House*—if there are any readers of *Weird Tales* who have missed it!—that "The Chinese Woman" is a completely self-contained story, fully able to stand on its own narrative merits without cross-referring back to the novel.

And a word of warning, as well: please don't be fooled by the slow, quiet development of "The Chinese Woman." Stick with the yarn: it rises to a shattering climax of unbelievable power.

WHEN we mentioned "August Derleth's Arkham House" a paragraph or two back, we should most properly have phrased it "August Derleth and Donald A. Wandrei's Arkham House," for as everyone must know by now, these two well-known *Weird Tales* writers combined forces back in 1939 to launch the hardcover publishing house that has been so successful, over the years, in preserving the cream of the "*Weird Tales* Culture" in the dignity of hardcover books.

We mention this, because Donald Wandrei marks a return to this magazine with our reprint in this issue of his maiden effort, "The Red Brain," in our new department, the "*Weird Tales* 'First.'" His memorable story, often anthologized, richly deserves a reappearance in these pages.

Our other regular department, the "Weird Story

Reprint," presents another classic from the early years of *Weird Tales*, "The Wind that Tramps the World," by Frank Owen, which appeared in our April, 1925 issue. The early period of *Weird Tales* very often featured yarns of Oriental fantasy or Eastern menace by such *Weird Tales* regulars as E. Hoffmann Price and Robert E. Howard; Frank Owen was among them, and his unique Chinese fables have a rare quality which we hope you will enjoy in the present tale.

Also among the *Weird Tales* regulars, we have a story by Mr. Howard and a poem by Clark Ashton Smith, both of which were but recently discovered among the papers of these authors. In the case of the Howard story—it is one of his "James Allison/racial memory" yarns, like "The Valley of the Worm" and "The Garden of Fear"—the story was one which he did not live to complete. Gerald W. Page finished it for him, working from a very detailed, complete outline. As very few posthumous works by Howard or Smith remain yet unpublished, we are fortunate to have secured these two items for our readers.

Another new story by Carl Jacobi appears this issue, and we believe our readers will enjoy it as much as they did "The Pit" a couple of issues back. And a new Cthulhu Mythos story by your editor helps to round out the issue (or so we hope).

As we put this issue to bed, word reaches us from California of the death at 77 of one of our earliest contributors, H. Warner Munn. Mr. Munn first appeared in these pages with a memorable novella, *The Werewolf of Ponkert*, published in our July, 1925 issue. Over the years, his short stories and novels appeared in some seventeen issues, his most famous story being the weird novel, *King of the*

World's Edge, which we serialized in four parts during 1939, and which was later reprinted in paperback.

It is ironic that his last appearance in this magazine was in our very last issue, to which he contributed a warm and gracious letter, welcoming our return to regular publication after so many years.

He was a good friend, and he will be missed . . .

FOR our next issue, we are fortunate to have a new story by Robert Aickman, who has become a major author of the weird and the macabre since this magazine suspended publication, and we welcome the return to these pages of yet more of the old *Weird Tales* "alumni," in particular, Ray Bradbury and Frank Belknap Long. Mr. Long's story is most aptly entitled "Homecoming"—we say "aptly" because it was in these pages, of course, that Mr. Long's very first story saw print. That was "The Desert Lich" back in November, 1924; today, well more than half a century later, Mr. Long is still alive and well and still, happily, writing.

Our new "discoveries," John Brizzolaro and Steve Rasnic Tem, will each have a story in the fourth issue of this new series, as will Ramsey Campbell. Robert E. Howard and Clark Ashton Smith will both be well represented, as well; and, as usual, there will be a few surprises. So, all things considered, our next issue is one you will not care to miss!

ROBERT A. W. LOWNDES writes from Hoboken, New Jersey:

I regret me that I never got around to mastering witchcraft, so I cannot cast any spells to insure that

your *Weird Tales* takes off well and goes into an excellent orbit for as long as you want it to sail. But it's the most exciting news I've heard in the magazine field since I left it (actually, I'm still making my living at magazines, but I have nothing to say—or at most very little—about what goes into them).

Needless to say, I've looked forward eagerly to the first issue of your new series; the knowledge of my being in it enhances that, but I'd be eager anyway, and take pleasure in the thought of joining the *Weird Tales* herd. You did a fine job for that series at Ballantine, so I know that WT has a first class editor!

DAVID MALLORY writes from Linton, Conn.:

Word that the wonderful old *Weird Tales* magazine was going to be revived after all those years in Limbo, caused great excitement among my friends and I, some of whom are just old enough to have read the last few years' issues off the newsstands. And looking over the first two issues of the new series, I must say I greet the magazine's return with enthusiasm and devoured each story with gusto. The balance of old and new, in style and author terms, struck me as precisely right—how exciting to see *new* stories by Ramsey Campbell and H. P. Lovecraft cheek by jowl, as it were, in the same issue!

I heartily enjoyed Howard's "Scarlet Tears" in the first issue, a superior example of the old pulp adventure yarn, and the contrast between its slightly archaic style and the brisk modernity of Steve Rasnic Tem (for example) made the complete package far more interesting than any ordinary anthology could be. Also, I must say the Lovecraft

novellette in the second issue was positively amazing . . . after all those years of advising young disciples to eschew specifics in their grisly fiction and lean entirely upon the slow putting-together of mood and atmosphere (which he was never once able to do, himself) he finally, pulled it off—with his last story! I like it almost as much as Algernon Blackwood's "The Willows," which I know HPL always regarded as exemplary.

I certainly hope that you will do your darndest to get brand new stories by the surviving writers of the old *Weird Tales* team. Ray Bradbury, Carl Jacobi, Frank Belknap Long, H. Warner Munn, C. L. Moore, Manly Wade Wellman, E. Hoffmann Price—there are still a lot of them around and still working at the same old stand. Anyway, I know you will do your best, because your "feel" for the magazine and the genre, as clearly visible in the first couple of issues, just couldn't be better. Congratulations and good luck! (New stories by Carl Jacobi and Manly Wade Wellman, of course, appear in the present issue, and our next will feature new work by Ray Bradbury and Frank Belknap Long. Both E. Hoffmann Price and Theodore Sturgeon are among the old regulars who have tentatively promised us new work in the future.—*Editor.*)

I lay bound hand and foot beside the altar-stone of the River People, with the howling of maddened worshippers in my ears and the hideous mask of the priest bending over me. Closer and closer bent that bestial visage, and closer and closer to my naked breast sank the hand gripping a stick in the cleft of which was a white-hot flint. I did not close my eyes as that hell-hot shard touched my skin and ploughed the flesh. A wisp of smoke curled up from my skin but I made no sound, nor showed my keen agony by so much as the flicker of an eyelash. From the River People rose a maddened howl; the priest straightened, waving the branding stone and screaming. On my breast, burned indelibly, showed the symbol of sacrifice.

Soon a knife of flint would plunge into my heart as I lay on the blackly stained stone, to flood that smoking symbol with red blood...

from "THE GUARDIAN OF THE IDOL"
by Robert E. Howard and Gerald W. Page

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